

THE LARGER HOPE

Scriptural Evidence for the Ultimate Salvation of All People

Anthony E. Johnson

Contact: thelargerhope@gmail.com

Some may take my title to mean that believers in Christ may only *hope* for salvation. But rather than casting doubt on the biblical promise of salvation to all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, *The Larger Hope* examines the scriptural grounds for belief in the ultimate salvation of all people.

For Christine and Helen, Connie, Melvyn, Norman and
Joan, Robert and Daphne.

Revised 2014

All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James
Version, unless otherwise indicated.

Translations Referred to:

KJV King James Version (1611)
RSV Revised Standard Version (1952)
NIV New International Version (1979)
PHIL Phillips New Testament (1958)
REB Revised English Bible (1989)
DOU Douay Bible Translation (1989)
TYN Tyndale New Testament (2002)
NJB New Jerusalem Bible (1990)
LAM Lamsa Bible Translation (1933)
WEY Weymouth New Testament (1912)
MOF Moffatt New Testament (1964)

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Introduction

All Christians treasure the Bible as God's inspired message to the world. All agree that His loving purpose for humanity is spelled out in the Holy Scriptures. However, despite this unanimity, there have been, and still are, various and often conflicting beliefs about the final destiny of the wicked. The traditional view is that all who receive Christ as Saviour and Lord will spend eternity with Him, while the rest will suffer endless punishment in hell. Another view, held by a growing minority, is known as Conditional Immortality. Advocates of this view deny that the soul is inherently immortal, and teach that immortality is reserved for believers in Christ. They believe the unrepentant will be judged and then suffer complete destruction. A lesser-known view, widely held in the first six centuries, and becoming increasingly popular in the last three, is that God intends to save all people. This is known variously as Universal Salvation, Universal Reconciliation / Restoration, and The Larger Hope.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430), a strong advocate of the traditional view, said there were 'very many' in his day who believed or leant toward Universal Salvation: including such godly and learned Fathers as Basil 'the great' (330-397), Gregory of Nyssa (330-395) and Gregory of Nazianzus (330-389) – Gregory of Nyssa being highly regarded as a champion of orthodoxy, indicated by his role in the formulation of the Nicene Creed. These, and many others of similar persuasion, were not only devout Christians, but also masters of Greek, the language of the Septuagint (an early Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures) and the New Testament. While this does not guarantee the validity of their interpretation of the Bible, it shows that in the first five centuries there were many Christians, including men of great learning and deep spirituality, who came to believe that God's love and saving grace will eventually reach all people, whether in this life or the next.

The objection is sometimes heard, that the early champions of Christian Universalism were influenced by philosophy. While many of them were philosophers as well as Christians, this is true of the Fathers generally. For instance, Justin Martyr (100-165), who was no friend of Universalism, strove to show how the ideas of Plato helped to prepare the Gentiles for the coming of the Messiah. Having said this, being devoted to Christ, all the early Fathers used the Bible as the basis for their teaching.

During the Dark Ages (5th - 11th cent.), the Church of Rome came to dominate western Christendom. Under the Papacy, the Augustinian view of the destiny of the wicked (endless torment) prevailed. The Reformation (14th - 17th cent.) brought greater freedom of thought and belief, and this was furthered by the availability of Bibles in languages other than Greek and Latin. However, whilst rejecting many aspects of Roman Catholicism, the Reformers retained Rome's doctrine of everlasting punishment. Moreover, some 18th and 19th century Protestants spelled out the torments of hell in great detail.

Hell-fire preaching has declined in recent times, but it still occurs in some of the more fundamentalist sects. However, even in churches where the traditional doctrine is still accepted, it is not always preached with the vehemence of former days, or taught in depth, or with real conviction.

There are a number of reasons why this has happened, one being that nowadays Christians and people in general have a more humane approach to justice and the punishment of offenders. Another is that many modern theologians view God's punishment of the wicked in a way that is more in line with some of the early Church Fathers, i.e. as essentially remedial and restorative.

It is significant that some Anglicans, and some people of other denominations, have become more tolerant of the larger hope. This does not, of course, prove that Christian Universalism (or even the hope of it) is true; but it does indicate that many Christians are becoming more open to it.

In the following pages, we will consider i) some scriptural evidence for the larger hope; ii) some key Bible terms connected with future punishment; iii) some Bible passages often cited in support of the traditional view; iv) some common objections to the larger hope; v) a comprehensive list of Bible verses that point to the larger hope, and vi) an extensive *A - Z of the Larger Hope*, designed to help readers study the subject in more depth.

My purpose in writing is to glorify God, and provide the reader with scriptural evidence for the larger hope. God is glorified when His love, goodness, mercy and grace are proclaimed; when His goodness is seen to embrace all; His grace shown to abound 'much more' than sin; His mercy declared to 'triumph over judgment', and His love known to

be, not simply one divine attribute among many, but the very essence of His Being, the motivating principle and power behind all His works (Ps.145:9; Rom.5:20, 21; Jam.2:13; 1John 4:8, 16).

The Larger Hope

The revelation of God's Son as the Saviour of the world is the dominant theme of Scripture. It features in the opening drama of Creation, and runs like a golden thread through the whole Bible. As it progresses, it becomes clearer, until it blazes forth in the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Not stopping there, it is explored and expounded by the New Testament writers, and seen to extend into the ages to come. In the light of this grand theme of Scripture, we can begin to understand something of God's purpose in making 'all things new', in and through His Son, the 'Saviour of the world' (Rev.21:5; John 4:42).

In the first part of the book, we will examine some Bible passages that teach, or strongly suggest, God's purpose to save all people.

The Old Testament

The Promised Seed (Gen.3:15)

'And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.'

This verse has come to be known as the *protevangelium*, i.e. the first mention of the Good News in Scripture. Paraphrasing, it says that 'the Seed of the woman [Christ] will bruise the seed of the Serpent [Satan] in the head,' which signifies Christ's destruction of the devil and his works. That the Seed of the woman is Christ, is clear from Gen.22:18 and Gal.3:16. No Christian disputes this. But what is disputed is the nature and extent of Christ's victory over Satan, revealed here. Most Christians believe that some / many people will be condemned to endless punishment in hell, with the devil and his angels; even though this is difficult to square with Christ's *total victory* over Satan, sin and death. However, a careful consideration of Gen.3:15, and related verses, shows that the traditional view falls short of the first promise of salvation in Scripture. In Gen.3:15 the promise is that Christ, the 'Seed

of the woman,' will *bruise Satan's head* – which clearly predicts the devil's complete overthrow and the release of all his captives (Heb.2:14, 15).

When Adam fell, all his progeny fell 'in him' (Rom.5:12; 1Cor.15:22), due to Satan's insidious work. But the Apostle John declares that 'the Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil' (1John 3:8), i.e. *all* his works. Christ's conquest of Satan ensures that 'those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage', i.e. the 'whole creation,' will be 'delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Heb.2:15; Rom.8:22, 23). These verses describe the universal extent of Christ's saving work. Unlike the traditional view, there is nothing narrow about it.

It could hardly be said that Satan and his works will be destroyed, if due to his work some / many of his victims will be permanently ruined and alienated from God. When our first parents were tempted, and fell into sin and condemnation, God revealed to them He would break the devil's power and rescue all his captives, in and through Christ. In Adam, the Fall was universal – for in him 'all die'. Likewise, God's remedy is universal in scope, resulting in life for all who believe in Christ. After saying, 'In Adam all die,' Paul says, 'even so in Christ all shall be made alive' (1Cor.15:22); not just resurrected but given life in and through Christ.

Great was the sin that brought humanity condemnation and death, but greater is the abundant grace that restores all people to life and blessing in Christ (Rom.5:19-21). A salvation more limited in scope and power than sin and death does not seem worthy of our gracious and merciful God and Father. Yet believers and unbelievers alike have been taught that the Fall has resulted in more people being condemned to endless punishment, than saved to enjoy the benefits of God's love.

In the following Bible passages the larger hope shines through. They should leave the unprejudiced reader with the distinct impression that God purposes to restore all people to Himself in Christ.

The Redemption of All Prefigured (Gen.3:7, 21)

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together

and made themselves coverings . . . also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin and clothed them.

A feature of the Creation story not always appreciated is the way God replaced Adam and Eve's self-made leafy coverings with tunics of animal skin. They had looked for something to cover themselves with, and leaves were readily available. This foliage represented their futile attempt to cover their guilt and shame, and the tunics of skin God's way of dealing with the problem. God's act of covering His disobedient children with skin, obtained through the shedding of blood, typifies Christ's redeeming sacrifice for them and all people (1Pet.1:18, 19). It speaks of His once and for all covering, cleansing and removal of humanity's sin through the death of His Son (John 1:29).

The link between covering our first parents with animal skin, and God's redemptive love for all people, may seem tenuous. But it becomes clearer when we realize that the human race was *in* Adam and Eve when God covered them – an act typifying the redemption of humanity in Christ, the greater Adam. So Christ 'tasted death,' not only for Adam and Eve, but for all their offspring – for 'everyone' (Heb.2:9; Acts 17:28, 29; 1Tim.2:6).

By this simple procedure in Eden, God indicated, in type and figure, the redemption of the whole world, in and through His Son. How simple, yet how profound! A race lost in Adam, but restored in Christ. There was divine wisdom in this apparently trivial act. If we do not understand, it is because God has 'hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes,' in order to 'put to shame the wise . . . and the things that are mighty . . . to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence' (Matt.11:25; 18:3; 1Cor.1:26-29).

These things assure us that Christ shed His blood for everyone, thereby revealing that we are all objects of His love. As such we have been redeemed, reconciled and made acceptable to God in Him (1Cor.1:30; Col.1:20; Eph.1:6). All is God's amazing work of love and grace, to be received by faith.

God's Promise to Abraham (Gen.22:18)

'In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.'

In this verse and others, such as Gen.12:1-3 and 26:4, God promises that all the inhabitants of the earth, i.e. every nation, tribe, kindred and tongue, will be blessed in and through Abraham's 'seed' (offspring). The promised seed who brings universal blessing is primarily Christ, then His Body, the Church (Gal.3:16, 29). Abraham's seed, the 'Seed of the woman,' is our Lord Jesus Christ, who came to destroy the devil and his works, and bring the Church, and the whole of humanity, into the good of His victory (Gen.3:15; Rom.16:20).

God has promised to bless 'all the nations of the earth' through Christ, the 'Saviour of the world' (1John 4:14). God Himself is the 'Saviour of all men, especially of those who believe' (1Tim.4:10) – 'those who believe' being the 'first fruits' (in this age) of the harvest that will be gathered in the age / ages to come.

A Worldwide Turning to God (Ps.22:27-29)

All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You. For the kingdom is the LORD'S, and He rules over the nations. All the prosperous of the earth shall eat and worship; all those who go down to the dust shall bow down before Him, even he who cannot keep himself alive.'

Psalms 22 is about Christ's suffering and victory. It foretells the salvation of Israel and the world, and reminds us of Isaiah's words, 'He shall see the travail of His soul, and be satisfied', i.e. satisfied with the glorious outcome of giving Himself 'a ransom for all' (Isa.53:11; 1Tim.2:6).

What could 'All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD . . . all the families of the nations shall worship before You . . . All the prosperous of the earth shall eat and worship . . . and all those who go down to the dust shall bow before Him' mean other than universal salvation and worship? The restoration described in these verses is broad and hopeful, even of all people turning to God. It is not a case of the few being saved (as the narrow theology teaches), but the many – even the all. Interpreting this passage in terms of universals by no means inflates it to mean something beyond what the Psalmist envisaged. The extent of the recovery of sinners to God is clear, 'All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD.' If these words are not meant to declare the widest hope for humanity, then what is the use of language?

Universal Mercy (Ps.145:8 -13)

The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works. All Your works shall praise You, O LORD, and Your saints shall bless You. They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom, and talk of Your power, to make known to the sons of men His mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of His kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations.

In this Psalm David's heart overflows with thanksgiving and praise to God. He applauds His greatness, majesty, goodness, righteousness, mercy and compassion (vv.1-9). He speaks of God's goodness and mercy extending over 'all His works' (vv.8, 9), and says, 'All Your works shall praise You, O LORD' (v.10). An important aspect of the saints' ministry in the world is to talk of God's power and 'make known to the sons of men His mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of His kingdom' (vv.11, 12). This refers to the little appreciated truth that whilst enjoying salvation themselves, the saints have the privilege and responsibility of magnifying God and declaring truth and hope to the 'sons of men,' i.e. the human race, which God has promised to subdue and restore to Himself (Acts 3:21; 1Cor.15:28; Phil.3:21; 1Cor.6:2).

After being gathered as the 'first fruits' of God's creatures (Rom.8:23; Jam.1:18; Rev.14:4), the saints will be instrumental in blessing the great harvest of the redeemed, when the whole creation is 'delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Rom.8:19-21).

In v.20 David says that God will destroy the wicked. However, there is reason to believe this means the destruction of their corrupt nature and evil ways rather than their whole being (Ps.99:8; Mic.7:19). Consequently, it will be an essentially remedial and restorative judgment, that will bring the wicked to repentance, and into the good of the redemption Christ has accomplished for all (Isa.53:6; 1Tim.2:6; Heb.2:9).

The dominant theme of Ps.145 is hope in God's goodness and tender mercy. There *is* an element of judgment, but throughout the Bible judgment and mercy are closely linked (Ps.67:4; 99:8; Isa.26:9; 40:1, 2;

54:8; Ezek.24:13; 1Cor.5:3-5 with 1Tim.1:20; and 1Thess.2:16 with Rom.11:25, 26). God judges the nations, not to destroy them utterly and punish them for ever, but 'to restore to the peoples a pure language, that they all may call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one accord' (Zeph.3:8, 9). Significantly, many rabbis of the Talmudic period (200 B.C. - A.D. 600) emphasize the essential link between judgment and mercy. Abraham Cohen, author of *Everyman's Talmud*, says:

While believing, therefore, that He is the Judge of the Universe, the Rabbis delighted to call Him *Rachmana* (the Merciful), and taught that 'the world is judged by grace' (Aboth III. 19, p.20).

It may come as a surprise to many, that Christian teachers often portray God and His judgments in much harsher tones than some of the more enlightened rabbis.

Ps.145 is an example of David's deep insight into God's character and purpose. Judgment will be severe for the wicked, but not without hope (Isa.57:16; Rom.8:20).

Christ Bears Everyone's Iniquity (Isa.53:6)

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid upon Him the iniquity of us all.

At a time when Israel felt spiritually superior to other nations, Isaiah had a remarkably clear vision of universal redemption. The last part of ch.52, and the whole of ch.53, describes the redeeming work of Christ, God's suffering servant, the Saviour of Israel and the world. The recurring 'we' in 53:1-6, shows that the godly and lowly-minded Isaiah identified himself with God's people who had 'gone astray,' and whose iniquity was laid on Christ (See Isa.6:5). However, Christ atoned not only for Israel's sin, but 'tasted death for everyone' (Heb.2:9), and 'gave Himself a ransom for all' (1Tim.2:6). This was according to the good pleasure of God, who 'will have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth' (1Tim.2:4 KJV).

Isaiah's words about God laying Israel's iniquity on Christ, and John the Baptist's about 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world', show that God has redeemed and reconciled all people to

Himself in His Son (Col.1:20; Heb.2:9). This points to the prospect of all people being saved, as the purpose of redemption and reconciliation is salvation.

Some may want to qualify this, by saying that although God has provided redemption and reconciliation for all people, they become operative only through faith in Christ. However, although faith in Christ is essential for salvation – repentance, faith and forgiveness of sins are *gifts* of God's grace (Acts 5:31; Eph.2:8; 2Tim.2:25). This being so, there is hope for the 'whole world' and the 'whole creation' (1John 2:2; Rom.8:20). The Lamb of God has taken away the world's sin (John1:29), and Paul speaks of God reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not imputing their trespasses to them (2Cor.5:19). Having prepared the ground for all people to be saved, Christ can and will 'draw all men' to Himself (John12:32 KJV), and 'subdue [conform] all things to Himself' (Phil.3:21); so that ultimately 'every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea' will bless, honour and glorify God and the Lamb (Rev.5:13).

Some may point out that Jesus said, 'If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins' (John 8:24), indicating that unbelievers are not redeemed or, if they are, forfeit their redemption through unbelief. However, dying in one's sins is not the same as being lost forever. It means, rather, that it is impossible to enter the good of redemption and reconciliation while people *remain* in their sins. Many will remain unconverted until God 'subdues' them, by bringing them to repentance and faith in Christ in the age / ages to come (1Cor.15:28; Phil.2:9-11; 1Pet.4:6). In Rom.11:25-32 God promises to take away Israel's sins, even from those who were 'hardened' and had died in their sins. Rejecting Christ in this life results in loss, but not the loss of hope. Significantly (with respect to John 8:24), faithful Zelophehad 'died in his own sin,' but there is no indication he was lost forever (Num.27:3).

Repentance and faith (God's gifts) are essential if we are to benefit from what God has accomplished for us in Christ. But we may rest assured that because God has redeemed and reconciled all people to Himself in Christ (1Tim.2:6; Col.1:19, 20), He will grant all people repentance and faith in due season. When Jesus' disciples asked Him about the extent of salvation, He replied: 'with God all things are possible' (Matt.19:25, 26) – words pregnant with the widest hope.

Mercy Triumphant Over Judgment (Ezek.16:44-63)

'When your sisters, Sodom and her daughters, return to their former state, and Samaria and her daughters return to their former state, then you [Jerusalem] will return to your former state' (v.55).

After condemning Jerusalem (the city which represented the Southern Kingdom of Israel), God promised to restore her, along with Samaria and Sodom. All these cities were morally and spiritually corrupt – especially Jerusalem; but God promised to atone for Jerusalem and all her evil ways (v.63). In fulfilment of this promise, Christ has made atonement / propitiation for the sins of the 'whole world', including the people of Jerusalem and her 'sisters' – the cities of Samaria and Sodom (1John 2:2).

This has happened, even though Jude says that Sodom and Gomorrah suffered the vengeance of eternal fire (Jude 7). Clearly, the 'eternal fire' that fell on those cities was not everlasting – for it *soon went out*. It signifies not endless fire, but a *divinely administered judgment*. It speaks more of the fire's heavenly *origin* than its duration. In a similar vein, in the New Testament 'eternal life' sometimes means life that is spiritual, or heavenly, in its origin, quality and nature, irrespective of its duration (John 17:3; 1John 1:1-3).

The promise of Sodom's restoration, along with that of Jerusalem and Samaria, tends to confirm the larger hope; in that through redemption and reconciliation – including the redemption of the people of Sodom, Jerusalem and Samaria (God restores *people* as well as cities) – all will be saved.

Many Old Testament passages point to the larger hope. Peter refers to them in Acts 3:21, where he speaks of 'the restoration of all things, which God has spoken of by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.'

Next we will look at this glorious theme as it unfolds in the New Testament, and show how both Testaments present a united testimony to God's eternal purpose to subdue and conform all things to Himself, to the end that He might be 'all in all' (Phil.3:21; 1Cor.15:28).

The New Testament

Good Tidings to All (Luke 2:10, 14, 29-32)

Then the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring good tidings of great joy which will be to all people'... 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!' . . . 'Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.'

The angel's 'good tidings of great joy' was a message of hope to 'all people' (v.10). It assured the startled shepherds that the newborn Child was 'a Saviour . . . Christ the Lord' (v.11), who would shortly to be acclaimed as 'the Saviour of the world' (John 4:42; 1John 4:14).

We may rightly assume that 'all people' (v.10), 'men' (v.14), and 'all peoples' (v.31), mean the *human race in its entirety* if the joyous, hopeful spirit of the angelic message is to be maintained. The coming of Christ as Saviour is Good News for '*all people*.' God intends all to hear and rejoice in His peace and good will in Christ.

In the same Nativity account, godly Simeon speaks of salvation being 'prepared before the face of all peoples' (vv.30, 31). Therefore, the meaning of these expressions of joy at Jesus' birth seems to be that God is extending His love in Christ to all people, in keeping with His will to save all men (1Tim.2:4 KJV). In view of these things, it is difficult to draw from Luke's Nativity story anything less than the larger hope.

The Saviour of the World (John 4:42; 1John 4:14)

' . . . this is indeed the Saviour of the world.'

*' . . . the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world
(KJV).*

Twice in the New Testament Christ is called 'the Saviour of the world.' The newly converted Samaritans declared it in response to His love for them, a despised people; and for people of every family, tribe, kindred and tongue. After seeing and hearing Him, they were convinced He could break down the age-old barrier between Jew and Samaritan, and

the barriers that divide people everywhere. This led them to call Him 'the Saviour of the world.' They probably had no clear theological understanding of what the name entailed, but were persuaded that Jesus could somehow unite all people by His love. They felt that all things were possible to the One who could overcome the festering animosity that had kept Jews and Samaritans apart for centuries (John 4:9).

John's description of Jesus as 'the Saviour of the world' (in his First Letter) is in the context of divine love (4:8-16). It came after many years contemplating His Master's life, death and resurrection. It is the core of his message of God's love for needy humanity and how this should lead us to love one another. He assures us that the Saviour of the world is available to the 'whosoever' (v.15). God 'is love' in the essence of His Being, and it is as our loving heavenly Father that He seeks the salvation of all His offspring (Acts 17:28, 29).

John makes confession of Christ as the Son of God essential for salvation; but he does not limit salvation to a select few; on the contrary, Christ is 'the propitiation for our sin . . . also for the whole world' (2:2). So, we may ask, why this universal provision if God does not intend to save the whole world?

The truth that Jesus is the propitiation 'for the sins of the whole world' demonstrates that all people have a place in God's heart, and that all are the focus of His paternal care. Would God send His beloved Son to redeem and reconcile 'the world' / 'all things' to Himself, and then not save the world? Has He provided the means of everyone's salvation, only to leave some / many of His creatures helpless and hopeless and in endless torment? Is the 'Saviour of the world' the Saviour of *only some* of His offspring, while the rest are condemned to suffer in hell forever? If so, what becomes of His *complete victory* over Satan, sin and death? And if only a portion of the human race is to enjoy salvation, in what sense will God be 'all in all', or 'everything to everyone'? (1Cor.15:28? MOF). Traditional answers to these questions often leave a lot to be desired.

How glorious, in contrast, is the prospect of Christ fully living up to His name, 'the Saviour of the world', by rescuing the whole of humanity from the damaging effects of the Fall. Isaiah says: 'Behold the LORD'S hand is not shortened that it cannot save' (59:1); and Jeremiah tells us that the sovereign Lord is able to give Israel 'one heart and one way,'

that they may fear Him 'forever' (32:39, 40). With universal overtones, God says to Jeremiah: 'Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?' (Jer.32:27; Luke 3:6; Matt.19:26).

What God has promised to do for Israel at the end of the age (Rom.11:25, 26), He can do for all nations, tribes and tongues; for He has 'committed all to disobedience that He might have mercy on all' (Rom.11:32). God, who 'will have all men to be saved' (1Tim.2:4 KJV), purposes to save all people, for He says: 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure' (Isa.46:10). Likewise, 'He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth' (Dan.4:35). In view of these, and many other declarations of God's sovereign will and power, we may derive the widest hope from Jesus' name, the Saviour of the world.

Christ Draws All Men to Himself (John 12:32 KJV)

'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.'

The NKJV rendering of this verse: 'And I . . . will draw all peoples to Myself', suggests it is *all nations* or *national groups*, rather than every individual, that Jesus promised to draw to Himself. However, other verses clarify that the beneficiaries of Christ's atoning death are 'all men' (Rom.5:18), 'all mankind' (Heb.2:9 REB), and 'the whole world' (1John 2:2).

Jesus draws all people to Himself through His atoning death. He had previously spoken of His death producing 'much fruit' (v.24 KJV), and went on to say He had 'not come to judge the world but to save the world' (v.47). Therefore we learn from Christ's declared intention that He died to save all people. These sayings express Christ's love for everyone, and lead us to believe that ultimately all people will be brought to repentance and faith in Him as Saviour and Lord (Isa.45:23, 24; Phil.2:10).

In Col.1:16, 20, we read that 'All things were created through Him and for Him,' and that it was the Father's purpose 'to reconcile all things to Himself by Him.' So having created, redeemed, and reconciled all things to God, the Saviour of the world will certainly draw to Himself everyone He has created, redeemed and reconciled, so that all may enter into the good of His salvation. The Son of God came not to 'condemn the world,' but to 'take away the world's sin' and 'give life to

the world' (John 3:17; 1:29; 6:33). Being all-powerful and all-merciful, He will accomplish everything He came to do (Isa.55:11).

The Restoration of All Things (Acts 3:20, 21)

' . . . that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.'

In v.21 Peter speaks of the 'restoration of all things,' when everything / everyone ruined by the Fall will be restored to perfect fellowship with God. All the Old Testament prophets, some of whose writings we have considered, envisaged this. The following passages, by no means exhaustive, help to fill out the picture: Ps.66:4; 67:6,7; 86:9; 102:15, 22; Isa.2:14; 19:18-25; 25:6-9; 52:10-15; Ezek.16:44-63; 47:8-12; Dan.7:13,14; Hos.13:14; 14:1-9; Amos 9:11-15; Mic.7:18-20; Hab.2:14; Zeph.3:9; Hag.2:6-9; Zech.8:20-22; Mal.3:1-4.

A 'restoration of all things' cannot happen unless every ruined sinner is redeemed, renewed, and restored to God. If just one sinner ends up being separated from God forever, there will be less than a complete restoration. Such an imperfect restoration will fall short of all things being made new (Rev.5:13; 21:5).

Sin has entered and spoiled God's creation. It has raised a barrier between sinners and God. The restoration of fellowship between God and His offspring is possible only through Christ, the 'Saviour of the world', the 'one mediator between God and man' (1Tim.2:5). The 'restoration of all things' implies a prior fall of all things. God permitted the Fall and its damaging consequences for good and wise reasons, which we will understand more fully when His purpose has run its course, and we know even as we are known (1 Cor.13:12).

Our heavenly Father would not have allowed sin and death to enter the world if He had not purposed to bring His fallen children into a better, more blessed relationship with Himself, based on mercy, grace and faith, rather than obedience to law (Rom.3:24; 11:32; Eph.2:8; 2Tim.1:9; Tit.3:7). In 1Cor.15:22 Paul tells us: 'For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.' This shows that God's saving work in Christ is as universal as the Fall was in Adam. In other words, everyone affected by the Fall will receive new life in Christ, and be

brought, with the whole creation, into ‘the glorious liberty of the children of God’ (Rom.8:21).

Reconciled and Forgiven (2 Cor.5:18, 19)

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

All people are at enmity with God by nature (Rom.5:10). We may not realize it, but it is true. When the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, and that we have fallen short of the glory of God, we become deeply aware that we deserve His judgment. The Good News is that God has redeemed and reconciled us to Himself in Christ, and no longer imputes our trespasses to us. Sin alienates the world from God, but ‘the Lamb of God . . . takes away the sin of the world’ (John 1:29). Isaiah, referring to the same redeeming work, says: ‘the LORD has laid upon Him [Christ] the iniquity of us all’ (Isa.53:6). These verses tell us that God’s work of redemption and reconciliation is universal. It is of ‘the world’, and of ‘us all’.

Having removed all obstacles to the reconciliation of all people to Himself through the death of His Son, God commands everyone to repent and be reconciled to Him, for it is through repentance and faith that we enter the good of all God has done for us in Christ (Acts 17:30; 2Cor.5:20, 21).

Repentance and faith are gifts of God (Acts 5:31; Phil.1:29; 2Tim.2:25). Because God is love, and His ‘tender mercies are over all His works’ (Ps.145:9), it follows that He will grant repentance and faith to all people in due season – either in this world or the next – for He is the ‘Saviour of all men’ (1Tim.4:10), the Saviour who ‘will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth’ (1Tim.2:4 KJV).

The reconciliation of the world to God in Christ, involved the removal of the barrier of sin between the world and God. It paved the way for Him to bring the whole world into the good of His love. Consequently, reconciliation is an integral part of God’s eternal purpose to restore all things to Himself.

All Things Gathered Together in Christ (Eph.1:9, 10)

. . . having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth - in Him.

When seen in the light of Scripture as a whole, this gathering together in one of 'all things in Christ,' is not simply the gathering together of all who are saved in this age, but the final restoration to God of everyone He has redeemed and reconciled to Himself in His Son. This restoration has its 'first fruits,' through whom God will bless the great harvest of souls when He subdues 'all things' to Himself and becomes 'all in all' (Jam.1:18; Rev.14:4; Phil.3:21; 1Cor.15:28).

The elect saints of this and former ages are not the only ones to be saved, leaving the rest of humanity to suffer endless punishment in hell, but are the *divinely appointed means*, in and through Christ, of judging, governing, instructing, serving and blessing the whole race in the ages to come (Ps.145:10-12; Dan.7:18, 27; 1Cor.6:2; Rev.5:10, 13). In the end, all people will worship God and the Lamb, for we read in Rev.5:13: 'And every creature which is in heaven and on earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea . . . I heard saying: "Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever."' This is one of the clearest pictures of universal praise in Scripture. It is hard to see how it can mean anything other than the restoration of all people to God.

In his *New Testament in Modern English*, J. B. Phillips renders Eph.1:10: 'he purposes in his sovereign will that all human history shall be consummated in Christ, that everything that exists in Heaven or earth shall find its perfection and fulfilment in him.' This brings out the universality of salvation in Christ, to the extent of 'everything that exists in Heaven or earth' reaching perfect fulfilment in Him.

Universal Confession of Jesus Christ as Lord (Phil.2:9-11)

Therefore God has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of

Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

In vv.5-8 Paul exhorts the Philippians to be humble like Christ. By walking in humility they would eventually be exalted like their Lord who, after He had suffered, was lifted high and universally praised. The expression 'of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth', and similar sayings in the New Testament (Eph.1:10; Col.1:20; Rev.5:13), means *all people everywhere*, possibly including all sentient beings, whether heavenly or earthly. The words 'all' and 'every' really mean what they say, for there is no reason to limit or qualify them.

Phil.2:9-11 is derived from Isa.45:22-24, which reads:

'Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath. He shall say, "Surely in the LORD I have righteousness and strength. To Him men shall come, and all shall be ashamed who are incensed against Him . . . "'

Bowing the knee to God, and confessing Him as one's "righteousness and strength" (v.24), is equivalent to confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord, for He is our 'righteousness' and 'strength' (1Cor.1:30; 2Cor.12:9). This confession should not be thought of as a forced act of homage, elicited as it were at knifepoint. On the contrary, it is a voluntary oath taken by all. It is nothing less than the willing confession of people who have come to believe that Jesus Christ is Saviour and Lord. The godly and learned Jerome understood it that way, for he says: 'By every knee bending in Jesus name is meant the obedience of the heart.' Likewise, St Patrick says: 'The Father has given his Son power over everything in heaven, on earth and beneath the earth, so that every tongue might rejoicingly say that Jesus Christ is Lord.'

Some may assume that those who 'shall be ashamed' (of their former opposition to God) will suffer endless loss (v.24), but there is nothing in this passage to warrant such an assumption. Those who will experience shame over having been 'incensed' against God will confess with everyone else that Jesus Christ is Lord, and that in Him

they have righteousness and strength. In Ezek.16:54, 61, Jerusalem's 'shame' over her apostasy, rather than signifying endless loss, is tied up with her forgiveness and restoration. Likewise, Daniel, after his moving prayer for the exiles in Babylon, in which he laments their 'shame,' asks God for mercy and forgiveness (Dan.9:8, 9).

All Things Reconciled to God (Col.1:19, 20)

For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

It pleased God to reconcile all things to Himself by Christ. Notice the extent of God's work of reconciliation. He has reconciled, not a few things, or even many things, but 'all things' to Himself by Christ.

A universal fall requires a universal remedy if grace is to be as extensive as sin and death (Rom.5:20, 21). A partial remedy would leave sin and death triumphant in the lives of some / many people. All are alienated from God by sin, and all stand in need of His reconciling grace. Thankfully, it has pleased God to reconcile all things to Himself by His Son. Through Christ's atoning death, God has removed the barrier of sin and enmity that stood between the world and Himself. This is taught repeatedly in Scripture, in type, prophecy, and plain words (Isa.53:5, 6; John1:29; 2Cor.5:19, 21; 1John 2:2). These verses spell out what God has done for all His sinful offspring, not just some of them.

The Bible makes it clear that we cannot reconcile ourselves to God, for we have all fallen short of His glory and are by nature dead in trespasses and sins (Rom.3:23; Eph.2:1). God has subjected the creation to 'futility' and 'disobedience' so that the whole of humanity depends on the 'hope' of His 'mercy' (Rom.8:20; 11:32). A grasp of these verses is essential for any true understanding of God's eternal purpose. On the one hand they describe the predicament we all experience by nature, but on the other hand they hold out the prospect of universal hope and mercy in Christ.

God Wills the Salvation of All (1Tim. 2:3, 4, KJV)

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

After telling Timothy how his conversion on the Damascus road was an example of how God will extend His saving grace to others (1:12-14, 16), Paul exhorted his young co-worker to be faithful in prayer (2:1-3). Prayer should be offered for 'all men,' including 'kings and all who are in authority,' to the end that Christians might enjoy peace and protection. However, Paul's burden was not simply that churches might be able to function without harassment, but that Christians should *pray for the spiritual welfare of all people*. After making this clear, he spells out the extent and purpose of salvation (vv.3-6).

In v.4, the Greek word rendered 'will' in the KJV; 'desires' in the NKJV; and 'wants' in the NIV, can, and often does, mean God's *purposeful* will, rather than what He would *like* to happen. It has this meaning in 'Thy will be done,' in the Lord's Prayer; and in Paul's exhortation to the Christians in Rome to 'prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God' (Rom.12:2). Paul says elsewhere: 'Christ gave Himself for our sins . . . according to the will of our God and Father' (Gal.1:4), evidently meaning that Christ fulfilled His Father's *determined purpose* to save us from our sins (see also 2Cor.1:1; Heb.10:7; Rev.4:11).

By departing from 'God . . . will have all men to be saved' (KJV), and preferring 'God . . . desires / wants all men to be saved,' NKJV and NIV translators detract from the wider, more hopeful meaning of this verse, i.e. that God *intends* to save all people. Their rendering gives the impression that God would *like* all people to be saved, but knows that some / many will be lost. Moreover, rendering the Greek word *thelo* 'desires' tends to detract from the universal redemption taught in v.6, where Paul says that Christ 'gave Himself a ransom for all,' i.e. *all people* (as the generic 'men' in v.5 indicates). For these reasons, 'will' (KJV, DOU, NAB, REB, TYN) is preferable.

Even if 'desires' expresses Paul's meaning, this need not cast doubt on God's intention to save all people, for in Isa.46:10 God says: 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure' – which can be translated 'all my desire' (Strong); *cf.* Ps.135:6; Isa.55:11. If God

‘desires to save all men,’ and always does what He desires, then what prevents Him from saving all men?

Many resist Christ to the end of their lives. Untold millions throughout history have never heard of Him. But rather than assuming that these are lost, may we not hope that God will bring them to Himself at the end of the age, even in the world to come? This is possible, even probable, in view of Jesus’ words to the unbelieving Jews of Jerusalem (Matt.23:39) who, when He returns, will say ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’ Similarly, we read in Rom.11:25-32 that Israel’s spiritual ‘hardness’ or ‘blindness’ (KJV), with regard to the Gospel, will continue only ‘until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel shall be saved.’ In the same vein, a comparison of Rev.1:7 with Zech.12:10-14 and 13:1 shows that at His return the ‘mourning’ of ‘those who pierced Him’ indicates, not their doom, but conviction of sin, repentance and restoration of God’s ‘beloved’ people (see also Jer.32:37-42; Rom.11:28). Moreover, the latter-day Jews will not be the only Jews to be shown mercy, for the words ‘all Israel’ mean the whole historical nation. And what is true of them is true of all people, for God purposes to subdue all things to Himself and become ‘all in all’ (1Cor.15:28).

Christ’s complete victory over Satan, sin and death involves the recovery of the whole human race, for by Him God has redeemed and reconciled all things to Himself (1Tim.2:6; 2Cor.5:19; Rev.5:13).

The Grace that Brings Salvation to All (Tit. 2:11)

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.

Versions of this verse differ considerably. Some express the widest hope for humanity, such as: ‘For the grace of God has dawned upon the world with healing *for all mankind*’ (REB); ‘For the grace of God has appeared *for the salvation of all men*’ (RSV); ‘You see, God’s grace has been revealed *to save the whole human race*’ (NJB), and ‘For the grace of God has appeared, *saving all*’ (NAB) (emphasis mine). All these translations of Tit.2:11 express *the purposeful nature and universal extent* of God’s saving grace.

The above words speak very clearly about the purpose and extent of God’s saving will. Paul goes on to say that Christ ‘gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity’ (v.14 KJV), and this resonates

with 'the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all' (Isa.53:6). So God has dealt with 'all iniquity', 'the iniquity of us all', in the redeeming death of His Son.

Tasting Death for Everyone (Heb. 2:9)

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

This is another trumpet blast announcing Christ's complete victory over sin and death. His redeeming work is said to be universal in scope, i.e. for 'everyone'. He tasted death for everyone, in order to extend God's grace to everyone, which suggests that He intended to redeem and ultimately save all people. Having reconciled 'all things' to God, through His death, 'whether things on earth or things in heaven,' Christ will not fail to save the world by His life; for He has been given 'all authority . . . in heaven and earth,' and is able to 'subdue [conform] all things to Himself' (Col.1:20; Rom.5:10; Matt.28:18; Phil.3:21).

The context of Heb.2:9 is rich in universals, e.g. 'all things' will be put under Him (v.8 KJV); 'all things' are said to be 'for' and 'by' Him (v.10; Col.1:16); and 'in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest . . . to make propitiation for the sins of the people' (v.17) – a propitiation which according to 1John 2:2 is for the sins of 'the whole world.'

The Propitiation for the Sins of the Whole World (1 John 2:2)

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.

This verse speaks of God's work of making all people acceptable to Himself in and through His Son. John wanted his brethren in Christ to understand that Jesus, through His atoning death, was the full propitiation ('expiation' RSV) for their sins and the sins of the entire human race.

The sense of John's words is that God's redeeming love, a love that 'covers all sins' (Prov.10:12), has been revealed for all to see and benefit from, in the gift of His Son for 'the life of the world' (John 6:51). Would God make such an all-embracing provision for the salvation of

the world, and not bring everyone into the good of it, especially as repentance and faith – the prerequisites of eternal life – are His unconditional gift to sinners? Knowing that God wills / desires to save all people, that He does whatever He pleases – and that, through the propitiation He has provided in Christ, He has removed the barrier of sin that stood between the world and Himself – we can confidently hope for the salvation of the ‘whole world.’

God is Love (1 John 4:8, 16)

He who does not love does not know God, for God is love . . . and we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

Cushioned between John’s twofold ‘God is love’ we find love’s perfect vehicle and expression – Christ the ‘Saviour of the world’ (v.14). Love is not simply one aspect of God’s character among others, such as wisdom, justice and power: love is the essence of God’s Being, the fount of all His attributes; the motivating principle behind all His works. Love is, as it were, the soil from which the roots and branches of all His purposes draw their life and fruitfulness. Love underlies, surrounds, and permeates everything God says and does in relation to the redemption, reconciliation and salvation of His children.

Sadly the love of God has often been made part of a theological balancing act, in which His judgment, wrath and vengeance are often made to tip the scales against His love, goodness and mercy, when it comes to the fate of many of His creatures. But when we understand that God’s love is the eternal foundation and edifice of all His dealings with us; and that His judgment, wrath and vengeance are but the sharp edge of His love for us; we can rejoice with joy unspeakable that even the severest outpouring of His anger is for our eternal benefit. God, in His wrath, does not purpose to destroy *us*, but only our fallen, sinful nature and ways – the ‘flesh’, as Paul calls it – that being purified of evil we might partake of His holiness (Ps.99:8; Isa.4:4; 1Cor.5:5; Rom.7:13-25; Heb.12:10).

The Old and New Testament passages we have studied in this section point to, or at least strongly suggest, the hope we may entertain for the eventual salvation of all people. However, there would be a serious imbalance if we did not consider a similar number of passages often

cited in favour of the traditional view. Therefore, after defining some key scriptural terms associated with judgment and punishment, we will explore the meaning of twenty passages that appear to teach the endless torment of the wicked.

The Traditional View of the Destiny of the Wicked

There is no generally accepted understanding of the nature of everlasting punishment, but all its advocates believe that persistent unbelievers will be separated from God forever. Some maintain that hell involves being subjected to endless burning in literal fire, while others view it as unending spiritual anguish, which seems just as horrific.

Due to the unpalatable nature of these beliefs, some evangelicals have opted for the less severe doctrine of Conditional Immortality, i.e. the faithful will be rewarded with immortality in God's presence, while unbelievers will suffer complete destruction / annihilation.

Many thinking people stand aghast at the awful severity of a God who condemns His creatures to everlasting torment, or oblivion, due to their failure to believe in His Son.

Advocates of these doctrines, and versions of them, claim they are biblical; but it can be shown that *few if any* of the passages they cite in support of the traditional view exclude all hope of God's mercy (Jam.2:13).

Some Preparatory Considerations

The words hell, damnation, judgment, wrath, destruction, perish, fire and eternal, pepper the pages of Scripture, and are often cited as evidence for the doctrine of endless punishment. Consequently, we need to define these terms with some degree of accuracy before examining the passages in which they occur. This will help to minimize repetition, although some is unavoidable. Before doing so, I include a few general observations in relation to future punishment.

Nowhere in the Old Testament is there any threat that the wicked will suffer conscious endless torment in hell. The Hebrew word Sheol in the Old Testament is rendered 'grave', 'pit' and 'hell' (KJV). To the ancient Hebrews, Sheol was the shady abode of departed spirits, whether they be righteous or unrighteous (Gen.42:38).

In view of the traditional belief about the fate of the wicked, we should expect to find at least one reference to endless torment in Old Testament judgments. However, there is no mention, threat or warning of it in the account of the Fall (Gen.2:16 – 3:34); the Flood (Gen.6:1 – 8:22); the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen.18:16 – 19:29); the judgment of Moab (Isa.ch.15; Jer.ch.48); Egypt (Isa.ch.19; Jer.46:1-26); Tyre (Isa.ch.23; Ezek.26:1 – 28:19); Assyria (Isa.3:27-33); Judah (Jer.ch.1-11); Ammon (Jer.49:1-6); Edom (Jer.49:7-22) or Babylon (Jer.ch.50-51).

'Tophet' was a place of judgment outside Jerusalem where children were sacrificed to Molech, and the dead bodies of criminals were consumed by fire and worms, hence not a place of endless torment (Isa.30:33; Isa.66:24).

The New Testament contains a few passages that appear to teach endless punishment. Jesus occasionally speaks of Gehenna ('hell' KJV), but Peter, Paul and John never use it in their Letters; which in view of Christ's use of it is difficult to explain. It occurs just eleven times in the first three Gospels: most of them in repetitions of Jesus' sayings, and once in James. So Gehenna occurs very infrequently in the New Testament. This may lead us to wonder why ministers have given hell such a disproportionate place in their preaching and teaching through the centuries.

We shall look at the derivation, meaning and use of Gehenna in Scripture in more detail, but the above considerations should be given proper weight in any discussion of the final destiny of the wicked.

Definitions of Terms

In any study of the Bible's teaching on the punishment of the ungodly, it is essential to understand the key words and concepts used by Christ and the Bible writers. Much damage has been done to generations of believers, and people in general, by the portrayal of God as an

unmerciful Judge who sentences many of His offspring to endless torment in hell-fire. No doubt most preachers have tried to be faithful to Scripture in this matter, but tragically they have given people a distorted understanding of God and His purpose for the ungodly, due to i) missing the true spirit of Bible teaching on the destiny of the wicked; ii) not sufficiently taking into account the *oriental modes of thought and expression* in Scripture; iii) neglecting the whole counsel of God on this subject; and iv) failing to appreciate God's *loving nature, character and purpose* in relation to Israel, the Church, and the world.

What we believe about God inevitably colours our understanding and proclamation of the Good News. So it is vital that Christians have a truly scriptural understanding of God, in terms of His nature, character and will. Please keep this in mind when we look at the twenty passages traditionalists usually cite as evidence for the doctrine of endless punishment. But first we need to define some Bible words that are closely associated with judgment, death and the hereafter.

Hell

Hell is an Anglo-Saxon word which means 'to cover' or 'to hide'. The first translators of the Bible into English regularly used 'hell' to translate the Hebrew words Sheol and Gehenna, and the Greek words Hades and Tartarus.

Sheol

This Hebrew word occurs 65 times in the Old Testament, and is translated 31 times 'grave', 31 times 'hell', and 3 times 'pit', in the KJV. It basically means the shadowy realm of the dead. The ancient Hebrews believed the dead existed in a dark insubstantial world as mere shadows of their former selves. The souls of the righteous and the unrighteous entered Sheol at death, although we gather from some passages, where Sheol is translated 'hell', that the wicked found little rest in that place / state. David dreaded the thought of Sheol, due to its association with death and the end of life as he knew it (Ps.9:17; 22:15). The author of Ps.116:3 portrays Sheol in the same way. So we derive from the Old Testament that Sheol was the abode of the dead, the mysterious place of departed spirits, the resting place of saints and sinners alike, but that it implied little if anything of the endless torment associated with later ideas of hell.

Hades

'Hades' occurs in eleven places in the New Testament and is translated 'hell' in ten of them. Hades is generally viewed as the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew 'Sheol' (bearing in mind that words can attract fresh nuances of meaning with the passage of time – in this case, through the influence of Greek culture). That these words have more or less the same meaning is evident from the way the scholars who produced the Septuagint, the famous Greek version of the Old Testament (132 B.C.), invariably substituted 'Hades' for 'Sheol' wherever it occurred in the Hebrew text. For example, in Acts 2:27, Luke, quoting from the Greek Septuagint of Ps.16:10, writes, 'You will not leave my soul in *hades*,' whereas this verse in the original Hebrew is, 'You will not leave my soul in *sheol*' (See p151).

In Jesus' parable of The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), where Hades in the KJV is rendered 'hell,' Hades has two parts / realms: 'Abraham's Bosom' for the faithful, and a place of punishment / chastening for the ungodly. We will study this parable in more detail later, but sufficient to mention here, by New Testament times Jewish ideas about the afterlife had become more clearly defined; and although 'torments' feature in the parable, there is no specific mention of their duration.

Tartarus

Tartarus is a Greek word that Peter 'borrowed' to describe the place where *fallen angels* await judgment (2Pet.2:4). This is the only instance of the word in Scripture. At the judgment described in Matt.25:41, Jesus sends heartless, self-centred humans into the 'everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels'. However in 2Pet.2:4 there is no mention of the final destiny of fallen angels'.

Gehenna

'Gehenna' is transliteration of the Hebrew *Ge Hinnom*. It occurs twelve times in the New Testament and is rendered 'hell' (KJV) in each case. It was derived from the Valley of Hinnom, outside Jerusalem's walls, and occurs thirteen times in various forms in the Old Testament. It never refers to anything like the *endless torment* of the traditional hell.

In New Testament passages where Gehenna appears it is never called 'endless' (we will consider its association with 'the unquenchable fire'

and ‘undying worm’ later). We have already mentioned the remarkable fact that there is *no reference to Gehenna in any of the Letters of Peter, Paul and John*. Jesus uses Gehenna eleven times: seven in Matthew, three in Mark, and once in Luke (some of these being repetitions of His sayings in the Synoptic Gospels). It appears once in James.

We have seen that in the first instance Gehenna was the name of a valley outside the walls of Jerusalem, where human sacrifice took place in the days of Ahaz and Manasseh. By Jesus’ day, it had become a rubbish tip where the bodies of criminals were consumed by fire and worms. During the centuries leading up to the coming of Christ, Jewish Apocalyptic writers – possibly influenced by Persian and Greek ideas about the afterlife – spiritualised Gehenna into a place where the souls of the wicked were punished. However, in Judaism generally, the judgment of Gehenna is understood in various ways. Some rabbis maintain it is a place of *eternal* punishment, by which they mean a place where the wicked suffer for a season, before being utterly destroyed. A minority of rabbis taught release from Gehenna after a period of remedial punishment. In *Everyman’s Talmud*, Abraham Cohen relates how the merciful view finds support in the teaching of some notable rabbis (pp.377, 378); and this view is generally taught in modern Judaism (Goldberg and Rayner, *The Jewish People: Their History and Religion*, pp.269, 270).

These views of Gehenna may have been around in first century Israel. If so, Jesus and His disciples would have been familiar with them. However, it would be wrong to assume that Jesus was greatly influenced by them, or that He made any of them the basis of His teaching about human destiny. He made it plain that He derived His authority from God and His inspired word (Matt.5:17-19; John 17:17), and taught that some of the religious traditions of His day made the word of God of no effect (Matt.15:6).

Jesus may have looked upon many of the eschatological speculations of the Jewish Apocalyptists as little more than ‘fables’ (Tit.1:14). To know how He understood Gehenna, we must study, not the conflicting ideas of the Hebrew mystics, but divinely inspired Scripture in the light of the Holy Spirit (2Tim.3:16; John 16:13). Having said this, the fact that He taught and exemplified divine mercy, compassion and forgiveness – like the more enlightened rabbis of His day, and since – it

would seem out of character if His teaching about Gehenna varied radically from theirs. As we might expect, He upholds and develops rather than departs from Old Testament assurances of mercy and forgiveness (Exod.34:6; Ps.118:14; 145:9; Matt.5:7; 18:21; Mark 6:34; Luke 6:36; 23:34). This is in keeping with the merciful ‘restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began’ (Acts 3:21).

Damnation

Modern translations of the New Testament have ‘judge’ and ‘condemn’ instead of ‘damn’ and its cognates. ‘Damn’ is misleading, due to the way people associate it with hell and endless punishment – an association often found in Christendom’s literature and art.

F. W. Farrar, famous for his books: *Life of Christ*, *Eternal Hope*, and *Mercy and Judgment*, provides the following information about ‘damn’ and its derivatives in the KJV:

The words ‘damn’ and its derivatives do not occur in the Old Testament. In the New Testament they are the exceptional and arbitrary translation of two Greek verbs and their derivatives, which occur 208 times. These words are *apollumi* and *krino*. *Apoleia*, ‘destruction,’ or ‘waste,’ is once rendered ‘damnation’ (2Pet.2:3), and once ‘damnable’ (2Pet.2:1); *krino*, ‘judge,’ occurs 114 times, and is only once rendered ‘damned’ (2Thess.2:12). *Krima*, ‘judgment,’ or ‘sentence,’ occurs 24 times, and is 7 times rendered ‘damnation.’ *Krisis*, ‘judging,’ occurs 49 times, and is 3 times rendered ‘damnation.’ *Katakrino*, ‘I condemn,’ occurs 24 times, and is twice only rendered ‘be damned’ (*Mercy and Judgment*, p.369).

Farrar says the presence of ‘damn’ in the KJV is due to the translators’ ‘exceptional and arbitrary’ decision to render a Greek word that means ‘judge’, or at the most ‘condemn’, by an English word that most people associate with everlasting punishment.

Judgment

Abraham Cohen informs us that judgment is invariably attended by mercy in rabbinic literature, some rabbis teaching that: ‘The attribute of grace exceeds that of punishment by five-hundredfold;’ others, that ‘the

world is judged by grace,' and that even the faithless, although unworthy, are 'still God's children' (*Everyman's Talmud*, pp.18-20).

Similarly, Thomas Allin says: 'Whenever judgment comes, it comes on Love's errand, if it comes from God' (*Christ Triumphant*, p.190). For Allin, God's punitive judgments are essentially expressions of His love and mercy. God judges *because He loves*. He chastens in order to improve. His judgments, while containing an element of just retribution for sin, are tempered with mercy and corrective in essence (Isa.19:22; Hos.5:14,15; Hab.1:12). This can be seen in God's major judgments of the wicked in Scripture, even judgments generally thought to be purely retributive. Consider the following examples:

i) *God's judgment of the antediluvians* was universal, apart from eight souls. However, a) there were no warnings of endless punishment before the Flood; b) Peter refers to that sinful generation *in what are conceivably hopeful terms* (1 Pet.3:18-29), and c) some of the Church Fathers saw in this passage glimmers of that generation's ultimate salvation. For example, Athanasius says:

They who were formerly disobedient and resisted God were set free.

More generally, Gregory of Nyssa says:

The power of evil will be taken away, and they, who on account of their disobedience were called God's enemies, shall by subjection be made God's friends.

Similarly, Basil says:

For all things shall be made subject to Him, and all things shall acknowledge His empire; and when God shall be All in All, those who now excite disorders by revolts, having been quite pacified (all things) shall praise God in peace and concord.

Cited by Allin, in *Christ Triumphant*, pp.133, 122,120.

ii) *God's judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah* is a proverbial example of His wrath against the wicked, yet nowhere in the account of the destruction of these cities is there any mention of their inhabitants being threatened with endless punishment. Jude speaks of Sodom and Gomorrah 'suffering the vengeance of eternal fire' (v.7), however, the fire that destroyed those cities was 'eternal' in a sense other than

everlasting, for it burned *only until they were destroyed*. Moreover, whilst Sodom and Gomorrah suffered terrible judgment, they are *promised restoration* with Jerusalem and Samaria (Ezek.16:53-63).

iii) *The divine judgment of both kingdoms of Israel*, culminating in the removal of the survivors to Assyria and Babylon, was particularly tragic, in that it happened to God's covenant people. However, as with the Flood, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the judgment of Israel is never spoken of in terms of endless punishment. On the contrary, judgment is often preceded and followed by promises of forgiveness and restoration (Isa.54:8; Jer.23:3; 32:36-42; Hos.14:4-7; Amos 9:11-15). Although God speaks of Israel's affliction being 'incurable' (Jer.30:12) – in the same chapter He says, 'I will restore health to you, and heal you of your wounds' (v.17), which clearly illustrates the remedial nature of divine punishment.

Therefore, because a) endless punishment does not figure in Old Testament judgments; b) the restoration of sinners of the deepest dye is promised, and c) Jesus called the Hebrew Scriptures 'truth' (John 17:17), these things are of vital importance in any study of divine judgment. In addition, Jewish teaching on this subject is significant. F. W. Farrar, in *Eternal Hope*, p.82, informs us that the editor of the *Jewish Chronicle* in his day said: 'endless torment has never been taught by the rabbis as a doctrine of the Jewish Church.' Although not as authoritative as Scripture, these words express historic Judaism's rejection of the belief that the wicked will suffer endless punishment in hell.

Wrath

There are many references to wrath in the Bible, far more in the Old Testament than in the New. In addition to the major judgments in Scripture (which as we have seen are accompanied by promises of restoration), the Bible contains assurances that God's anger lasts only for a season (Ps.30:5; 103:8-10; Isa.54:8; 57:16-18; Mic.7:18). So divine wrath is temporal, designed for the correction and restoration of offenders. This is what we would expect of the Father of mercies.

Destruction

When God 'destroys' the ungodly, it is to make them whole (1Cor.5:5). What is true of the promised restoration of Sodom, Samaria and

Jerusalem, and their people, is also true of Egypt and Assyria (Isa.19:18-25); Elam (Jer.49:34-39); Moab (Jer.48:42, 47), and Ammon, despite the latter's 'perpetual desolation' (Zeph.2:9 and Jer.49:6).

Fullness of spiritual life is possible only when the 'flesh' (sinful nature) is 'put to death' (Rom.8:13). A believer's failure to 'mortify' his sinful members may lead to being 'delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus' (1Cor.5:5; Col.3:5). Judgment and destruction, yes, but also hope. Peter says: 'For this reason the Gospel was preached to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit' (1Pet.4:6). The God who judges and 'kills' also 'makes alive' (1Sam.2:6). Even Christ was 'put to death in the flesh [as our sin-bearer] but made alive by the Spirit' (1Pet.3:18), which shows what must happen to our 'flesh' before we can experience fullness of spiritual life (Col.3:1-11).

We see this principle in God's dealings with the people of Israel. They were repeatedly chastised, punished and 'destroyed', at times receiving 'double' for their sins (Isa.40:2; Jer.16:18), but only in order to bring them to repentance. Israel's current period of hardening in unbelief, due to their rejection of Christ, will be followed by their restoration and salvation (Rom.11:25-36). This is promised repeatedly in the Old Testament, for instance in Isa.54:7-10, where God says: 'For a moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will gather you. With a little wrath I hid my face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you . . . My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall my covenant of peace be removed.' Likewise, Peter speaks of the 'restoration of all things which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began' (Acts 3:21). The broken vessel, Israel, will not be cast away forever, but be remade by the divine potter, along with the whole creation (Jer.18:1-6; Rom.8:19-21; Rev.21:5).

Perish

With regard to 'perish' in the Old Testament, a careful study of the relevant passages shows that in almost every instance it is *physical* destruction that is in view, rather than endless punishment or total annihilation. In view of this, and the fact that the Hebrew Scriptures are

God's word of 'truth' (John 17:17), 'perish', for the Jews, meant little more than physical death, through natural causes or invading armies acting as God's instruments of chastening. Occasionally (Num.24:24; Job.4:20 KJV) 'perish' is accompanied by 'for ever'.

In the New Testament, 'perish' sometimes appears to mean more than physical death. But, in keeping with its regular Old Testament meaning, it generally refers to the end of natural life. The notion of perishing forever is often deduced from passages that contain no specific reference to it. We have seen instances of cities, peoples and nations 'perishing' due to their ungodliness, that are nevertheless promised restoration. The Israelites were warned they would perish if they forsook God (Deut.11:17; Ps.80:14-18; Ezek.25:7), but there are many promises of their restoration. If the promise of mercy for the wicked is so explicit in the Old Testament, at a time when 'life and immortality' had not yet come to light, should we not hope for mercy in the age of abounding grace, in which the 'Sun of Righteousness' has risen 'with healing in His wings'? (2Tim.1:10; Rom.5:20; Mal.4:2).

Many of the Church Fathers had a broad and hopeful understanding of what it meant for people to 'perish.' Methodius, for example, says that the custom of Scripture is to call destruction: 'that which is only a change for the better.'

Similarly, Gregory of Nyssa says:

When the Psalmist prays, Let sinners and the unrighteous be destroyed, he is (really) saying that sin and unrighteousness may perish . . . and if there be found any such prayer elsewhere (in the Scriptures), it has exactly the same meaning, viz., that of expelling sin, and not of destroying the man.

And Jerome says:

All God's enemies shall be destroyed, His enemies shall perish and cease to exist but perish in that wherein they are enemies.

Cited by Allin in *Christ Triumphant*, pp.189, 190.

Consequently, these Fathers – and many others – understood the words 'destroy' and 'perish' to mean something radically different from endless punishment. They believed that while sin and unrighteousness will perish, sinners *themselves* will be saved.

Fire

Materially and figuratively fire is thought of as an instrument of torture in hell. But it is important to realize that in Scripture 'fire' often symbolizes the *refining process* that removes the dross of sin and evil from people's lives. For instance, in Mal.3:1-7 the 'Messenger of the covenant' (v.1) comes 'like a refiner's fire' (v.2) to 'purify the sons of Levi' (v.3). Israel and its priesthood repeatedly fell away from God, but Christ's purpose as the 'Messenger of the covenant' was not to destroy them utterly, but refine and purify them, and make their priestly ministry acceptable to God (vv.3, 4). That this fiery judgment was meant to purify them is seen in v.6, where the important truth is revealed that God's purpose was to save, *not consume*, the 'sons of Jacob' (see also 1Cor.3:10-15).

Similarly, the fires of judgment that on a number of occasions destroyed Jerusalem (a pivotal one being that in A.D.70, which led to the dispersion of the Jews throughout the Roman Empire) did not, as we have seen, destroy all hope of Israel's restoration. Neither did the 'eternal fire' that fell on Sodom and Gomorrah destroy those cities and their inhabitants *irrecoverably*.

Jesus said: 'For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt' (Mark 9:49), which in the light of Hebrew sacrifice is a *hopeful* saying, as it signifies purification (Lev.2:13).

Mark 9:49 immediately follows Jesus' teaching on the importance of self-denial. The metaphors He uses in vv.42-48, i.e. the 'millstone around the neck,' the 'hand and foot cut off,' and the 'eye plucked out,' emphasize the seriousness of 'causing one of these little ones who

believe in me to stumble' (v.44). His triple use of Gehenna ('hell' KJV) signifies the punishment reserved for those who fail to master their sinful impulses in this life (2Cor.7:1; 1 John 3:3). 'Unquenchable fire' (Nestle, Marshall, *RSV Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*) is more accurate than 'the fire that will never be quenched'. It means, not unending fire, but fire / judgment that is 'unquenchable' *until it has accomplished its purpose*. For example, the 'eternal fire' that fell on Sodom and Gomorrah burned *only until God's judgment of those cities achieved its purpose*.

We fear fire because it causes pain and destruction. But in Scripture, fire is multi-purposed, in that while it destroys evil and corruption, it cleanses and purifies. Love for God steels believers to face the heat of trial, and then helps them to benefit from it.

In relation to the judgment / chastening of saints and sinners, fire (whether literal or metaphorical) is sometimes called 'eternal', in that it comes from the eternal One, and the eternal realm, and continues only until it has served its purpose.

Eternal

We have seen that 'eternal' in Scripture often means things other than 'endless' and 'everlasting'. The Hebrew equivalent of the Greek word *aiōnios* (often translated 'everlasting' and 'eternal' in the New Testament) is *olam*. The meaning of *olam* depends on the context in which it is used. When describing God, it can take on a limitless sense, as when Moses declared: 'from everlasting to everlasting, You are God' (Ps.90:2). However, it often describes things that have served their purpose and come to an end. W. F. Farrar supplies the following examples:

The Passover sprinkling (Exod.12:24); . . . the Aaronic priesthood (Exod.29:9); . . . the inheritance of Caleb (Josh.14:9); Solomon's Temple (1Kings 8:12,13); the smoke of Edom (Isa.34:9, 10). To take one or two books, combinations of *Olam* . . . occur in Exodus at least twelve times out of fourteen of things which have passed away; in Leviticus twenty-four times, always of things which have come to an end; in Numbers ten times; in Deuteronomy about ten times out of twelve; and so on throughout the Old Testament. If the word were used but once in a finite sense it would be

enough, but the fact is that it is so used repeatedly, and more often than not.

Mercy and Judgment, p.378.

This being the case with *olam* (translated *aionios* in the Greek Septuagint version of the Old Testament), we might expect *aionios*, like *olam*, to mean age-long, age-during, an indefinite period of time, or something less than absolute endlessness, *except* where it describes someone / something endless or timeless by nature, such as God and His attributes (Rom.1:25; Heb.7:24). Even in these verses, ‘forever’ is derived from ‘unto the ages’ and ‘unto the age’ (Nestle-Marshall, *RSV Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*).

These things should lead us to ask whether the punishment of the wicked will endure as long as God Himself? As we have seen, this cannot be substantiated from the Old Testament, or with any certainty from the apocalyptic literature of the period between the Testaments. So this leaves room for the larger hope: the belief that in the hereafter the punishment of unbelievers will be limited and remedial, ceasing when they have come to repentance and faith in Christ (Prov.20:30).

Openness, honesty and humility are required as we consider the following New Testament passages, most of which are commonly used to support the doctrine of everlasting punishment. It is essential to approach them with insight and imagination, for the inspired writers often used the symbolism and imagery of their day. My aim is not so much to prove beyond any doubt the validity of the larger hope, as to show from Scripture, the Church Fathers, and other respected authorities, that we can rightly hope for the salvation of all people.

Bible Passages Commonly Cited in Support of Endless Punishment

We begin with four Old Testament verses, the first of which is sometimes cited as evidence that our eternal destiny is determined by our spiritual condition at death.

Ecclesiastes 11:3

And if a tree falls to the south or the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie.

In verses 1 and 3, the Preacher assures his readers that three things can be counted on in life, including a tree remaining where it falls; but nothing in this saying is remotely connected with a person's eternal destiny. Even if it could be shown that these words allude to someone's spiritual state at death, and their inability to change it, they do not exclude the possibility of God's mercy (Lam.3:31-33; Mic.7:18; Jam.2:13).

What the Preacher appears to be saying – following on from, and in agreement with, his exhortation to be charitable (vv.1 & 2) – is that letting our charity fall like bread (v.1) and rain (v.3a) on the needy, will do lasting good and be a solid memorial to our generosity – a memorial as permanent as a fallen tree. There are many interpretations of this verse, but this one is clearly in harmony with the context.

Isaiah 33:14

The sinners of Zion are afraid; fearfulness has seized the hypocrites: 'Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with the everlasting burnings?'

Some maintain that 'everlasting burnings' suggests hell-fire, but this is unwarranted. The preceding verses are about God's judgment of Israel, through the instrumentality of their enemies. They would be threshed and burned like stubble; scorched with burning, like the burning of lime; and burned like thorns in the fire (vv.11, 12), which describes, not everlasting punishment, but painful destruction by their foes.

But were not these 'sinners' and 'hypocrites' in fear of endless torment by fire? Not according to this verse. They knew, as did the author of Hebrews, that God is a 'consuming fire' (Heb.12:29), and that only the pure in heart can dwell with Him (Ps.24:3, 4); hence, that sin must be forgiven and lives made pure if people are to dwell in His holy presence. However, chastening, correction and purification are not the same as endless torment. So this verse, with its vivid imagery, is about *the holy character of God*, not everlasting punishment. It says nothing about endless torment by fire, only our need of holiness if we are to dwell with Him. It tells us that God cannot and will not tolerate unrighteousness in His children, but must deal with our sin, and consume our defilement (1Cor.3:11-15; 2Cor.7:1).

So 'everlasting burnings' is a figurative expression of God's holy, burning love; a love that will lead God to cleanse us from the moral and spiritual impurity that grieves Him and harms us, that we may dwell with Him and serve Him acceptably forever (Mal.3:1-7). It is a 'fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God' (Heb.10:31), not through fear of endless punishment, but mainly because, as His offspring, we dread the thought of grieving and being chastened by our Father who loves us, and has sent His Son to save us from our sins and restore us to Himself.

Isaiah 66:24

'And they shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.'

Here we are given a vivid preview of God's judgment of 'all flesh' (v.16). The idolaters and the impure are punished together (v.17). Their carcasses are left unburied for all to see. Exactly when and where this slaughter takes place is uncertain, but God's judgment of His enemies is certain (v.6), and the righteous will witness it.

Despite the terrifying imagery, this judgment is not the traditional hell, because *corpses*, not living people (or spirits), are depicted. They remain for a season as a reminder of God's judgment of the wicked, but are ultimately 'consumed' by the 'worm' and the 'fire' (v.17, 24).

But in view of what we have seen concerning the eventual restoration of ungodly Sodom, Samaria and Jerusalem, it seems reasonable to hope for the ultimate restoration of these also. For God has redeemed and reconciled all people to Himself, and 'will have all men to be saved' (2Cor.5:19; Col.1:19, 20; 1Tim.2:4-6 KJV). Not even the terrible judgment described in this verse detracts from the hope that all people will finally be subdued and restored to God, the 'Father of mercies,' who faithfully disciplines His disobedient children in love, for their eternal good; sometimes with summary death and post-mortem correction (1Cor.5:5; Heb.12:5-11; Luke 16:22-26; Rom.11:32; 1Pet.4:6).

Daniel 12:2

Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Of the Old Testament verses we have looked at, this seems to lend most support to the doctrine of everlasting punishment. However, we need to bear in mind that:

i) The word *olam*, here translated ‘everlasting,’ as we have seen can mean age-long, or an indefinite period of time, and everlasting only when it refers to something / someone intrinsically never-ending, such as God and His attributes. Therefore, because there is some uncertainty about which of these meanings of *olam* applies in this verse, it is arbitrary to *insist* on ‘everlasting’ in an absolute sense.

ii) In an almost identically worded passage (Matt. 25:41, 46), Matthew uses the Greek word *kolasis* (translated ‘punishment’ in ‘everlasting punishment’ KJV). *Kolasis* originally meant ‘to prune’ i.e. to *correct* and *improve*, rather than punish in a purely retributive way, hence the possibility of ‘age-long correction.’

iii) If God intended to punish / torment wrongdoers for ever, one would think that clear and repeated warnings of this would be found in the Old Testament, the Scriptures of ‘truth’ (John 17:17; Amos 3:7, 8), but they contain few, if any.

iv) ‘Everlasting contempt’ (‘abhorrence’ REB; ‘disgrace’ NJB) suggests something less severe than everlasting torment in hell.

In view of these things, is it conceivable that the New Testament – in which God’s grace is declared to abound ‘much more than sin’, His goodness to extend to the just and the unjust, and His mercy to triumph over judgment – teaches a system of punishment infinitely severer than anything found in the Old Testament?

The advocates of the traditional dogma, claim that unending punishment is not only conceivable, but is in complete harmony with the character of God and the mind of Christ. They point to a number of New Testament passages (sixteen of which we will examine) that appear to exclude hope from people who do not come to faith in Christ in this life. Before we look at this ‘evidence’ for the doctrine of endless

torment, it is important to remember the terminology we have considered, as it will help to correct some popular misconceptions about the teaching of Christ and His Apostles on the destiny of the wicked. Because judgment, punishment and related words frequently occur in the New Testament, some repetition is inevitable.

To gain a truly scriptural understanding of divine punishment, it is essential to realize that we are looking at the judgments of God, who is not only righteous and holy, but unchanging love in the essence of His Being, hence loving in all He is and does. He is not only our Creator and Judge, but our Father, Redeemer, Reconciler and Saviour who, because He is 'good to all' (Ps.145:9), never ceases to seek our eternal good. If this truly Christian understanding of God and His character is kept in heart and mind as we approach the following passages, it will help us to appreciate their spirit as well as their letter.

Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds.

Matthew 3:12

'His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.'

John the Baptist uses imagery from Malachi to describe the Messiah's ministry (Mal.3:3). The Christ he heralds will perform the purging and separating work depicted here, and in the sowing and reaping parables (Matt.13:24-30, 36-43). But does the last part of Matt.3:12 speak of the endless punishment of the wicked?

The gathering work begun by John, and continued by Jesus, was quickly followed by God's judgment of the nation in A.D.70, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and scattered the survivors like 'chaff' throughout the Empire, while Christ's followers, the 'wheat', were preserved. This seems to be the judgment that John announces in this verse (Matt.24:1, 2; Luke 21:20-24). If so, the 'unquenchable fire' he speaks of represents a *temporal judgment*, as it does in the Old Testament (Jer.7:20; 21:12; Ezek.20:47, 48; Amos 5:6). This shows how careful we should be when interpreting Scripture, especially its figurative language.

Israel's many judgments, including the Exile, were followed by restoration. God's purpose was to *correct* and *restore* His covenant people when they went astray. With regard to Israel at the end of the

age, Paul teaches that after being ‘hardened in part . . . all Israel will be saved’ (Rom.11:25, 26). So it is wrong to interpret the Baptist’s words in Matt. 3:12 as teaching that the Jews of his day were in danger of endless punishment, when what he probably meant was that failure to repent and get right with God would expose them to the severe but temporal judgment that loomed on the horizon.

John’s words remind us that everyone will be ‘seasoned with fire’ (Mark 9:49) in order to destroy the ‘chaff’ (that which has no spiritual value in our lives) and prepare us for greater participation in the life of God (Mal.3:1-3; 1Cor.3:12-16; 5:5). Believers must judge and purify themselves, in order to avoid the severer chastening suffered by all who ‘fall into the hands of the living God’ who, *because He loves*, ‘scourges’ and purifies ‘every son He receives’ (1Cor.11:31; 2Cor.7:1; Jam.1:21; Heb.10:31; 12:6, 10).

Matthew 5:21, 22

‘You have heard that it was said to those of old, “You shall not murder,” and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. But I say unto you that whoever is angry with his brother without cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, “Raca!” shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, “You fool!” shall be in danger of hell fire.’

‘Hell fire’ (v.22), is ‘gehenna of fire’, the exact nature of which (as we have seen) is uncertain, although traditionalists view it as a place of endless torment.

Jesus warns His disciples of the sin of unbridled anger, for anger often leads to insult, and insult to violence. Even in its mildest form, unwarranted anger could lead to ‘the judgment’ (local court), and when vented in the derisory “*Raca!*” (“Worthless one!”), could bring condemnation from the highest court (the Sanhedrin). More serious still, the withering reproach “You fool!” could lead to the punishment of Gehenna.

Christ’s words, ‘in danger of Gehenna’ (v.22), may have involved the shame of being refused an honourable burial, by having one’s body thrown into the Valley of Hinnom to be consumed by fire and worms, prior to suffering one of the fates taught by the rabbis. Jesus’

characteristic emphasis on love, mercy and forgiveness, suggests that He favoured and held out the more hopeful prospect.

Jesus' uncompromising language in this passage emphasized the seriousness of uncontrolled anger. While He never misled people, He sometimes used vivid metaphor and powerful imagery to impress important truths on His hearers (Matt.5:27-30; 7:1-5; 19:24). However, to claim He was warning of the danger of an everlasting fiery hell is going too far. A Gehenna where the ungodly are destroyed, or mercifully receive just and remedial punishment, is one thing, but not even the sternest rabbis of Jesus' day taught the endless conscious torment of the wicked.

Matthew 10:28

'And do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell.'

These words must be understood in relation to their context and spirit. They are a part of Christ's preparation of his disciples for mission, a preaching tour that would involve danger. In many places their message would be unwelcome. Like their Lord, some of them would be put to death for their faith (vv.17-22). Therefore they must be 'as wise as serpents and harmless as doves' (v.16), and avoid trouble as much as possible (v.23). They would encounter misunderstanding and malice, but must love, not fear, their enemies (vv.26, 28).

Jesus' purpose was not to terrify His disciples with the thought of Gehenna ('hell' KJV), for He went on to assure them of their heavenly Father's love for them (vv.29-31). His main point was not Gehenna. He referred to it simply to emphasize that God, and not the enemies of the Gospel, controls human destiny. While their enemies could destroy the body, only God is able to destroy both body and soul in Gehenna.

The most Jesus says about future punishment in this verse is that God is *able to* destroy both body and soul in Gehenna. But although He taught the possibility of such a fate, 'destroy' in this context needs clarification. When John and James wanted to bring fire down on some inhospitable Samaritans, Jesus rebuked them with, 'You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.' (Luke 9:55, 56). In view of Jesus' declared purpose of coming to *save men's lives*, can we doubt that He

will accomplish what He came to do – what God the Father has willed Him to do (Ps.40:7, 8; John 4:34; 1Tim.2:4 KJV)?

As we have seen, some notable rabbis taught that the ‘destruction’ of Gehenna is not total, but that the souls of the wicked will join the company of the blessed after a period of remedial punishment / chastening.

Matthew 16:26

‘For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his own soul?’

Commenting on this verse, Allin says:

This certainly shows that a man by persisting in sin may lose his soul, a loss greater than that of the whole world. But i) how does this loss teach endless torment, or endless sin? (To be shut out of God’s presence for an age would far overbalance the enjoyment of the world for a lifetime). Or ii) how does it prove anything against a final restitution, against Christ’s seeking and finding the lost soul? (*Christ Triumphant*, pp.268, 269).

With regard to ii) above, we have seen how a whole world of sinners was ‘lost’ at the Flood, and how great swathes of humanity, including the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the two kingdoms of Israel, and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, were ‘lost’, and yet are promised restoration . In view of this, and Christ coming ‘to seek and to save that which was lost’, and keeping on seeking ‘until He finds it’ (Luke 19:10; 15:4) – will He not find all the lost in the end? Will He not continue searching, in this world and the next, until all His lost offspring are found and brought home?

Dr. Leslie Weatherhead says:

There can be no kingdom of heaven on earth if any class or individual is left out. There can surely be no heaven of heavens if the son or daughter of one saint inside is left outside in the hell of isolation from God and the beloved community. I know there is the theoretical possibility that a soul with free will may finally say ‘No’ to God and refuse to belong to the family. But can the love of God finally fail? The

woman sought the lost coin *until she found it*. The shepherd sought over the dark mountains the lost sheep *until he found it* (*In Search of a Kingdom*, p.183).

F. W. Farrar (*Eternal Hope*, p.219), cites a number of notable rabbis who expected a final restoration of all the lost. While their views, and those of other respected authorities, do not prove that all the lost will be 'found', they remind us that many learned and devout people find evidence of the larger hope in Scripture.

Jesus' 'hard sayings' (and Scripture as a whole) are best interpreted in the light of God's infinite goodness and mercy. They should be seen through the eyes of God who, whilst being holy, is unchanging love, with whom nothing is impossible (1John 4:8, 16; Jam.1:17; Matt.19:23-26).

Matthew 25:41, 46

'Then He will also say to those on the left hand, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" . . . And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'

The KJV and the NKJV are inconsistent in their translation of *aionion* in these verses. They render it 'everlasting' twice, and once 'eternal', whereas the RSV and NIV have 'eternal' throughout. The scholars responsible for the KJV and the NKJV have translated *aionion* 'everlasting' with regard to the punishment of the wicked, apparently to indicate their belief that the wicked will be punished forever; but they have translated it 'eternal' with regard to the future life of the righteous, apparently to emphasize the *quality* and *nature* of that life (John 17:3; 1John 1:1, 2), which savours more of interpretation than consistent translation.

As we have seen, *aionion*, like the Hebrew *olam*, often means an age or long period of time, and hence may have a bearing on the meaning of '*aionion* punishment' (v.46). We have also seen that *aionion* means endless, only when it describes something / someone inherently everlasting, such as God and His attributes. What is true of God's endlessness is not necessarily true of the punishment of the ungodly. The punishment spoken of in the above verses may endure for an age, ages, or an indefinite period of time, but not necessarily forever. Bearing this in mind, we may paraphrase v.46, 'And these will go away

into the punishment of the age to come, but the righteous into the life of the age to come', which leaves open the possibility of the wicked being restored to God after a period of remedial punishment, as taught by many early Fathers, and some learned and devout people in recent centuries and in the present day.

Moreover, an important consideration with respect to 'punishment' in v.46, is that it is a translation of the Greek word *kolasin*, which in ancient times meant punishment inflicted *for the good of the offender*, rather than strictly retributive punishment. The Greeks used *kolasis* to describe the pruning of trees to improve their fruitfulness. This suggests that divine punishment (whether of believers or unbelievers) is not only just, but remedial and restorative (Isa.54:8; Hos.6:1-3; 1Cor.5:5; 1Tim.1:20, Heb.12:3-11).

Fairly weighed, these things shed light on Jesus' words: light that reveals the love, goodness and mercy of God.

Mark 3:28, 29

'Assuredly, I say unto you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation.'

This is Jesus' response to the Pharisees, when they accused Him of using demonic power to cast out evil spirits (v.22). From this we gather that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is to attribute works that are patently good, and of God, to the power of the devil. In other words, it is to call good evil, simply out of spite or malice. It reveals a heart that has become impervious to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. There can be no doubt, therefore, about the seriousness of this particular sin. However, we need to consider a number of things in relation to Jesus' words:

- i) If all other sins and blasphemies 'will be forgiven,' this creates almost unlimited hope for the human race.
- ii) With regard to v.29, many scholars consider 'an eternal sin' (RSV, NIV, PHIL, REB) more accurate than 'eternal condemnation.'
- iii) The Greek word translated 'subject to' in v.29 is rendered 'in danger of' in Matt.5:21, 22 in the KJV and the NKJV. Vine, in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, says this word:

'is used in the sense of being in danger of the penal effect of a misdeed.' So Jesus meant that 'eternal condemnation' for sinning against the Holy Spirit is *possible* – but not inevitable.

iv) Using 'in danger of' instead of 'subject to'; and 'age-long' instead of 'eternal' (for reasons we have considered); and 'sin' instead of 'condemnation', we arrive at the possible translation, 'is in danger of age-long sin', which is something almost infinitely less severe than endless condemnation.

v) Support for the 'possible translation' in iv), is found in the Nestle / Marshall *RSV Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*. Its alternative to 'never has forgiveness' is 'has not forgiveness unto the age,' which leaves open the possibility of forgiveness in following ages. Some early Church Fathers cherished this hope, including:

Athanasius, who says of this sin:

If they may obtain pardon, for there is no sin unpardonable with God to them who truly repent.

And Chrysostom:

We know that this sin was forgiven to some that repented.

And Dionysius (Syrus):

Many who did blaspheme against the Holy Spirit, afterwards repented and obtained pardon.

While these comments do not prove that this sin may be forgiven, they do show that forgiveness has been deemed possible by some notable Church Fathers.

vi) Jesus was not speaking to the notorious sinners of His day, but to the Pharisees. Due to their theological training and influence, the Pharisees were especially accountable to God for their response to Jesus and His teaching. This suggests it is the proud, the learned and the scrupulously devout who are most in danger of committing this sin.

vii) In view of the inherent ignorance and frailty of even the most able and self-possessed human beings, it is questionable whether *anyone* could *truly* recognize the Holy Spirit's presence

and power in a situation, and deliberately and maliciously ascribe His work to the devil? Therefore:

viii) It seems natural to ask whether our merciful heavenly Father, who always seeks our good (Ps.145:9), would ever permit us to commit a sin that would create an insurmountable barrier to His forgiveness? No truly caring parents would allow their loved ones, their own offspring, to create such a barrier to their forgiveness, if they could help it.

Lastly, and in the same vein:

ix) Both Peter and Paul tell us that the religious leaders who engineered the death of Christ (the very class Jesus alerted to the danger of sinning against the Holy Spirit), acted with a *degree of ignorance* (Acts 3:17; 1Cor.2:8). Saul of Tarsus himself bordered on this sin, when he persecuted the early Church and instigated the murder of Spirit-filled Stephen. Ever-conscious of this, Paul drew comfort from the fact that he had done it 'ignorantly and in unbelief' (1Tim.1:13). Consequently, if Paul, the 'chief of sinners', viewed his spiritual ignorance as a mitigating factor in his crimes against God and the Church then, to repeat an earlier question, is it possible for weak, ignorant human beings to knowingly and wilfully sin against the Holy Spirit?

These and other considerations should make us approach this subject with caution and sensitivity, and help us to avoid reaching hasty, dogmatic conclusions.

Mark 14:20, 21

Then He answered and said to them, 'It is one of the twelve who dips with me in the dish. The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born.'

In a study of Christ's words about Judas, F. W. Farrar says:

First it should be observed that 'Woe to that man' is not, as is usually supposed, an anathema, but, as Stier says, 'the most affecting and melting lamentation of love, which feels the woe

as much as holiness requires or will admit.’ The woe is, as in Matt.24:19, an expression of deepest pity.

Continuing, he says:

While we are not called upon to speculate as to the place and lot of Judas, let us remember that there were some in the early Church who saw in the remorse of his suicide the germs of a possible repentance, and thought that the wretched man hurried into the next world that he might implore his Lord for that forgiveness which Peter, who in the hour of danger had denied Him with curses, lived to gain on earth.

Mercy and Judgment, p. 458, 60, 61.

If some learned divines countenance the possibility of mercy for Judas, may we not? More importantly, may God not, ‘whose tender mercies are over all His works’? (Ps.145:9).

Significantly, in connection with our Lord’s words, the rabbis of His day, from some of whom He had received instruction, were often heard to say of someone: ‘It were a mercy if he had never come into the world,’ or ‘It would have been better if he had not been created’ (A. Cohen, *Everyman’s Talmud*, pp. 27, 95). This kind of comment came under the heading of *Haggadah* (opinion), rather than *Halachah* (binding teaching), and was considered an appropriate fate even for enquiring about such things as, ‘what is above, what is beneath, what is before and what is after?’ (For Paul’s apparent use of *Haggadah*, see 1Cor.7:6; 9:8). So may not our Lord’s words about Judas reflect something of *Haggadah* (opinion / feeling), rather than *Halachah* (inflexible law), thereby softening their meaning? If so, while expressing His deep sorrow, disappointment and disapproval of Judas, our Lord’s words may not exclude the possibility of mercy.

Did Judas repent? Perhaps the ‘germs of a possible repentance’ can be seen in Matt.27:3-5. Samuel Cox (cited by Allin, in *Christ Triumphant*, p.274) detects four signs of Judas’ true repentance: ‘i) his rejection of the wages of iniquity; ii) his open confession of his guilt; iii) his public testimony to the innocence of the Man Whom he had betrayed, and iv) his profound consciousness that the just wage of such a sin was death.’

It may have been Judas' unbearable sense of guilt and remorse over betraying His Master (rather than fear of punishment), that Jesus referred to when He said: 'It would have been good for that man if he had never been born.'

Judas' betrayal of Christ seems unforgivable. But Jesus, in a different context, where *salvation* is the subject, says, 'With God all things are possible' (Matt.19:26), which raises hope, even for Judas. Once, a wise woman told David that God 'devises means, so that His banished ones are not expelled from Him', and this moved him to seek reconciliation with his son, Absalom (2 Sam.14:14). Our Lord loves His enemies, blesses those who curse Him, does good to those who hate Him, and intercedes for those who despise Him and cause Him grief. Our attempts to follow His example, however imperfectly, reflect our heavenly Father's heart toward His enemies (Matt.5:44, 45). If Christ calls us to love and forgive those who sin against us, even 'seventy times seven,' will He not forgive Judas, His 'familiar friend' (Ps.41:9) who, though turning traitor, never previously cursed, hated, spitefully used or persecuted Him? And are not we told that Judas did what he did largely under the influence of Satan, whose works Jesus came to destroy, and whose captives He came to deliver? (1John 3:8; Heb.2:14, 15). All these things remind us of God's mercy and grace, even to the 'chief of sinners' (1Tim.1:15).

May we not hope, then (for surely we should), that the Lord who loved Judas, and loves him still because He is unchanging, will in the end make him a glorious example of mercy triumphing over judgment? (Jam.2:13).

Never yet abyss was found
Deeper than the Cross could sound.

Luke 12:46

' . . . the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and in an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.'

Jesus' teaching about the Faithful Servant and the Evil Servant (vv.35-48) emphasises the importance of watchful and compassionate service, and the consequences of neglect and cruelty to fellow

servants. Loving faithfulness wins Christ's approval and blessing, whilst negligence and ruthlessness bring punishment proportionate to the knowledge of His will.

Although these verses contain some interesting details, the main point of Jesus' teaching is *not the nature of the rewards and punishments*, but the importance of wise and faithful stewardship.

In response to the traditional view that those pictured by the evil servant will suffer endless punishment in hell, it is important to realize that:

i) Nothing in the wording of v.46 supports this. Jesus says nothing about the *duration* of the wicked servant's punishment. And with regard to the words 'will cut him in two,' J. C. Ryle, in his *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, p.94, says:

It admits of some doubt whether the Greek word so translated will bear so strong a sense as our translators have put on it . . . Parkhurst thinks that it means, 'shall scourge with utmost severity.' Others think that it means, 'shall separate, or remove, from his office; - shall dismiss.'

Likewise, Phillips, in his translation, has:

' . . . will punish him severely, and send him to bear the penalty of the unfaithful.'

The RSV simply has:

' . . . will punish him, and put him with the unfaithful.'

ii) This passage is about Christ's dealings with His *servants*. At His coming He will call His servants to account and, because He is unchanging, relate to them as their just and merciful Master. When we look at what happened to some wayward Christians in New Testament times, such as the immoral church member at Corinth (1Cor.5:5), and the blasphemers in the church at Ephesus (1Tim.1:18-20), their punishment was clearly remedial, in keeping with Heb.12:3-11. This shows that Christ's punishment of His servants, no matter how severe, is always for their eternal good. As we have seen, the Bible encourages us to hope for the restoration of even the worst offenders. So,

viewed in this light, the punishment of the evil servant in Luke 12:46 does not exclude his eventual restoration.

iii) Jesus often used startling metaphor to teach His followers important lessons (Matt.7:4; 17:20; 19:24).

Luke 16:22-26

'So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then 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 in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us."'

The story of the Rich Man and Lazarus comes at the end a series of parables that Jesus taught with the Scribes and Pharisees in mind (15:1-3; 16:14); and after which He adds the injunction to forgive and keep on forgiving all who sin against us (17:3-4). This parable is often wrenched from its context in order to teach the dogma of endless punishment. But when looked at contextually, linguistically and, where appropriate, figuratively, it becomes evident that it teaches no such thing. Consider the following observations:

i) At its most basic level, it teaches that the materially prosperous have a duty to care for the needy; and that if people suffer through our neglect, the time will come when we will have to face the consequences of our selfishness and lack of compassion.

ii) The rich man reminds us of Israel's religious leaders, and Lazarus the people they deemed 'uneducated' and 'accursed' (John 7:49; 9:34; Acts 4:13). Despite their public profession of religion, many of the Pharisees neglected 'justice, mercy and faith,' and were in danger of judgment (Matt.23:33). On the other hand, it was the believing poor, the 'poor in spirit' who

were promised the kingdom of heaven (Matt.5:3), all of which resonates with the main characters in this parable.

iii) Alternatively, the situation in this parable reminds us of the tension between Jew and Gentile in Jesus' day. The Jews were proud of their religious heritage, particularly the Scriptures, which were a spiritual feast set before them day by day. In contrast, the despised and spiritually famished Gentiles could only gather 'crumbs' of truth and blessing that fell from Israel's table. Gentile dependence on the Jews for spiritual truth and nourishment is poignantly seen in the Syro-Phoenician woman's plea for her sick daughter: 'Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs' (Mark 7:27, 28) – words and sentiments clearly mirrored in Luke 16:21.

iv) This parable reveals something about the afterlife, but what exactly? In place of 'hell' KJV, the NKJV has 'Hades': the realm of the dead where the souls of the righteous and the unrighteous await judgment (albeit in separate places). Hades is the *intermediate state* between death and the Last Judgment. Consequently, the popular notion that the rich man was in Gehenna ('hell' KJV) is unfounded.

v) The 'torment' and 'flame' (vv.23, 24), whether literal or otherwise, could be *remedial*, hence *temporal*, rather than purely retributive and endless. The 'great gulf fixed' in Hades is generally taken as proof of permanent separation from God, but a) it could be 'fixed' for a limited period, for 'fixed' is neither preceded nor followed by 'endlessly' or 'forever'; and b) there is nothing about the 'great gulf' that precludes Christ, who has the 'keys of Hades and Death', from bridging it (Rev.1:18).

vi) The wording of v.25 suggests a *reciprocal judgment*, i.e. some years of deprivation and neglect suffered by Lazarus, and a just / reciprocal period of punishment suffered by the rich man – for with God punishment fits the crime (Luke 12:47, 48), and is tempered with mercy (Ps.62:12). God's love 'covers all sins', and His grace 'abounds much more' than sin; just as His mercy 'triumphs over judgment', even to the extent of 'not punishing us according to our sins' (Prov.10:12; Rom.5:20, 21; Jam.2:13; Ezra 9:13; Ps.103:10).

vii) Not least of the things that run counter to the traditional understanding of this parable, is the change in the rich man brought about by God's dealings with him. Finding himself in Hades, he sees Lazarus in 'Abraham's bosom' (a place / state of blessedness in Hades) and begs the patriarch for mercy (vv.22-24). When this is denied him (at that stage in his punishment), he becomes mindful of his 'father's house' and 'brethren,' and begs Abraham to send Lazarus to warn them about the place of torment that awaits them – nothing is said about the torment being endless. His plea for mercy, and his newfound consideration for others, may not, at that stage in his punishment, represent full, heartfelt repentance; but the improving process seems to have begun. The nature of God's love for us, and even His enemies, is such that He chastens us for as long as it takes to bring us to genuine repentance and submission to His will, that we may partake of His holiness (Heb.12:10) – in this case, after death. Until then, the 'gulf' of separation from eternal blessing is 'fixed' – by our sinfulness, as much as by God.

We end our consideration of this parable with these words of F. W. Farrar:

Unlimited inferences [on the side of endless punishment] have been drawn from the Parable of Dives and Lazarus, regardless of the fact that i) it is not only a parable but is also full of metaphoric language; ii) that the tremendous inferences built upon its symbols must at least be modified by other inferences equally valid; and iii) above all that Dives is in the Intermediate, not in the Final State.

Mercy and Judgment, p.365.

We have examined this parable in some depth in order to show that it neither detracts from nor undermines the larger hope.

John 3:36

'He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.'

Commenting on this verse, Allin says in *Christ Triumphant*, p.275:

The meaning is clear – the unbeliever, *continuing such*, shall not see life, but if he repent he may obtain peace. If it were not so, all would be lost.

There are many instances in Scripture where, through the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, dealings and adverse circumstances, unbelievers are brought to repentance and faith, and are restored to God. Such experienced His wrath, but not unremittingly.

God says: 'I am merciful, and I will not remain angry forever' (Jer.3:12). Micah says that God 'does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy' (7:18). Therefore, Jesus' words 'the wrath of God abides on him' do not alter what God has revealed about His enduring mercy, and His purpose to chasten sinners only until they repent and believe. He knows about the obstacles to faith that people encounter, including many that are beyond their control, for i) the vast majority of the world's people, past and present, have had little or no opportunity to accept Christ; ii) untold numbers have died in childbirth, infancy and youth, before reaching the age of discernment; iii) many poor souls have been blighted from birth, either physically or mentally, or have been psychologically damaged through neglect or ill-treatment, making it difficult, if not impossible, for them to consider the love of God in Christ, and iv) innumerable people have been raised in non-Christian cultures and religions, or influenced by sects and cults that distort Bible truth and put enormous pressure on members to conform.

In view of such things, are we to believe that these largely hapless souls are lost forever, through not having come to Christ in this life? The heart, if not the head, protests 'Surely not!' For God is the 'Father of spirits,' whose 'tender mercies are over all His works' (Num. 27:16; Heb.12:9; Job.34:19; Ps.145:9).

As Allin points out, persistent rejection of Christ invites God's judgment; but Jesus' words (or John's – for it is unclear who uttered them) do not exclude the possibility of hardened souls being drawn to Him, either in this life or the next. The purpose of God's wrath is to help bring the repentance and faith that make irreversible judgment unnecessary – as in the case of those who, while rejecting Christ during His earthly ministry, came to faith shortly after His death (Acts 6:7). Jesus promised to draw *all men* to Himself, and Paul tells the Philippians that Christ is able to 'subdue all things to Himself', i.e. subdue in the sense of 'conform' (John 12:32; Phil.3:21; 1Cor.15:28).

Acts 13:46

Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, 'it was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.'

The principles of interpretation applied to John 3:36, that uphold the hope of salvation for people who initially fail to accept Christ, apply also to Paul's words to the unbelieving Jews at Antioch in Asia Minor. As long as they resisted the Good News of God's grace, they missed out on 'eternal life' (NIV). But who is to say they had no further opportunities to believe in Christ in this life. If not, their salvation is assured when 'all Israel' is brought to repentance and saved at the end of the age, after being hardened in unbelief for a season (Rom.11:25, 26; Jer.32:36-42; Ezek.39:25-29; Matt.23:37-39).

As long as people resist the Gospel, they remain 'unworthy of eternal life' (RSV). But this does not mean they will never, despite God's corrective dealings, come to repentance and faith in Christ, either in this world or the next. When we consider the whole counsel of God, with respect to believers and people in general, we find that hope springs eternal, notwithstanding verses like John 3:36 and Acts13:46.

Romans 9:22, 23

What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory . . .

We should study these verses in the context of God's overall purpose for Israel, the climax of which is described in Rom.ch.11, especially vv.25-36, where Paul says that 'all Israel will be saved' (v.26); that God 'might have mercy on all' (v.32); and that 'of Him and through Him and to Him are all things' (v.36). In Rom.ch.8-11 we find a progression in God's dealings with Israel. She is part of the creation that has been 'subjected to futility . . . in hope' (8:20), with which she will be 'delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God' (8:21). Being 'broken off' (11:17-24), 'hardened' (v.25), and 'committed to disobedience' (v.32), are all aspects of God's chastening/correction of Israel. His wrath and discipline are designed to discipline

her and ultimately bring her to Christ. All this will come to pass because God has redeemed and reconciled her, and has promised to save and restore her at the end of the age (Isa.43:1; 53:6; 2Cor.5:19; Isa.45:25; 54:7, 8; Rom.11:26).

These promises, and what we have seen about 'wrath' and 'destruction', make it unthinkable that Paul, in Rom.9:22, 23, means that some Jews will be lost forever. These verses raise the matter of 'election', i.e. the biblical teaching that certain people are divinely predestined, not simply to enjoy a special relationship with God (as traditionalists believe), but to be channels of blessing to humanity as a whole – a glorious truth that is little appreciated. Rather than stopping to discuss the significance of election here, we will look at it in more detail in Objections to the Larger Hope.

2Thessalonians 1:6-9

It is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.

This passage is often used to prove that the Jewish persecutors of the church at Thessalonica (and all like them) will suffer endless punishment. However, on close examination it becomes evident that this is not Paul's meaning:

- i) If 'eternal' in 'eternal destruction' (RSV, NIV, REB) means the same as 'eternal' in 'eternal fire' – the fire God used to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah (Jude 7) – then, as we have seen, *that* 'eternal fire' was far from everlasting. It was called 'eternal' due to its *heavenly source and nature*, not its duration. It was 'eternal' in that it came from the eternal One – not because it burned forever.
- ii) In harmony with 1Cor. 5:5 and 1Pet.4:6 (and all divine judgments), 'destruction,' in 2Thess.1v.9, seems more to do with the destruction of the 'flesh', the old fallen nature, than any absolute destruction of God's creatures as such. This is clearly

seen in the *promised restoration of Sodom and its people*, even though, like the Christ-rejecting Jews of Thessalonica, they persecuted Lot and his family, and ‘did not know God’ (Ezek.16:44-63).

iii) Compare 2Thess.1:6-9 with Zeph.3:8-9, and notice, in the latter, God’s *fiery anger* against the nations. However, that fiery judgment is designed, not to destroy the ungodly nations utterly, but ‘to restore to the peoples a pure language, that they may all call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one accord’.

iv) It is difficult to imagine Paul encouraging his brethren to take heart from knowing that their persecutors would suffer endless punishment, when in his first letter he exhorts them to ‘abound in love to one another and to all,’ and ‘see that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all’ (1Thess.3:12; 5:15). This spirit of love and forgiveness also comes through in his letter to the Romans, where he says, ‘Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse’ (Rom.12:14), which is in complete contrast to the hard-line understanding of 2Thess.1:6-9. For the Thessalonians to be told that their enemies would be severely punished *for their ultimate good* is one thing, but to be told to take comfort from their endless separation from God seems alien to the mind and spirit of Paul, and Christ (Matt.5:43-48; 6:14, 15; Luke 23:34; Acts 7:54-60; 1Tim.2:1-4).

Until traditionalists can show how their understanding of 2Thess.1:6-9 squares with Christ’s teaching that we should love and pray for our enemies, and with Paul’s exhortation that we should *pray for all* and be *charitable to all*, we need not reject the more hopeful interpretation outlined above.

Revelation 14:9-11

Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength 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 ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.'

Here is a supreme example of apocalyptic language, which, if taken literally, leads to a distorted understanding of Christ and the Book of Revelation. I do not apologize for the following lengthy quotation from Farrar's *Mercy and Judgment*, for it is an excellent commentary on these verses, and on the language and purpose of the Book of Revelation generally. A careful study of it will reward the reader, not least Farrar's warning about having too literal an understanding of a book that is full of figurative language and symbolic imagery:

I might well decline the task of examining any of the passages which are alleged on behalf of this dogma [endless punishment] from the Apocalypse. Like most of such passages, they apply to nations and classes, not to individuals; and primarily to temporal and earthly, not to future and endless judgments. Without in any way weakening its canonical authority, I might (if need were) claim to coordinate its teaching with the later wisdom of St John's riper and more loving age in the Gospel and Epistles. It is obvious that a book respecting the interpretation of which the Church has never agreed; a book of which the strange symbols have been understood by devout and learned students in hundreds, if not in thousands, of different ways; is less suited than any other to furnish "texts" for the basis of dogmas which find from all the rest of Scripture so very small measure of support.

It is obvious too that this book, if its weird metaphors have given rise to endless speculations as to the horrors of Hell, furnishes us also with passages which (as is the case with the rest of Scripture) seem to tell of a glorious final consummation. Until men have approximately agreed as to whether, on the authority of that book, there is or is not to be on earth a literal reign of Christ for a thousand years; until they have settled whether they are going to be Praeterists or Futurists, or neither; until they have come to a reasonable certainty as to whether the main symbolism of the Book points to a progressive history of the Church for hundreds of years, or only to the events which should precede and accompany the

coming of Christ in the close of the old dispensation and the destruction of Jerusalem; until they can give us some finally decisive criterion as to the interpretation of this prophetic imagery, and in what cases it is to be taken in the sense of temporal judgments, and in what other cases of everlasting doom, – it is obvious that we are building the popular doctrines upon the sandiest of foundations if we rely for their proof on passages taken from so mysterious a book.

“Nil agit exemplum quod litem lite resolvit.”

Take, for instance, the vision of Rev.14, which is the vision of the harvest of the world and the vintage and winepress of the wrath of God. It is the chapter from which has been deduced the pernicious belief – a belief more liable than any other to deprave and harden the character of so many professing Christians – that the blest will exult in the torments of the damned. That passage is as follows:

“If any man worship the beast . . . he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torments ascendeth up for aeons and aeons, and they have no rest days nor nights, who worship the beast.”

Perhaps it is hardly wonderful that educated as most men are in ignorance of the principles which apply to the true appreciation of Scripture language, and in the vanity which makes them think their interpretations are infallible, they should take this literally, and apply it to endless torments, though one cannot but wonder about the pure arbitrariness which would, I suppose, refuse, a few verses later, to take literally the river of blood rolling out of the winepress bridal deep for a length of one hundred miles. But meanwhile what becomes of such applications after we have noticed one or two facts?

First of all the judgment obviously has a very limited primary application, because, beyond all shadow of a doubt, the Apocalyptic Beast is, in the first instance, Nero. Here then we at once get the true bearings of the verse. Those who worship the beast, that is the persecuting world power of Rome, – and

as long as they worship the beast are doomed to terrible catastrophes, such as actually did befall Rome during that epoch; and these calamities are compared to being tortured with fire and brimstone. Even Mr. E. B. Elliott, in his elaborate *Horae Apocalypticæ*, comes to the conclusion that, so far from revealing the endless torments of the wicked, the whole vision refers to temporal judgments in this present world. These earthly catastrophes are indicated in strong Jewish metaphor, not untinged with the natural feelings inspired by an epoch of horrible persecution, and the Lamb and His angels are (in human language) represented as cognizant of the earthly overthrow and punishment of those who war against them. And this is to be twisted into the delight of the blest at the shrieks and writhings of the lost, among whom may inevitably be some of those who were sweetest and dearest to them on earth! The whole passage is a symbol as unlike as possible to the inferences which have been deduced from it. And to interpret of interminable agony the expression, "the smoke of their torments ascendeth for aeons and aeons" is doubly erroneous; for first, the phrase is borrowed partly from Gen.19:28, and partly from Isa 34:10, both of which refer to temporal judgments, and of which the second furnishes a strong proof of the false results of an unreasoning literalism. Of the land of Idumaea, Isaiah says, "The streams thereof shall be turned into pitch. It shall not be quenched night or day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever." Interpreted in the light of prophecy, and of subsequent history, it is clear that "fire" and "brimstone," and "smoke ascending for ever," are terms which, in the highly impassioned and figurative language of prophecy, may be applied to temporal catastrophes, without the remotest allusion to the state of souls in the world beyond the grave. But if the most learned and approved of all Evangelical commentators on the Apocalypse tells us that the vision has no reference to the life to come, what guarantee have we that any of the other visions are not similarly inapplicable to future torments?

And here I will furnish another proof of our liability to misinterpret entirely the daring metaphors of Eastern imagination. We think "a lake of fire and brimstone," and "a

fiery oven,” and a “burning fiery furnace,” images far too frightful and intense to represent temporal calamities, or anything but the most inconceivable anguish. If we took the trouble to search the Bible, instead of reading into it our own fancies and those of the Fathers, it would remove all misconceptions by throwing the plainest possible light on its own symbols and figurative forms of expression. Thus in Deut.4:20 Egypt is said to have been to the Israelites an “iron furnace”; and the same terrible metaphor is repeated in Jer.11:4, and in 1Kings 8:51 (“Thy people which Thou broughtest forth out of Egypt from the midst of the furnace of iron”). And yet the metaphors imply a condition so far removed from intolerable torments that the children of Israel said, “It was well with us in Egypt,” and positively sighed for that which they describe as a land of sensual ease! “We remember the fish that we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic.” Until we take the trouble to learn something of the hyperbolic character of Eastern and prophetic metaphor, it is certain that we shall be led continually into wild mistakes.

Instances so decisive will probably be sufficient for many competent and candid readers. They will see how little we can build dogmas on such metaphors as the devil being cast with the Beast (Nero and the Roman world powers) and the false prophet (?) “into the lake of fire and brimstone, and tormented by day and by night for the aeons of the aeons”; into which also are cast two such abstract entities as “Death,” and “Hades.” At any rate he will see that this lake of fire is on the earth, and that immediately afterwards we read of that earth being destroyed, and a new heaven and a new earth in which there is to be no more death or curse. In the Book of Revelation there are infinitely great and precious truths, but certainly no method which has ever yet been applied to it justifies us in regarding the notions of future retribution which have been founded on the literalising of its symbols as other than in the last degree precarious and wrong.

Mercy and Judgment, pp. 468-473.

Having pondered Farrar's telling comments, the reader will appreciate why it is unwise, even wrong, to insist that Rev.14:9-11 (and other highly symbolic passages in Revelation) can be marshalled, without qualification, on the side of the traditional dogma of endless torment. And if unwise and wrong, then the larger hope, which has so much support in Scripture, is in no way undermined by such passages.

Revelation 21:8

'But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake of fire and brimstone, which is the second death.'

Allin gives five reasons why the traditional understanding of these words leaves much to be desired:

- i) It will be necessary to consider the entire context of this verse, if we desire to understand its purport. It opens with the vision of the great white throne (20:11), and we find that after the judgment of that Great Day, so far from death and hell (Hades) continuing, they are "cast into the lake of fire" – very unlike, nay, contradicting the popular view.
- ii) Then comes a declaration that God is to dwell with men - not with the saints - but with men as such, and that as a consequence, they shall be *His people, and God shall be with them and be their God.*
- iii) It is distinctly said, there shall be *no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor any more pain.* Is this not a denial of an endless hell rather than an affirmation of it – nay, an emphatic denial of such a doctrine?
- iv) Then comes a voice from the throne with a glorious promise, "*Behold I make all things new,*" – not *some* things. Note, too, this promise is remarkably emphasized, it opens with the word "*Behold,*" to draw attention to it: it closes with the command to write it, "For these words are true and faithful." Was there no reason for this? Is there not thus attention drawn to this as the central point of the whole vision, *i.e. all things made new?* But this again is a denial of the popular creed.

v) In close connection with such promises come highly figurative threats of the lake of fire. It is perhaps possible to argue that this may imply (although I do not think so) the destruction of those cast into it; but it is *wholly impossible to understand it as teaching endless torment* in the face of what has just been promised – (no more crying nor pain, v.4). Therefore, I conclude, looking at the repeated promises (see “iii” and iv”) of this very passage, which contrast in their perfect clearness with the highly figurative language of its threats, looking at the true meaning of God’s judgments and at the whole spirit of Holy Scripture – nay, its express declaration of universal restoration – that what is here taught, is a fire that purifies while it punishes, a fire that is, in God’s mysterious way, an agent in making all things new.

Christ Triumphant, pp.280, 281.

Revelation 22:15

But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.

As we have seen, arriving at an accurate interpretation of the Book of Revelation is fraught with difficulty due to its figurative language. This verse, like 21:27 and 22:11, is in a context of *openness* and *hope*. The gates of the New Jerusalem, i.e. of the Church and Bride of Christ (21:2), are *left open* (21:25); the prophecy *is not sealed* (22:10); and the Spirit and the Bride’s invitation to come and ‘take of the water of life freely’ is *still open* (22:17). Consequently, along with the warnings and judgments there is hope.

From 22:11 it appears that the wicked are fixed in their sinful ways, but God’s mercy ‘endures forever’ (1Chron.16:34; Ps.118:1-4; Jer.33:11). Nothing is ‘too hard’ for God (Jer.32:17, 26). He is able to save the worst sinners, for with Him ‘all things are possible’ (Matt.19:26). He can bring the vilest to repentance, turn them from their sin and enable them to ‘do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city’ (22:14).

Moreover, from 21:24 and 22:2 we gather that people *other than those who constitute the New Jerusalem* have access to the tree of life and its healing leaves. The clause ‘of those who are saved’ (v.24 KJV), in

connection with the nations who walk in the light of the New Jerusalem, is not in the best manuscripts. Without it, this verse suggests the prospect of people *other than the glorified Church* coming to enjoy the benefits of the Kingdom of God. Consequently, people / 'nations' coming to be blessed *by and through* the Church / New Jerusalem *points to the larger hope*, i.e. the belief that *all people* will be blessed through Abraham's 'seed' – Christ and the Church (Gal.3:16, 29).

The larger hope embraces the belief that God will ultimately bring the wicked, mentioned in 22:15, to accept the Spirit and the Bride's invitation (v.17), and join the nations who enter the city. That this hope is justified, is seen from the universal scope of God's saving and restoring purpose taught in 1Cor.15:28; Phil.2:9-11; 3:21; Rev.5:13. These verses, and others like them, provide us with clear teaching on the final outcome of God's saving purpose.

Objections to the Larger Hope

We began by considering twenty Bible passages that provide evidence for the larger hope. Then, after briefly examining some terms relating to divine judgment, we looked at twenty passages often used to support the traditional doctrine of the everlasting punishment of the wicked. I have endeavoured to show that many verses that appear to teach the traditional view, do not in fact do so, at least not unambiguously.

Having read the foregoing scriptural evidence for the larger hope, some Christians may disagree with my conclusions, and for a number of reasons, including the following:

Christ Died for His Sheep, Not for the Whole World

Addressing the last part of this objection first, advocates of Limited Atonement (the belief that Christ died for the elect, and for them only – as taught by Calvin) discount not only Christian Universalism (the belief that all people will ultimately be saved), but also Arminianism (the belief that Christ died for all people, including the elect, but that only those who believe in Him in this life will be saved). So both Calvinists and Arminians reject the belief and even the hope that all people will be saved.

Like Arminians, Christian Universalists believe that God has redeemed and reconciled all people to Himself in Christ; but they go further, by

maintaining that He has not only redeemed and reconciled the whole world, but purposes to save all people, as considered in the first part of this book. For Arminians to accept the larger hope, they would have to reconcile their belief that only *some* will be saved, with what Scripture says about Christ giving Himself 'a ransom for all', and God becoming 'all in all' (1Tim.2:6; 1Cor.15:28). Similarly, Calvinists would have to reconcile their belief that Christ died exclusively for His 'sheep', with His taking away 'the sin of the world', and His tasting death 'for all men' (John 1:29 KJV; Heb.2:9 KJV; John 10:11).

Arminians, Calvinists and Christian Universalists find it difficult to harmonize these and other apparently conflicting passages on the extent of salvation. However, it seems to me that Christian Universalists are able to reconcile these strands of teaching more successfully and convincingly than the others, and in a way that most magnifies the love, goodness and mercy of God.

Christian Universalists show from Scripture how the elect and humanity in general will be saved. In addition to the sovereign love and mercy of God, they usually point to the *nature* and *purpose* of God's elect in relation to the rest of humanity. They maintain that the elect, including *individuals* (such as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, especially Jesus, Isa.42:1; Matt.12:18), and the saints *corporately*, i.e. the nation of Israel and Christian believers (Deut.14:1, 2; Isa.45:4; Eph.1:3-6), are chosen not simply for their own benefit, but as *channels of blessing to others, even the whole world* (Gen.22:15-18; Isa.42:6; John 6:51; 1John 2:2). So it is both the elect *and all who are blessed through them* that God purposes to save. It is not just a matter of either/or, but both. This, in essence, is the larger hope. It is Christ in, with and through His elect people, blessing and restoring the whole creation.

The Church, 'Abraham's seed' (Gal.3:29), in and with Christ, is 'light' and 'salt' for the illumination and preservation of humanity. The elect are the 'sons of God' who will be revealed at the 'manifestation of the sons of God,' when the whole creation will be 'delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Rom.8:12-17, 19-23 KJV; Eph.1:5).

The Church is i) the '*body of Christ*' (1Cor.12:27; Col.1:24); ii) the '*first fruits*' (Rom.8:23; 2Thess.2:12 DOU; Jam.1:18; Rev.14:4); iii) the '*church of the firstborn*' (Heb.12:23), and iv) the '*overcomers*' (1John 5:4; Rev.21:7). The overcoming Church will reign with Christ as kings and

priests, and judge the world and angels (Rev.3:21; 2Tim.2:12; Rev.5:10; 1Cor.6:1-3). God's 'called, chosen, and faithful' ones, His 'royal priesthood' and 'holy nation' (1Pet.2:9), have the privilege and responsibility of being His corporate firstborn, the body of Christ the Firstborn. Using their 'double portion' (their inheritance of spiritual riches in Christ), they will minister judgment and justice to the rest of redeemed and reconciled humanity (Rev.17:14; 1Pet.2:9,10; Deut.21:17; Eph.1:18; 3:8-11). God's purpose to bless the world through His elect 'firstborn' and 'first fruits' is explained more thoroughly by Andrew Jukes, in his book *The Second Death and the Restitution of All Things*, pp.30-48.

Those who assume the elect are the only ones for whom Christ died, hence the only ones destined for salvation, may have difficulty accepting the above teaching on the elect's ministerial role in relation to the rest of humanity; but it glorifies God in a way that far surpasses the narrow, traditional view. It inspires the widest hope for the world, and helps to dispel the despair felt by believers and others who have been taught there is no alternative to many of God's children / offspring being lost forever, including some of their loved ones.

The Church Has Always Taught the Endless Punishment of the Wicked

This is not strictly true. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) says there were 'very many' in his day ('brethren of pity' he calls them), who believed and taught the ultimate salvation of all people. The more hopeful view came into official disfavour in the sixth century, largely due to Augustine's narrow theology, backed by imperial authority; but it persisted, especially in the Eastern Church, and became more widely accepted in the West after the Reformation. In more recent times, particularly in the last hundred years or so, many scholars, Church leaders, and Christians generally have accepted or become more favourable to the larger hope. Some major denominations now accept Christian Universalism as a valid theological position.

Despite this, most Christians believe that at least some people will finally be lost. But this should not be taken as proof that traditional doctrine on the destiny of the wicked is true. Many things previously believed by most Christians are no longer accepted as true. This is easily shown: for in pre-Reformation times, when the Church of Rome dominated western Christendom, people believed i) the Church of

Rome was the only true Church; ii) all clergy must be celibate; iii) unbaptized children were forever denied the Beatific Vision (i.e. sight of God); iv) going on Crusades and purchasing indulgences earned forgiveness of sins, and v) dying in 'mortal sin' (which included non-attendance at Mass) could result in being condemned to hell forever. This list could be extended, but these examples prove the point.

Nowadays most Christians reject the above beliefs, and in time may come to reject the doctrine of endless punishment. As we have seen, most of the proof texts marshalled in its favour can be understood in more hopeful ways. Belief that the Father of mercies purposes to save all His fallen children is gaining ground, bringing hope, peace and joy to many.

Why Preach the Gospel if All Will be Saved Anyway?

This objection to the larger hope reveals shallow thinking. For with Christians generally, Christian Universalists believe that God uses *means* to draw people to Himself. For instance, Calvinists do not let their belief in the elect's eternal security deter them from calling people to repentance and faith in Christ. And Arminians, who believe that God elects some to salvation on the basis of His foreknowledge of their acceptance of Christ in this life, are regularly active in evangelism. So Christians of all types, including Christian Universalists, proclaim the Good News of God's grace as His appointed means of bringing people to Christ. They do this out of love, and because Jesus told His followers to 'preach the Gospel to every creature' and 'make disciples of all the nations . . . teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you' (Mark 16:15; Matt.28:19, 20).

Salvation is much more than deliverance from the 'wrath to come' (1Thess.1:10). God's anger *is* something to fear, but the essence of salvation is coming to know and love God, and having His image restored in us by His grace through the enlightening and sanctifying power of His Spirit. So, being transformed into His Son's likeness, we may glorify Him and be a blessing to others. In other words, salvation is the possession and enjoyment of Christ as our life. This becomes a reality only through hearing and believing the Good News. Therefore, the Gospel of God's love in Christ must be proclaimed in all the world as a witness to all nations (Matt.24:14).

No one can be saved apart from repentance and faith in Christ (Acts 4:12; 17:30). Believers in the larger hope are fully aware of this, and

give it due weight in their teaching. They declare the Good News with confidence, because they know that some will respond to Christ in this age, and that in the end *everyone* will worship Him, and confess Him Lord (Phil.2:10; 3:21). God will accomplish this in due season, but only through His divinely appointed means.

The Larger Hope Weakens or Destroys Belief in Future Punishment

Allin mentions this objection in *Christ Triumphant*, pp. 2, 3. In reply he says:

The very opposite is surely the truth, for you establish future punishment, and with it that sense of the reality of sin (to which conscience testifies) on a firm basis, only when you teach a plan of retribution, which is itself reasonable and credible. A penalty which to our reason and moral sense seems shocking and monstrous loses all force as a threat. It has ever been so in the case of human punishments. And so in the case of hell. Outwardly believed, it has ceased to touch the conscience, or greatly to influence the life of Christians. To the mass of men it has become a name and little more (not seldom a jest); to the sceptic it has furnished the choicest of his weapons; to the man of science, and to the more thoughtful of all ranks, a mark for loathing and scorn: while, alas, to many a sad and drooping heart, which longs to follow Christ more closely, it is the chief woe and burden of life. But the conscience, when no longer wounded by extravagant dogmas, is most ready to acquiesce in any measure of retribution (however sharp it may be) which yet does not shock the moral sense, and conflict with its deepest convictions. And so the larger hope most fully recognises at once the guilt of sin, and the need of fitting retribution: nay, it may be claimed for it, *that it alone places both on a firm and solid basis*, by bringing them into harmony with the verdict of reason, of conscience and of Holy Scripture.

God who commands us to 'do justly' (Mic.6:8) never behaves unjustly Himself, but always tempers punishment according to the level of culpability (Lev.4:1-12, 13-21, 22-26, 27-35; Luke12:45-48). This suggests that God takes into account every consideration and mitigating circumstance when judging, sentencing and punishing offenders.

The just penalty for sin is death / alienation from God. Therefore, if God judged us *solely* on the basis of His holiness and justice there would be no hope. But, as has been repeatedly emphasized in this book, God is LOVE in the essence of His Being; which means that all His dealings

with us are rooted and grounded in love. His judgment, correction, chastening and punishment are never divorced from His love, but are ministered in love, and are designed to deliver us from everything that grieves Him and ruins our lives, lives He has created and loves. His eternal plan is to save the world through His Son. We see the groundwork for this in His redemption and reconciliation of the whole world in and through Christ. It is anticipated in prophecy, type and shadow, beginning with Gen.3:15, 21, where the conquest of evil and the imputation of Christ's righteousness is promised to our first parents and their children.

Having created, redeemed and reconciled the world to Himself through His Son, God is in the process of bringing all people into the good of His salvation, by grace through faith. As the name implies, the *first fruits* are the first to be saved from condemnation; then from the power and presence of sin, through sanctification and glorification. These will live and reign as co-heirs with Christ, and will govern and administer the kingdom of God with Him. Before the rest of humanity experience salvation they, like the saints, will have to be brought to repentance and faith, and go through the same process of dying to self. Punishment there will be, in some cases severe, but it will be remedial and ministered in love.

The Larger Hope Finds Little Support in Scripture

This is simply untrue. In addition to the passages we have considered in the first part of this book, the following more comprehensive list, compiled by Allin, show Christian Universalism's broad scriptural basis. Verses we have already considered are marked with an asterisk (emphasis Allin's).

Old Testament

Ps.22:7* - 'All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD, and *all the families of the nations* shall worship before You.'

Ps.65:2 - 'O You who hear prayer, to You *all flesh* will come.'

Ps.66:4 - '*All the earth* shall worship You and sing praises to You; they shall sing praises to Your name.'

Ps.72:11-19 - 'Yes, *all kings* shall fall down before Him; *all nations* shall serve Him.'

Ps.86:9 - '*All nations* whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord.'

Ps.145:9, 10* - 'The LORD is good to *all*, and His tender mercies are over *all His works*. *All Your works* shall praise You, O LORD, and Your saints shall bless You.'

Isa.45:22-24 - 'I have sworn by Myself . . . to Me *every knee* shall bow, *every tongue* shall take an oath. He shall say, "Surely in the LORD I have righteousness and strength."

Isa.53:6* - '*All we* like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, *every one*, to his own way; and the LORD has laid upon Him the iniquity of us *all*.'

Isa.54:8 - 'With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you.'

Isa.57:16 - 'For I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry; for the spirit would fail before Me, and the souls which I have made.'

Lam.3:31-33 - 'For the Lord will not cast off forever. Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.'

Mic.7:18 - 'He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights In mercy.'

Zeph.3:8, 9 - 'All the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy. For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that *all* may call upon the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one accord.'

New Testament

The following verses are not in Scriptural order, but are arranged so as to emphasize various aspects of the larger hope.

Col.1:19, 20* - 'For it pleased the Father . . . to reconcile *all things* to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.'

Acts 3:21* - 'whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of *all things*, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.'

Heb.1:1, 2 - 'God . . . has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of *all things* . . .'

John 13:3 - 'Jesus, knowing that the Father had given *all things* into His hands . . .'

Gal.3:8 - 'In you *all the nations* shall be blessed.'

John 17:2 - 'You have given Him authority over *all flesh*.'

Luke 3:6 - 'And *all flesh* shall see the salvation of God.'

1Tim.2:3, 4* - 'God our Saviour . . . desires ['will have,' KJV] *all men* to be saved.'

2Pet.3:9 - 'the Lord is . . . not willing [Gk *boulomai* = determining] that *any* should perish but that *all* should come to repentance.'

Rom.11:32 - 'For God has committed them *all* to disobedience, that He might have mercy on *all*.'

Rom.11:36 - 'For of Him and through Him and to Him are *all things*, to whom be glory forever.'

Eph.1:22 - 'And He put *all things* under His feet. . .'

Eph.1:10* - 'that . . . He might gather together in one *all things* in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth - in Him . . .'

Rom.5:18 KJV - 'by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon *all men*.'

John 12:32* KJV - 'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw *all men* unto Me.'

Rev.21:5 - 'Behold, I make *all things* new.'

John 1:7 - 'This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that *all* through Him might believe.'

John 3:17 - 'For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that *the world* through Him might be saved.'

Tit.2:11* - 'For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to *all men*.'

John 1:29 - 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of *the world*.'

John 6:51 - 'the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of *the world*.'

Rom.11:29 - 'For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.'

John 6:33 - 'for the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to *the world*.'

John 8:12 - 'I am the light of *the world*.'

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

1Tim.4:10 - 'the living God, who is the Saviour of *all men*, especially of those who believe.'

1John 3:8 - 'For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.'

Heb.2:14 - 'through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.'

2Tim.1:10 - 'our Saviour Jesus Christ, who has *abolished death* and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.'

Heb.9:26 - 'once at the end of the ages He has appeared to *put away sin* by the sacrifice of Himself.'

Phil.3:21 - 'He is able to subdue *all things* to Himself' (the context shows that this involves *conforming* all things to Himself).

1Pet.3:18, 19 - 'Christ was . . . made alive by the Spirit, by whom He went and preached to the spirits in prison . . .' (Christ takes the gospel to Hades itself).

Rev.1:18 - 'And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.'

Heb.13:8 - 'Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.'

1Pet.4:6 - 'the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit' (thus even the *dead* are evangelised). Note: the word 'now' before 'dead' in the NIV is not in the original.

Rev.20:14 - 'Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.'

1Cor.15:22 - 'For as in Adam *all* die, even so in Christ *all* shall be made alive.'

John 17:4 - I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.'

John 19:30 - 'It is finished!'

Acts 3:21 - 'whom heaven must receive until the restoration of *all things*.'

Rev.22:2, 3 - 'And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of *the nations*. And there shall be no more curse.'

Phil.2:10* - '*every knee* should bow . . . *every tongue* should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord . . .' [note that the OT source of this verse, Isa.45:23, 24 KJV, NKJV, has 'to Me *every knee shall bow . . . every tongue shall take an oath*. He shall say, "Surely in the LORD I have righteousness and strength" '].

Rom. 8:21 - '*the creation* itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.'

Rev.5:13 - 'And *every creature* which is in heaven and on earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and *all that are in them*, I heard saying, "Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto Him who sits on the throne, and unto the Lamb, forever and ever."

1Cor.15:28 - 'Now when *all things* are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put *all things* under Him, that God may be *all in all*.'

These Bible verses tell us that God wills and purposes to bless all His creatures, and bring them into the Good of His love in Christ, the Redeemer, Reconciler and Saviour of the world. Teaching the salvation of the few, or even the many, is sadly lacking in the light of this powerful scriptural testimony to the universal scope of God's love, goodness and mercy, and His ultimate purpose of being *All in All*.

Some may protest that these verses do not prove universal salvation. Whilst that may be so, taken together their spirit resonates with the larger hope more than with the traditional doctrine of the endless punishment of many of God's creatures.

Few Christians of Spiritual Stature Have Believed In Universal Salvation

It is not surprising that opponents of the larger hope raise this objection, when most critiques refer to only a handful of its advocates. But, like the previous objection, it is untrue, as the following list of seventy eminent people from a list of *almost five hundred* shows. The compilers point out that it includes 'early Church Fathers and leaders, theologians, scholars, historians, royalty, writers, poets, statesmen, humanitarians, scientists and people from other streams of life.' Those listed below are internationally renowned, and the rest are well known in their own countries and spheres of influence.

The list 'was compiled from several sources, among which are: *A Cloud of Witnesses*, by J. W. Hanson, first published in 1885 and reprinted by Concordant Publishing Concern; *Mercy and Judgment*, by Canon F. W. Farrar, published in 1881; *Christ Triumphant*, by Thomas Allin, first published in 1890 and reprinted by Concordant Publishing Concern; and *Universal Reconciliation and Evangelical Covenant Church*. Dean Hough, Editor of *Unsearchable Riches*, also contributed greatly to the list.'

Some Advocates of the Larger Hope

- **Clement of Alexandria**, theologian (c.150-215).
- **Origen**, eminent Early Church scholar (c.185-254).
- **Athanasius**, Bishop of Alexandria (c.296-373).
- **Ambrose**, Bishop of Milan (c.339-97).
- **Chrysostom**, Bishop of Constantinople (c.347-407).
- **Gregory of Nyssa**, Bishop of Nyssa (c.330-95).
- **Gregory of Nazianzus**, Bishop of Constantinople (c.329-89).
- **Eusebius**, Early Church historian, Bishop of Caesarea (c.260-340).
- **Cyril**, Patriarch of Alexandria (d.c.444).
- **Diodore**, Bishop of Tarsus and Jerusalem (d.c.390).
- **Theodore**, Bishop of Mopsuestia (c.350-482).
- **Theodoret**, Bishop of Cyrrhus (c.393-460).
- **Erigena**, philosopher (c.810-77).
- **Anselm**, Archbishop of Canterbury (c.1033-1109).
- **Thomas Hobbes**, philosopher (1588-1679).
- **Sir Isaac Newton**, mathematician and natural philosopher (1642-1727).
- **Daniel Defoe**, writer (1660-1731).
- **Isaac Watts**, pastor and hymn-writer (1674-1748).
- **Bishop Joseph Butler** (1692-1752).
- **John Donne**, poet (1571-1631).
- **Dr Philip Doddridge**, cleric and hymn-writer (1702-51).
- **Samuel Johnson**, author and lexicographer (1709-84).
- **Fredrick the Great** (1712-86).

- **Immanuel Kant**, philosopher (1724-1804).
- **William Cowper**, poet and hymn-writer (1731-1800).
- **Dr Joseph Priestley**, minister and scientist (1733-1804).
- **T. W. Goethe**, poet and novelist (1749-1832).
- **William Law**, spiritual writer (1686-1761).
- **Anne Bronte**, novelist (1820-49).
- **John G. Whittier**, Quaker poet (1807-92).
- **Robert and Elizabeth Browning**, poets (1812-89).
- **Robert Burns**, poet (1759-96).
- **Samuel Taylor Coleridge**, poet (1772-1834).
- **George Macdonald**, minister, novelist and children's writer (1824-1905).
- **Charlotte Bronte**, novelist (1816-55).
- **Emily Bronte**, novelist (1818-48).
- **General Gordon** (1833-85).
- **William Wordsworth**, poet (1770-1850).
- **Florence Nightingale**, (1820-1910).
- **Ralph Waldo Emerson**, philosopher and essayist (1803-82).
- **Canon Charles Kingsley**, cleric, social reformer and writer (1819-1901).
- **Bishop Westcott**, Bishop of Durham, scholar (1825-1901).
- **Canon F. W. Farrar**, Dean of Canterbury (1831-1903).
- **F. W. Faber**, Christian writer (1814-63).
- **Walter Savage Landor**, poet (1775-1864).
- **Percy B. Shelley**, poet (1792-1822).
- **Nathaniel Hawthorne**, novelist (1804-64).
- **Hans Christian Andersen**, children's writer (1805-75).

- **John Stuart Mill**, philosopher and economist (1806-13).
- **Henry Wadsworth Longfellow**, poet (1807-82).
- **Alfred Tennyson**, poet (1809-92).
- **W. M. Thackeray**, novelist (1811-63).
- **Harriet Beecher Stowe**, abolitionist and author (1811-96).
- **Charles Dickens**, novelist (1812-70).
- **Lewis Carroll**, children's writer (1832-98).
- **Franz Delitsch**, OT scholar (1813-90).
- **John Ruskin**, art critic and social reformer (1819-1900).
- **Walt Whitman**, poet (1819-92).
- **Matthew Arnold**, poet (1822-88).
- **Henry James**, novelist (1843-1916).
- **William Morris**, designer, socialist and poet (1834-96).
- **Victor Hugo**, poet, novelist (1802-85).
- **Schleiermacher**, theologian (1768-1834).
- **George Washington** (1732-99).
- **Abraham Lincoln** (1809-65).
- **William Temple**, Archbishop of Canterbury (1881-1944).
- **C. H. Dodd**, New Testament scholar (1884-1973).
- **Karl Barth**, theologian (1886-1968).
- **William Barclay**, theologian, scholar and writer (1907-78).

The above list (only a seventh of that supplied by the compilers) contains as bright a gathering of spiritual, intellectual and human personalities as you will find anywhere. This in itself does not prove the truth of Christian Universalism, but it undoubtedly shows that some of the greatest, noblest and most creative hearts and minds of the last two thousand years, have found in this understanding of God and his word, that which most satisfies the deepest longings and highest

aspirations of the human spirit; a fact which cannot easily be ignored or dismissed by those who insist on the narrower, less-merciful creed.

Conclusion

In the first part of this book, I have tried to treat the larger hope and the more traditional view of the destiny of the wicked fairly, by examining an equal number of passages on both sides of the question. The definitions of scriptural terms associated with divine judgment help to show that proof texts for endless punishment can often be understood in more hopeful ways. However, some may find the case for the larger hope inconclusive. In the end it is a matter of which view is most in harmony with the letter and spirit of Scripture.

Many believe that eternal judgment is God's last word to those who continue to resist His call to repentance and faith in Christ. Others, including those listed above, believe in the victory of love and grace over the power of sin and death in every single case. In traditional theology the great 'Judge of all' often looms larger than the 'Saviour of all'; and the great 'Avenger of sin' more than the 'the Father of mercies.' Some view human birth as the coming into existence of people who may be predestined to endless punishment. Those who rejoice in the larger hope believe that God has purposed to save every lost and ruined soul, the latter believing that God permitted the Fall only because He had preordained the ultimate salvation of all (Rom.8:20, 21; 11:32).

Accepting the Bible as the inspired revelation of God's will for our lives does not exclude reasoning from *human* experience to *the mind, character and will of God*, especially when God encourages this. For instance, when Jesus wanted to emphasize God's goodness to His fallen children, He said: 'If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!' (Matt.7:11). God is good, not only to those who know and love Him, but to the 'evil' and the 'unjust' (Matt.5:45). So, by *doing good to our enemies as He does*, we show that we are children of our heavenly Father (vv.44, 45).

These things prove that God is 'merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth' (Exod.34:6). When He is angry, it is as the Father whose love, even for His enemies, remains constant.

He disciplines to improve. No matter how severely He chastens, it is for our good, not harm. Divine chastening, even when it leads to acute suffering and loss, including death, is the pathway to life. For we read that God ‘kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and brings up’ (1Sam.2:6). Even those banished from His presence, whether in this life or the next, can hope for restoration, for ‘He devises means, so that His banished ones are not expelled from Him’ (2Sam.14:14). In the incident related in this chapter, the woman of Tekoah pleads with David for his banished son, Absalom, reminding him of God’s forgiveness and restorative mercy to sinners – which is something we are inclined to forget.

In closing, I want to magnify the truth that God is infinitely good. As our heavenly Father, He possesses all the attributes of a good and loving human father, but to the extent and perfection only possible in a Divine Being. Consequently, He never behaves less justly, kindly or mercifully than we do. Likewise, no good and compassionate father would ever forget, forsake or condemn his children (or for that matter anyone) to endless suffering, no matter what they had done, but, if necessary, would lay down his life to prevent it – which is exactly what Christ has done, in that He has ‘tasted death for everyone’, and promised to subdue and conform all things to Himself, that in the end God might be All in All. All God’s dealings with us flow from His unchanging goodness and love. They are directed towards the glorious restoration of all things when the whole creation will be brought into the fullness of His love and blessing in Christ.

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A-Z of the Larger Hope

Adam (Saved)

'It was necessary for Him to save that very man who had been created after His image and likeness - that is, Adam.'

'In as much as man is saved, it is fitting that he who was created as the original man should be saved too.'

'Everyone who disallows Adam's salvation speaks falsely.'

Irenaeus (c.180).

'Jesus delivered from the lowest Hades the first man of earth, when that man was lost and bound by the chains of death.'

Hippolytus (c.205).

'Adam and Eve . . . were candidates for restoration.'

Tertullian (c.270).

All - See 'Many'

Ashamed

Heb. *Boosh* – 'become pale, ashamed, disappointed, delayed, confounded, dry'.

Strong's Concordance.

'Shame' in Isa.45:24; Jer.31:18-20; Ezek.39:25, 26; Dan.9:8, 9; does not mean *endless* shame – for Jerusalem, Samaria and Sodom are all promised restoration (Ezek.16:44-63; esp. vv.52, 54, 61, 63 in relation to 'shame'). So some, as in Phil. 2:10, 11, may confess Christ with shame, but *all* will say, 'Surely in the LORD I have righteousness and strength' (Isa.45:24 KJV, NKJV).

Paul did not want to be ashamed of anything in His ministry at the Lord's appearing, but should such an eventuality occur nothing could rob him of salvation (Phil.1: 20).

Banished

God shows mercy to people He has banished from His presence, by devising means whereby they can be restored (2Sam.14:14). ‘Banish’ in 2Sam.14:14 and Lam.2:14 (KJV) is from the same Hebrew root, which suggests that God’s promise to restore His banished ones in 2Sam.14:14 extends to the restoration of apostate Israel (Ezek.39:25).

Blotted out of God’s Book

This should be studied alongside passages like Luke 10:20; Phil.4:3; Rev.13:8; 5:13. In three of these it is believers’ names that are written in the book of life, which touches on the eternal security of believers, in which many Christians believe. In the end, God will be ‘all in all’ (1Cor.15:28), and ‘*every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea and all that are in them,*’ will say ‘*blessing and honour and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!*’ (Rev.5:13). So whatever being ‘blotted out of the book of life’ means, *all people* will worship God in the end.

Break in Pieces

Christ will break the nations in pieces (Rev.2:27). He can do this by His word / words (Job.19:2; Rev.19:15). But the nations thus broken are promised healing (Isa.19:22; Zeph.3:8, 9; Rev.22:2).

Bride of Christ (Elect, Church)

The following verses show that the nations will be saved through Christ and the Church’s ministry (Ps.145:10-13; Isa.2:1-4; Dan7:18, 27; John 3:29; 1Cor.3:16; 6:2; 1John 2:2; Rev.2:26, 27; 5:10; 21:24). The words ‘of those who are saved,’ in Rev.21:24 KJV, are not in the best manuscripts: which suggests that *all nations without exception* will walk in the Church’s light, indicating their salvation / ‘healing’ (Rev.22:2).

In the Athens of Pericles’ day, the *ecclesia* was a *ruling body of citizens*. It was chosen not simply for its own benefit, but for the good of all the Athenians. Paul may have viewed the Christian *ecclesia* in a similar light when he wrote of the Church being destined to reign with Christ, i.e. for the benefit of others – even all people.

Brimstone

Sulphur was used by the ancient Greeks and Romans as a medicine to *cleanse* and *purify*, which provides an insight into Rev.20:10; 21:8.

Cast Off

A withdrawal of God's approval which need not mean being rejected for ever (Ps.108:10-13; Rom.11:1-12, 25, 26, 32-36).

Chastening (God's)

God chastens us in His love, for our profit, to make us holy (Job 5:17,18; Prov.13:24; Jer.31:18-20; Ezek.6:7-10; 24:13; Mal.3:1-3; 1Tim.1:20; Heb.12:6, 10; Rev.3:19). And because He loves His enemies, for their profit also (2Chron.33:10-13, 18, 19; Ezek.16:44-63; Dan.4:27, 34-37; Zeph.3:8-9; Rom.8:18-23; 1Cor.15:28).

Consume

Jerome says: 'Death shall come as a visitor to the impious; it will not be perpetual; it will not annihilate them, but will prolong its visit, till the impiety which is in them shall be consumed' (Allin, *Christ Triumphant*, p.134).

In Jer.8:13 God says He will 'consume' His people, i.e. 'refine them and try them' (9:7). He sent them into exile to consume their 'filthiness' not to destroy them irremediably (Ezek.22:15 KJV). God 'consumed' them to 'correct' them (Jer.5:3).

Correction

There is an element of correction in all God's punitive judgments (Job 37:13; Ps.94:10; Jer.2:19; Hab.1:12).

Curse

God's curse is corrective, not simply punitive / retributive (Deut.ch.30).

Damnation

In Jam.3:1 KJV 'damnation' clearly means 'judgment' (as in NKJV).

Luther, in his *Table Talk*, speaks of Christ dying for the 'comfort of us poor, miserable and damned creatures'. Evidently he did not consider such beyond hope.

Death

Solomon considered the dead, the unborn and those who never existed better off than the living (Eccl.4:2, 3), which says a lot in view of the doctrine of endless torment. Advocates of Conditional Immortality maintain that the wicked will be annihilated, but:

. . . are any of the varied deaths which Scripture speaks of as incident to man, his non-existence or annihilation? Take as examples the deaths referred to by St Paul, in the sixth, seventh, and eighth chapters of the Epistle to the Romans. We read (ch.6:7), 'He that is dead is free from sin.' Is this 'death' that is freedom from sin, non-existence or annihilation? Again, when he says (ch.8:6), 'To be carnally minded is death,' is this 'death' non-existence or annihilation? And again, when he says (ch.8:38), 'Neither death, nor life, shall separate us,' is the 'death' here referred to annihilation? When Adam died on the day he sinned (Gen.2:17), was this annihilation? When his body died and turned to dust (Gen.5.5), was this annihilation? Is our 'death in trespasses and sins' (Eph.2:1, 2) annihilation? Is our 'death to sin' (Rom.6:11), annihilation? * * Do not these and similar uses of the word prove beyond all question, that whatever else these deaths may be, not one of them is non-existence or annihilation?

Andrew Jukes, cited Allin's *Christ Triumphant*, pp.184-185.

Irenaeus says:

'He [God] prevented further transgression (for Adam) by the interposition of death, and by causing sin to cease by the dissolution of the flesh . . . that man, ceasing to live in sin, and dying to self, might begin to live to God.' [See 1Pet.4:6].

So according to Irenaeus, the highly regarded early Christian teacher, God's purpose in sentencing our first parents to death, and banishing them from Eden, was to prevent them eating from the tree of life and living forever in their sinful state (Gen.3:22-24). As we have seen, this happened only after He had promised them redemption in Christ (3:15, 21).

Destruction

In 1Cor.5:5 and 2Thess.1:9 'destruction' is a translation of the Greek word *olethros*. In 1Cor.5:5 it means the destruction of the 'flesh', not the whole person. This may have a bearing on 2Thess.1:9, in that the 'destruction' mentioned there may also mean the destruction of the offenders' 'flesh' (corrupt nature), rather than their whole being, in keeping with God's stated plan to deliver the creation from the bondage of corruption (Rom.8:21).

Doctrine

F. W. Farrar says:

If, as has been said, there are two systems of religious doctrine, in one of which "sin" is the central thought; "terror" the motive power; "personal salvation," the object: and in the other, "God as revealed in Christ," the centre; "the goodness of God" the motive power; "the restoration of His scattered children to Him" the object, - then I think that the former may be taken to represent much of the popular theology and the latter the Gospel of Christ. The result of the former is too apt to be a hard and loveless religionism: the latter may, by God's grace, develop the spiritual mind.

Mercy and Judgment, pp.363, 364.

These conflicting doctrinal emphases are illustrated in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. Addressing the child Jane, the heartless Mr Brocklehurst says:

'Deceit is indeed a sad fault in a child; it is akin to falsehood, and all liars will have their portion in the lake burning with fire and brimstone . . .' It is interesting to compare this hard, unfeeling spirit, unleashed in the presence of a child, with the very different spirit of Helen, Jane's dying friend. In reply to Jane's question: 'Where is God? What is God?' Helen says:

'My Maker and yours, who will never destroy what he created. I rely implicitly on his power, and confide wholly in his goodness: I count the hours till that eventful one arrives

which shall restore me to him, reveal him to me . . . I am sure there is a future state; I believe God is good; I can resign my immortal part to him without any misgiving. God is my father; God is my friend: I love him; I believe he loves me . . . You will come to the same region of happiness: be received by the same mighty, universal Parent, no doubt, dear Jane.'

This belief in the merciful fatherhood of God is expressed by another Helen, in Anne Bronte's, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. She says of her husband who has died after a life of debauchery:

'Thank God I have hope – not only from a vague dependence on the possibility that penitence and pardon might have reached him at the last, but from the blessed confidence that, through whatever purging fires the erring spirit may be doomed to pass – whatever fate awaits it, still, it is not lost, and God who hateth nothing that he hath made, will bless it in the end.'

These writers emphasize the love and mercy of God that permeate true Christian doctrine (Ps.118:1-4;145:9; Prov.10:12; 2Cor.1:3).

Double Punishment

Israel suffered 'double' punishment for all her sins – yet was pardoned (Isa.40:1, 2).

Dying in One's Sins

Compare John 8:24 with Num.27:1-3, and note that in the latter there is *no sense of eternal loss*. Christ has redeemed, ransomed and reconciled all people, including Zelophehad, who 'died in his own sin' (Isa.53:6; 1Tim.2:6; Col.1:20).

Dying in one's sins is the common lot of people who have never heard of Christ – or, having heard of Him, have for various reasons not believed in Him. This would seem fatal, but for the fact that Christ has ransomed all from sin and death, will draw all people to Himself, and will bring all to love and praise Him (1Tim.2:6; John 12:32; Rev.5:13). Nevertheless, it is patently better to believe in Christ in this life, and enjoy fullness of life now, than live and die in one's sins.

Elect

See 'Bride' (above).

Gen. 20:7,17 – Abraham, God's elect servant, prayed for heathen Abimelech and he was healed – an example of the elect's priestly ministry / service to humanity as a whole. God's appointment of the elect should be seen 'not as a special favour, but as a special mission' (*Dictionary of Religions and Secular Faiths*).

Gen.27:34-40 – Esau was not condemned to endless punishment, but *to subservience to his brother Jacob*, God's choice for the rights of the firstborn (Rom.9:12, 13). Lamsa brings this out in his rendering of Rom.9:13: 'As it is written, Jacob have I loved but Esau have I set aside' (*The New Testament, From the Ancient Eastern Text*, Harper and Row). Although denied the rights of the firstborn, Esau and his descendants will be blessed through Christ and the elect in the ages to come when, at the 'manifestation of the sons of God', all who are in bondage to futility and corruption will be 'delivered into the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Rom.8:20, 21). Esau's being 'hated' (Rom.9:13) meant losing the rights of the firstborn, *not* salvation (See Luke 14:26, where Jesus teaches His followers that 'hating' one's family means, *not negation of love for one's family*, but being willing to leave one's family in order to follow Him).

Deut.21:5 – the Levitical Priesthood typifies the Church which God has chosen in Christ to serve Him and humanity, both now and in the ages to come (1Pet.2:9; Rev.5:10).

1Sam.2:8 – Hannah speaks of how the Lord lifts (elects) the 'poor' and the 'beggar' from the dust and the ash heap, 'to set them among princes' and make them 'inherit the throne of glory.'

1Chron.22:5 – the Temple, the 'house of the Lord,' typifies the Church, which is destined to become 'famous and glorious throughout all countries,' a glorious 'household,' 'body,' 'kingdom,' consisting of the 'sons of God,' 'the saints' through whom all nations will be blessed (1Pet.2:4; Eph.2:19; 3:6; Luke 12:32; Rom.8:19-23).

Ps. 45 – presents a detailed picture / allegory of Christ and the redeemed, and different kinds of people in relation to the 'king' and 'queen' (v.9) – including 'companions' (v.7); 'king's daughters,' and 'honourable women' (v.9); the 'daughter of Tyre,' and the 'rich among

the people' (v.12); the 'virgins, the companions of the royal daughter' (vv.13,14), and the 'sons,' who are 'princes in all the earth'(v.16). This is a richer, more complex picture of the kingdom of heaven than is generally envisaged.

Ps.65:4 – the elect will dwell in God's courts and be satisfied with the goodness of His house.

Ps.145:10-13 – the 'saints' will proclaim to the 'sons of men' God's 'mighty acts' and the 'glorious majesty of His kingdom.'

Isa.32:1 – Christ the King and His elect princes will rule with justice, i.e. rule and serve the whole company of the redeemed in the restored creation.

Isa.66:10-13 – Jerusalem, a type of the Church (New Jerusalem), becomes a source of nourishment, comfort and blessing to others.

Dan.7:27 – the 'saints of the Most High' will receive the 'kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven.' So the saints are destined to reign with Christ over the nations (1Cor.4:8).

Matt.13:11 – the elect are given understanding of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.

Rom.1:7 – all Christians are 'called to be saints.'

Rom.11:28 – in Paul's day only a remnant in Israel received Christ (11:5); but in v.28 he speaks of the whole nation being elect. So it appears that in v.5, Paul refers to the elect of Israel in his day (those of the elect nation who believed in Christ at that time); and in v.26 of 'all Israel' who will ultimately be saved. Hence, all Israel are elect, even though the 'lump', the larger part, will be saved after the fullness of the Gentiles has come in (vv.25, 26; see also v.16 and Isa 41:8, 9).

1Cor. 3:16 – the elect are God's Temple, Church, and House of Prayer for all nations, in that through them, the promised seed (in and with Christ), all nations shall be blessed (Gal.3:16, 29).

Tit.2:13, 14 – the elect are God's chosen and special people, called to be holy and zealous for the good works that will lead others to glorify Him (Matt.5:13-16; 1Pet.2:12).

Heb.2:10 - 3:6 – this is a passage about Christ's 'brethren,' God's 'sons' and 'house,' i.e. the elect who have the heavenly calling to reign with Christ as kings and priests in a restored creation.

1Pet.2:12 – speaks of the honourable conduct of the church / elect leading others to glorify God 'in the day of visitation.'

Rev.2:26, 27; 3:9; 5:9,10 – the elect saints will rule / subdue the nations (see also Ps.149:5-9).

Rev.15:1-4 – the saints who triumph over the beast sing of all nations coming to worship before God.

Clement of Rome (c.96), cited in *Early Christian Writings*, p.38, Penguin (1968), speaks of the elect as 'first-fruits'. He says: 'Behold, the Lord takes a people for Himself out of the midst of the nations, as a man takes the first-fruits of his threshing floor, and it is out of that people that the Holy of Holies shall come' (Exod.23:19; 34:26; Ezek.44:30).

Markus Barth, in *The Broken Wall*, p.248, says: 'The Church is the showpiece of the omnipotence of God's love.' She is God's called, chosen and faithful vehicle for subduing and ultimately blessing the whole creation at the 'revealing of the sons of God' (Rev.2:26, 27; 17:14; Rom.8:18-23).

Esau

We read in Rom.9:13 that God 'hated' Esau. However, see Jer.12:7, 8, where the people of apostate Judah are the object of God's 'love' and 'hatred'. However, God's love and forgiveness won through in the end (Jer.30:12,17). This holds true concerning God's love for Esau and all people. His hatred of sinners (in the sense He hated Esau and Judah) does not alter His purpose and power to save them in the end.

In Deut.2:1-12 God gives Esau Mt Seir and the territory of the Horites, and tells the Israelites to leave Esau's descendants alone (Deut.23:7, 8). God's provision for and protection of Esau and His descendants presents a somewhat different picture from the traditional one, in which God rejects and damns them. God 'hated' Esau in the sense of denying him the rights of the firstborn. The firstborn son in every Hebrew family received a 'double portion' of the family inheritance (Deut.21:17), not simply for his own benefit, but for the benefit of his needy brethren. In keeping with this, Christ, with the 'church of the

firstborn' (Heb.12:23), will 'deliver the whole creation [including Esau] from bondage to corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Rom.8:18-23). Jacob's forgiveness of Esau, after many years of separation, points to Christ, God's Firstborn, and His forgiveness and blessing of His enemies (Gen.ch.33; Matt.5:43-48).

Lactantius (c.250 - c.325) describes how we should view offenders like Esau:

If we all derive our origin from one man whom God created, we are clearly of one blood. Therefore it must be considered the greatest wickedness to hate a man – even if he is guilty . . . for if we are all animated and enlivened by one God what else are we than brothers.

Especially

The Greek word *malista* is translated 'especially' in Gal.6:10; 1Tim.4:10; 1Tim.5:17; 2Tim.4:13 and elsewhere. In 1Tim.4:10 Paul says that God is 'the Saviour of all men, especially of those who believe.' Many take this to mean that God is the Saviour of those who believe in this life, and not all people without exception. However, in this and the other verses mentioned above, Paul uses 'especially' in an *inclusive* rather than *exclusive* way. In Gal.6:10 the 'all' to whom the Galatians are to do good *includes especially* the 'household of faith.' Similarly, in 1Tim.5:17 the 'elders who rule well,' and are 'worthy of double honour' *include* some among them who are *especially* commended, i.e. 'those who labour in the word and doctrine.' Likewise, in 2Tim.4:13 Paul asks Timothy to *especially include* the 'parchments' with the things he brings from Troas.

Consequently, while believers are *especially* blessed, in that they have come to faith in Christ in this life (1Tim.4:10), it is not to the exclusion of others, for 'the Saviour of all men' will ultimately 'subdue all things to Himself' and become 'all in all' (1Cor.15:28; Phil.3:21).

Eternal / Eternity / Ever

'Eternal' means without end only when it applies to someone (or something) intrinsically everlasting, such as God and His attributes.

The basic meaning of the Greek noun *aion* (adjective = *aionion*) is 'an age' or 'an indefinite period of time'. For instance, the words *eis ton*

aion can be translated 'to the age' (Matt.21:19, Nestle-Marshall RSV *Interlinear Greek-English NT*). *Aion* sometimes occurs in the NT in its plural form, 'the ages to come' (Eph.2:7), and 'throughout all ages' (Eph.3:21). Michael Green calls salvation [eternal life] 'the life of the age to come' (*Evangelism in the Early Church*, p.3).

Farrar shows that the Old Testament word *olam* ('forever') often means *an indefinite period of time* (*Mercy and Judgment*, p.52).

Ps.74:1 – the Psalmist's 'forever' reveals that *olam* can mean something other than 'without end', for God still loves and deals with His covenant people (Rom.11:1, 25, 26, 28-32).

Isa.32:13-15 – 'forever' (with regard to the desolation of the people of Israel and their land) is 'until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high' (v.15).

Jer.17:4 – 'forever' here describes God's anger in relation to Israel at the time of the Exile, but the Exile lasted only seventy years.

Jer.25:12 – 'perpetual desolation' ('perpetual' = *olam*) describes Babylon and the region, which was devastated by the Persians, yet many Jews settled there from the Exile onwards; and recently buildings have been erected at the old site of Babylon – which illustrates the limited duration of *olam*.

Joel 2:2 – 'ever,' is the equivalent of 'many successive generations.'

Amos 1:11 – 'perpetually' and 'forever' describe Edom's anger and ruthlessness against Israel in a way that means less than 'forever' in its absolute sense.

Amos 5:2 – Israel is said to 'rise no more' – yet there are many predictions of her restoration.

Zeph.2:9 – 'Moab shall be like Sodom, and the people of Ammon like Gomorrah . . . a perpetual desolation' – yet Sodom will be restored (Ezek.16:44-63).

John 17:3; 1John 1:1, 2; 2:24, 25 – 'eternal life' sometimes refers to the quality of spiritual life enjoyed by believers.

Heb.6:2, 5 – 'eternal judgment' is linked to the 'age to come' (v.5), hence can be thought of as the judgment of 'a coming age' (Literal

translation of the Greek in Nestle's *The RSV Interlinear Greek - English New Testament*).

The Community Rule of the Essenes (like one of the three rabbinical views on the judgment of the wicked) speaks of eternal torment *coming to an end* with shameful extinction: 'The times of all their generations shall be spent in sorrowful mourning and bitter misery, and in the calamities of darkness *until they are destroyed* without remnant or survivor' (Cited in Paula Clifford's *A Brief History of the End Time*, p.74). This is highly significant, in that it is an example of 'eternal torment' being used in New Testament times in a way that means something less than endless conscious punishment.

Leckie, in *The World to Come*, p.112, draws attention to the way the words 'eternal punishment' are used by Jewish writers: 'We have to remember that the phrase "aeonian punishment" is used with great freedom by many Jewish writers, as illustrated by a passage in Philo (*Fragmenta*), wherein this very expression describes a purely temporal and earthly penalty. The *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* also states that women who adorn themselves unduly are reserved for "eternal punishment" (*kolasis aionios*). And surely no one can adopt rigour to this pronouncement' (Reuben 5:5). (See also scholars' comments on *kolasis*).

Philo also says that although the lower creatures are our enemies to 'an illimitable eternity,' they will eventually be reconciled to humanity.

Fall (The Fall)

The fall of our first parents from innocence is usually referred to as 'the Fall'. It speaks primarily of *their* fall, but also signifies everyone's fall, because the human race *in them* was adversely affected by their fall (Rom.5:12-14; 1Cor.15:50-58).

Thankfully, even before the creation of the world, God planned the restoration of all things damaged by the Fall. The larger hope is the belief that sooner or later all people *will be subdued, saved and restored to God*, in and through His Son, that God might be 'all in all' (1Cor.15:28).

Father (God as)

God is revealed in Scripture as Israel's Father (Deut.32:6, 18; Isa.63:16; 64:8; Jer.3:19; 31:9; Mal.1:6).

He is the Father of individuals also (Ps.89:26; Jer.3:4). He calls Israel's unjust and partial judges 'children of the Most High' (Ps.82:6); and the children of His apostate people, 'My children' (Ezek.16:21).

He is the Father of all people – Ps.68:5; 146:9; Mal.2:10; Acts 17:28, 29. In line with Acts 17:28, 29, the Roman emperor and philosopher Marcus Aurelius (121-180) wrote in his *Meditations*: 'It is time now to realize the nature of the universe to which you belong, and of that controlling power whose offspring you are' (2, 4), revealing his familiarity with the Greek poets.

Note that in Mal.2:10 God is mentioned as Israel's Father and Creator, showing that the Creator has a paternal care for all His creatures – hence Matt.5:1 and 6:9, where Jesus teaches His disciples (and the 'multitudes') to pray, 'Our Father . . . ' (See Num.16:22; Heb.12:9).

Lactantius (c.314) says in his address to a pagan audience: 'If only God were worshipped there would not be dissensions and wars. For men would know that they are the sons of one God.'

Although we come to know God as our Father in a personal, spiritual and experiential way through the new birth, He is nevertheless the Father of *all* His offspring, in that He is the Creator, Preserver, Saviour and Restorer of all (Neh.9:6; Col.1:15-18; Job 7:20 KJV; 1Tim.4:10; Acts 3:21; 17:28, 29).

Fire

The 'fire' that Scripture speaks of does not harm God's redeemed (Isa.43:2; Rom.13:10; 1Cor.3:11-15). Clement of Alexandria (c.150-c.215) puts it this way: 'God does not punish, for punishment is retaliation for evil. Rather, He chastens – for the purpose of good.'

By fire and the sword the Lord will judge all flesh (Isa.66:16). All people will be seasoned with fire (Mark 9:49).

Fire is used to try, refine, purify (Isa.1:25; 6:6, 7; Zeph.3:8, 9; Mal.3:2, 3; 1Cor.3:12-15; 1Pet.1:6, 7; 4:12).

Fire is a figure of God's jealous and righteous anger (Ps.18:7, 8; 89:46; Zeph.1:18). In Zeph.3:8, 9 God's fiery judgment restores ungodly nations to a 'pure language.' Consequently divine jealousy, anger and fire bring about correction, purification and restoration – not complete destruction.

Israel and other nations were frequently chastened that they might 'know the Lord'. Their punishment was corrective, therapeutic and educational rather than purely retributive (Exod.6:7; 16:12; 1Kings 20:28; Ezek.6:7, 10-13; 36:23; Isa.37:20).

Fire destroys the 'flesh', i.e. the old, sinful nature (2Sam.23: 6, 7; Isa. 9:19; 30:33; 47:13-15; Ezek.5:1-4; ch.15) – compare Heb.12:29 with Zeph.3:8, 9 and 2Thess.1:7-9, and by deduction note the possibility of a restorative 'destruction' of the wicked. The principle of corrective judgment in 1Cor.5:5 – the flesh being destroyed that the spirit may be saved – arguably applies universally, for God 'will have' (KJV), or 'desires' (NKJV), 'all men to be saved' (1Tim.2:4).

God never contemplates burning His children with fire. It never enters His heart or mind (Jer.7:31; 32:35). It was widely practised by heathen nations, and by Israel when corrupted by their ways (Lev.18:21; 2Kings 23:10; 2Chron.33:6; Jer.19:5; Ezek.16:20, 21; Dan.3:6). The context of Deut.4:24 shows that God 'consumed' / 'destroyed' disobedient Israel in order to deliver her from sin and restore her to Himself – hence a remedial destruction.

John Donne wrote: 'Burn me, O Lord, with a fiery zeale of Thee and Thy house, which doth in eating [consuming] heale' (in *Love's Redeeming Work*, p.141, Oxford).

At Passover the first fruits of the barley harvest were taken to the Temple, where they were lightly beaten, scorched with fire, winnowed and ground into flour; typical, perhaps, of the trial, refining and purification of the Christian 'first fruits' (Rom.8:23; 2Thess.2:12 (DOU); Jam.1:18; Rev.14:4; 1Pet.1:6, 7; 4:12, 17).

Fire (Unquenchable)

'Unquenchable fire' in the OT speaks of judgment that continues *only until it has accomplished its purpose* (2Kings 22:17; 2Chron.34:25; Isa.1:31; 34:9, 10; 66:24; Jer.4:4; 17:27; Ezek.20:45-48). These verses

help to refute the seriously mistaken idea that God torments His creatures forever.

Jer.11:11 – God’s refusal to hear the prayers of his people under judgment / punishment clarifies the meaning of ‘unquenchable’ in ‘unquenchable fire’, i.e. judgment that continues *until it has served its purpose* prior to Israel being restored / saved (Ezek.39:25; Rom.11:26).

Firstborn / First fruits

Christ is the ‘firstborn over all creation,’ and the ‘firstborn from the dead’ (Col.1:15 NKJV; Col.1:18). In OT times the firstborn son in a family had the right, privilege and sacred responsibility of being set apart to God as priest, judge and leader of his family / tribe (Exod.13:2; 24:5). He could redeem his brother from slavery, and raise up a seed to his deceased brethren (Gen.38:8; Deut.25:5-10; Ruth 4:6-10). He was able to perform these duties because he was given a ‘double portion’ of the family inheritance (Deut.21:17). Joseph was given a double portion, which shows that he, not Reuben, inherited the rights of the firstborn (Gen.48:22).

This suggests / foreshadows the privilege, role and responsibility of the ‘church of the firstborn . . . registered in heaven’ (Heb.12:23). Christ and His Church (‘manifest sons of God’) are the divinely elected means of blessing the whole creation, both now and in the age / ages to come (Rom.8:18-23).

In OT times Israel is spoken of as God’s ‘firstborn’ and ‘first fruits’ (Exod.4:22; Jer.2:3). This points forward to the complete family / harvest, when ‘every knee will bow’ and ‘every tongue take an oath, saying: “Surely in the LORD I have righteousness and strength”’ (Isa.45:23, 24).

Israel’s failure to become God’s channel of blessing to the world, due to her apostasy, exclusiveness, and rejection of Christ, has meant that Christ and His faithful followers have taken up, not always faithfully, the mantle of a holy, overcoming firstborn and first fruits, commissioned to live and preach the Good News to all nations – until Christ subdues all things to Himself (Luke 2:23; Col.1:15; Heb.12:23; 2Thess.2:12 (DOU); Jam.1:18; Rev.14:14; 1Cor.15:28; Phil.3:21). Again, all this points to a great harvest, when ‘every creature’ in existence will bless, honour and glorify God and the Lamb (Rev.5:13).

Andrew Jukes, in his *The Second Death and the Restitution of All Things*, pp.30-48, describes the nature and role of the first fruits and firstborn in Scripture. They are not chosen simply for their own benefit, but that they may be God's channel of blessing to all people, even the 'whole creation' (Rom.8:18-23).

Futility

In His eternal love and wisdom, God has subjected the creation to futility / vanity *in hope* (Rom.8:20; Eccl.6:12). Likewise, He has committed all people to disobedience, trouble and adversity with a view to *having mercy on all* (Rom.11:32; Job 5:7, Jer.45:5).

The world's people are by nature 'futile' in their thoughts, and dark in their hearts and minds (Rom.1:21; Ps.94:11; 1Cor.3:20). God has allowed this in order to underline the folly of trying to live without Him; and to teach us, through our own experience, that we cannot be truly good, holy or blessed when we leave Him out of our lives. Then at last, having learned our lesson (however slowly and reluctantly), we may by His grace be brought to our senses and brought back to Him – which is perfectly illustrated in the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

God's wise and loving purpose is that we may learn that life without Him is intolerable. All will realize and admit this in the end, and acknowledge that He has redeemed and reconciled all things to Himself in and through His Son (Isa.45:22-25; Phil.2:9-11; 1Tim.2:6; Col.1:20).

Petrarch expresses something of this futility in his *Letter to Posterity*, where he says: 'The Author of all ages and times permits us miserable mortals, puffed up with emptiness, thus to wander about, until, finally, coming to a tardy consciousness of our sins, we shall learn to know ourselves' (See Acts 14:15,16).

Gehenna

J. H. Leckie, in *The World to Come*, p.72, says:

'The rabbis did not distinguish between *hades* and *gehenna*, but many of them believed that punishment in the place of fire would, at least in the case of many, last for only a limited time.'

He says also:

‘There can be no doubt that all the rabbis of NT times believed that *gehenna* was a state from which release was possible. They did not hold that everyone who entered it had met his final doom. Rather did they hope that most of those who went down into the place of bondage would finally come up again. The *gehenna* of the thoughtful Jew of those days is, therefore, not to be identified with the hell of later Christian theology. If it was hell it was also purgatory. There was no inscription over its gates – “All hope abandon ye who enter here” (p.143).

Farrar, in *Mercy and Judgment*, pp. 374-5, says of *gehenna* :

The Valley of Hinnom [from which the word *gehenna* is derived] is mentioned thirteen times in the Old Testament... In not one of those thirteen passages does it mean “hell.”

Five times it is used of a valley outside Jerusalem which in ancient days had been, and in subsequent ages again became, “the pleasant valley of Hinnom” (Josh.15:8, *bis*; 18:16, *bis*; Nehem.11:30).

Three times it is mentioned as having been defiled by the burning of human beings alive in the Moloch worship of Ahaz and Manasseh (2 Chron.28:3; 33:6; 2 Kings 23:10).

Five times in connection with God’s wrath against the abomination of cruelly burning human beings, and especially infants, with fire; of which He expresses His abhorrence as a thing “which never came into His mind” (Jer.7:31, 32; 19:1-15; 32:35). In two of these passages it is spoken of as a place of carcases.

In the New Testament Gehenna is alluded to by our Lord seven times in St Matthew (5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33); three times in St Mark; once in St Luke (12:5); once in St James (3:6). In not one of these passages is it called “endless.” The only possible inducement to attach such a notion to it is the addition in Mark 9:43 of “quenchless fire and deathless worm,” expressions purely metaphorical and directly borrowed from a metaphor of Isaiah respecting earthly consequences. Seven of the ten allusions to Gehenna come out of one single passage of one single

discourse (Matt. 5, repeated partly in Matt.18 and Mark 9), and it is extremely questionable whether in all seven the primary allusion is not to an earthly Jewish punishment.

The word does not occur once in all the thirteen Epistles of St Paul, and Hades only once, though he had declared to his converts “the whole counsel of God.” Nor does it occur once in the pages of him who leaned on the Lord’s bosom; nor In the Epistle to the Hebrews; nor in the Epistles of the Chief of the Apostles.

Isaac the Syrian (d. c.700) says of Gehenna:

I am of the opinion that He [God] is going to manifest some wonderful outcome, a matter of immense and ineffable compassion on the part of the glorious Creator, with respect to the ordering of this difficult matter of Gehenna’s torment: out of it the wealth of His love and power and wisdom will become known all the more – and so will the insistent might of the waves of His goodness. It is not the way of the compassionate Maker to create rational beings in order to deliver them over mercilessly to unending affliction in punishment for things of which He knew even before they were fashioned, aware how they would turn out when he created them – and whom nonetheless He created.

All this gives valuable insight into the meaning and limited use of the word *gehenna* in the Bible. It helps to dispel the horrors Christendom has historically imposed upon this word, in the form of unjustifiable connotations heaped on the Anglo-Saxon word ‘hell’.

Goodness (God’s)

God is good, and His goodness is often linked with His mercy (1 Chron.16:34; 2Chron. 5:13; 7:3; Ezra 3:11; Ps. 100:5; 106:1; 107:1; 118:29; 136:1; 145:9; Jer.33:11).

In Ps.145:9 we read that ‘God is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works.’ So there is no partiality with respect to His goodness.

His goodness is everywhere: for we read that ‘the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD’ (Ps.33:5).

God is good and does good (Ps.119:68). The 'evil' He creates (Isa.45:7 KJV) is not moral evil, but 'calamity' (NKJV), i.e. just punishment for sin, but punishment designed to bring sinners to repentance – hence calamity / affliction / adversity that is corrective and remedial.

Didymus (c.313-98) says that those who perceive that God's judgments are deigned to amend the sinner 'confess Him to be good' (Allin, in *Christ Triumphant*, pp.199-200).

In Exod.33:18,19 God assures Moses that His goodness and glory are essentially one: a truth that calls for our utmost attention and appreciation, because many understand God's glory to be the brightness of His presence (which it is, in one of its manifestations). But once we grasp that God's glory is His goodness, and His goodness His glory, then our approach to God will be to the One who is not only light, but goodness itself in the essence of His Being.

God our Father wants us to know He is essentially good and merciful. To be convinced of this brings peace, joy, thankfulness, and worship in spirit and truth. God's goodness, like His love, is a vital key to understanding His will and ways.

None of this in any way conflicts with or undermines God's justice, judgment and holy anger, for in essence these are expressions of His unchanging love and goodness through which He subdues sinners and brings them to Himself (Ps.119:67, 71, 75; 1Pet.3:18).

Good Pleasure (God's)

If God wills / desires something, such as the salvation of all people (1Tim.2:4), He can accomplish it in accordance with His good pleasure; for if not, His will / desire would be frustrated, which is unthinkable in the God for whom 'all things are possible' (Job 23:13; Isa.44:28; 46:10; Luke 12:32; Eph.1:5, 9, 10; Phil.2:13; 2Thess.1:11; Matt.19:26).

Jesus wanted to gather the people of Jerusalem to Himself as a hen gathers her chicks (Matt.23:37-38), but at that time they 'were not willing!' God often wanted to do this with His covenant people in OT times, and disciplined them until they were humbled and made willing to turn to Him (2 Chron. 33:9-13, 19; Jer.7:13; 13:11 with ch.30). As Jesus says, the time will come [after a period of chastening] when the inhabitants of Jerusalem will bless and welcome Him (Matt.23:39; Zech.12:10-14; Rom.11:25, 26; Phil.2:9-11).

God always fulfils His purpose (Isa.46:10; Eph.1:11). The following verses are just some of the many that show God's power to fulfil His sovereign will and good pleasure:

Num.23:18-20 – even sit-on-the-fence Balaam was right when he said that God always fulfils His word / promise and, by extension, desire and good pleasure. As we have seen, there may appear to be some delay, as when the people of Jerusalem would not come to Christ, but in the end He will mercifully draw them, and all people, to Himself.

Ps.135:6 – a clear declaration that God does whatever He pleases.

Eccl.8:2, 3 – what is true of absolute monarchs like Solomon (i.e. they do as they please) is true of Almighty God: the difference being that God always seeks our eternal good (Ps.145:9).

Isa.53:10 – if it pleased God to bruise His beloved Son for our salvation, if He went to such incredible lengths to demonstrate His love for us, will He not be pleased to bring all His offspring into the good of His love in Christ? Moreover, we see that God's good pleasure 'prosper' in Christ's hands. In other words, Christ accomplishes whatever His Father wills and desires, even the salvation of all (1Tim.2:4; 2Pet.3:9).

Isa.55:11 – God fulfils His declared purpose (all He is pleased to do), every word and promise that leaves His mouth. We cannot separate God's 'will' from His 'good pleasure.' So from 1Tim.2:4-6 we may deduce the widest salvation. Instead of interpreting this verse and similar broad-hope passages in the light of those that seem to restrict salvation to the few (or the many), we can, as Thomas Talbot (in his book *The Inescapable Love of God*, pp. 54, 56) suggests, endeavour to interpret the apparently narrower, less-hopeful passages in the light of the broader, more hopeful ones, as we interpret sin and guilt in the light of abundant grace.

Ezek.33:11 – God tells Israel that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, and says to them, 'Why should you die?' If He had no pleasure in their destruction at the hands of the Babylonians, it means He *had pleasure* in their deliverance and restoration, promised throughout Scripture (Isa.45:22-25; Ezek.16:44-63 and Acts 3:21; Rom.11:25-36).

2Cor.1:20 – God will keep His promises – Christ is their seal and guarantee. He will fulfil all He has promised – according to His good pleasure.

Eph.1:9-10 – God’s ‘will’ is essentially His ‘good pleasure’ and ‘eternal purpose.’ These are virtually synonymous. It is wrong to separate them and set them against each other, as traditionalists often do.

Rev.4:11 – all things were created according to God’s ‘will’ – note that in 1Tim.2:4 *thelo* is translated ‘will’ (KJV, DOU, REB, TYN), and ‘desires’ (NKJV and NIV), which shows that translations often differ and can be misleading. However, these translations (Rev.4:11 and 1Tim.2:4) show that God’s ‘will’ to create, and then to save, is His *purposeful will*, not merely something He *desires to do* – but *may not do*. Consequently, the KJV’S ‘who will have all men to be saved,’ is a declaration of God’s *sovereign will* and *purpose* to save all people – which is in line with what Scripture says about God always doing what He wills and desires.

Hades

(See William Barclay, *The Apostles’ Creed*, pp.97-109)

There are several interpretations of Christ’s descent into Hades:

- i) Some of the early Church Fathers believed that Christ went to announce His victory to the Old Testament faithful in Hades, before taking them to heaven.
- ii) Other Fathers believed that Christ preached to *all* the dead (including those who rebelled in Noah’s day) and brought hope to all (1 Pet. 3:18-20).
- iii) Some conservative evangelicals believe that 1Pet.3:18-20 teaches that Christ preached to the antediluvians *through* Noah (2Pet.2:4, 5).

Barclay’s summary of the various views is worth reading, but it is important to remember that many of the most godly and learned ante-Nicene Fathers understood Peter to mean an actual visit of Christ to Hades. Christ holds the keys of Hades and Death (Rev.1:18, 19), which suggests hope. These verses breathe Christ’s total victory over death, and the realm of the dead – not a lesser, partial victory that leaves some of God’s children in a place of endless suffering.

With respect to Hades, John Wenham (an advocate of Conditional Immortality) has an interesting interpretation of the Parable of Lazarus and Dives in his book *The Enigma of Evil*, p.88.

Hope

Christian hope is God's gift to believers. This hope is living and certain rather than mere wishful thinking (Ps.119:49; 2Thess.2:16; 1Pet.1:3).

God / Christ is our hope (Ps.71:5; Jer.14:8; 1Tim.1:1).

Dispersed Israel can hope for restoration (Jer.31:17; Hos.2:15, 14-23).

Our hope and prayer should be that all who oppose the Gospel and persecute God's people may be granted repentance and brought to the knowledge of the truth (1Tim.2:1-6; 2Tim.2:24-26). 2Thess.1:7-10, and similar 'hard sayings', should be seen in the light of more hopeful verses of Scripture.

We sometimes say, 'Where there is life there is hope.' The scriptural basis for this is found in Rom.8:20, where Paul says that God has 'subjected the creation to futility . . . in hope', i.e. the hope of 'mercy' (Rom.11:32), for 'mercy triumphs over judgment' (Jam.2:13). James says those who show no mercy will receive 'judgment without mercy', but such judgment could be remedial, hence temporal, rather than purely retributive and endless. Loving parents always forgive their children when they are sorry for being unmerciful to others. At the same time, they may wisely withhold an *open* expression of forgiveness from them when they persist in being unkind and unmerciful – until they are truly sorry. Truly loving parents would never *permanently* withhold forgiveness from their children. With respect to the above case, temporarily withholding forgiveness from unmerciful children *is itself a mercy*, designed to bring them to their senses. James is saying that it is better for us to be merciful than receive God's remedial chastening for our lack of mercy.

Even when the prospect of someone coming to salvation seems hopeless, we are told that 'Love . . . hopes all things' (1Cor.13:7).

What Paul says in Eph.2:12 and 1Thess.4:13 about people having no hope, does not mean that unbelievers have no hope of salvation, but that *in their unconverted state* they know nothing of the blessed hope that faith brings. Being aware of the plight of such, should lead us to

hope and pray for all people, especially for our unbelieving loved ones (Matt.19:23-26; 1Cor.7:16; 1Tim.2:1-3).

Human Reasoning (The Place Of)

Despite the Fall and its effect on our understanding of God, Jesus invites us to reason *from* the human *to* the divine:

Matt.7:9-12 – reasoning from our kindness to our children, to God's unstinting goodness and generosity to His. Even if we fail our children, God never fails His (Isa.49:15,16; Heb.13:5).

Luke 15:4-7 – reasoning from a shepherd's concern for his sheep, to Christ's loving concern for every lost sinner.

Luke 15:8-10 – reasoning from a woman's determination to find her lost coin, to Christ's unrelenting search for every lost soul.

Luke 15:11-32 – reasoning from a father's forgiveness of his reckless and wasteful son, to God's forgiveness of His wayward children.

Scripture contains many helpful parallels between human behaviour, traits and responses, and God's way of dealing with His creatures. We see this in its typology, symbolism and parable, and in its history, culture and ritual. God reveals Himself to us through all of these, and by them helps us to understand His ways.

God's thoughts and ways are higher than ours, but they are not altogether different, otherwise we could not understand anything about Him. We understand, albeit only 'in part', when He reveals His goodness, wisdom and purpose in Scripture. Without this revelation God would remain a mystery to us. Even with it, His ways are still mysterious (Rom.11:33-35). Nevertheless, He has enabled everyone, through reason and observation to detect something of His providence and power in the created order (Rom.1:20).

All our ideas about God must be tested by Scripture (Isa.8:20; 2Tim.3:16, 17;1John 4:1). But reasoning that is in line with scriptural truth, even when framed in non-biblical terms, is acceptable. The Bible gives us scope for imagination and creativity in the way we understand and use its incredibly rich store of truth.

Ignorance (Of God's Will)

Rom.1:18-23 – God's power, wisdom and providence are clearly displayed in the created order, leaving unbelievers without excuse for not believing in Him. However, both Jesus and Paul show that God mercifully makes allowance for ignorance of His will and purpose, as shown in the following:

Matt.11:20-24 – Jesus said that the people of Tyre and Sidon would have 'repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes' if His mighty works had been done in them, and that at the end of the age, the judgment of Sodom will be more tolerable than that of Capernaum. This shows that God takes ignorance and lack of opportunity into account when estimating people's guilt (See Ezek.16:44-63, and S. Cox, *Salvator Mundi*, ch.1).

Luke 23:34 – Jesus asked God to forgive His executioners because they did not know He was the Son of God. Therefore, surely the world's ignorance, with regard to His identity and saving work, would draw from Him the same prayer?

Luke 12:35-48 – the different degrees of punishment meted out in this parable indicate that God makes allowance for ignorance of His will.

Acts 3:17 – Peter exhorts those who in their ignorance 'killed the Prince of life' (v.15) to repent and believe in Him (See 1Cor.2:7, 8).

Rom.10:3 – in their ignorance the Jews tried to establish their own righteousness, rather than submitting to the righteousness of God in Christ. Yet in the end 'all Israel will be saved' (Rom.11:25, 26).

1Tim.1:12-17 – Paul himself acted in ignorance when he persecuted the Church, yet God had mercy on him, the 'chief of sinners.' His conversion was a 'pattern' for all who would come to faith in Christ, i.e. a pattern of God's grace and mercy to unworthy sinners.

1Cor.2:7, 8 – the rulers of this world crucified the Lord of glory, but they would not have done so if they had known He was God's Son.

Heb.9:7 – in Judaism atonement was made for people who sinned in ignorance, which suggests that Christ's sacrifice covers all who have likewise sinned.

Eph.4:17, 18 – shows that ignorance of God and His will may be coupled with hardness of heart, bringing greater culpability. However,

the above passages teach that God takes ignorance of Him, and His saving work in Christ, into account, when it comes being given further opportunities to come to faith in Him. For the goodness of God can lead to repentance (Acts 11:18; Rom.2:4).

Impossible?

Gen.18:14 – ‘Is anything too hard for the LORD?’

Jer.32:17 – ‘There is nothing too hard for You.’

Jer.32:27 – ‘Is there anything too hard for Me?’

Zech.8:6 – God does marvellous things – beyond our expectation.

Matt.19:26 – God can do what is humanly impossible (with regard to the *extent* of salvation).

Luke1:37 – ‘For with God nothing will be impossible.’

Improvement

God disciplines us for our spiritual improvement, just as fire refines metal (Mal.3:2, 3; Acts 9:15,16); and believers must discipline / purify themselves (2Cor.7:1; Jam.1:21; 1Pet.1:22; 2:11; 1John 3:3).

Loving parents discipline their children for their improvement. If this is true of earthly parents, how much more of our Heavenly Father?

The expression ‘the restoration of all things’ (Acts 3:21) speaks of the renewal / improvement of God’s broken creation, until It becomes what He intends it to be. So God’s chastening of His creatures is part of His responsible, gracious and loving purpose to restore all things to Himself in Christ.

Incurable

In several places in Scripture, people and nations are said to be ‘incurable’ with respect to their physical, spiritual and moral condition – yet they are ‘cured’ / ‘delivered’ (Job.34:6; Jer.15:18-21; 30:12, 15, 17; Mic.1:9 with 4:6, 7 and 7:8, 9, 18-20) – all of which point to the hope that God will forgive, cure and restore all who are deemed incurable / incorrigible sinners, even the worst offenders (Ezek.16:44-63; 1Tim.1:15).

Inventions

God forgave Israel, but took vengeance on her 'inventions' (Ps.99:8 KJV; 'deeds' NKJV). This vengeance is seen in Ezek.6:1-10, and His forgiveness and restoration of Israel in Ezek.16:53-63 and elsewhere in the Old Testament. This is a clear example of God hating sin but loving the sinner; of destroying the 'flesh' in order that the 'spirit may be saved' (1Cor.5:5); of chastening / 'scourging' offenders for their profit, that they may 'partake of His holiness' (Zeph.3:8, 9; Heb.12:10).

Israel

God loves the people of Israel – Deut.4:37; 2Chron.9:8; Isa.48:14; Jer.11:15; 12:7; 31:3; Rom.11:28. They are redeemed / ransomed – Deut.9:26; 21:8; Ps.74:2; Isa.43:1; 53:6; 44:22; Zech.10:8 (KJV); John1:29; 1John 2:2. God calls them His children, His chosen and holy nation, a special treasure above all people – Deut.14:1, 2.

Both the 'first fruit' of Israel (the Jews who receive Christ in this age) and the 'lump' (the whole nation) are holy (set apart unto God) – Rom.11:16.

God will save the 'whole house of Israel', even 'all Israel' – Isa.45:17, 25; 60:21; Ezek.37:11-14; 39:25; Rom.11:25-32; Heb.8:7-13.

God has given the Holy Land to Israel – Exod.6:8; Lev.25:38; Num.27:12; Judg.2:1; 1Kings 8:34; 1Chron.16:14-18; Isa.14:1; Jer.7:7; 25:5; 31:35-37; Amos 9:14:15; Zech.8:7, 8;

Judas

See Andrew Jukes, *The Restoration of All Things*, p.132, and footnote, where, by comparing Ps.69:23, 25 with Rom.11:10 and Acts 1:19, 20, he shows that God's promise to restore Christ-rejecting Israel raises hope even for Judas.

Judgment

Many Christians view God's judgment of the wicked as purely retributive and condemnatory. The following aspects of judgment in Scripture help to reveal it in its true light.

Judgment Accompanied by Mercy, Correction, Healing and Restoration

God combines judgment with mercy in order to instruct and restore – 2Chron.33:10-13; Ps.62:12; 89:14; 96:10-13; 119:75-76, 175; Isa.16:5; 19:22, 26:9; 30:18,19; 42:1-4; 51:4, 5; Ezek.36:16-38; Hos.5:14,15; 6:1, 2; Hab.1:12; Zeph.3:8, 9.

Jerome's comments on Zeph.3:8-9 are helpful:

'The nations, even the multitude of the nations, are gathered to the Judgment, but the kings . . . are led up for punishment, in order that on them may be poured out all the wrath of the fury of the Lord. And this is not done from any cruelty . . . but *in pity*, and *with a design to heal* * * For the nations being assembled for judgment, and the kings for punishment, [is] in order that wrath may be poured out on them: not in part but in whole, and both wrath and fury being united (in order that) *whatever is earthy may be consumed in the whole world.*'

Allin adds: 'The Day of Wrath that is to burn like fire, and to consume the adversaries of God, burns up *only what is earthy* [in them], *bringing to every sinner salvation*' (Allin, *Christ Triumphant*, p.198).

Judgment as Justice

God's judgment always involves justice – Job.37:23, 24; Ps.72:2; Isa.45:21; 56:1 KJV; Jer.23:5 KJV; Dan.4:37; Mic.7:9; Zech.8:16; 9:9.

True judgment involves spiritual discernment – 1Kings 3:9, 16-28.

God's judgment of the world in righteousness is a cause for joy – Ps.98:8, 9; Acts 17:31.

God's Judgment of Israel

Apostate Israel was judged and sentenced to the sword, famine and death, but with no mention of endless punishment in hell – Jer.15:1-3; Hos.9:17.

Although God's judgment of apostate Israel was severe, His thoughts were of peace towards the captives in Babylon – Jer.29:7, 11-14.

Israel's bruise was 'incurable,' her wound 'grievous,' but God promised to cure and heal her – Jer.30:12, 17.

The valley of dry bones shows that those who had sinned and experienced temporal judgment, and were like dry bones, were given new life through God's mercy – Ezek.ch.37.37.

Ps.119:20, 75, 175 – God's pure, righteous and searching, judgments are always for our good. We fear the pain / shame of exposure and correction, and the spiritual surgery this involves – even though it is beneficial and necessary if we are to partake of God's holiness (Heb.12:10).

God's Judgments are Educational and Reformative

This is seen in Isa.26:9, where Isaiah realizes that God's worldwide judgments are necessary if the earth's inhabitants are to learn righteousness. This is true at the individual level also (1Cor.5:5; 1Tim.1:20).

Suffering the Ultimate Temporal Judgment

Our first parents suffered what might be called the ultimate temporal judgment, i.e. death. But God said nothing about any endless suffering/punishment. This was because He intended to redeem them, and the human race in them, typified by the coverings of skin He provided for them – Gen.3:15, 21; 1Cor.15:22.

All Adam's offspring are redeemed, for although all are by nature 'dead in trespasses and sins,' Christ 'gave Himself a ransom for all' (1Tim.2:6). Adam and Eve were more culpable than their offspring, because although they were created innocent (hence not in bondage to sin, Satan, the world, and the flesh), they disobeyed God. Yet God mercifully redeemed them – and the human race in them.

Some of the wicked seem to be without hope, such as the Antediluvians, the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, and those who will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev.20:11-15; 21:8). However, because divine judgment / chastening is designed to correct, refine, purify and renew sinners, it is conceivable that even those who are cast into the lake of fire (remembering the highly symbolic nature of much of the language in the Book of Revelation), suffer that judgment (whatever it's nature) in order to have all traces of their moral and spiritual impurity destroyed, so as to be saved 'yet so as through fire' (Zeph.3:8, 9; 1Cor.3:14,15; 5:5;). Significantly, brimstone / sulphur (mentioned in connection with the lake of fire) has *purifying properties*.

Even the faithful suffer mortification of the old sinful nature *in this life* (Rom.8:13; Col.3:5), the refining ‘fires’ of persecution for faithfulness to Christ (1Pet.1:6,7; 4:12-14), and cleansing from every defilement of flesh and spirit in order to become partakers of God’s holiness (2Cor.7:1; Heb.12:10).

God ‘scourges every son whom He receives’ (Heb.12:6), sons who are willing, out of love for and obedience to Christ, to suffer with Him that they might reign with Him. This helps us to understand Jesus’ words, ‘everyone will be seasoned with fire’ (Mark 9:49). Those who reject Christ now, or have no real opportunity to believe in Him in this life, will suffer God’s searching but remedial judgment in the next, in order to bring them to repentance and faith in Him, so that they may join the ranks of believers in the new heavens and new earth, where God will be ‘all in all’ (2Pet.3:13; 1Cor.15:28).

So divine judgment has many aspects. It may include an element of retribution, but always involves justice, mercy, correction, reform, healing and restoration. Although traditionalists often polarize God’s goodness and severity, both of these are aspects of His loving purpose to restore all people to Himself in Christ.

Kingdom of God / Heaven

The kingdom of God has many aspects: past, present, future and eternal – for God is the sovereign Lord of the ages.

Jesus taught His followers to pray for God’s kingdom to come, and for His will be to done on earth as it is in heaven. But God’s sovereign will is supreme at all times and is done by all His creatures, either knowingly or unknowingly, willingly or unwillingly, for He ‘works all things according to the counsel of His will’ (Eph.1:11). However, it is only when all people love and obey Him voluntarily that the kingdom of God and its benefits will be enjoyed universally.

Paul describes the kingdom of God as ‘righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’ (Rom.14:17). This shows that the kingdom is seen not just in the outworking of divine authority, but also in the spiritual life of believers.

The Kingdom as the Reign and Ministry of the Saints

This aspect of the kingdom is not usually given sufficient emphasis in Christian teaching. This may be because it suggests that Christians have a special place / role / responsibility in the outworking of God's purpose to bless *all people* (See Elect, Firstborn and First-fruits). This aspect of the kingdom of God should be handled with humility and sensitivity, because most Christians believe that the Church is the only beneficiary of God's saving grace.

Jesus said to His disciples, 'you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel' (Luke 22:28-30). See also Luke 12:32; Heb. 12:28; and Rev. 1:6, where John says that Christ has made believers a 'kingdom of priests' (Nestle-Marshall, *RSV Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*). Lamsa, in *The New Testament From the Ancient Eastern Text*, renders Rev. 1:6: 'Christ . . . has made us a spiritual kingdom to God and His Father'.

We should note that i) it is those who share Christ's 'trials,' i.e. 'endure' (NKJV) 'suffer with' (KJV) Him, who will reign with Him in glory (2Tim. 2:12); and that ii) the kingdom bestowed on the twelve disciples (and, by inference, on all the faithful) entails the privilege and responsibility of judging and ruling the nations with Christ (1Cor. 6:2; Rev. 3:21).

In 1Cor. 6:1-3 Paul speaks of the saints judging the 'world' and 'angels,' which echoes Dan. 7:18, 27, 'the saints of the Most High will receive and possess the kingdom forever and ever.' And that 'the kingdom and dominion . . . shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High.' This kingdom reign of the saints features also in Rev. 2:26, 27 and 3:21, where Christ promises 'overcomers' power over the nations, i.e. power to rule / Gk 'shepherd' them with a rod of iron, and to sit with Christ on His throne (3:21).

Then there are the twenty-four elders around the throne, who are given white robes and crowns of gold, and are made kings and priests, and are destined to reign on the earth (Rev. 4:4, 10; 5:9-10). There are various interpretations of the twenty-four elders destined to reign on the earth. They may represent the 'church of the firstborn' (Heb. 12:23): the number 'twelve' being associated with the elect patriarchs, tribes, and

Apostles; and ‘twenty-four’ speaking of the ‘double portion’ given to firstborn sons in Bible times, to enable them to govern, lead and serve their family / tribe (Deut. 21:17). This is only conjecture, but not without some foundation, for all the above passages suggest it will be Christ’s tried and tested servants who will reign with Him – governing, judging and serving redeemed and restored humanity, even the whole creation, in the ages to come – a ‘high calling’ indeed (Phil.3:14).

Paul calls this ‘high calling’ a ‘prize,’ whereas eternal life is a gift; which suggests he is referring to the privilege, not only of being with and like Christ, but qualified through faithful service to reign with Him in the administration of His kingdom (Matt.25:19-23; Luke 19:16-19).

All these aspects of the kingdom should challenge Christians to be vigilant and diligent, to watch and pray, and earnestly wait for God’s Son from heaven. We should occupy ourselves with the work He has given us to do until He comes (Matt.26:41; 1Thess.1:10; Luke 19:13). Although salvation is ‘by grace through faith,’ from the above we get the distinct impression that it is the faithful, vigilant, persevering, overcoming saints (Rev.ch.2-3) – those who earnestly love and serve the Lord (2Tim.4:8) – who will reign with Him in the ages to come. These tried and tested ‘sons of God’ will have the privilege of ruling and serving redeemed humanity with Christ, until the whole creation is ‘delivered from corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God’ (Rom.8:18-23).

Knowledge (Of God)

God reveals Himself primarily through the testimony of creation and Scripture (Ps.19), but also through conscience, providence, events and circumstances. If we ignore these, He will bring us to know Him through judgment, chastening and death. God spells this out in Ezek.ch.6 & 7 where, after announcing each judgment, He says ‘then you / they shall know that I am the LORD.’ God has purposed to bring Israel (and all people) to know Him, love Him and submit to Him, by one means or another, in order that He might bless us. He chastens us in order that we might learn to love and obey Him, for His glory and our eternal good. In the end, every creature will bless, honour and glorify Him (Rev.5:13).

Knowledge (Of God's Will)

Even Spirit-filled believers can be ignorant of aspects of God's will. We see this in Acts ch.10 & 11, where the Apostles in Jerusalem were reluctant to accept Gentile believers. Likewise, there are important truths of which many of today's Christians are ignorant – including God's purpose to save all people.

The Old Testament prophets declared God's intention to receive and bless Gentile believers, but the Jews, and even the pre-Cornelius Church (which was almost entirely Jewish), initially failed to recognize this. Similarly, after 2,000 years of Christianity, many Christians still have a blind spot with regard to passages in both Testaments that declare God's purpose to restore *all things / people* to Himself, in and through Christ.

God's purpose to save Gentile believers was a revelation to Jewish Christians of the greatness and extent of His redeeming love. Similarly, the truth of God's broader intention to ultimately save *all people* reveals the universal scope of His redeeming and reconciling love in Christ.

Peter needed courage to tell other Church leaders what he had seen and heard on the rooftop at Joppa, and the subsequent conversion of Cornelius and his household. To begin with, his fellow-Apostles in Jerusalem were offended, but in the end had to acknowledge that God accepted believing Gentiles. However, some of the Jerusalem believers remained spiritually blinkered, and attempted to impose Jewish customs on Gentile converts (Acts 15:1). Resistance to change is understandable, even change for the better; this may help to explain why many today reject the belief that God will ultimately save all people.

We should all try to avoid undue narrowness and bigotry, because, as Paul says, even if we understand all mysteries but do not have love, it profits us nothing.

Lost

Being lost (in a spiritual sense) can mean different things to different people. Traditionalists believe that being finally 'lost' means endless separation from God, and various levels of retributive punishment. Those who embrace Conditional Immortality believe that persistent sinners will suffer annihilation / permanent non-existence. In contrast,

Christian Universalists believe the lost suffer alienation from God, but only until He ‘finds’ them, i.e. brings them to repentance and belief in Christ, either in this life or in the world to come. Christian Universalists believe that God’s punishment of unbelievers is essentially remedial, leading to their eventual restoration in Christ.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:1-7) shows that apart from lost-ness being linked to sin and guilt, it is *the Good Shepherd Himself* who has lost *His* sheep. Our loss is God’s loss, and to remedy this He graciously (and responsibly) sets out to seek, find and restore us to Himself – so that in the end, not one of His loved ones will be lost. Like the shepherd in the parable, Jesus searches for the lost ‘until’ He finds them (Luke 15:4).

Suffering ‘loss’ (1Cor.3:15) and ‘destruction’ (1Cor.5:5) are related, in that they describe, not final loss, but the loss / destruction of the ‘flesh’ (sinful nature) in order that the lost may partake of God’s holiness (Heb.12:10). Whilst these verses in the first instance relate to believers, God, the Father of spirits, provides the one means (Christ), and seeks the one end (the restoration of all things), until He has delivered the whole creation from its bondage to corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom.8:21).

In Paul’s analogies of the ‘the race’ and ‘the fight’ (1Cor.9:24-27), Christians are encouraged to endure. The word ‘castaway’ (v.27 KJV) has been interpreted in various ways. Matthew Henry and Matthew Poole say it means eternal loss, as though Paul believed he could lose his salvation through neglecting his walk with Christ. However, Leon Morris maintains that being ‘cast away’ (KJV), ‘disqualified’ (NKJV) means, not the loss of eternal life, but having one’s Christian work and service rendered invalid.

Similarly, from 1Tim.1:18-20 we gather that Christians may suffer ‘shipwreck,’ through rejecting ‘faith and a good conscience’ (v.19). However, this ‘shipwreck’ does not mean the loss of salvation, because Paul delivered Hymenaeus and Alexander (the offenders) to Satan in order that they might ‘learn not to blaspheme’, showing that Paul anticipated their repentance and restoration to the Christian community.

Many Christians object to the larger hope because they have been taught to believe that unbelievers will be lost forever unless they come to faith in Christ in this life. Wanting people to avoid everlasting

punishment seems to be their chief motivation for preaching the Gospel. Whilst it is true that permanent rejection of God's love in Christ would mean permanent separation from God, the difference between Christian Universalists and the more traditionally-minded on this issue, is that the former believe that God is so good, loving and merciful that He can, and ultimately will, win all His offspring to Himself. Dr Leslie Weatherhead says: 'I know there is the theoretical possibility that a soul with free will may finally say "No" to God and refuse to belong to the family.' However, with him, we ask, 'But can the love of God ultimately fail? The woman sought the lost coin until she found it. The shepherd sought over the dark mountains the lost sheep until he found it.' (*In Search of a Kingdom*, p.186).

A related aspect of being 'lost' is that people are *already lost* until they come to faith in Christ, i.e. are in a state of being lost. Jesus came 'to seek and to save that which was lost.' He came, not to condemn or destroy, but to save us from our sins (John 3:17; Luke 9:56; Matt.1:21). He came to save us, not only from condemnation due to sin, but to save us *from sin itself* and give us abundant life now and in the world to come (John 10:10).

Receiving and enjoying new life now, and as an ongoing experience, is the main thrust of Jesus' teaching on salvation. It is not *primarily* about being saved from punishment. Fear of, and deliverance from, the wrath to come has its place (1Thess.1:10), but wrath understood in the light of Scripture as a whole.

Gehenna ('hell' KJV) is a serious matter. Those who persist in sin will find that it is a 'fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God' (Heb.10:31). The fact that punishment will be administered by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, who 'is love,' will increase rather than diminish its unpleasantness, but the outcome will be positive, even glorious, in that it will purify, reform and restore wayward souls, and bring them, with all other creatures, to worship God and the Lamb (Phil.2:9-11; Rev. 5:13).

It will be fearful and grievous for unbelievers to fall into God's hands because:

- i) They will be brought to understand and confess their unbelief and grievous catalogue of sins against God, their Creator and

Redeemer; and realize the terrible harm their sin has done to themselves and others.

ii) They will be compelled to face the God they have never known or loved, an experience that will deepen their trauma, until He reveals Himself as their merciful Father who loves and chastens them for their good.

iii) They will have to suffer the 'fire' of His disciplinary and remedial judgment, whatever form it takes.

These things are fearful to contemplate, but they spring from the father-heart of God and His gracious purpose to bless His wayward creatures, if necessary through the 'fires' of correction, purification and renewal. All who hope in Christ in this life 'purify themselves' by mortifying the 'flesh' – their old, sinful nature (Rom.8:13; 2Cor.7:1; 1John 3:3). The rest, who are indifferent and even hostile to God, will be brought to repentance, faith and holiness through appropriate forms of divine judgment (2Chron.33:10-13; Isa.45:22-25; Ezek.16:44-63; Zeph.3:8, 9).

We should want people to be saved from having to tread such a path to God and His blessing, described somewhat imperfectly above; but our desire for this should not spring from the falsely-grounded, hope-withering fear that God will condemn some / many of His children to endless torment.

Glorious hope springs from the conviction that God purposes to search for all His lost children until He finds them.

Love

God is love (1John 4:8,16) – love in the essence of his Being. Love is not just one of God's attributes, but is the motive power and guiding principle in all He is and does. Hence, God cannot be anything other than loving in all His purposes and ways. Even His sharpest judgments and punishments are grounded in and spring from His unchanging love for His creatures.

Paterson Smyth, author of *A People's Life of Christ*, leant towards the larger hope but could not embrace it entirely. Nevertheless, he wrote: 'Love is the plant that must top all others in the whole kingdom of God' (*The Gospel of the Hereafter*, p.99).

'Love does no harm to a neighbour' (Rom.13:10), and 'love covers all sins' (Prov.10:12). These verses about human love and forgiveness reflect the love of God, even for His enemies – the love He wants to see in us. Love of enemies displays our heavenly Father's likeness and identifies us as His children (Matt. 5:43-48).

'God so loved the world' (the world of humanity) and because unchanging, always loves it. He promises that all who believe in Christ, His love gift to the world, will not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16). This verse has led many to think the contrary is true, i.e. that people who do not believe in Christ in this life will perish eternally. A truer understanding, based on the whole counsel of God, is that the One who *so loves* humanity does not merely *offer us salvation*, then leave it to our spiritually impotent hearts and minds to respond in faith; but will sooner or later draw us to Himself, in saving grace. For of what use is the offer of life, unless those to whom it is offered are given the will, repentance, and faith to receive it? We read that God gives sinners the ability to believe, and to 'will and to do for His good pleasure' (Eph.2:8; Phil.2:12,13). The Church, the first fruits, is given this ability in this age, but what is true of the first fruits is in principle true of the great harvest of souls in the age / ages to come, according to God's promise to Israel and the whole creation (Rom.11:15, 16, 25-36; 8:18-23).

God is 'kind to the unthankful and the evil' (Luke 6:35), so we can reason, on the basis of the testimony of Scripture, and God's tender mercies being over 'all His works' (Ps.145:9), that He will not restrict His kindness to meeting people's *material needs* (including the needs of the unthankful and the evil), but will meet their *infinitely greater need of being restored to Him*; otherwise it would be like providing food and clothing for prisoners, while denying them the keys of liberty – which in the matter of salvation are the keys of repentance and faith in Christ, the gifts of His grace (Jer.24:7; 31:18; 33:25, 26; Acts 5:31; 11:18; Jam.1:17).

God can turn the wicked to Himself, as He turned Manasseh, Nebuchadnezzar and Saul of Tarsus. These instances of sovereign grace exemplify His will and ability to save every redeemed / ransomed sinner, including the 'chief of sinners' (1Tim.2:4-6; 1:15).

'Love covers all sins' (Prov.10:12). The earliest example of this truth is the way God covered Adam and Eve, and the human race in them, with garments made from the skin of a sacrificed animal (Gen.3:21). In His

love, God has embraced the whole race, redeeming and reconciling all people to Himself in Christ. He has promised to restore all things to Himself: beginning with the 'first fruits,' then ultimately by bringing 'every creature' to bless, honour and glorify Him and His Son (Rom. 8: 21; Rev.5:13).

Rom.5:6-8 reveals that God's love for the 'ungodly,' i.e. for all who have sinned and fallen short of His glory, led Him to send His Son to die for us, even while we were yet sinners. Some Reformed Evangelicals deny that God loves all people in a saving way. But Scripture presents a different picture – for if Christ died 'for the ungodly,' and is 'the propitiation for the sins of the whole world' (1John 2:2 KJV), God's saving love must embrace everyone? The Love that embraces the first fruits will be seen to embrace all people when God fulfils His purpose for the whole creation.

As we have seen, God's 'hatred' of Esau (Rom.9:13) meant denying the rights of the firstborn to Esau, and giving them to Jacob, i.e. giving Jacob the privilege and responsibility of leading, counselling, shepherding and representing his people before God, as well as participating in the Messianic line.

God loves Israel despite their failure as His covenant people (Jer.31:3; Rom.11:28). In Hos.9:15 He says, 'I have hated them . . . I will love them no more', which seems to cast doubt on His love for them. However, in 14:14 He says, 'I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely.'

Evidently God can 'hate' and 'love' at the same time, i.e. hate sin and its evils whilst loving the sinner (See Ps.99:8; Jer.12:7, 8; 1Cor.5:5). This principle is vital in any true understanding of God's dealings with Israel and the world in general.

With all the historic Christian Creeds that exist, not one creedal statement contains those magnificent words with which the Bible uniquely describes God – "God is love." And He is such love that He loved the world in all its brokenness, and gave Himself up for its healing and salvation. The Creeds state all kinds of important truths, but none start from this foundation of the pre-eminence of God's love; yet it is the most unique facet of Christian truth. No other World Religion worships a God who is by nature love. Ultimately,

fundamentally, when God judges, when He redeems, when He works in the Universe, when He chastens us – in everything that He is doing – it is all out of His great altruistic heart of love, which He adequately demonstrated when Jesus hung on the cross. Our God points to the cross and says, “I love you like that.” That kind of love is worth suffering for.

Source unknown.

The Love of God

Love afflicts – then heals (Isa.19:22).

Love employs the devil – but only to teach (1Tim.1:20).

Love scourges – but only to chasten (Heb.12:5, 6).

Love banishes – then restores (2Sam.14:14).

Love exiles – then brings home (Isa.43:1-21).

Love kills – then makes alive (1Sam.2:6).

Love burns – but only to remove our dross (Zeph.3:8, 9; Mal.3:1-3).

Love breaks – then remakes (Jer.18:1-4).

Love destroys – but only to save (1Cor.5:5).

Love exposes – then covers (Prov10:12).

Love imprisons – then releases (Ps.107:10-16).

Love avenges – then forgives (Jude 7; Ezek.16:53-63).

Love uproots – then replants (Jer.24:6).

Love acts for the benefit of the beloved (1Cor.10:24; Phil.2:4).

Love does no harm to anyone (Rom.13:10).

Love is kind to the unthankful and evil (Luke 6:35).

Love should motivate all we do (1Cor.16:14).

Love is the more excellent way (1Cor.12:31-13:13).

Love is the essence of God’s Being (1John 4:8,16).

Love, when perfected, casts out fear (1John 4:18).

Many

It is important to have a correct understanding of the word 'many' in Scripture. In some verses it means 'less than everyone', but in others, dealing with redemption, reconciliation and salvation, it frequently means 'everyone without exception' (unless the context, or common sense, suggests otherwise). To give an example from everyday speech, when we speak of the earth's *many* inhabitants we obviously mean *all* its inhabitants.

In the following examples the equivalence of 'many' and 'all' is clear: with regard to 'all' Israel (Isa.53:6,11), and 'all' people (Matt.20:28 & 1Tim.2:6; Rom.5:15,18). In these passages, the natural sense of 'many' and 'all' is 'all' *without exception*. Trying to make them mean less than 'all' seems unnatural.

In Heb.9:27 Paul tells us that men are appointed to die once, obviously meaning 'all people without exception.' Then he speaks of the divine remedy: Christ being offered to bear the sins of 'many' (v.28). If 'many' here means less than 'all without exception', then God's provision of redemption for humanity is more limited than His appointment of all to die. This seems hard to square with Paul's teaching that grace abounds *much more* than sin (Rom.5:20, 21).

Places Where 'All' Means All Without Exception

Job 34:19 – all people are the work of God's hands.

Isa.25:6-8 – 'all' occurs five times in these promises of salvation. It is difficult to imagine Isaiah meaning anything less than all people without exception.

Isa.40:5 – all flesh shall see the glory of the Lord. Whether or not this means that all people will be saved, *all will see God's glory*.

Isa.52:7-10 – 'all the ends of the earth' will see the salvation of God' (See Luke 3:6).

Dan.7:14 KJV – and 'all people, nations and languages' will serve Christ.

John 5:22, 23 – 'For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son: that all should honour the Son, just as they honour the Father...' This is fulfilled in Rev.5:13, where John hears every creature giving honour to God and the Lamb (Rev.5:13).

Rom.11:32 – ‘God has committed . . . all to disobedience,’ with the express intention of having ‘mercy on all.’ His withholding His mercy from Israel (Rom.9:15) is only ‘until’ His saving purpose for ‘all Israel’ is fulfilled (Rom.11: 25, 26). God’s discipline of Israel has always been, and always will be, for her ultimate good; and because God loves the world, this applies to all people.

1Cor.15:25-28 – ‘all things,’ in these verses, means all people without exception. To these, Paul says, God will become ‘all In all.’

Phil.3:21 – Christ is able to transform and conform our lowly bodies to His glorious body, just as He is able to subdue all things to Himself, i.e. all things / people without exception.

1Tim.2:1 – Paul exhorts Christians to pray for ‘all men.’ The early Fathers understood Paul to mean that we should pray for *all people*, not just all ‘kinds’ or ‘classes’ of people.

1Tim.2:6 – Christ ‘gave Himself a ransom for all’ – which clarifies what Jesus meant when He said He would give His life a ‘ransom for many’ (Mark 10:45). Bearing in mind the infinite greatness of God’s goodness, love, mercy and grace, it would be wrong to insist on something less than *all people without exception* in these verses.

Heb.1:2, 3 – Christ is the ‘heir of all things’, i.e. ‘all things’ in an absolute sense – all things without exception. He says, ‘All things that the Father has are Mine’ (John 16:15).

‘All’ in a Limited Sense

Matt.3:5 – ‘all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to Him,’ clearly means that *many* or *most people* from those regions (but not all) went to see John the Baptist.

Luke 15:1 – ‘all the tax collectors and the sinners’ probably means *most* of them.

John 3:26 – ‘all’ in this verse means *most* or the *majority*, because some people still followed the Baptist (see ch.4:1).

John 8:2 – ‘all,’ but not every single person in Jerusalem.

Acts 22:15 – ‘to all men’ – Paul became a witness to all who heard him, or of him – through his writings and people’s testimony – but not everyone in the world.

Col.1:6 – ‘in all the world’ means something like ‘far and wide’ rather than in every country, city, town and village.

Opponents of the larger hope are quick to point out that ‘all’ in Scripture can mean something less than *all without exception*, depending on the writer’s intention. They are right, of course, for in some of the above instances this is obvious. But equally, in many passages dealing with the scope / extent of redemption, reconciliation and salvation, ‘all’ means *everyone without exception*.

Mercy

There are too many references to God’s mercy in the Bible to comment on all of them, but the following are some notable examples.

God’s Merciful Nature

Exod.34:6 – ‘the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abounding in goodness and truth’ (See Neh.9:17; Ps.86:15; 103:8). The first thing God declares about Himself in Exod.34:6 is that He is ‘merciful.’ He does say that He will not clear the guilty, and that their iniquity will be visited on their children to the third and fourth generation (v.7); but repentance and forgiveness are always possible (Ps.51; Acts 3:19; 1John 1:9). There is no mention in Exod.34:6 (or in any judgment passage in the Old Testament) of endless torment in hell. The damaging effects of sin, even sin that has been forgiven, can persist for a lifetime, or longer, as in the case of David, whose adultery and murder had repercussions for him and his family; and in the case of Solomon, whose idolatry led to the division of the kingdom. However, due to God’s unchanging mercy, Israel was not totally consumed (Mal.3:6). This shows that while God’s wrath, judgment, punishment and chastening may contain an element of just retribution, they are always tempered with love and mercy, hence are essentially remedial and restorative.

Ps.118:1-4 – this fourfold declaration that God’s mercy ‘endures forever’, shows that mercy is an intrinsic part of His character.

Ps.145:9 – God’s tender mercies are over ‘all His works,’ i.e. all people, and all sentient beings (Isa.57:16; Num.16:22; Job 34:19; Isa.57:16; Col.1:16).

2Cor.1:3 – God is the ‘Father of mercies,’ a name that should fill us with hope.

Further Aspects of God's Mercy

Deut. 24:7 – in view of this death sentence on all who kidnap and sell their brethren into slavery, Joseph's brethren deserved to die (Gen.37:27, 28). However God, through Joseph, was merciful to them, assuring them that selling their brother into slavery was part of His plan to provide for them and their father's house during famine, and for the people of Egypt and other nations. Likewise, while all of us have sinned and deserve to die, the greater Joseph, our Lord Jesus Christ, has mercifully redeemed and reconciled us to God. The story of Joseph admirably illustrates the larger hope – God's mercy toward all who deserve His judgment.

Judges 10:15, 16 – God could not bear to see His people suffer. After a period of chastening He granted them repentance and forgiveness. Unlike His mercy, His wrath does not endure forever (Mic.7:18). So if after witnessing His people's misery for a number of years, He was moved to forgive and deliver them, could He condemn anyone to endless suffering? (See Judges 2:18).

2Sam.18:5 – David ordered his generals to deal gently with his Absalom, his murderous and rebellious son. So will not the greater David, our Lord Jesus Christ – whose 'mercy endures forever' – show mercy to all who rebel against Him? Even when Absalom trampled on his father's loving-kindness, David still sought his welfare – which illustrates God's unchanging mercy toward His rebellious children.

1Chron.21:13 – David preferred to fall into God's hands rather than suffer an alternative form of punishment. This was because he knew God's mercies were 'very great'.

Job.6:14 – we should be merciful and kind to the afflicted, *even though they forsake the fear of the Almighty* – which clearly mirrors God's mercy to sinners.

Ps.90 – this Psalm illustrates the truth of Rom.11:32, i.e. that mercy, grace and love – not merit, works and human achievement – are at the heart of salvation.

Ps.99:8 – God is merciful to sinners, but takes vengeance on our 'inventions' (KJV), 'deeds' (NKJV).

Ps.130:3, 4 – the Psalmist rejoices that there is forgiveness with God. He is a God who does not mark iniquities – at least not forever.

Ps.136:25 – will the God who ‘gives food to all flesh’ because ‘His mercy endures forever’ withhold salvation – the greater mercy – from any of His creatures? Some may be ‘cast away’ and suffer ‘hardening’ for a season, as has happened to the Jews (as a people), but Paul assures us that ‘all Israel will be saved’ in the end (Rom.11:15, 25, 26).

Prov.21:13 – the unmerciful deserve no mercy, but will be justly and remedially disciplined – like the Rich Man in the Parable (Luke 16:19-31). But punishment / correction, however severe, will come to an end when it has accomplished its purpose – for the Lord will not be angry forever (Heb.12:10, 11; Mic.7:18, 19).

Prov.24:17; 1Kings 3:11; Ezek.33:11 – some say believers will take pleasure in the torment of the ungodly, but these verses show that God disapproves of such a thing.

Isa.19:18-25 – God will forgive and mercifully restore His / Israel’s longstanding enemies.

Jer.32:16-44 – God will bless His undeserving people in sovereign love and mercy (See also Jer.33:1-11; Joel 3:21).

Lam.3:31-33 – God will not cast off forever, but ‘will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies . . . ’

Ezek.5:7-11 – God withdraws His pity from Israel, but promises them His mercy (Ezek.39:25).

Ezek.20:44 – God does not deal with Israel according to their sins. They will come to know Him through the merciful and remedial nature of His judgments.

Ezek.39:25 – God will have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and if on Israel, who had sunk lower than Sodom and Gomorrah (Ezek.16:44 – 63), then surely on all people – for Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world (1John 2:2).

Dan.9:3-19 – God keeps His covenant mercy with those who love Him and keep His commandments. Israel had not kept them, and deserved judgment. But Daniel appeals to God’s mercy. Daniel’s great intercessory prayer is Christ-like, for Jesus loved us while we were yet sinners, showing that all people can hope for God’s mercy. Mercy means being kind to the undeserving.

Hos.9:15 – tells us that God hated His sinful people, and that He would love them no more. But this was *hatred of their sin*, not them; for He promised to ‘ransom them from the power of the grave,’ and ‘redeem them from death’ (Hos.13:14; Isa.53:6).

Amos 7:1-6 – God grants mercy in answer to prayer – which should encourage us to pray for all people (1Tim. 2:1-3).

Mic.6:8 – God exhorts us to ‘love mercy’ in emulation of Him. Do we really love mercy when it comes to the fate of the wicked? Jesus showed mercy to the woman caught in adultery, to Thomas who doubted Him, to Peter who denied Him, to the soldiers who crucified Him, and to Saul who persecuted Him. God is merciful to the undeserving – to adulterers, doubters, deniers, persecutors, and to those who killed His Son – in other words, to all people (Rom.11:32). We need repentance and faith, but should take heart that these are God’s gracious gifts

Hab.3:2 – Habakkuk prayed, ‘O LORD . . . in wrath remember mercy,’ which indicates that God’s wrath does not exclude mercy, but can be the very means of leading to repentance.

Rom.5:20, 21 – sin and death reign in all Adam’s descendants (vv.12-14), but grace and the gift of righteousness reign super-abundantly in and through Christ (vv.17-19).

Rom.11:32 – God has committed all to disobedience, that He ‘might have mercy on all.’ So Paul succinctly states God’s desire / intention to save all people through His mercy and grace in Christ.

1Cor.5:1-8 – a believer has sinned against the light, and in a way not even mentioned among unbelievers. He is disciplined and after coming to repentance is restored to church fellowship. This leads us to ask whether God will withhold His mercy from sinners who have never known the light, and are therefore less culpable than the Corinthian offender.

1Tim.1:15 – God showed mercy to Saul of Tarsus (the ‘chief of sinners’), as He did to other great sinners such as Manasseh and Nebuchadnezzar (2Chron.33:10-20; Dan.4:27-37). In sovereign mercy He brought them to repentance and faith, which shows that He can subdue even the worst offenders to Himself – raising the hope of mercy for all.

Heb.8:10-12 – mercy is at the heart of both Covenants – and is expressed in the Jewish saying: ‘Trust in the mercy of God, even if the sharp sword be at your throat; He forsakes none of His creatures, to give them up to destruction.’

The above passages are powerful evidence that God extends His mercy to all His offspring. They encourage us to believe in the ultimate triumph of mercy over judgment in *every single life* (Jam.2:13).

Perish

In the Old Testament ‘perish’ generally refers to the end / termination / destruction of physical life. Likewise, in the New Testament ‘perish’ often means physical death. The following references confirm this:

Job 4:7, 9, 11 – people and animals perish: people through war, disease, starvation, and natural causes; and animals through predators, pollution, disease, and old age.

Job.4:19-20 – ‘those who dwell in houses of clay . . . perish forever, with no one regarding,’ i.e. ‘forever’ *from the observer’s viewpoint*.

Job 34:10-15 – Elihu says ‘all flesh would perish together and man would return to dust’ if God ‘should gather to Himself His Spirit and His breath’ – in other words all would die.

Job 36:5-12 – Elihu equates ‘perishing’ with death by the sword, i.e. the termination of natural life, with no reference to what comes after (see Matt.26:52).

Prov.10:28 – the ‘expectation of the wicked will perish’ – not that all hope of mercy and forgiveness will perish, but that wicked people’s plans and purposes *for this life* will come to nothing, like those of the rich fool (Luke 12:13-21).

Isa.41:11 – perishing and becoming as nothing, with regard to Israel’s enemies, means their physical death.

Isa.57:1, 2 – even the righteous ‘perish,’ sometimes violently, but benefit in that they are taken from this evil world. They rest and are at peace, and even ‘walk in their uprightness.’

Jer.6:21 – God laid stumbling blocks before His lawless people that they might fall and perish i.e. die physically (1Sam.2:6, 7).

Amos 1:8 – the Philistines perished i.e. were destroyed in battle.

Luke 13:3, 5 – Jesus referred the loss of life in two tragic incidents in His day, and warned His hearers that unless they repented they would likewise ‘perish.’ By ‘perish’, in vv.6-9, He may have been thinking of the Jews who would be killed by the Romans in the coming destruction of Judea in AD70.

John 3:16 – ‘perish’ means to ‘die in one’s sins’ without experiencing the joy of new life in Christ in this world (John 8:24) – but see Num.27:1-3, where it is said that faithful Zelophehad ‘died in his own sins,’ which removes any idea of the eternal loss of people who so die.

1Cor.8:11-13 – ‘perish’ (v.11) means being *spiritually damaged* and *made to stumble* in one’s walk of faith (vv.12, 13). It seems unlikely that Paul meant that an offended believer would suffer endless loss simply through the insensitivity of others.

2Cor.4:3 – this should be understood in the context of 3:7-18, where Paul speaks of the veil which remains over the eyes of Israel as a nation. Unbelieving Israel is ‘perishing,’ but will not perish forever, for their ‘hardening’ is ‘until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in,’ then ‘all Israel shall be saved’ (Rom.11:25, 26). Similarly, as long as anyone continues in unbelief they are perishing, but in the end all people will bow the knee and confess Jesus as Lord, which is the equivalent of saying, with an oath, ‘Surely in the Lord I have righteousness and strength’ (Isa. 45:22-24 KJV, NKJV; see also Phil.2:9-11).

2Cor.4:16; 5:1-5 – ‘perishing’ and ‘destruction’ in these verses relate to the outward man / nature.

Jam.1:9-10 – wealth and beauty perish like flowers in the heat – which means the transience of all living things – not endless loss / punishment (with respect to people).

Punishment

In Connection with Old Testament Judgments

The death sentence passed on Adam and Eve resulted in their spiritual and physical death (Gen.2:16,17; 3:19; 5:5). Death comes to all people for ‘all have sinned’ (Rom.5:12-14). Immediately after the Fall, God signified the redemption of His erring children (and all ‘in them’) by the coverings of skin He provided for them (3:21). He had planned their redemption before they sinned – even from the foundation of the world

(Rev.13:8). In Gen.ch.1-3 there is no mention of *endless* punishment for sin.

The death sentence announced on our first parents eventually brought the summary destruction of all people at the Flood – except for Noah and his family (Gen. 6:5-8; ch.7-8). But the Deluge account contains no hint, warning or threat of endless punishment. What is more, *no Old Testament judgment contains the threat of endless punishment.*

Corrective and Remedial Punishment

Punishment in Scripture is essentially remedial, even when described as ‘eternal’, as the following examples show.

Old Testament

Exod.22:9 – for the loss of, or damage to, neighbours’ animals or possessions, punishment in Israel was limited to recompensing ‘double’ their value.

Num.12:14-16 – Miriam was restored after bearing her shame ‘seven days’.

Deut.25:1-3 – in Israel punishment was usually proportionate, partly in order to protect offenders from being excessively humiliated before onlookers (v.3). Mercy and moderation were enjoined, even in the punishment of the wicked (vv.1, 2).

1Kings11:39 – God afflicted the descendants of David, but ‘not forever.’

Ezra 9:13 – God did not punish Israel according to their sins (Ps.103:10; Ezek.20:44).

Job.37:13 – God thunders with His voice in nature and in His judgments (vv.1-12). His reasons include ‘correction’ and ‘mercy.’ He ‘does not oppress.’ His clemency was designed to lead people to fear Him, i.e. love, respect and obey Him (vv.23, 24).

Ps.66:8-12 – Israel exhorted to bless God for refining and enriching them through affliction.

Ps.83:16-18 – prayer for Israel’s enemies, that they may be ashamed, seek God’s name, and know that He is the Most High over all the earth; which reminds us of God’s commendation of Solomon for not praying for the death of his enemies (1Kings 3:11).

Prov.20:30 – ‘Blows’ and ‘stripes’ ‘cleanse away evil’ and ‘the inner depths of the heart’ – indicating that the main purpose of punishment should be correction, not retribution.

Ecc.3:3 – this suggests that God kills and breaks down in order to heal and re-build (see Deut.32:39: 1Sam.2:6).

Isa.19:22 – after striking and healing Egypt, God unites her with Israel and calls her His people (v.25).

Isa.30:8-18, 26 – God brings His rebellious children to account for their iniquity (vv.9-11,13). He breaks them in pieces (vv.13,14), then binds up their bruises and heals their wounds (vv.18, 19, 26).

Isa.40:2 – Jerusalem receives ‘double’ punishment for all her sins. Whilst being *severe*, ‘double’ is infinitely less than *endless* .

Isa.48:9,11 – God uses restraint in His punishment of Israel. He refines them in the furnace of affliction for the honour of His name, to demonstrate His faithfulness to them as His covenant people. Their punishment is just, but is also corrective and remedial.

Jer.2:19 – Israel’s backsliding would correct and reprove them.

Jer.10:18 – God afflicts His people that they may seek and find Him (that ‘He may be found’ - DOU, LAM).

Jer.31:18-20 – God chastises Ephraim, but yearns for him and promises to have mercy on him.

Ezek.39:24-29 – God sends His people into exile in Babylon for their ‘uncleanness’ and ‘transgressions’ (vv.24, 26), but mercifully promises to restore them to Himself, and to their land. This promise of restoration has a minor and major fulfilment: their return from Babylon; and their complete restoration at the end of the age (Rom.11:25, 26).

Ezek.44:10-16 – God puts some formerly sinful Levites in charge of Temple maintenance.

Dan.4:27-37 – God reduces proud Nebuchadnezzar to eating grass like an animal – but only until he acknowledges His sovereignty.

Hos.5:1-15 – God judges Israel and Judah for their spiritual adultery (vv.3, 4), pride (v.5), treachery (v.7) and adherence to man-made precepts (v.11) – but only until they acknowledge their sin and return to Him (v.15).

Hos.13:7-10 – God ‘tears Israel open’ (v.8) and pleads with them to return to Him as their King, Helper and God (vv.9, 10; 14:1, 2); then promises to ‘heal their backsliding,’ and ‘love them freely’ (14:4). So His love has aspects of severity and mercy (Heb.12:5, 6).

New Testament

Matt.1:21 – Christ ‘will save His people from their sins.’ He will not merely attempt to save them, but will accomplish their salvation. Having redeemed His people, He will save them. Although suffering judgment throughout their history, ‘all Israel’ will be saved in the end (Isa.45:25; Ezek.39:25, 28; Rom.11:25-36).

God loves His enemies and exhorts us to love ours (Matt.5:43-48). Love ‘does no harm’ (Rom.13:10). Love ‘covers all sins’ (Prov.10:12). Love does not return evil for evil, or reviling for reviling, but blesses (1Pet.3:8, 9). God ‘is good to all’ (Ps.145:9). He asks us to pray for our enemies and intends to answer our prayers (Matt.5:44). God’s heart of love and mercy (even toward His enemies) is constant, therefore we can hope for the salvation of all.

Matt.23:37-39; Luke 19:44 – In Jesus God ‘visited’ His covenant people, but they would not come to Him. However, they will welcome Him and call Him blessed when He comes again, after their long period of spiritual hardening / blindness (Rom.11:25, 26 KJV / NKJV).

Luke 15:1-32 – these three parables teach that Christ searches for those who have gone astray *until He finds every last one of them* (vv.4, 8, 32). Like the ‘shepherd’ and the ‘woman’ in these parables, God, having lost *what is His*, diligently searches for His lost ones *until He finds them*. As Isaiah says, ‘all we like sheep have gone astray’ (53:6): not just a few, but the whole house of Israel and, in the broader picture, all people (Rom.5:12-21).

Acts 13:8-12 – the wicked sorcerer Elymas was severely punished / chastened by God for opposing the Gospel, but only for a season – hence *remedially*.

Rom.11:25, 26 – the people of Israel suffer hardening for their rejection of Christ, but only ‘until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.’

1Cor.5:5-8 – Paul orders the church at Corinth to deliver one of its members to Satan, ‘for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.’ The man’s offence was so

serious that it was ‘not even named among the Gentiles’ (v.1). However, on his repentance he was received back into fellowship, which shows that his punishment was remedial (2Cor.2:3-11).

1Tim.1:20; 2Tim.2:17, 18 – Paul delivers two offending Christians to Satan, that they may ‘learn not to blaspheme.’ As in 1Cor.5:5-8, God employs Satan as His sovereign instrument of chastening *for the benefit* of the offenders.

These Bible passages, drawn from both Testaments, present a hopeful picture of divine judgment, punishment and chastening, even when inflicted on God’s enemies. However, there are some passages that appear to rule out any hope for the wicked. The following fall into this category.

Bible Passages that Appear to Teach Endless Punishment

Ps.34:16 – cutting off remembrance of those who do evil suggests an irreversible judgment, but many whose destruction Scripture describes (or foretells) are promised restoration (e.g. Ezek.16:44-63). So, being ‘cut off’ from memory must mean cut off for a limited period, i.e. until ‘the restoration of all things’ (Acts 3:21).

Ps.92:7, 9 – the wicked are ‘destroyed forever,’ and ‘perish,’ but this must be seen in the light of the meaning of ‘destroyed,’ ‘forever’ and ‘perish’.

Ps.104:35 – the Psalmist prays that the wicked might ‘be no more.’ However, this should be considered in the light of what the Bible and some early Christian Fathers say about God’s destruction of ‘sin’ and ‘the flesh’ (the old nature) – but not sinners themselves.

Prov.11:7 – the ‘expectation’ and ‘hope’ of the unjust are said to perish at death. But the Hebrews had an unclear view of life after death. All that Solomon may have meant is that death curtails the *earthly hopes, plans and expectations* of evildoers. This seems to be the case, for in v.8 he contrasts the way the righteous are delivered from trouble *in this life*, with the trouble that comes to the wicked *in this life*.

Isa.24:21, 22 – Isaiah describes a day of judgment, when the ‘host of exalted ones’ (presumably fallen angels) and the proud ‘kings of the earth’ will be imprisoned, and after many days ‘visited’ (KJV), ‘punished’ (NKJV), ‘remembered’ (*The Jewish Study Bible*, Oxford Press). The Hebrew word *paqad* is frequently translated ‘visited’ in the KJV. The Amplified

Version has the footnote: 'The Hebrew word used here may mean visit in mercy as well as visit in punishment, but the context does not seem to indicate the possibility of mercy in this case.' However, note that Isa.52:15 depicts heathen 'kings' being purified and compelled to 'consider' Christ and His redeeming work. Isa.52:15 is in a context of redemption (52:13 – 53:12), and there is no hint of condemnation. This suggests that truth and mercy, and not further punishment, are extended to the heathen kings in Isa.24:21, 22. Moreover, we read in Isa.25:6-8 that God says He will destroy the covering (of death) over 'all people,' 'swallow up death for ever,' and 'wipe away tears from all faces,' which surely includes the prisoners in Isa.24:21, 22 (See Ps.102:19-22; Isa.61:1).

Jer.6:26-30 – God rejects Israel for rejecting His prophets and their faithful ministry (v.30). However, this does not mean He has rejected them forever, for the prophets are full of promises of Israel's restoration (Ezek.ch.16; Hos.5:14,15; Mic.7:18-20; Zech.2:6-13). It was the same in Jesus' day (Matt.23:37-39). But notice, in v.39, how Jesus predicts that Israel will finally accept Him, after a long period of spiritual blindness and unbelief (Rom.11:25, 26, 32).

We see the same principle, when God's judgment of Israel was at its most severe (Jer.23:38-40). Promises of forgiveness and restoration permeate Scripture, with regard to Israel and all nations.

Jer.24:9,10 – Judah was delivered to 'trouble . . . for their harm', which seems to undermine any idea that God's punishments are always remedial, for people's good. They *are* remedial, but may contain an element of retribution, which is only just. His justice and mercy combine to produce repentance. The temporary 'harm' Judah suffered was the necessary element of God's severity in His essentially merciful purpose to bring them to their senses.

Luke12:54-59 – debtors to God who fail to 'settle' with Him will be punished *until* they have 'paid the last mite' (vv.58, 59). Likewise generally speaking law-breakers are kept in prison until the last day of their sentence. Painful though this may be, it is a mercy. For God's 'committing [margin, 'shutting them all up'] all to disobedience' (and its consequences), is that He 'might have mercy on all' (Rom.11:32). So God's severe chastening for disobedience never rules out His mercy, a mercy that always triumphs over judgment (Jam.2:13).

2Thess.1:6-9 – Paul says that the Jews of Thessalonica who ‘troubled,’ i.e. persecuted the church, would be ‘troubled’ by God. By itself this hardly suggests endless punishment in hell. These Jews fell into the same category as those in Jerusalem (along with their leaders) who rejected Christ and persecuted the Church. In tones of hope, both Peter and Paul tell us that those Jews were ignorant of Jesus’ identity as God’s Son (Acts 3:17,18; 1Cor.2:8). Paul, in 1Tim.1:13, deems his own ignorance *as a mitigating factor* in his opposition to Christ and the Church. Moreover, many who initially rejected Christ and opposed the Church became believers (Acts 6:7). So Paul’s words in 2Thess.1:6-9 should be understood in this light and spirit, and in the spirit of Christ’s own words about loving, forgiving and praying for one’s enemies (Matt. 5:43-48). Both Christ, and Stephen – with their dying breath – prayed for forgiveness for those who ‘troubled’ them. Persistent rejection of Christ brings judgment, but He is able to subdue all things to Himself, and bring all people to ‘bow the knee’ and ‘confess Him Lord’ in preparation for the time when God will be ‘all in all’ (Phil.3:21; 1Cor.15:28).

Rev.18:6 – Babylon the great will receive ‘double’ for all her wickedness, just as apostate Israel received ‘double’ for all her sins (Isa.40:1, 2). After being doubly punished, Israel was *comforted* and *promised restoration*. ‘Double’ is a *finite* measure or amount. In this context it indicates thorough discipline but not endless punishment.

Comments of Greek Scholars on the ‘Punishment’ Words Used in Scripture

William Barclay says: ‘The word for punishment [in Matt.25:46] is *kolasis*. This word was originally a gardening word, and its original meaning was *pruning trees*. In Greek there are two words for punishment, *timoria* and *kolasis*, and there is quite a definite distinction between them. Aristotle defines the difference; *kolasis* is for the sake of the one who suffers it; *timoria* is for the sake of the one who inflicts it (*Rhetoric* 1.10). Plato says that no one punishes (*kolazei*) a wrongdoer simply because he has done wrong – that would be to take unreasonable vengeance (*timoreitai*). We punish (*kolazei*) a wrongdoer in order that he may not do wrong again (*Protagoras* 323 E). Clement of Alexandria (*Stromateis* 4.14; 7.16) defines *kolasis* as pure discipline,

and *timoria* as the return of evil for evil. Aulus Gellius says that *kolasis* is given that a man may be corrected; *timoria* is given that dignity and authority may be vindicated (*The Attic Nights* 7.14). The difference is quite clear in Greek and it is always observed. *Timoria* is retributive punishment; *kolasis* is remedial discipline. *Kolasis* is always given to amend and cure.'

The Apostles' Creed (1998), p.189.

Barclay's comments are highly pertinent to the interpretation of Matt. 25:46, which is usually cited as evidence for the endless retributive punishment of the wicked. They show how a true understanding of 'eternal punishment' in this verse makes the traditional interpretation invalid. The 'goats' are punished with *kolasin aionion*, i.e. the corrective punishment of the age / ages to come, designed to reform and restore them to God .

W. E. Vine maintains that the classical Greek meaning of *kolasis* does not apply in common (*koine*) Greek (*Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, p.231 (1973)). However, even if *kolasis* had by New Testament times come to mean retributive punishment, we have seen that *aionion* can mean 'age-long', or 'eternal in quality', rather than 'everlasting' .

Significantly, in none of the other instances of *kolasis* in the New Testament does the word carry the sense of purely retributive punishment. In Acts 4:21 it describes the *corrective* punishment the Sanhedrin wanted to inflict on the Apostles. In 2Pet.2:9 it is used in connection with the fallen angels who are reserved under punishment ('for' NKJV) 'until' (Nestle-Marshall *RSV Interlinear*) 'the day of judgment.' Lastly, in 1John 4:18, the Apostle, speaking to believers, says that while perfect love casts out fear, 'fear involves torment' (*kolasin*). Moulton, in his *Analytical Greek Lexicon*, has 'chastisement' and 'disquietude' as alternative meanings of *kolasin* – words that describe the anxiety believers can feel before they have been perfected in love. In none of these instances does *kolasis* mean *endless* punishment / torment.

Clement, Bishop of Alexandria (c.195) says: 'God's punishments are saving and disciplinary, leading to conversion.' He says this in his commentary on Christ's descent into Hades to preach to the spirits in

prison (1Pet.3:18-20), showing that he (like many of the early Church Fathers), believed that God's love and mercy can reach the unconverted in the next life.

Leckie, in *The World to Come*, p.72, says: 'In the *Books of Adam and Eve*, punishment occurs in *sheol* [the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek *hades*] until the end of the age' – hence, not endlessly.

From the above we get the impression that God punishes and chastens His creatures, not to harm them, but to correct, refine and restore them, and make them 'partakers of His holiness' (Zeph.3:9; Mal.3:2, 3; Heb.12:10).

Purification

Job 7:17, 20 – 'man' in v.17 is a reference to humanity / all human beings. God 'visits' and 'tries' us in order to test, refine and bless us. The words 'O thou preserver of men' (KJV), '...keeper of men' (DOU), bear out God's benevolent concern for us. He 'preserves,' 'keeps' and 'watches' us for *our good*, not harm.

Does God set His heart on us simply for the duration of this life? *Our* weak human affections follow our loved ones into the next world, and often *never fade*. Surely then, God our Father's love for us, His 'offspring' made in His image, *never fades* (2Sam.12:23; 18:33; Jer.31:3; Acts 17:28, 29).

Job 23:10 – the trials of this life can refine us and work to restore God's image in us. Malachi foretells that Christ will come to refine the spiritually debased sons of Levi (Mal.3:1-4). Our refining as believers is an ongoing process. We suffer with Christ so that we may become like Him, and live and reign with Him (2Tim. 2:12; 1John 3:2, 3). The Bible shows that the saints, with Christ their Head, will liberate, judge, rule and serve humanity in the age / ages to come, until God becomes 'all in all'.

Ps.10:15 – here we see an underlying principle in God's dealings with persistent sinners. He not only punishes the wicked, but purges them from their wickedness.

Ps.66:10-12 – God's severest punishments are remedial and restorative. Those who have been refined, proved and afflicted with snares, crushing defeat, and fire and water, are in the end brought into 'rich fulfilment.'

Isa.4:4 – God’s judgment of apostate Jerusalem by the ‘spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning’ is a purification of the city before He dwells there.

Isa.6:5-7 – when Isaiah saw the Lord in His holiness, he became painfully aware of his, and his people’s, sin (vv.3-5). He feared being ‘undone’ (Heb. ‘cut off’). However, the Lord responded with mercy and cleansing. In the same way, God’s mercy can reach all sinners. He can convict them of their sin and unworthiness, and purify them as He did Isaiah. For it is ‘a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners’ – even ‘the chief of sinners’ (1Tim.1:15).

Isa.19:18-25 – God strikes and heals the Egyptians, and calls them His people.

Isa.22:14 – God appears to be saying there will be no atonement for Jerusalem / the Jews. But this would go against many passages that foretell Israel’s restoration. The sense seems to be that because Israel refused to repent (vv.12, 13), they would not be forgiven *in this life*; but will experience forgiveness, cleansing and restoration (with the people of other nations, including Assyria, Egypt, Sodom and Samaria) in the age / ages to come (Isa.19:18-25; Ezek 16:44-63).

Isa.29:23, 24 – those who ‘erred in spirit . . . and murmured’ will ‘come to understanding and will learn doctrine’ – which speaks of the educative purpose of their chastening.

Isa.48:9, 10 – God ‘tests’ and ‘refines’ Israel in the ‘furnace of affliction’ – a further example of His restorative punishment.

Jer.2:19 – God makes Israel’s wickedness and backsliding (and the consequences) His means of correction.

Jer.9:7 – God’s severe judgments ‘try’ and ‘refine’ His people.

Dan.4:27, 34-37 – God used affliction and humiliation to chasten Nebuchadnezzar, which is an instance of His remedial chastening of all nations. God’s subjugation of the Babylonian tyrant illustrates His ability to subdue *all the ungodly* and bring them to faith in Himself. God subjects and subdues the wicked, not by sentencing them to endless punishment, but by conforming them to His will, that He might be ‘all in all’ (1Cor.15:28; Phil.3:21).

1Cor.3:11-15 – that in us which is of no spiritual value will be removed, ‘burned,’ consumed – as dross is purged from precious metal. The method / process God uses is always just and in keeping with His holiness, goodness, mercy and love.

1Cor.5:5, 7, 8 – our ‘flesh’ (fallen, sinful nature) must go / be destroyed if we are to partake of God’s holiness.

2Cor.7:1 – we must purify ourselves from ‘all filthiness of flesh and spirit,’ thereby ‘perfecting holiness in the fear of God.’ Failure to do this (with the Holy Spirit’s help) could mean being handed over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (1Cor.5:5; 1Tim.1:20; 1Tim.5:22; 1John 3:2, 3; 1Pet.1:22).

Heb.12:29 – God is a ‘consuming fire’ and it ‘is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God’ (Heb.10:31). These sobering truths are part of the writer’s exhortations to *believers*. They are not warnings about hell fire, but about the more hopeful truth that in His holy, burning love, God will purge us from all impurity. We know that God loves His enemies, as well as those who trust Him; and that He wills / desires the salvation of all people. Consequently, His purifying judgment of the ungodly is no different in essence and purpose from His chastening of believers, for all are His ‘offspring’ (Acts 17:28, 29), and He cares for ‘the evil and the good . . . the just and the unjust’ (Matt.5:45). Jesus calls *sinner*s to repentance, which reveals His concern for all who are alienated from God by sin.

God wants the best for all His creatures. Through Christ and the Church in this age (His corporate channel of blessing), God will subdue and restore all things to Himself, so that in the end He will be ‘all in all’ (Phil.3:21;1Cor.15:28). Then, all that is ‘of Him’ and ‘through Him’ [‘all things’] will be restored ‘to Him’ in Christ (Rom.11:36; Eph.1:10).

Ransom

In both Testaments ‘to ransom’ means to buy back / redeem people who are lost, forfeited or brought into bondage / slavery. We have seen that Christians disagree about the extent of redemption: some limiting it to the elect, believing that only these will be saved. Most, however, believe that by His death Christ has ransomed *all people*, but that only those who believe in Him in this life will be saved. A minority of Christians accept the more hopeful view espoused by some of the early

Church Fathers, i.e. that Christ has redeemed and will ultimately save all people – either in this life or the next.

Isa.25:6-8 – in line with the third view above, these verses show that God will make a feast for ‘all people . . . destroy the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations . . . swallow up death forever . . . and wipe away the tears from all faces.’

Isa.51:10, 11 – ‘ransomed’ and ‘redeemed’ are synonymous, in this case with respect to the nation of Israel. However, *all people / nations* are ransomed (Isa.45:22-25; Zeph.3:8, 9; John 1:29; 1Tim.2:6).

Hos.13:9, 15-16 – although Israel’s persistent sin led to their destruction, the Lord promised to ‘ransom them from the power of the grave,’ and ‘redeem them from death’ (v.14).

Mark 10:45 – Some Christians point out this verse as evidence for limited / particular redemption, for Christ says He came to ‘give His life a ransom for many’? When it is pointed out that Paul says that Christ ‘gave Himself a ransom for all’ (1Tim.2:6), they argue that ‘all’ in this verse, means all *without distinction*, not all *without exception*, i.e. that Christ has ransomed some Jews and some Gentiles, but not all. However, as we have seen, ‘many’, in passages about redemption (such as Isa.53:11; Rom.5:15, 19), clearly means *all, even all without exception*. That ‘all,’ in 1Tim.2:6, means *all without exception* is shown by v.5, where Paul says, ‘For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.’ ‘Men’ in this verse clearly refers to humanity as a whole. After declaring Christ’s mediation ‘between God and men [all men],’ Paul says that Christ ‘gave Himself a ransom for all.’ So the unstrained meaning of these verses is that Christ, the one mediator between God and men, gave Himself a ransom for all people without exception.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation occurs when two or more alienated parties are brought together again. In Scripture it means God’s reconciliation of sinful human beings to Himself, in and through Christ, and His non-imputation of trespasses to them. (2Cor.5:18, 19). This reconciliation relates i) to **believers** – in v.18 Paul says to believers, ‘Now all things are of God who has reconciled us to Himself,’ and ii) to **‘the world’** (v.19) – hence *universal* reconciliation.

In Col:1:19, 20 Paul says 'it pleased the Father that in Him [Christ] all fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things [cf. vv.16, 17] to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.' Having reconciled all people to Himself in Christ, God invites all to be reconciled to Him through faith in His Son (2Cor.5:20).

Redemption

All Israel Redeemed

Neh.1:10 – the Jews are a redeemed people.

Isa.43:1 – Israel created, redeemed and owned by God.

Isa.60:21 – all the people of Israel shall be righteous and inherit the land – which could not happen if they were not redeemed.

Jer.31:11 – God has redeemed and ransomed Israel, showing that 'redeem' and 'ransom' mean the same thing (See Isa.51:10,11).

Hos.3:1, 2 – Hosea and his wife picture God's redemption of Israel.

Hos.7:13 – the Israelites transgressed against God and were 'destroyed,' but God remained faithful and promised to 'ransom them from the grave' and 'redeem them from death' (13: 9,10,14).

John 11:49-52 – Israel's high priest prophesied that Jesus 'would die for the nation,' and not for Israel only, but for 'all the children of God who were scattered abroad,' meaning the Jews of the Diaspora, whose sin is 'taken away' with the 'sin of the world' (John 1:29).

Redemption Irrevocable

God often judged Israel, and even disowned and cursed them (Isa.43:28; Jer.24:9,10; Dan.9:11). However, this did not nullify their redemption, but became God's disciplinary means to bring them into the good of redemption, i.e. through chastening – for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable (Num. 23:19, 20; Eccl.3:14; Rom.11:29).

Ps.49:7-9 – the Psalmist implies that redemption, when it is accomplished, is 'eternal' (see Heb. 9:12). It is impossible for sinners to redeem themselves, but Christ has redeemed fallen humanity by His 'costly' sacrifice (1Pet.1:18, 19).

Universal Redemption

Gen.3:21 – the redemption of Adam and Eve (and the human race which sprang from them) is typified by the coverings of skin that God provided for them.

Isa.52:15 – Christ ‘sprinkles,’ (cleanses) ‘many nations,’ i.e. *all* nations (1John 2:2).

John 1:29 – the Lamb of God takes away *the world’s sin*, not just Israel’s (Isa.53:6).

Acts 10:15, 16 – Peter’s housetop vision at Joppa was repeated three times, to emphasize that God had cleansed the Gentiles.

Col.1:20 – Christ made peace by the blood of His cross for ‘all things . . . whether things on earth or things in heaven.’

1Tim.2:6 – Jesus ‘gave Himself a ransom for all.’

Heb.2:9 – the Son of God became a man that He ‘might taste death for everyone.’

This scriptural testimony shows the universal extent of Christ’s redeeming work. Some teach limited atonement / particular redemption because they fail to grasp that Christ has redeemed both the elect *and* people in general – the elect being His channel of blessing to all people.

Repentance

Repentance is God’s Gift

Like faith, repentance is God’s gracious gift. So we can hope that because God wills / desires the salvation of all (1Tim.2:4), He will grant repentance to all His offspring. God ‘commands all men everywhere to repent’ (Acts17:30; Luke 24:47), which suggests He is able and willing to give people the repentance He commands. The following verses show that repentance is God’s gift:

Jer.24:7 – God promises to give Israel a new heart and the ability to return to Him.

Jer.31:18, 19 KJV – an admission of dependence on God for repentance and restoration.

Jer.33: 25, 26 – God mercifully promises to ‘cause’ the captives of Israel to return.

Lam.5:21 – prayer for the ability to repent and be restored.

Acts 5:31 – Christ gives repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

Acts11:18 – God grants the Gentiles repentance and life.

Rom.2:4 – God’s goodness leads us to repentance.

Jam.1:17 – God is the giver of every good and perfect gift – including repentance.

The Meaning of Repentance

Isa.55:6, 7 – to seek the Lord, and call on Him; forsake wicked ways and unrighteous thoughts, and return to God.

Jer.3:17 – to walk no more after the stubbornness of our evil heart.

Jer.4:1 – to return to the Lord and put away our abominations from His sight.

Jer.18:11 – to forsake our evil ways and return to God; to make our ways and doings good.

Ezek.18:21, 27, 28 – to turn from all our sins, keep God’s statutes, do what is lawful and right, and turn from our transgressions.

Joel 2:12-14 – a comprehensive description of repentance.

Only God can give us such a radical change of heart – anything less is self-generated and powerless. Only He can lead / bring us to the deep and sincere cry of the Publican in the Temple, ‘God be merciful to me, a sinner,’ and to the genuine change of heart and life experienced by Zacchaeus. It takes God’s Spirit, love and grace to produce true repentance in people who are dead in trespasses and sins. It happens only when the Spirit convicts us of ‘sin, righteousness and judgment’, and grants us repentance and saving faith.

Restoration

The larger hope is belief in the restoration of *all things*. We have seen that universal restoration is repeatedly taught in Scripture, a key example being Acts 3:20, 21 – ‘Jesus Christ . . . whom heaven must

receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.’

Notice that the restoration of all things is a regular Old Testament theme. According to Acts 3:20, 21 *all the prophets* speak of it (See below *)

Another key verse that refers to the restoration of all things is Rev.21:5 – ‘Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful.”’

Jesus’ words ‘in the regeneration . . .’ (Matt.19:28 NKJV; ‘at the renewal of all things’ NIV, NRSV), refer to the restoration of all things. The Greek word translated ‘regeneration’ means born again or new birth. It is used of individuals (John 3:3, 5; Tit.3:5), but its sense in Matt.19:28 is far wider, even universal – the rebirth of a fallen world, the regeneration of the human race. God allowed our first parents (and the human race in them) to fall into sin and death only because He purposed something better for us all in Christ – a new creation founded on grace rather than self-generated works and obedience to law. Many Bible passages contain references to the restoration of all things, either specifically or inferentially, including: *Ps.22:27-29; Prov.10:12; Isa.25:6-8; 45:22-25; John12:32; Acts3:21; Rom.8:19-21; 11:32-36; 1Cor.15:27, 28; 2Cor.5:19; Eph.1:9-11; Col.1:19-21; Rev.5:13; 21:5.

Saints - see Elect

Salvation

One aspect of salvation is being ‘saved’ or ‘delivered from’ the wrath to come (Rom.5:9; 1Thess.1:10); but nowhere does the Bible speak of endless wrath / anger. On the contrary, Old Testament writers tell us that God *will not be angry with the wicked forever* (Ps.30:5; Isa.57:16; Jer.3:12; Mic.7:18).

Salvation is deliverance from sin, evil and every damaging consequence of the Fall. This is spelt out in Ezek.36:24-33, where the salvation of Israel involves being brought back to God and His blessings after a period of exile. It also means being cleansed from spiritual uncleanness and idolatry, receiving a new heart and spirit, and being enabled to walk in His statutes and keep His judgments.

Matt.1:21 – Jesus saves His people from their sins.

Acts 3:26 – Jesus turns believers from their iniquities.

Rom.8:21 – God will deliver creation from the bondage of corruption.

Gal.1:4 – Christ delivers believers from this present evil age.

Tit.2:14 – Christ died to redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

Heb.9:26 – Christ puts away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

So the main purpose of salvation is *deliverance from sin and its attendant evils*. A person being saved is someone who is being delivered from sin and its consequences, and brought into newness of life in Christ. Salvation is sometimes spoken of as a process: i) salvation from *condemnation due to sin*, ii) salvation from the *power of sin*, and ultimately, iii) salvation from the *presence of sin*.

Salvation (Extent of)

See 'Many' and 'Redemption'.

Satan

Some religious teaching implies that Satan has almost as much power as God, including the power to take untold millions into hell. This suggests the victory of evil in many cases, in that the prince of this world has been allowed to permanently ruin many, even the majority of God's creatures made in His image. However, there is no dualism in Scripture. God is the sovereign Lord of all. He only permits Satan to operate within strict limits, and for the ultimate good of His children, as the following verses show:

Job 1-2 – is a classic example of God's sovereign power over Satan. He allows him to afflict Job, but within prescribed limits, for His eternal purpose and glory, and Job's ultimate benefit.

Luke 13:16-17 – a woman is afflicted / bound by Satan for many years, but only until her miraculous deliverance glorifies God and His Son – a foretaste of creation's deliverance from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom.8:21).

Luke 22:31 – Jesus allowed Satan to oppress Peter, in order to separate the 'chaff from the 'wheat' in his life (the carnal from the

spiritual), but prayed for him, and kept and strengthened him, so that in turn he may strengthen others.

1Cor.5:5 – a believer is disciplined for sexual immorality by being handed over to Satan for ‘the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.’ In this instance Satan is employed in a remedial / educational role in the man’s punishment, to bring him to his senses prior to his restoration to church fellowship. God simply uses Satan as an instrument of correction for the offender’s good.

1Tim.1:20 – Paul delivers Hymenaeus and Alexander (irreverent believers) to Satan, to teach them not to blaspheme. As in 1Cor.5:5, Satan’s role is disciplinary).

Satan is cast into the ‘lake of fire’ (Rev.20:10), along with those who are not written in the Book of Life (20:14). Just what this means – bearing in mind that all creatures will ultimately worship God and the Lamb (Rev.5:13) – is difficult to say. Some of the early Fathers, particularly those from the East, taught the ultimate restoration of all things in heaven and earth. This must happen, if all that has gone wrong with God’s creation, from the time of Satan’s rebellion to the present day is to be rectified. Consequently, the ‘lake of fire’, like the rest of God’s punitive / purgative measures, must be remedial – the ultimate corrective punishment of the wicked, and not torment without end. ‘Forever and ever’ (Rev.20:10) can mean from ‘age to age’, i.e. as long as it takes for the wicked to be brought to repentance and willing submission to God and Christ.

Satan (Children of)

In a few places in the Bible certain people are called ‘Satan’, ‘brood of vipers,’ ‘of your father the devil,’ and ‘son of the devil’ (Matt.16:23; Matt.3:7; John 8:40-44; Acts13:10). This is because of their Satan-like behaviour. For example Peter, in his endeavour to prevent Jesus from going to His death, said, “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to you!” Jesus’ rebuke ‘Get behind Me, Satan!’ was severe, but He did not mean that Peter *was* Satan, or satanic – only that in his well-meaning but misguided attempt to hinder Jesus from going to the Cross, he was unwittingly behaving *like* Satan (Matt.16:23).

Similarly, John the Baptist’s scathing description of the Pharisees, Sadducees and multitudes as a ‘brood of vipers,’ was simply his strong

disapproval of their evil ways (Matt.3:7; Luke 3:7). It did not indicate they were beyond redemption and salvation. Acts 6:7 and 1Tim.1:12-17 show that 'a great many of the priests' (and later Paul, the 'Pharisee of Pharisees') came to know Christ. The same is true of many others who were initially hostile to Jesus (John 8:40-44; Acts 2:36-42).

Paul called Elymas the sorcerer 'you son of the devil' because he was in Satan's grip (Acts13:10), but his punishment was only 'for a time,' presumably until he turned from his wickedness.

These examples show there is hope for the wicked, even for those who are in Satan's grip (aren't we all – until Christ rescues us?). Our sovereign Lord came to 'destroy him who had the power of death, that is the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage' (See Gen.3:15; 1John 3:8). Some of the early Fathers preached the 'harrowing of hell', i.e. the rescue of all Satan's captives by the risen and glorified Christ. They taught Christ's complete victory over every damaging consequence of the Fall, hence the ultimate salvation of all people.

Sheep

Some Christians point to passages such as John 10:2-3, 11, 14, 25-30 as evidence that Christ came to save a limited number of people, i.e. His 'sheep.' Taken at face value, without considering the teaching of Scripture as a whole, these verses seem to limit salvation to Christ's 'sheep.' But when we understand God's purpose for the 'elect', it becomes evident that rather than being the only ones Christ saves, they are actually His called, chosen and faithful sons, who in this age are trained to live and reign with Christ, and become the appointed *means* (with Christ) of judging, serving and restoring the whole of humanity to God in the ages to come.

The people of Israel are also God's sheep, for Isaiah (who humbly includes Himself with the apostate nation) says, 'all we like sheep have gone astray . . . and the LORD has 'laid on Him the iniquity of us all' (Isa.53:6). (See Jer.50:6; Ezek.ch.34).

In Ps.100:1 God equates 'all you lands' ('all the earth', margin), with the work of His hands, the 'sheep of His pasture' (v.3), showing that in the broadest sense His flock is the human race (1John 2:2). 'God is love' (1John 4:8,16); He loves 'the world' (John 3:16); He is 'the Saviour of all men . . .' (1Tim.4:10); He 'will have all men to be saved' (1Tim.2:4

KJV, DOU, TYN, NEW AMERICAN BIBLE); Christ is the ‘Saviour of the world’ (John 4:42; 1John 4:8,14,16); and God will ultimately bring all people to bless, honour and glorify Himself and the Lamb (Rev.5:13).

Sheol

Isa.5:14,15 – the Hebrews viewed *Sheol* as a shady realm where the souls of the dead were ‘brought down . . . and humbled,’ and where God would be ‘exalted in judgment . . . and hallowed in righteousness.’ There is more than a hint here of the purpose of *Sheol*. It was thought of as a place where human pride vanishes in the light of God’s holiness, but where hope is not entirely extinguished. Death brings the cessation of sin, a necessary preparation for the redeemed sinner’s eventual restoration to God.

Our first parents were sentenced to death, and kept from eating from the tree of life to prevent them from living forever in sin (Gen.3:22). In this sense death was a mercy to them, for it showed that God had something better for them than a life of sin. Little is said in Scripture about the nature of the soul’s existence in *Sheol*, but we may deduce from the above that it is a place of judgment and preparation for life in Christ. The fact that our first parents (and the human race in them) were given a token of redemption (coverings of skin provided by God), points to a hopeful future for all who have entered *Sheol / Hades*

Sin

Sin is breaking God’s law and falling short of His glory – Rom. 5:20; 3:19, 20, 23.

We are all tainted by sin from the time of our conception in the womb – Job 14:4; Ps.51:5; 58:3; Isa.48:8.

All have sinned – 2Chron. 6:36; Prov.20:9; Eccl.7:20; Isa.64:6; Rom.3:9, 19, 23; 1John 1:8-10.

Sin affects all classes – Isa.9:13-17.

Sin has been ‘taken away,’ ‘put away,’ and ‘borne’ by Christ – John 1:29; Heb.9:26; 1Pet. 2:24.

People can sin through ignorance – Luke 12:48; 23:34; John 4:10; Acts 3:17; Rom.10:3; 1Cor.2:7, 8; Eph.4:17, 18; 1Tim.1:13; Heb.9:7.

Sin against the Holy Spirit - see pp.51-94

Sodom and Gomorrah - see pp.17, 17

Sons of God – The Church and House of God

People become sons / children of God through the new birth. The Spirit bears witness with their spirit that they are the children of God – Rom.8:12-17. They 'walk according to the Spirit' (Rom.8:1), 'live according to the Spirit' (vv.5, 12, 13), are 'led by the Spirit' (v.14), are 'spiritually minded' (v.6; 1Cor.2:16), have 'received the Spirit of adoption' (v.15), are 'heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ', and 'suffer with Him' that they 'may be glorified with Him' (v.17).

According to Heb.2:10 – 3:6 the sons of God are Christ's 'brethren' (2:11, 12, 17), have a 'heavenly calling' (3:1), and together constitute the 'house of God / Christ' (v.6). In and with Christ, the sons of God are Abraham's seed (Gal.3:16, 29). In and through them 'all the nations of the earth will be blessed' (Gen.22:18). At the manifestation of the sons of God, the creation itself will be 'delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God', and will be judged, governed and instructed in righteousness by Christ and the saints (Rom.8:18-21; Ps.148:5-9; Acts17:31; 1Cor.6:2; Dan.7:18, 27; Rev.5:10; Ps.145:10-13; Isa.2:2-4; Heb.3:6).

The sons of God are His Church, Temple, Priesthood, House and City, and are the Bride of Christ – all these, in and with Christ, have been and will be instrumental in enlightening, blessing and healing the nations (Isa.2:2-4; Matt 5:14-16; Eph.3:8-11; 1Pet.2:4; Rev.21:22-24; 22:2,17).

Sovereignty (God's)

God's sovereignty over all things permeates Scripture.

Gen.45:5-9; 50:15-20 – the story of Joseph typifies God's sovereign purpose to bless Israel and all nations through Christ.

God always does what He says He will do – Num.23:19, 20; Josh.21:43-45; 2Chron.6:4; 10:15; Isa.48:3.

God ordains events and outcomes according to His will and purpose – 1Kings 12:15; 2Kings 14:6, 27; 2Chron.11:4; 25:8; Job 42:2; Ps.105:25; 106:15; Jer.27:4-6; 32:28; Ezek.36:24-33; Dan.4:35.

God does according to His good pleasure – 1Sam.3:18; Job 23:13; Ps.135:6; Isa.44:28; 46:10, 11; 53:10; 55:11; Luke 12:32; Eph.1:5, 9; Phil.1:6; 2:13; 2Thess.1:11.

God's sovereignty also applies to individuals – Prov.16: 9; 20:24; 21:1; Jer.17:14; 31:18; John 6:65; 19:11; Rom.14:4.

God in His sovereign mercy turns us to Himself that we may be saved, blessed, healed, etc. – Ps.80:3, 7, 19; Jer.17:14, 15; John 3:8.

God can give or withhold understanding – Deut.29:4; Matt.13:11; John 15:15.

With God all things are possible – Job 42:1, 2; Jer.32:17, 27; Mark10:23-27; Luke 1:37.

God has a purpose and reason for all He does – Ezek.14:23; Jer.22:8, 9; Eph.1:11.

In His sovereignty, God wills the salvation of all people. To this end He has redeemed and reconciled all people to Himself, and will subdue all things to Himself (1Tim.2:4, 6 KJV; Col.1:20; 1Cor.15:28; Phil.3:21).

Spirits in Prison

In 1Pet.3:18-20 Peter speaks of Christ going in the Spirit to 'preach to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is eight souls, were saved through water.'

Scholars interpret these verses in different ways. Some in the Reformed tradition believe they refer to Christ's preaching to the antediluvians through Noah (2Pet.2:4-5). However, the natural sense of 1Pet.3:18–20 seems to be that Christ went and preached to the 'spirits in prison' *after His resurrection*. Some early Church Fathers taught that these spirits were the spirits of men, i.e. of the antediluvians, and not fallen angels. A few of the Fathers taught that Christ liberated *every captive spirit from Hades* (see Thomas Allin in *Christ Triumphant*, pp.118, 143).

In 1Pet.4:6 we read that 'the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.' If 1Pet.3:18-20 and 4:6 are thematically related, Peter appears to be teaching that Christ's saving

work reaches beyond the grave, even bringing hope to the souls of the ungodly in Hades. The word 'now,' in 'are now dead' (1Pet.4:6 NIV), is not in the Greek Text. Its inclusion by the NIV translators is an example of *interpretation* rather than translation, and suggests that Christ preached to people *before they died*, and not to spirits of the dead in Hades. William Barclay, in *The Apostle's Creed* (1998), pp.97-109, looks at this question in some detail.

Subdue

'Subdue' and 'subject' are sometimes used in connection with Israel's conflicts with her enemies (1Chron.17:10; Zech.9:15), but speak of *temporal* and *physical* subjugation rather than *eternal* punishment. Micah tells us that God will subdue Israel's 'iniquities' but save the nation (7:19), which illustrates the saying, 'God loves sinners but hates their sin.' We see a further example of this in 1Cor.5:5, where a sexually immoral believer is handed over to Satan for the 'destruction of the flesh,' 'that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.' God's restoration of apostate Israel through the subjugation of her sins; and His restoration of the immoral believer at Corinth through the destruction of his flesh / sinful nature, shows that with God 'mercy triumphs over judgment' (Jam.2:13).

Some may cavil that whilst this is true with regard to God's dealings with His Old and New Testament people, it is not true with regard to unbelievers. However, several passages speak of 'all things' / 'every creature' ultimately being subdued and restored to God. Of these, four come to mind (Isa.45:22-25; 1Cor.15:25-28; Phil.3:21, and Rev.5:13).

Isa.45:22 – God commands all the ends of the earth to look to Him and be saved. Eventually 'every knee shall bow,' and 'every tongue shall take an oath,' and will say 'Surely in the LORD I have righteousness and strength' (v.24 KJV, NKJV), which is the equivalent of acknowledging Christ as Lord and Saviour (Phil.2:11).

1Cor.15:25-28 – God will subject 'all things' to Himself that He may be 'all in all' (v.28). Notice that the Greek verb *hupotasso* ('subject') in v.28, is used of 'all things' being subjected to God, and *Christ's own subjection* to Him. Christ's subjection to God the Father is voluntary, so we have reason to believe this is true of 'all things' in the same verse.

Phil.3:21 – Christ is not only able to conform / subdue *believers* to Himself, but also – in due course – *all things*. The sense seems to be

that His great work of conforming the first fruits (sons of God in this age) to Himself, will be followed by His deliverance of the *whole creation* from bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom.8:19-22).

Rev.5:13 – furnishes us with a clear description of the ultimate ‘restoration of all things’ (Acts 3:21). John sees every creature in heaven and earth, and under the earth and in the sea, blessing, honouring and glorifying God and the Lamb. Whatever process of purification and beatification those in John’s vision have undergone, they are all praising and worshipping God. This proves that all God’s judgments, punishments and dealings with His sinful creatures are essentially remedial and restorative, hence designed to bless and magnify His love, goodness, mercy and grace.

Other verses that shed light on the meaning of ‘subdue’ are:

Gen.1:28 – God commanded Adam and Eve to ‘subdue’ the earth – not harm or destroy it. The second Adam, Christ, with the Church, His Bride, will fulfil this commission in the ages to come, when God will subdue all things to Himself through them (Rom.8:19-22; 1Cor.15:28).

Ps.66:3 – God’s subjugation of His enemies leads the Psalmist to sing, ‘All the earth shall worship You and sing praises unto You; they shall sing praises to Your name (v.4).

Isa.52:13-15 – the glorified Christ will subdue the kings of many nations into silence. They will behold and consider things they had not seen or heard. There is no suggestion of forcible subjugation here, only being reduced to silence, wonder and awe by the majesty of Christ.

Mic.7:19 – God will subdue Israel’s ‘iniquities’ and cast their sins into the depths of the sea.

Rev.11:15 – Christ will rule, not utterly destroy, the nations He subdues, and His saints will reign with Him (Dan.7:18, 26, 27; Rev.5:10).

Eph.6:10-20 – In Old Testament times Israel subdued her enemies by force of arms, but the Christian’s warfare is spiritual, through use of the sword of the Spirit, the word of God.

Tartarus

In Greek Mythology, Tartarus is the son of Gaia (Earth) and Aither (Sky), and is the father of Typhon by his own mother (Gaia). Eventually

Tartarus becomes the lowest part of the underworld, a place of spiritual darkness reserved for the Titans and the souls of all who commit gross evil.

The word Tartarus occurs just once in the NT in 2 Pet. 2:4 (See also Jude 6). It is difficult to understand why the author of 2 Peter borrowed a term from Greek mythology to describe God's dealings with His fallen angels, unless it mirrors an actual place / state in His scheme of things.

Tartarus is a place where *wicked spirits* are confined before they are judged – not souls of human beings.

Terror (Of the Lord)

'Many make the text, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2Cor.5:11) the keynote in their religion and their preaching,' says F. W. Farrar in *Mercy and Judgment*, p.363. He goes on to say:

That "text" like most of the others adduced to for a similar purpose, is mistranslated and most egregiously misapplied. It does not so much as touch on the outermost sphere of the subject we have been examining [the doctrine of everlasting punishment]. The context almost demonstrates its meaning to be simply this – "knowing that the fear of God is the principle of my own life, I try to persuade you that it is so, and that I am no hypocrite; my sincerity is known to God, and I strive to make it known to you."

The outline of the revelation of God which polarises my own thoughts is very different from that which uses terror as an object of persuasion. It is that God is love; that the object of true religion is to be like Him; that destruction is to fall from that foundation and fail of that end; that salvation is the deliverance from that error and from that sin; and that God the Saviour is manifested in the name of Jesus because He saves His people from their sins.

Testimonies to the Larger Hope

Augustine of Hippo (345-430)

Says that *very many* in his day believed in the salvation of all people.

Clement of Alexandria (c.150 - c.215)

‘Christ saves *all* men. Some He converts by penalties, others who follow Him of their own will * * that *every knee* be bent to Him, of those in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, i.e. angels, men, and souls, who, before His coming, passed away from this mortal life.’ – in Allin, *Christ Triumphant*, p.108.

Methodius (d.c.311)

Christ died and rose again that He might ‘be by *all created things* equally adored.’ – in Allin, p.112.

Marcellus of Ancyra (d.c.374)

‘For what else do the words mean, “Until the times of restitution” (Acts 3:21), but that the Apostle designed to point out that time, in which all things partake of that perfect restoration.’ – in Allin, p.112.

Athanasius (c.296-373)

‘Christ captured over again the souls captured by the devil, for that He promised in saying, “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men to Me.”’ – in Allin, p.113.

Hilary of Poitiers (c.315-67/8)

‘When the poor in spirit shall have been set in the heavenly kingdom, then *every creature*, together groaning and mourning, is to be set free from the bondage of corruption.’ ‘In this way God will bruise and break the nations of His inheritance, so as to reform them.’ ‘Far be it for Him to desire that he [the sinner] should be slain. But the sinner is slain *when he dies to the world* * * in this way is the sinner slain, when the birth of spiritual life is renewed, by the death of all vices and sins.’ – in Allin, pp.114, 115.

F. M. Victorinus (d.c.304)

‘Because Christ is the life, He is that by Whom (*in quem*, into Whom) all things have been made, for *all things cleansed by Him return into eternal life.*’ ‘He is Jesus Christ, because He will save all things unto life.’ ‘Thus the mystery was completed by the Saviour in order that, perfection having been completed throughout *all things and in all things* by Christ, *all universally should be made one through Christ and in Christ.*’ – in Allin, p.116.

Titus of Bostra (4th cent.)

In a passage about evil spirits, he says: ‘The very pit itself is a place of torments and of chastisement, but is not eternal * * It was made that it might be *a medicine and help to those who sin.* Sacred are the stripes which are medicine to those who have sinned. * * “Therefore we do not complain of the pits (of hell) – *abyssis* – but rather know that they are places of torment, and chastisement, being for the correction (amendment) of those who have sinned”’ ‘Death is not appointed by God to cause men hurt, but is appointed for the great benefit both to the *righteous and the unrighteous.*’ – in Allin, pp.116, 117.

Ephrem of Syrus (c.306-73)

‘Christ burst open the most voracious belly of hades * * seeing this Death trembled * * and sent forth all whom from the first man up to that time he had kept in bonds.’ – in Allin, p.117.

Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389)

‘To-day salvation has been brought to the universe, to *whatsoever* is visible and *whatsoever* is invisible.’ Christ is man that He may be ‘like leaven for the entire mass (of mankind), and having made that which was condemned (or ‘damned’), one with Himself, frees the whole from condemnation (damnation)’ . . . everything (*ta panta*) shall be subdued to Christ, and they shall be subdued by a full knowledge (*epignosis*) of Him, and by a remodelling. * * Now God will be All in All at the time of restitution.’ Of the heretical Novatians, he says: ‘Perhaps there (in the other world), they shall be baptized with the fire, the last and more laborious, and more protracted baptism, which

devours the substance like hay, and *consumes the lightness of all evil.*' – in Allin, pp.118, 119.

Basil the Great (c.330-79)

'For *all* things shall be made subject to Him, and *all* things shall acknowledge His empire; and when God shall be All in All, those who excite discords by revolts, having been quite pacified (*all things*) shall praise God in peaceful concord.' – in Allin, p.120.

Gregory of Nyssa (c.330 – c.395)

'At some time the nature of evil shall pass *to extinction, being fully and completely removed from existence*; and divine unmixed goodness shall embrace in itself *every rational nature*: nothing that has been made by God falling away from the kingdom of God: when, all the evil that is blended with existence * * being consumed by the melting action of the cleansing fire, everything that has had its being from God, shall become such as it was at first, when as yet untainted by evil.' 'The evil are to look for great severity from the Judge; but after due curative treatment, and when the fire shall have destroyed all foreign matter, then the nature, even of these, shall improve by the copious nurture they receive, and at length they too shall regain the divine impress.'

Allin says: 'this Father expressly attributes [in the Greek, but not in the later Latin translation] cleansing properties to the "*eternal*" fire.' Gregory also rejoices in that in the end: '*every created being shall be harmonised into one choir* * * and when, like a cymbal, the reasonable creation, and that which is now severed by sin * * shall pour forth a pleasing strain, due to mutual harmony. * * Then comes the praise of every spirit for ever * * abounding with increase unto eternity.' – in Allin, pp.122-124.

Didymus (c.313-98)

'By the Son all things endowed with reason received their being, so by Him the salvation of all of them has been wrought out. * * For Christ brought peace to all things through the blood of His Cross, whether in heaven or on earth. * * For as men, by giving up their sins, are made subject to Him, so, too, the *higher*

intelligences, freed by correction from their wilful sins (*correcta spontaneis culpis*) are made subject to Him, on the completion of the dispensation ordered for the salvation of all.' Christ 'descends to hades and brings back the souls, there detained on account of their sins.' – in Allin, pp.125, 126.

Ambrose of Milan (c.339-97)

'In God's saying to the adversaries of Jerusalem, "they shall be as though they were not," * * you are to understand they shall exist substantially and as *converted* (to God), but shall not exist as (God's) enemies,' 'How then shall (all things) be subject to Christ? In the very way in which the Lord Himself said, "Take My yoke upon you." For it is not the untamed who bear the yoke, but the humble and gentle * * so that in Jesus' name every knee shall bend.' He proceeds to discuss Christ's subjection to the Father. 'Is this subjection of Christ now completed? Not at all. Because the subjection of Christ consists not in few, *but in all* (becoming obedient) * * Christ will be subject to God in us by means of the obedience of all * * (then) when vices having been cast away, and sin reduced to submission, one spirit of *all* people, in one sentiment, shall with one accord begin to cleave to God, then God will be All in All.' 'All nations shall come and worship before Thee * * for *all* flesh shall come to Thee, no longer subject to the world, but united to the spirit.' 'The mercy of the Lord is to all flesh, in order that *all flesh* * * may ascend to the Lord.' 'So the Son of Man came to save that which was lost, i.e. *all*, for as in Adam *all* die, so too in Christ, shall all be made alive.' – in Allin, pp.130-132.

Jerome (c.345-420)

'Christ will, in the ages to come, show, not to one, but to the *whole number of rational creatures*, His glory, and the riches (of His grace).' In the end of (all) things * * the whole body which had been dissipated and torn into diverse parts shall be restored.* * Let us understand the *whole number of rational creatures* under the figure of a single rational animal * * let us imagine this animal to be torn * * so that no bone adheres to bone, nor nerve to nerve.' 'So in the restitution of all things, when the true physician, Jesus Christ, shall have come to heal the body of the whole Church, *every one* * * shall receive his

proper place * * What I mean is, the *fallen angel will begin to be that which he was created*, and man, who has been expelled from Paradise, *will once more be restored to the tilling of Paradise*. These things, then, will take place *universally*.' 'With God *no rational creature perishes eternally*.' 'Death shall come *as a visitor to the impious*; it will *not be perpetual*; it will not annihilate them; but will prolong its visit, *till the impiety which is in them shall be consumed*.' 'The Cross of Christ has benefited not earth only but heaven * * and *every creature* has been cleansed by the blood of its Lord.' 'By every knee bending in Jesus name is meant, 'the obedience of the heart.'

Jerome says that Christ's coming is 'to destroy *sins*' (not sinners). 'At the consummation of the world, every creature shall have been set free.' Jerome says that God does not strike sinners in order to destroy for ever, but in order 'to amend.' Again, he says, 'He will destroy, not for their ruin, but for *their amendment*.' And again, 'He created all things out of nothing . . . not in order to destroy that which He had created, but in order that by His mercy the things created should be saved.' – in Allin, pp.134-136.

Diodorus (d.c.390)

'For the wicked there are punishments not perpetual, * * but they are to be tormented for a certain brief period, according to the amount of malice in their works. They shall therefore suffer punishment for a short space, but *immortal blessedness*, having no end *awaits them*; * * the penalties to be inflicted for their many and grave crimes are very far surpassed by the magnitude of the mercy to be shown them. The Resurrection, therefore, is regarded as a blessing not only to the good but also to the evil.' – in Allin, p.137.

Paulinus (353-431)

The destruction of the heathen by Christ is really their *cure*. His iron rod 'breaks their hearts as though vessels formed of clay, in order to remake them (for the) better.' – in Allin, p.138.

Chrysostom (c.347-407)

Speaking of the result of Christ's work, he says: 'By this is inevitably shown that death is plucked up root and branch; * * not only was the sin (of Adam) *abolished*, but *also all other sins whatsoever*.' He speaks of the coming unity when 'all things shall have been brought under one head.' 'God does all things through love, as, e.g. to benefit man He set him in Paradise, and to benefit him He turned him out of Paradise. * * To benefit him He sent that fire on Sodom.' 'Our Lord, when He was in hades, set free *all* who were kept prisoners by death.' – in Allin, pp.139-141.

Theodore of Mopsuestia (c.350-428)

God 'recapitulated all things in Christ * * as though making a compendious renewal, and restoration of the whole creation, through Him, * * Now this will take place in a future age, when *all mankind and ALL POWERS (virtues) POSSESSED OF REASON*, look up to Him, as is right, and obtain mutual concord and firm peace.' – in Allin, pp.142-143.

Cyril of Alexandria (d.444)

'It is, perhaps, not improbable to think, that those who have been entangled in sins, are, as It were, homicides of their own souls; * * So, then, the wretched soul of man is punished by exile from the world and the body, and residing *in the recesses of death as in a city of Refuge*, was spending these long ages: but was with difficulty set free when Christ, the High Priest died, * * and went down to hades and loosed their bonds.' 'Through Christ has been saved the holy crowd of the Fathers, nay, the whole human race altogether, which was earlier in time (than Christ's death) for He died for all, and the death of all was done away in Him.' – in Allin, p.143.

Maximus of Turin (d.408)

'We read in the Scripture, that the salvation of the entire human race, was won by the redemption of the Saviour * * the everlasting safety of the entire world.' – in Allin, p.144.

Theodoret (c. 393-c.460)

‘Afterwards the Psalmist speaks more plainly “All the kings of the earth shall adore Him.” Some, indeed, in the present life willingly, but all the rest after the Resurrection; for not yet do we see *all things* subject to Him, but then every knee shall bow to Him.’ ‘Thou,’ says Christ to Satan, ‘art justly despoiled of all thy subjects * thou shalt vomit forth all that thou hast already swallowed * * I shall free all from death * * for I paid the debt for the *race*. * * As the debt has been paid, it is right that those confined on account of it should be set free from their prison.’ ‘After His anger, God will bring an end to His judgment, for He will not be angry unto the end, nor keep His wrath to eternity.’ – in Allin, pp.145, 146.

Chrysologus (c.400-450)

On the parable of the hundred sheep, he says that the one lost sheep represents ‘the whole human race lost in Adam,’ and so the Good Shepherd ‘follows the one, seeks the one, in order that in the one He may restore all.’ – in Allin, p.140.

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The above testimonies to the larger hope are a sample from the writings of many Christians in the first five centuries who believed in the ultimate salvation of all people. Allin suggests that due to the doctrine of ‘reserve’, i.e. the belief that it is not always expedient to teach universal salvation openly, the larger hope was probably more widespread in the early centuries than is generally supposed. A careful study of the above quotations should leave the unbiased reader with the distinct impression that the larger hope was not merely tolerated but *prevalent* in the early centuries, especially in the Eastern Church.

More Recent Testimonies to the Larger Hope

William Law (1686-1761)

‘The goodness of God breaking forth into a desire to communicate good was the cause and the beginning of the creation. Hence it follows that to all eternity God can have no thought or intent towards the creature but to communicate good; because He made the creature for this sole end, to receive good. The first motive towards the creature is unchangeable; it

takes its rise from God's desire to communicate good, and it is an eternal impossibility that anything can ever come from God as His will and purpose towards the creature but that same love and goodness which first created it; He must always will that to it which He willed at the creation of it. This is the amiable nature of God. He is the Good, the unchangeable, overflowing fountain of good that sends forth nothing but good to all eternity. He is the Love itself, the unmixed, unmeasurable Love, doing nothing but from love, giving nothing but gifts of love to everything He has made; requiring nothing of all His creatures but the spirit and fruits of that love which brought them into being. Oh, how sweet is this contemplation of the height and depth of the riches of Divine Love! With what attraction must it draw every thoughtful man to return love for love to this overflowing fountain of boundless goodness!' – from *Selected Mystical Writings*.

Abraham Lincoln (1809-65)

'Abraham Lincoln did not nor could not believe in the endless punishment of any one of the human race. He understood punishment for sin to be a Bible doctrine, that the punishment was parental in its object, aim, and design, and intended for the good of the offender; hence it must cease when justice is satisfied. All that was lost by the transgression of Adam was made good by the atonement.' – Cited by Gerry Beauchemin in *Hope Beyond Hell* (2007) p.16.

Charles Kingsley (1819-75)

'This world is strange and often terrible; but be not afraid, all will come right at last. Rest will conquer Restlessness; Faith will conquer Fear; Order will conquer Disorder; Health will conquer Sickness; Joy will conquer Sorrow; Pleasure will conquer Pain, Life will conquer Death; Right will conquer Wrong. *All will be well at last.*' – in Allin, p.285.

John Foster

'Far be it from me to make light of the demerit of sin. But endless punishment – I admit my inability (I would say it reverently) to admit this belief together with a belief in the divine goodness – the belief that God is Love, that His tender mercies are over all His works.' – in Allin, p.52.

Hinton

‘And here I may briefly say, that to my own mind, the language of the New Testament appears *unequivocally to affirm the redemption of all men*; their actual redemption from this evil and diseased state in which we now are; the actual raising up of all to a perfect life. To my mind this *universality* seems to be clearly expressed in Scripture.’ – in Allin, p.220.

Edna Lyall (1857-1903)

‘How is it possible that those who know the depths of sin and ignorance, those who hear the character of God slandered by believers and unbelievers, those who *love* the ones who pass unrepentant into the Unseen – how is it possible that they should rest satisfied, while retaining in their hearts even a shadow of a doubt that, “as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive?”’ – in Allin, p.vi.

Andrew Jukes

‘And yet the love that brought forth the existence of all things changes not through the fall of its creatures, but is continually at work to bring back all fallen natures and creatures. All that passes for a time between God and His fallen creatures is but one and the same thing, working for one and the same end, and though this is called ‘wrath,’ and that called ‘punishment,’ ‘curse,’ and ‘death,’ it is all from the beginning to the end nothing but the work of the first creative Love, and means nothing else, and does nothing else, but those works of purifying fire, which must and alone can burn away all that dark evil which separates the creature from its first created union with God. God’s providence, from the fall to the restitution of all things, is doing the same thing as when He said to the dark chaos of fallen nature, “Let there be light.” He still says, and will continue saying, the same thing, till there is no evil of darkness left in nature and creature. God creating, God illuminating, God sanctifying, God threatening and punishing, God forgiving and redeeming, are all but one and the same essential, immutable, never-ceasing working of the Divine Nature. That in God, which illuminates and glorifies saints and angels in heaven, is that very same working of the Divine Nature, which wounds, pains,

punishes, and purifies, sinners upon earth. And every number of destroyed sinners, whether thrown by Noah's flood or Sodom's brimstone into the terrible furnace of a life insensible of anything but new forms of misery until the judgment day, must through the all-working, all-redeeming love of God, which never ceases, come at last to know that they had lost and have found again such a God of love as this.' – *The Second Death and the Restitution of All Things* (1877) pp.164, 165.

F. N. Oxenham

'I have tried to show that there are no sufficient grounds on which the popular doctrine, here dealt with [i.e. everlasting punishment], can rightly claim any place as a necessary article of the Christian faith. I have ventured to assert, that the popular doctrine, if not certainly false, is certainly unwarrantable, that it is not "*de fide*;" and I have done so with the desire of helping to lift the veil of hopeless misery, and to quiet the risings up of horrified and indignant rebellion, which are two at least of the sad but sure results of believing that the God of Scripture and of Christianity is such a God as this popular doctrine of everlasting punishment represents Him to be.' – *What is the Truth as to Everlasting Punishment?* (1881) p.202.

Samuel Cox (1826-1893)

'No sooner do we begin to look at the New Testament more closely, than, beneath its surface-current of meaning, we detect glimpses of a deeper and more spiritual meaning. Of this undercurrent we become conscious as we consider all those passages which affirm the universal extent and the universal efficacy of the Redemption wrought by Christ; or which imply that the love of God is more than all our sins, an eternal unchangeable love, that does not alter where it alteration finds; or in which an inspired Apostle argues that "all Israel shall be saved," and that "the fullness of the Gentiles shall be brought in," declares that "the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable," or concludes that God has "shut up all men in unbelief, that He may have mercy upon all.'" – *Salvator Mundi* (1890), p.234.

Thomas Allin

'I believe – in the sole true catholicity of the Church of Christ, as destined to embrace all mankind – in the power of His Redemption, as something no will can resist, to which all things must yield one day in perfect submission, love and harmony. I plead for an acceptance of this central truth as the great hope of the Gospel, that the victory of Jesus Christ must be final and complete, i.e. that nothing can impair the power of His Cross and Passion to save the entire human race. I believe that He shall see the travail of His soul, and be satisfied. And I feel assured that less than a world saved, a universe restored, could not satisfy the heart of Jesus Christ, or the love of our Father. I ask all fair and reasonable minds to reject as immoral, and incredible, the picture of a heavenly Parent, Who, being absolutely free and absolute in power and goodness, creates any children of His own, whom He knows to be, in fact, certain to go to endless sin and ruin. Therefore in these pages I have pleaded for the larger hope. Therefore I believe in the vision, glorious beyond all power of human thought fully to realise, of a "Paradise regained," of a universe from which every stain of sin shall have been swept away, in which every heart shall be full of blessedness, and in which "God shall be All and in All." – *Amen.*' - *Christ Triumphant* (1891), pp.320, 321).

J. H. Leckie

‘Whatever we may think of Universalist teaching, in the rigour of its dogmatic form, we must gladly admit that it stands for a priceless element in our religion – for the assurance that truth is stronger than error, good than evil, light than darkness; and that God has a purpose of redemption in His Son which exceeds in sweep and depth and beauty all that we have ever dreamed. Christian faith in all ages has cherished a secret hope richer and more tender than it has been able to express, and has always been the prophet of the victory of God. The things that finally abide in the light of the face of Christ are not fear and pain and death, but faith and hope and love. And God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we are able either to ask or to think.’ – *The World to Come - And Final Destiny* (1918), p.290.

William Temple (1881-1944)

‘And how can there be paradise for any while there is hell, conceived as unending torment, for some? Each supposedly damned soul was born into the world as a mother’s child; and paradise cannot be paradise for her if her child is in such a hell. The scheme [conscious, endless punishment] is unworkable in practice even by omniscience, and moreover it offends against the deepest Christian sentiments.’ – *Resurrection and Immortality* (1979).

Percy Dearmer (1867-1936)

‘He came indeed as the embodiment of the divine love; and in his own person he exhibited that love, not as inflicting punishment but as innocently enduring it: he pictured God, no longer as a mere king, still less as a capricious and vindictive sultan, but as a father, loving all his children; and in the story of the Prodigal Son he showed what sort of father he had in mind. His teaching was of mercy and forgiveness; he bade men harbour no thoughts of vengeance or retribution, but forgave utterly because that is the way God forgives: he destroyed the terrors of the Law, and he saw God as one who is always seeking the hearts of erring men that he may bring them to health. Rarely had tenderness been combined with great power in the ancient world; he combined them as never before; and it

is his infinite kindness that has drawn all men to him and has led the hesitating world to a moral conception of God.' – *The Legend of Hell* (1929), p.291).

Dick Sheppard (1880-1937)

'The Anglican Communion resolves that its teaching and official literature should be purged forthwith of any suggestions that ascribe to God a desire for vengeance or a willingness to punish eternally those who have strayed from the Father's home. Any suggestion that the Christian God is cruel or capricious in his judgments, unjust in his punishments, or less wholly lovable than a human father of human conception, must be removed both from the teaching of the Church and from its Prayer Book. In particular the teaching of Jesus Christ about God cannot be reconciled with the current conception of hell.' – *The Impatience of a Parson* (1927)

Herbert H. Farmer (1892-1981)

'There seems no conclusive reason why we should not follow the logic of our belief in the love and sovereignty of God and affirm the restoration of all into unity with God and with one another; but if we do affirm it, we must not regard the bare idea of restoration as an adequate description of the final consummation. We are bound to add that it will be a restoration which contains within it both an infinite cost to God and also the unimpaired significance of human choices and decisions in time.' – *God and Men* (1948), p.150.

C. H. Dodd (1884-1973)

'Those who turn in faith to God through Him are incorporate in Christ, in His Body: first the handful of Jewish believers, then the Gentile converts who began to stream into the Church. The inclusive process cannot stop before the rest of mankind is gathered in: first the Gentiles, then the Jews, until at the last there will be life from the dead for the entire race. And then the vision broadens, to include the physical universe out of which man sprang . . . And so at last all things are gathered up in Christ (Eph.1:10): the divine purpose reaches its consummation:

God is all in all' (1Cor.15:28). – *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (1932), pp.186-7.

Thomas Talbott

'As Paul saw it, God does indeed elect or choose individuals for himself. But the election of an individual inevitably reaches beyond the elected person to incorporate, in a variety of ways, the community in which the person lives and, in the end, the entire human race.' – *The Inescapable Love of God* (1999), p.120.

Gerry Beauchemin

'It is inconceivable God would have created the world without first anticipating the atonement. Even if all were to incur the second death described in Revelation, all men are still redeemed by the blood of the lamb slain before the foundation of the world! (1Pet.1:20; 2Tim.1:9; Rev.13:8). He purchased all men on the cross (Jn.19:30). He died for the whole world! (1John 2:2). Christ's blood was not shed in vain for anyone! It will achieve all the glorious purpose for which God has ordained it. It cannot miss its mark!' – *Hope Beyond Hell* (2007), p.174).

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My purpose in providing an interesting and impressive list of supporters of the larger hope, in the early centuries and in more recent times, is to inform the reader of its place and influence in Church history. This influence is increasing as more people become aware of it and welcome it as a more truly scriptural alternative to the narrower, less-merciful teaching.

Church history is dotted with numerous godly, learned and compassionate people, who through their profound knowledge of Scripture, and their genuine sympathy with the human condition, made wretched through the Fall, have concluded that God, in His eternal love and goodness, has purposed to redeem, reconcile and restore all things to Himself in Christ. Those listed above, who unanimously magnify God as the Father of mercies, are representative of such loving spirits.

Torment

Those who believe in the everlasting punishment of the wicked base their belief on the ‘torment’ passages in Scripture. However, the word ‘torment’ in the New Testament suggests something other than the purely retributive infliction of pain. Apart from Heb.11:35, all the instances of ‘torment’ and its derivatives are translations of the Greek word *basanos*, which means a *touchstone* used to scratch metals and coins to ascertain their true nature. There is no sense in which it ‘tormented’ these things, it simply *tested / tried* them.

Basanois in Matt.4:24 RSV is translated ‘pains’ – pains suffered by people who were sick and diseased. They were not being punished by their pain, but rather their pain revealed / showed they were ill.

People often cite the suffering of the rich man in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus as evidence of the torments of hell – but they are mistaken. As well as considering the general meaning of this parable, note that i) the rich man was suffering in Hades, the intermediate state between death and the last judgment, not Gehenna (‘hell’ KJV); ii) there is no mention of his suffering being everlasting; and iii) ‘fire’ in Scripture, especially in eschatology (the last things), often speaks *metaphorically* of various kinds of judgment. In what is clearly a parable, the rich man’s torment seems to produce an element of remorse, in addition to the pain of losing his earthly privileges. The touchstone of God’s judgment, truth and righteousness makes him aware of his lifelong insensitivity to people in need. This raises the prospect of forgiveness and restoration on his heartfelt repentance and genuine concern for others. His growing anxiety over his brethren’s welfare suggests this learning process has begun.

The ‘torment’ passages in the Book of Revelation, like many others, are highly symbolic. Hence it is dangerous to reach hasty and dogmatic conclusions about the fate of the wicked from them. Whatever conclusions we reach must be consistent with the eternal love, goodness and justice of God, who ‘does not punish us according to our iniquities,’ and whose ‘tender mercies are over all His works’ (Ps.103:10; 45:9).

In view of God’s love for His enemies, and His sovereign power to subdue and draw all things to Himself – even through ‘fiery’ judgments

– we can, I believe, hope for the ultimate restoration of all things / people in Christ (Acts 3:21).

Universalism

Universalism, in its theological sense, means different things to different people: i) God will save *some people from every nation* – those who believe in Christ in this life; ii) God will save *all people without exception* – by bringing all to faith in Christ, either in this life, or in the life to come; and iii) God will save *all people* – regardless of their religious persuasion. To those who accept iii) Christianity is just *one among many* paths to God. Christians generally reject iii), because of its denial of Christ as the only Saviour.

Christian Universalism

So far, we have looked at some scriptural evidence for Christian Universalism – option ii) above. In this section we will consider a more extensive selection of verses related to this subject which I have gleaned from Scripture over many years. I have tried to avoid duplicating references and comments, but some repetition has been unavoidable. The passages are in Bible order. My comments are necessarily brief due to the constraints of a book this size, but they should prove helpful to the thoughtful student.

Some of the following verses / passages clearly point to the restoration of all things, whilst others, I feel, support it.

Old Testament

Gen.3:15 – this first Gospel message in Scripture predicts Christ's victory over Satan, and implies the destruction of all his works and the release of all his captives (Rom.8:21; Heb.2:14-15; 1John 3:8).

Gen.3:21 – the tunics of skin that God made from a sacrificed animal, typify the 'Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29).

Gen.19 – describes Sodom's depravity and destruction. But in Ezek.16:44-63 God promises to restore Sodom along with apostate Jerusalem and Samaria.

Gen.20:6 – God kept Abimelech from sinning against Him, hence is able to restrain and subdue all things / people to Himself (1Cor.15:28; Phil.3:21).

Gen.20:7 – through Abraham’s intercession, God granted Abimelech forgiveness and life. Likewise, through the redemption that is in Christ, and through the prayers of His elect, God can grant forgiveness and life to all people (1Tim.2:1-6; 1John 2:2; Num.11:2; Jam.5:16).

Gen.16:10; 21:8-21 – God’s promise to make Hagar’s descendants a great nation suggests His merciful purpose to include her and her descendants in the restoration of all things (Isa.19:18-25). They will be among the nations, tribes and tongues blessed through Christ, Abraham’s seed (Gen.22:18; Gal.3:16).

Gen.22:18; 26:4 – all nations will be blessed through Abraham’s seed, i.e. Christ and the Church (Gal.3:16, 29).

Gen.45:1-15; 50:15-21 – Joseph’s forgiveness of his brethren is a prophetic picture of Christ the greater Joseph showing forgiveness to ‘His own’ who rejected Him. His provision of bread for the Egyptians, his family, and surrounding nations, speaks of Christ, the ‘bread of God,’ who gives life to the world (John 6:33, 51).

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Exod.19:5-6; Ps.135:4 – the people of Israel were meant to be a ‘special treasure’ to God ‘above all people’. As His ‘kingdom of priests’ they were meant to be a channel of blessing to all nations (Deut.4:6; Isa.60:3; 61:5-7) – a role fulfilled by the Church (when she is faithful to her commission) (1Pet.2:9).

Exod.33:18-19 – God’s glory is His goodness – and vice versa – a revelation full of hope for humanity.

Exod.34:6, 7 – God’s mercy, grace, longsuffering, goodness and truth. His punishments said to extend only to the third and fourth generation (Mic.7:18-20).

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2 Sam.14:14 - God ‘devises means, so that His banished ones are not expelled from Him’ – words of hope for all people, for ‘the world’ and ‘all things’ He has reconciled to Himself in Christ (2Cor.5:19; Col.1:20).

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1Kings 8:43 – Solomon’s prayer that ‘all the peoples of the earth’ may know and fear God, is surely a prayer for the salvation of all people. To

that end, Jesus tells us to love our enemies, and Paul exhorts us to pray for all men, for Christ has 'given Himself a ransom for all' (Matt.5:44;1Tim.2:1-6).

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Job.13:25 KJV – Job pleads, will God 'break a leaf driven to and fro?' and will He 'pursue dry stubble?' He feels very fragile in his infirmity, but healing and restoration will come. Christ will not break a bruised reed or quench smoking flax, but will 'send forth justice to victory, and in His name the Gentiles will trust' (Matt.12:20, 21); a reminder that 'God is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works' (Ps.145:8, 9).

Job.14:1-17 – God will not destroy irrecoverably the frail works of His hands, made in His image, the objects of His love and pity. His desire is towards the work of His hands (v.15); He has covered our iniquity and taken away our sin (v.17; Gen.3:21; Isa.53:6; John 1:29).

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Ps.2:8-9 – God has given the 'nations' and the 'ends of the earth' to Christ as His 'inheritance.' The rebellious will be broken and dashed to pieces, but only in order to subdue, re-make and restore them to God through Christ (See Punishment and Purification).

Ps.22:27-29 – the 'ends of the world,' 'all the families of the nations,' and 'all that go down to the dust' shall 'bow' and 'worship before God' (Isa.45:22-25).

Ps.64:9 – 'all people will fear...declare the work of God...'wisely consider His doing' – then there will be universal, reverent and wise acknowledgement of God.

Ps.65:1-3 – 'all flesh' will come to God, and He will 'provide atonement for them' (John 12:32; 1John 2:2).

Ps.66:3, 4 – all God's enemies will submit to Him; all the earth will worship Him and sing His praises – a clear declaration of the restoration of all things / people to God.

Ps.67 – the Psalmist asks God to 'Let all the peoples' . . . 'all the ends of the earth' praise Him – a request that will be fulfilled (Rev.5:13).

Ps.68:18 – a declaration of Christ’s victory. He leads captivity captive, and even receives the rebellious – for ‘He is able even to subdue all things to Himself’ (Phil.3:21).

Ps.68:30-32 – the Psalmist invokes God to rebuke all bestial people, until they submit to Him with ‘pieces of silver,’ i.e. tokens of redemption. He then exhorts the nations to sing God’s praises (See Dan.4:27-37).

Ps.72:8, 9, 11, 17 – God’s dominion will be universal, ‘from sea to sea, from the River to the ends of the earth.’ All who are remote / distant from Him will ‘bow before Him, and His enemies will lick the dust.’ ‘All kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him.’ ‘Men shall be blessed in Him, and all nations shall call Him blessed.’ We gather from this that God will subdue / subjugate all nations (including His enemies) in order to restore them to true / pure worship (Zeph.3:8, 9).

Ps.86:9 – all nations will come and worship before God.

Ps.100 – the Psalmist calls ‘all you lands’ (‘all the earth’, margin) to praise God and serve Him with gladness; for ‘the LORD is good, His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations.’ His desire for God to be universally praised will be realised (Rev.5:13).

Ps.102:15 – all the nations and kings of the earth will fear (acknowledge) God and His glory (Rev.21:24; 22:2).

Ps.103:8-10 – God does not deal with us according to our sins, or punish us according to our iniquities. He does not keep His anger forever, because He is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. In other words, God’s grace abounds more than sin, and His mercy more than judgment (Rom.5:20, 21; Jam.2:13).

Ps.138:4, 5 – when the kings of the earth hear the words of God’s mouth, they will sing of His ways (Isa.52:15).

Ps.145:8-13, 15, 16 – God is good and merciful to all. His saints (the elect) will make known to the sons of men His mighty acts and the glorious majesty of His kingdom. God satisfies the desire of ‘every living thing.’ If He meets the physical needs of every creature, will He withhold Christ, the bread and water of life from anyone? Will He provide all creatures with the lesser, but deny to some people the greater?

Ps.148:11 – the psalmist exhorts all things – including the earth’s kings, princes and judges, young men and maidens, old men and children – to praise the name of the LORD – which they will do in due season (Rev.5:13).

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Prov.10:12 – this is perhaps the most concise declaration of the Good News in the whole of Scripture – ‘love covers all sins.’ In our Lord Jesus Christ, the Alpha and the Omega, we have the beginning, development and glorious fulfilment of this truth. It sums up the larger hope perfectly – the ultimate salvation of all people.

Prov.22:15 – the rod of correction drives foolishness from the heart of a child. God, in His corrective / remedial love, will ultimately drive it from all His offspring.

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Eccl.3:3, 4 – there is ‘a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.’ All this indicates that death and mourning will give way to healing and joy – when all people are restored to God in Christ; for God has ‘committed them all to disobedience that He might have mercy on all’ (Rom.11:32).

Eccl.3:18 – God tests us, to show how beastly we have become due to the ravages of sin, with a view to mercifully restoring us to our right mind (Dan.4:27-37).

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Isa.2:1-4 – all nations will flow to the mountain / house of the LORD. God will teach, judge and rebuke many people, and they will learn peace.

Isa.19:18-25 – Israel’s traditional enemies will be chastened, subdued, and united with her as God’s people.

Isa.25:6-8 – a passage like Rev.21:3-5, in which death, the veil covering all people and all nations, will be swallowed up.

Isa.45:22-25 KJV, NKJV – all people will bow the knee to God and say, ‘Surely in the LORD I have righteousness and strength’ (Phil.2:9-11).

Isa.52:15 – Isaiah foretells the cleansing ('sprinkling,' KJV) and enlightening of all nations by Christ.

Isa.53:6 – God has laid Israel's iniquity on Christ, who 'gave Himself a ransom for all' (1Tim.2:6).

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Jer.3:17 – 'all the nations shall be gathered to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem . . . they shall walk no more after the stubbornness of their evil heart.'

Jer.32:17, 27 – God has made all things. He is the 'God of all flesh.' Nothing is too hard for Him to accomplish – not even the salvation of all people (Matt.19:23-26).

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Ezek.16:44-63 – the promised restoration of apostate Jerusalem, Samaria, and even wicked Sodom, points to the 'restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began' (Acts 3:21).

Ezek.47:1-12 – wherever the river of life flows 'every living thing will live' (vv.1, 9; Rev. 22:1-5).

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Dan.7:14 – all peoples, nations and languages will serve Christ.

Dan.7:18, 27 – in the ages to come, the saints will reign with Christ as kings and priests, and all dominions and all people will serve and obey God (Rev.5:10, 13).

Dan.9:8, 9 – God's mercy and forgiveness triumph in the end, even though his people have rebelled against Him.

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Hos.2:19, 23 – those who were not God's people (through rebellion), and had not received mercy, obtain mercy and become His people again.

Hos.3:4-5 – Israel's restoration is foretold. Repentance is required, but repentance is God's gift (Zech.12:10 - 13:1; Matt.23:39; Hos.12:6; Jer.24:7; Acts11:18; 2Tim.2:25).

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Jonah 4:2 – God’s forgiveness of the people of Nineveh is in keeping with His grace, mercy and love, which raises the hope that all people will be brought to repentance and salvation.

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Micah 7:18-19 – God ‘does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy.’ He will have compassion on us . . . subdue our iniquities . . . and cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.’ If God does this for ‘the remnant of His heritage’ (v.18), He will do it for all the redeemed / ransomed (John 1:29; Heb.2:9; 1Tim.2:6; 1John 2:2).

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Hab.1:12 – God appoints to judgment, i.e. ‘correction’ – not eternal death.

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Zeph.3:8, 9 – God’s judges the nations with a fiery judgment, in order ‘to restore to the peoples a pure language, that they all may call on the LORD with one accord.’

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Zech.8:20-22 – ‘Peoples shall yet come, inhabitants of many cities’ . . . ‘many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem.’

Zech.9:9, 10 – the ‘ends of the earth’ will be brought under Christ’s sway – and ‘He will speak peace to the nations.’

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New Testament

Matt.5:43-48 – Loving our enemies marks us out as children of our heavenly Father, who provides for the evil and the unjust, as well as the good and the just. God loves all people, even His enemies, and seeks their eternal good.

Matt.9:36, 37 – Jesus looks with compassion on the multitudes and likens them to ‘sheep without a shepherd,’ a ‘truly plentiful harvest,’ which speaks of the broadness of His saving purpose.

Matt.13:33 – all the meal, not just some, was leavened.

Matt.18:2, 14 – ‘It is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.’ Christ purposes to draw all His ‘offspring’ to Himself (Acts 17:28, 29; John 12:32). We all begin life as ‘little ones,’ and we are all children in God’s eyes (John 21:5; Heb.2:13-15; 1John 2:1, 12, 18).

Matt.21:31, 32 – ‘before’ (v.31) means before *in time*. Whilst believing tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before Israel’s self-righteous religious leaders, Jesus’ use of ‘before’ implies that the latter will eventually enter when, by the mercy of God, the ‘whole house of Israel’, i.e. ‘all Israel,’ are saved (Ezek.39:25, 29; Rom.11:26, 32).

Matt.23:37-39 – the unbelieving Jews of Jesus’ day (‘Jerusalem’) were ‘not willing’ to come to Him. With great sorrow, He told them, ‘Your house is left to you desolate’ (v.38). He did not mean they were doomed to endless rejection – for He went on to say that they (with the whole house of Israel) would *welcome Him* on His return. Many preachers / commentators ignore Jesus’ wonderful promise in v.39, made *after* His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matt.21:1-10), thus pointing to His second coming and the restoration of Israel (Zech.12:10-13:1; Acts 3:21; Rom.11:25, 26).

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Luke 1:37 – The Bible tells us repeatedly that nothing is impossible with God (Jer.32:17; Matt.19:26; Luke 1:37; Eph.3:20). In Matt.19:26, Jesus says this in answer to His disciples’ question about the *extent of salvation*.

Luke 2:10, 14, 29-32 – the good tidings of great joy – the good news of the Saviour’s coming into the world – is good news for ‘all people’ (v.10). His coming is proof of God’s good will toward ‘men’ i.e. *the human race*. God has prepared His salvation ‘before the face of all peoples’ (vv.30, 31). His love for the world has been displayed in the birth, ministry, death and resurrection of His Son. His good will is broad – even universal.

Luke 3:4-6 – we are distinctly told that ‘all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’ Not simply as observers, but beneficiaries. This seems to be the natural sense of these words (Isa.45:22-25; Rev.5:13).

Luke 4:5, 7 – under His overall sovereignty, God has given Satan a measure of authority over fallen humanity, but only until Christ destroys

both him and his works (Heb.2:14, 15; 1John 3:8). Then the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever (Rev.11:15). All Adam's offspring are by nature subject to the ruler of this world, and remain dead in trespasses and sins until they are quickened to life by grace through faith in Christ. (Eph.2:1, 8). But God has promised that 'the whole creation,' will be 'delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Rom.8:21, 22).

Luke 15:11-32 – The Prodigal's suffering, trial and hardship, precedes his conviction of sin, repentance and restoration. This shows how God chastens us for our benefit, that we may partake of His holiness and bring forth the peaceable fruit of righteousness (Heb.12:3-11). In keeping with the spirit of this parable, will not our heavenly Father, the 'Father of spirits' and 'Father of mercies', bring all the lost to their senses and to Himself in the end? The parables of 'The Lost Sheep' and 'The Lost Coin' surely encourage us to hope for this, for the things that are lost are eventually found.

Luke 19:10 – Jesus came initially to recover the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt.15:24). But His coming 'to seek and to save that which was lost' had a deeper and wider purpose than finding and saving Israel. The whole world needs the Saviour, for all the descendants of Adam, the 'sheep of His pasture' (Ps.100:1-3), have strayed from the great Shepherd of souls, and need to be found and brought back to Him. Whatever God purposes, He sooner or later does, for He 'does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth' (Dan.4:35). (See God's Sovereignty). We can rest assured that the Good Shepherd will find *all* the lost and will gather them to Himself in Christ (Eph.1:9-10).

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John 1:29 – the Lamb of God, 'takes away the sin of the world.' The sin of the 'whole world' was 'laid' on Him (Isa.53:6; 1John 2:2). God has redeemed and reconciled the world to Himself, i.e. all things in heaven and earth (1Tim.2:6; 2Cor.5:19; Col.1:20; see 'Redemption' and 'Reconciliation'). In order to deny the *universal scope* of redemption and reconciliation, some Christians interpret 'world', in John1:29; 3:16 and other passages, to mean *some* Jews and *some* Gentiles. However, most Christians interpret 'world' in these verses to mean *all people*.

John 3:17 – ‘God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that through Him the world might be saved’ (Luke 9:56; 19:10; John 12:47). God sent His Son to ‘save the world’ (John 12:47). Jesus does ‘all things well’ (Mark 7:37). He ‘finished the work’ His Father gave Him to do (John 17:4), and promised to ‘draw all people to Himself’ (John 12:32). The Saviour of the world came to ‘save men’s lives’ (Luke 9:56) and will fulfil His mission.

John 4:42 – after spending a few hours with Christ, the people of Sychar came to believe He was ‘the Saviour of the world.’ After years of deep reflection on his Master’s life and teaching, the Apostle John writes, ‘the Father has sent the Son as Saviour of the world’ (1John 4:14). Notice how he places these words between the twofold declaration that ‘God is love’ (vv.8, 16), thus highlighting divine love as the *source* and *guarantee* of the world’s salvation.

John 6:33, 51 – Christ came as the ‘bread of life’ in order to ‘give life to the world’, and give His flesh ‘for the life of the world.’ There is nothing narrow or restrictive about Jesus’ words. By nature, the whole world is dead in trespasses and sins, and Christ is the unfailing remedy.

John 12:32 – Christ’s death on the cross, His being ‘lifted up,’ was for the sins of the whole world. ‘In Adam all die,’ but in the crucified and resurrected Christ ‘all shall be made alive’ (1Cor.15:22), for He will draw all people to Himself. Most evangelical commentators interpret ‘all people’ in John 12:32 to mean Jews and Gentiles, rather than the entire human race. However, in the previous verse Jesus speaks of ‘the judgment of this world,’ and the ‘ruler of this world’ (i.e. the whole world). Then, in this context, He immediately speaks of drawing ‘all men’ to Himself, which must surely mean *all people without exception*, all under Satan’s thralldom.

John 17:2, 6, 11, 20 – these verses are part of Jesus’ great high-priestly prayer, in which He prayed for His disciples and those who would believe in Him through their word. It is a prayer for the elect – those destined to suffer with Him in this age and reign with Him in the ages to come (See ‘Elect’). However, it is clear from Scripture as a whole that the final number of the saved is not restricted to the elect, the ‘manifest sons of God,’ for it is *through their ministry, under Christ*, that the whole creation (including all the unsaved) will be ‘delivered from bondage to corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God’ (Rom.8:18-23).

John 17:21, 23 – Jesus wanted ‘the world’ to ‘believe’ and ‘know’ that God had sent Him into the world, which ties in with His coming to save the world (Luke 9:56; 19:10; John 3:17; 12:47).

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Acts 3:21 – the coming ‘restoration of all things’ runs like a golden thread in the preaching of all God’s holy Prophets from the beginning of the world.

Acts 10:15, 28 – God revealed to Peter that He had cleansed the Gentiles whom the Jews considered unclean. The vision seems to mean that God had cleansed, not only Cornelius and his household, but all people through Christ’s redeeming work (1Tim.2:6).

Acts 13:11 – if anyone deserved severe and prolonged punishment it was Elymas the sorcerer. But God afflicted him with blindness ‘for a season’ (KJV), presumably to bring him to his senses and a more favourable response to the Gospel – for God can and will subdue all things / people to Himself (Phil.3:21; 1Cor.15:28; See ‘Subdue’).

Acts 17:28, 29 – in his preaching to the Athenians, Paul alludes to an aspect of Greek culture. One of their poets calls human beings God’s ‘offspring’ and Paul makes use of this in his saying, ‘since we are the offspring of God . . .’ (v.29). All people are God’s children – fallen, it is true – but nevertheless His children. He is the ‘God of the spirits of all flesh’ (Num.27:16) and, more intimately, the ‘Father of spirits,’ the ‘Our Father’ of our prayers (Heb.12.9; Matt.6:9). We become God’s children in a spiritual sense through the new birth, when we come to know the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as *our* Father. Nevertheless Paul, in Acts 17:28, 29, reminds us of God’s love and care for all people (See ‘Father’).

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Rom.4:13 – Abraham is the ‘heir of the world,’ in that Christ, his ‘seed,’ will bless all nations, tribes and tongues – although he may not have understood the glorious outcome of this in the salvation of all people in Christ.

Rom.5:10 – Paul teaches that all who have been reconciled to God through the death of His Son will be saved by His life. Elsewhere he teaches that ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world [all things] to Himself’, and that by faith all people can enter into the good of His

glorious work of reconciliation (2Cor.5:19; Col.1:20; Eph.2:8). Since grace and faith are God's gifts, and since He 'will have all men to be saved' (1Tim.2:4 KJV), we can hope that He will give repentance and faith to all people, and bring them to salvation, either in this world or the next.

Rom.5:12-21 – Paul spells out in the plainest terms how God has nullified the results of the Fall by granting sinners justification, abundant grace, and the gift of righteousness through faith in Christ. The parallels in this passage are very revealing. Through one man's offence 'judgment came to all men,' but through Christ 'the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life' (v.18). 'Where sin abounded . . . grace abounded much more' through Jesus Christ (vv.20-21).

Rom.8:20 – God has subjected the creation to futility – but 'in hope'. The futility, corruption (decay) and groaning (vv.20-22) applies to *human beings* as well as the rest of creation (v.23). So God has subjected the creation (including all people) to futility, in order to show that salvation and restoration depends on His mercy – the mercy He wants to show to all people (Rom.11:32).

Rom.11:32 – 'God has committed them all [Jews and Gentiles] to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.' Futility and disobedience are our lot as sinners. This makes us totally dependent on God's grace and mercy for salvation. When, by His grace, we acknowledge our sin / need, and turn to God in repentance and faith in His Son, we experience acceptance and life according to the riches of His mercy in Christ (Eph.2:4-10).

Rom.12:21 – Paul exhorts the Christians in Rome, 'Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.' This sums up Jesus' teaching in Matt.5:43-48, and is a reflection of our heavenly Father's loving heart. The point here, as far as the larger hope is concerned, is that if we are exhorted to overcome evil with good, then even more so God, our great Exemplar, will overcome evil in all people, and be 'all in all' one day (1Cor.15:28).

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1Cor.2:8 – this verse, along with Acts 3:17 and 1Tim1:13, teaches a vital truth concerning people who are opposed to Christ (See 'Ignorance'). Whilst those who persecute Christ / Christians are far from blameless, because cruelty to fellow-humans is always wrong, Paul

distinctly says that if the rulers of this age had known that Jesus was the 'Lord of glory,' they would not have crucified Him. This, along with what Jesus says about the people of Tyre, Sidon and Sodom (Matt.11:20-24), suggests that these – and all whose lives are darkened by sin and ignorance – will eventually believe, when God removes the covering / veil of death spread over all people (Isa.25:7:8; 52:15; 45:22-25; Phil.2:9-11).

1Cor.5:5 – reveals how God deals with believers who fall into sin, and how He restores them to Himself. The offender was 'delivered . . . to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.' Happily, the man did not have to wait until that day, for he repented and was restored to the fellowship of the church (2Cor.2:3-11). Notice Satan's role in God's chastening process. He was involved in the 'destruction' of the man's 'flesh' (sinful nature), a disciplinary / corrective process that led to his restoration (See also 1Tim.1:20). Consequently, if God extends His mercy to erring Christians, will He withhold His mercy from people who by nature are blind, and dead in trespasses and sins? Will God restore those who sin against the light, but destroy eternally those who, due to spiritual blindness, do not, and cannot (without His grace), respond to the light?

1Cor.6:2 – after exhorting his brethren to settle their differences without resorting to secular courts, Paul reminds them that 'the saints will judge the world,' even 'angels.' They had a lot to learn before they were ready for that. Here Paul sheds light on the role of the elect in relation to the rest of humanity. The saints will have a judging role when Christ comes to judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31). This will result not in the utter destruction of the wicked, but their discipline, purification and restoration, fitting them for life in the new heaven and new earth, through the ministry of Christ and the Church (Ps.145:10-12; Jer.3:15-18; Dan.7:13, 14, 18, 27; Matt.19:28; 1Pet.2:9; Rev.1:5; 5:10). The saints will execute judgment on the wicked (Ps.149:5-9), but with a view to their ultimate salvation.

1Cor.15:28 – God's subjugation of all things, Paul tells us, is in order to restore all people to Himself, that He might be 'all in all' (See 'Subdue').

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2Cor.5:19 – when Paul says, 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself . . .' he uses the past tense, referring to Christ's finished work

of redemption and reconciliation. Paul entreats all people to 'be reconciled to God' (v.20) through faith in Christ. In the end, *everyone* will declare, 'Surely in the Lord I have righteousness and strength' – even those who are 'incensed against Him' (Isa.45:24 NKJV), showing that all will ultimately enter into the good of redemption and reconciliation.

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Eph.1:9-11 – by covering Adam and Eve (and all their offspring) with the skin of a sacrificed animal, God indicated His provision of universal redemption in His Son. In line with this, Paul tells us that 'in the dispensation of the fullness of times He [God] might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth – in Him.' The following translations bring out the *universal extent* of God's gathering together of 'all things' in Christ:

' . . . that everything that exists in heaven or earth shall find its perfection and fulfilment in him' (PHIL).

' . . . that the universe, all in heaven and on earth, might be brought into a unity in Christ' (NEB).

' . . . to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ' (NIV).

' . . . that all things, both the things which are in heaven and also the things which are in earth, should be gathered together, even in Christ' (TYN).

' . . . that all things in heaven and earth alike should be gathered up in Christ' (MOFF).

This gathering together in and under Christ follows God's divinely appointed order. In Rom.8:23 Paul says that Christians in this age are 'the first-fruits of the Spirit' (See also Jam.1:18). So this gathering up of all things in / under Christ begins in this age, with the Church of the 'first-fruits', and extends into the ages to come, when God will 'subdue all things to Himself' and deliver the whole creation from corruption, and bring all people to bless, honour and glorify God and the Lamb (1Cor.15:28; Phil.3:21; Rom.8:20-23; Rev.5:13).

Eph.4:10-12 – Jesus 'descended into the lower parts of the earth,' i.e. into Hades (1Pet.3:18-20). From there He ascended, leading captivity

captive, 'far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things', giving gifts and ministries to the Church. This filling of all things begins with the Church, the first fruits and firstborn, and as we have seen continues until God becomes 'all in all'. Things have to happen before this, but in the end there will be a complete and universal restoration of all things damaged by the Fall.

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Phil.2:10, 11 - see pp.23-25

Phil.3:21 - see p.154

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Col.1:16 – just as the Son of God created all things for Himself, as the Alpha and Omega He will gather / subdue all things to Himself at the restoration of all things (1Cor.15:27, 28; Eph.1:10; Acts 3:21). Because He created all things for His own pleasure, and is Himself the embodiment of divine goodness and mercy, He will surely bring all things into the fullness of His love.

Col.1:19, 20 - see pp. 25-25

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1Tim.2:1-6 – this is one of the Bible's most powerful testimonies to the larger hope. It begins with Paul's exhortation to Timothy, his 'son in the faith,' and to all in his care, to pray for all people, including rulers and those in authority – not least that rulers may leave the churches in peace, and in their fellowship and Christian witness. Then Paul says, 'God . . . will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth' (vv.3, 4 KJV). Notice that 'all men' in this verse resonates with 'men' in v.5, i.e. humanity as a whole. In other words, Christ stands as the divinely appointed mediator between God and the human race, and He 'gave Himself a ransom for all' (v.6), the same 'all' as in vv.2 and 4. There are no textual reasons for restricting 'all' in these verses to something less than *everyone*. God wills / desires to save all people, and is clearly able to do so (See 'Sovereignty').

1Tim.4:10 – Paul and his fellow-Christians often 'suffered reproach' because they trusted in the living God, 'the Saviour of all men, especially of those who believe.' Today, it is not so much non-Christians who oppose those who believe in the salvation of all people,

but mostly Christians, due to their belief that unbelievers must be converted in this life, or be lost forever. Such usually claim that the second part of 1Tim.4:10 limits salvation to ‘those who believe.’

While no one will be saved apart from repentance and faith in Christ, there is little if anything in Scripture that restricts the possibility of salvation to this life. Paul tells us that God is the Saviour **of** all men. He does not say that God is the Saviour **for** all men, i.e. someone who is there **for** us all if we would only accept Him; but that God is the **actual** Saviour **of** all people. To use a simple illustration: a man is struggling in the sea, and is in danger of drowning. On the beach stands a qualified lifesaver, whose job it is to rescue him, but he loses his nerve at the sight of the breakers. Another man runs up, dives into the water, and brings the drowning man to safety. Clearly, the first man was but a **potential** saviour **for** the drowning man, while the second was the **actual** saviour **of** the man. Paul says that God **is the Saviour of all men**, implying that He **will save all**. This may seem like playing with words, but it helps to show that God is *far more than merely a potential Saviour for the world*.

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2Tim.2:24-26 – these verses contain words of hope for all people. Paul acknowledges the spiritual principle that repentance, knowledge of the truth, and deliverance from Satan are **gifts of God**, the unmerited outflow of His mercy and love. Like Paul, we can gently, patiently and humbly teach and admonish all who oppose the truth. Because salvation depends on God’s love, mercy and grace, we can hope for the salvation of all.

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Titus 2:11 - see p.27

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Heb.1:2 – Christ is the ‘heir of all things.’ As we have seen, He has redeemed all things and reconciled all things to God. He will draw all people to Himself, and in Him God is gathering together all things. To limit these ‘alls’ (as some try to) is unjustified, even a wresting of Scripture to make it fit into a particular theological mould. It is better to take these plainly stated verses (and others like them) as they stand, unless there are very good reasons not to. The truth that Christ is the

'heir of all things' has a comforting ring. It means that all things are His by right and inheritance. Picture the all-merciful Christ embracing all who have been 'delivered from bondage to corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God,' and ask whether it is possible, after purging us from our sins (v.3), and tasting death for everyone' (2:9 NJKV), for Christ to condemn some of His redeemed to endless torment? Surely, as the 'heir of all things,' He will ensure that no part of His costly inheritance will be lost.

Heb.2:9 – Jesus tasted death for everyone (See 1Tim.2:6). He has therefore redeemed all people from the power of death and its consequences. By so doing, He has laid a solid foundation for all His redemptive dealings with His creatures. Through His work of redemption He has made all people His own. As the Good Shepherd, He leads all His sheep to eternal pastures. Sometimes this involves chastening, discipline and remedial punishment, but all this takes place in the sphere and security of universal redemption.

Heb.2:17, 18 – once a year Israel's high priests made atonement / propitiation for the sin of the whole nation. The bigger and more glorious picture is that Christ our great High Priest has offered Himself for the whole world (1John 2:2).

Heb.9:26-28 – the writer of Hebrews describes Christ's atoning death as the putting away of sin by 'the sacrifice of Himself.' This reminds us of John 1:29, 'The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.' God has dealt with our sin once and for all in the death of His Son. God no longer imputes trespasses to the world He has reconciled to Himself in Christ (2Cor.5:19), a reconciliation which paves the way for all people to be saved.

In Heb.9:27 the writer tells us 'it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.' These words are often cited to prove that death ends all possibility of salvation for the unbeliever. However, when this verse is kept in context, we see that it is because death is followed by judgment (no mention of endless punishment) that Jesus offered Himself for the sins of 'many' (v.28). 'Many' here means 'all'. We can say this because by His sacrifice Jesus put sin away in its entirety (v.26), rather than the sin of some but not others (See 'Many').

Moreover, in v.27 the writer speaks in universal terms of all people ('men') being appointed to die. So v.28 does not refer to a limited

number of human beings, i.e. those who eagerly await Christ's coming; rather, its main message is that believers should not become enmeshed in the world, or neglectful in their watching and waiting for Christ. Instead, they should prepare themselves for His coming. Those who are prepared for His coming will live and reign with Him as kings and priests. Theirs will be the 'prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus' (Phil.3:14). The rest will have to wait until 'the end' when God will 'subdue all things to Himself' and ultimately become 'all in all' (1Cor.15:24-28).

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1Pet.4:6 – this verse repeats a truth found elsewhere in Scripture, namely that all God's chastening and purifying judgments are designed to destroy the 'flesh,' i.e. the fallen nature at the root of all sinful behaviour, so that we may be renewed and restored by His Spirit, either in this life, as with the sinful believer at Corinth (1Cor.5:5), or, as Peter indicates, in the next. Some of the early Church Fathers taught that after His death Christ went and preached to the antediluvians in Hades – and forgave them (1Pet.3:18-21), and that similarly He will reach and save all who die in their sins.

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2Pet.3:9 – this verse reminds us of 1Tim.2:4 KJV. Peter says that God is 'not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.' 'Willing' is a translation of the strong word *boulomai*, which elsewhere is sometimes rendered 'purposed' or 'determined'. Therefore, Peter could be saying that God has not determined that any should perish, hence that all may hope for salvation. If the door of salvation is open to all, as this verse suggests, then Calvin's double-decree, i.e. that God has ordained some to eternal life, and others to endless punishment, falls down. However, it is difficult to be dogmatic about Peter's use of *boulomai* here, because in some places the difference in meaning between *boulomai* and *thelo* ('I will / want') is not always distinct. What is clear is that God is merciful and longsuffering, and wills / desires to save all people, and unquestionably is able to accomplish His will / desire.

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1John 4:10; 2:2 – John says Christ is the propitiation not just for the sins of his readers, but also for the sins of 'the whole world.' Having

atoned for the sins of the whole world, every barrier to all people being saved has been removed. Having 'so loved the world' (John 3:16), and sent His Son to 'take away the sin of the world' (John 1:29), God will surely go the whole way and save the entire world – for repentance and faith, the prerequisites of salvation, are gifts of His mercy and grace (Ps.103:8-14; Eph.2:5-8).

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1John 4:8,16 - see pp.29, 30

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Rev.1:7 – Christ's coming with the clouds may look ominous for all the tribes of the earth, including 'those who pierced Him.' He will certainly judge His enemies, and they will be greatly ashamed (Isa.45:24). But when seen in the light of Zech.12:10-14 (which is a prophecy of this great event), there is a hopeful outcome, even for those who crucified Him. At the sight of the One they had pierced (by their rejection of Him down the centuries), every family in Israel will repent and mourn over the way they have treated Him. They will mourn as for the death of an only son, and this will lead to their forgiveness and restoration, for in Zech.13:1 we read that 'in that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and uncleanness' (Rom.11:26).

But will God's forgiveness be extended to all the tribes of the earth who witness Christ's coming? For reasons we have considered in this book, we can surely believe so. The how and when is shrouded in mystery, but the prospect is hopeful and glorious (Rom.11:25-33).

Rev.5:10 – the saints have a special role in God's purpose. They are chosen to reign with Christ – now, in a spiritual sense, and over the earth in the ages to come. Far from being the only ones to be saved, they are destined to govern the nations and minister healing to all people (Dan.7:14, 18, 22, 27; Rev.21:24; 22:2). They constitute the New Jerusalem whose gates are open day and night, a source of blessing to all who enter (Rev. 2:26; 3:21; 17:14; 22:2, 17).

Rev.5:13 – it bears repeating that this verse is powerful evidence for the larger hope. Every creature in existence will bless, honour and glorify God and the Lamb. How can one square a hell filled with endlessly hopeless people with this verse?

Rev.14:4, 5 – these verses tell us various things about the one hundred and forty-four thousand who stand with the Lamb of God on Mt Zion, having His Father's name on their foreheads (v.1). They are 'virgins,' which indicates their holiness and single-minded allegiance to Christ. They 'follow the Lamb wherever He goes,' which speaks of their undeviating faithfulness to Him. They are 'first fruits to God and to the Lamb,' which points to the coming great harvest of souls. They are the 'church of the firstborn,' the holy city Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb.12:22, 23). Again, we see the first fruits / firstborn and their special closeness to Christ as they prepare for their role as kings and priests with Him in the ages to come, and when, with Him, they will shepherd, bless and serve restored humanity.

Rev.21:1-5 – the culmination of God's purpose for humanity is described in apocalyptic terms and imagery. The old creation has passed away, i.e. probably meaning cleansed, renewed and restored. John sees the 'holy city, the New Jerusalem,' 'coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.' A loud voice announces that 'the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them . . . and be their God.' Suffering, mourning and death will be no more, for God says, 'Behold, I make all things new.'

The 'bride,' the 'New Jerusalem,' and the 'tabernacle of God' have great significance. All are names / descriptions of the glorified Church. Her historic service to God and humanity reaches perfect fulfilment in the new heaven and new earth. Through Christ and the Church, God will govern and bless humanity, and reverse all the damaging effects of the Fall. The Church is just a part of the company of the blessed: a key and facilitating part, but not the only part, as Christians are often led to believe. In and with Christ, she is God's appointed and anointed channel of blessing to the whole creation.

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This above list of Bible verses under the heading of 'Universalism' is by no means exhaustive; but it helps to show that God's eternal purpose of restoring all people to Himself, in and through Christ, is woven into the very fabric of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation.

Unquenchable Fire - see p100

Will (God's) - see p26

Worm (Undying)

Jesus weaves Old Testament imagery of the 'undying worm' into His teaching about the fate of the wicked (Isa.14:11; 66:24; Mark 9:44-48).

The expression 'the undying worm' has nothing to do with any endless conscious torment of the wicked. This is easily shown. For instance, in Isa.66:24 such worms are depicted devouring *corpses*, therefore causing no pain. In fact, they are serving the wicked by devouring their corruption.

The 'undying' aspect of the 'undying worm' (if descriptive of God's dealings with the wicked after death) has the same meaning as 'unquenchable' in 'unquenchable fire', i.e. a fire that continues until it has consumed the old sinful nature. It speaks of the removal of all defilement from what is eternal and perfectible in human beings.

This purifying process continues in the wicked until it has accomplished its purpose. 'Never,' in Mark 9:43, 45, is not in the best manuscripts (See Nestle - Marshall, *RSV Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*).

Wrath (God's) - see p37

End.

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Contact: Tony Johnson thelargerhope@gmail.com

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