

Optimism



Out of Control

A CLARIFICATION OF THE GOSPEL

Jeff Martin



After decades of defeat in a wrestling match with grace Jeff is now thankful to offer a helping hand to those seeking escape from confusion and even self-righteous deception. Discover the awesome Biblical news that God loves you... because he loves all mankind! Jeff thanks God for the patience and prayers of many Christians and especially a few Christians who showed him grace while he thrashed through life searching for the answers that were right in front of him, to God be the glory.

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ISBN: 151523990X

ISBN-13: 978-1515239901

Optimism History

- 01/15/2006 *Optimism* article series begins at DGJC.ORG
- 03/01/2013 Online release at DGJC.ORG
- 03/19/2016 Print release via Createspace.com
- 04/17/2016 Formatting and minor content additions and corrections
- 03/19/2017 Sanded rough edges and added pages 361-368
- 06/21/2018 Citations added, corrections, and added pages 369-386
- 09/08/2018 Use of terms 'Universalism' and 'Restorationism' clarified
- 08/20/2021 Minor corrections and P.T. Barnum cited

Dedication & Acknowledgements

After decades of defeat in a wrestling match with grace I am now thankful to offer a helping hand to those seeking escape from confusion and even self-righteous deception. Read on to discover the awesome Biblical news that God loves you... because he loves all mankind! I thank God for the patience and prayers of many Christians and especially a few Christians who showed me grace while I thrashed through life searching for the answers that were right in front of me, to God be the glory.

I also thank my editors for their review of the *Optimism Out of Control* manuscript. Their suggestions and corrections were invaluable. However, any remaining faults in grammar, tone, logic, and use of Scripture are my sole responsibility. Also the book developed over a period of years as collections of articles and concepts were assembled. Thank you for your patience if you discover unnecessary repetition. Further time and effort certainly could have improved the work, but the urgency of clarifying the gospel of grace pressed for publication. I kindly ask you to contact me at DGJC.ORG/CONTACT with your own suggestions and corrections.

This book is given to my family, my friends, and my fellowman.

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A Clarification of the Gospel



Years ago I shared a thought with a friend, an incredibly awesome thought. He responded by saying that perhaps my “*optimism had just gotten out of control.*” The phrase was so peculiar that it has stuck with me all these years. I am thankful for my friend’s comment, which he has likely long forgotten. It served the good purpose of encouraging my deeper reflection. Also, the phrase has since developed a life of its own as the title of several articles in my DGJC.ORG/ZINGERS *Optimism Out of Control* series, and now this concluding *Optimism Out of Control* book.

How far would optimism have to go in order to be out of control? I would like to think that I have a pretty good answer to that question, being a husband and father of four. As a younger man, I might have said it was impossible for optimism to ever get out of control. After all, God is for us, so who can be against us? True, our lives are never out of God’s control. Yet God also commands us to exercise *self*-control. God has given his followers the mind of Christ to plan carefully while looking forward to the miraculous. We are not to optimistically leap off buildings flapping our arms expecting to fly, but neither are we to pessimistically conclude that we cannot fly. We *are* to optimistically trust God as we pray and work, fully expecting to fly. *Ora et Labora!* Pray and work! Optimism that has abandoned reason is out of control, and therefore out of bounds. However, optimism bolted onto the grace, truth, and power of God is unstoppable. In Romans 4:17b (WEB) we see that God “***gives life to the dead, and calls the things that are not, as though they were.***” Our God brings things that are not into reality! If miracles are not optimistic, what is?

Since God has our backs covered, is it okay for our optimism to run out of control? He will nonetheless save us. True, God does have our backs covered and protects us from many of our foolish decisions. Yet he also tells us not to put him to the test in Matthew 4:7 (WEB), “***Jesus said to him, ‘Again, it is written, ‘You shall not test the Lord, your God.’***” Leaping off buildings, flapping our arms and expecting to fly, is not okay. Yes, God is in control, yet his sovereign demonstration of grace still allows for great tragedies in our fallen world. Nail-biting parents may take the joy out of life, and I may be such a parent at times. However, losses will come and can be

quite painful, but foolish losses are especially painful. So it is not okay to allow our optimism to put God to the test. God will correct us for taking leaps that require miracles to bail us out. Yet he does command us to obey and he provides miracles along the way according to his wisdom. Thus we should fuel the fires of our optimism. But rather than let them explode out of control, we must focus our optimism with good planning directed toward purposeful targets, with self-control.

That said, the purpose of the *Optimism Out of Control* book is to fully explain my incredibly awesome thought, learned from the Bible. I hope to use careful reason and self-control to accurately fire at the target of your heart with this simple message:

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.

That is it. That is my incredibly awesome thought. The thought is not my own, of course, but my understanding of the good news of Jesus Christ, as well as the understanding of a few good friends. My defense of this statement will be a thorough and surprising exegesis of the grand conclusion of New Testament grace theology found in the simply-stated verse of Romans 11:32.

The thought is optimistic, but readers beware. The propositions of this book will challenge your current notions about faith, grace, Heaven, Hell, the Lake of Fire, and destiny.

You are invited to post comments and questions online at each page or at DGJC.ORG/CONTACT. Also read alternate formats of *Optimism Out of Control* at DGJC.ORG/FORMATS and God bless!

I am not the first to leap for joy over this awesome news!

The Apostle Paul said, *“Therefore God also highly exalted him, and gave to him the name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, those on earth, and those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father,”* (Philippians 2:11 WEB).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_the_Apostle

The Pastor Watchman Nee said, *“God...held council with His Son even before the foundation of the world so as to have His Son come down and go to the cross in order to reconcile all things back to himself, rescue fallen mankind, and resolve the rebellion of Satan,”* (God’s Plan and the Overcomers, Nee).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Watchman_Nee

The poet George MacDonald said, *“Every atonement that God cares for; and the work of Jesus Christ on earth was the creative atonement, because it works atonement in every heart. He brings and is bringing God and man, and man and man, into perfect unity: ‘I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one...’ Justice then requires that sin should be put an end to; and not that only, but that it should be atoned for... but there is no refuge from the love of God; that love will, for very love, insist upon the uttermost farthing,”* (Justice, MacDonald).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_MacDonald

The statesman Abraham Lincoln said, *“It is everybody or nobody,”* (Unity, Volumes 13-14, Lincoln when questioned who would ultimately be in Heaven). *“I believe the will of God prevails. Without Him all human reliance is vain. Without the assistance of His divine Being, I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail. Being a humble instrument in the hands of our Heavenly Father, I desire that all my works and acts may be according to His will; and that it may be so, I give thanks to the Almighty, and seek His aid,”* (The Creed of Abraham Lincoln in His Own Words, Wood). *“[All that was lost by the transgression of Adam was made good by the atonement: all that was lost by the fall was made good by the sacrifice - Cogdal],”* (The Almost Chosen People, Wolf)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_views_of_Abraham_Lincoln

The writer Madeleine L'Engle said, *“All will be redeemed in God’s fullness of time, all, not just the small portion of the population who have been given the grace to know and accept Christ. All the strayed and stolen sheep. All the little lost ones,”* (A Stone for a Pillow, L'Engle).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madeleine_L'Engle

And even the entertainer P.T. Barnum said, *“I believe that finally every created soul will be drawn, not forced, to choose to seek, and when he chooses to seek will be helped to find eternal life. I have no knowledge of place or time. I have the great hope ... I base my hope on ... the attributes of God, ... the office and character of Jesus Christ, ... the trend of Scripture,”* (Why I am a Universalist, Barnum).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/P._T._Barnum

The Apostle, the pastor, the poet, the statesman, the writer, and the entertainer above have all agreed that **Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.** Following is my defense of the same. The publication is available for free at DGJC.ORG/OPTIMISM and various locations online. If possible, read the supporting articles referenced throughout the book also found at DGJC.ORG. You also are invited to read the *Optimism Abstract and Study Guide* found on pages 147-151.

Salvation Inception



Again, my simple thesis is that **Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.** A related thesis is that **salvation is without condition and a free act of God's grace, given by him to chosen mankind.** This salvation is not conditioned on any work, action, thought, or choice of man. God has given grace to all mankind without our invitation or pre-condition. This salvation cannot be missed, ruined, or lost, since God himself secures the beginning,

middle, and end. The inception and finale of salvation is God. The result is guaranteed.

This is incredibly optimistic. Christ's salvation is the only source of confidence and peace. He is the foundation to build your life upon. Unfortunately, the message is often clouded by hasty conclusions, poor interpretations, divided opinions, incomplete understandings, and inaccurate Bible translations. Sin itself obscures the message of salvation at times, though God's Word is not obscure. God has spoken truth and love to reach both our minds and our hearts.

Perhaps that is one reason for the apparent obscurity. God could have given the Bible in the form of an encyclopedia or a step-by-step guide to salvation. That may have been clearer to our minds. We could easily memorize the outline and the steps. The knowledge would be locked in our minds, but the heart of salvation would be missed. God does want to explain the gospel to our minds, but he also is determined to share his love with our hearts. He is more than a teacher to us. He is our lover. If we read the Bible as notes from our teacher, we will miss God's heart. The Bible is not just a textbook for salvation, but also history, prose, poetry, and song. The Bible is God's love letters to our hearts.

Love is a common desire worldwide. Why would anyone ever refuse God's love? Why is there even one non-Christian in the world? If Jesus is so good, why isn't everyone cheering for the Son of God? Why argue with the idea that God has chosen to love you, me, and all mankind, in Jesus Christ? Can we name one valid objection to Jesus Christ? Did Jesus ever wrong one person? Can we see one imperfection in his words or actions?

Consider this dialogue between Peter and Jesus in Luke 5:1-11 (WEB).

1) Now while the multitude pressed on him and heard the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret. 2) He saw two boats standing by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them, and were washing their nets. 3) He entered into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. 4) When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a catch.'

5) Simon answered him, 'Master, we worked all night, and took nothing; but at your word I will let down the net.' 6) When they had done this, they caught a great multitude of fish, and their net was breaking. 7) They beckoned to their partners in the other boat, that they should come and help them. They came, and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. 8) But Simon Peter, when he saw it, fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord.' 9) For he was amazed, and all who were with him, at the catch of fish which they had caught; 10) and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon.

Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't be afraid. From now on you will be catching people alive.' 11) When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything, and followed him.

This story shows that we really do not want God to get close to our hearts. We are afraid, and hide our sin from his eyes. Peter asked Jesus to leave because Jesus' holiness convicted him and made him uncomfortable. I suggest that atheism and false religion share a similar motivation to Peter's. We build defenses that keep us at a "safe" distance from God. Atheists choose the lie that God does not exist to keep him away. The religious choose a veneer of self-righteousness to shield themselves from God's gaze, while clinging to their fire insurance policies. If we dare to take a step closer to him, we dress ourselves up, hoping to hide our sin. We know we have done bad things and so we are uncomfortable around Jesus because he is good. We are just like our fallen parents, Adam and Eve, who tried to hide from God in the Garden of Eden.

Since we hide from God, special tactics beyond education are needed to defeat unbelief and reach the heart of sinners hiding from God's love.

However, there is no hiding from God, even if we pretend that he does not exist. One day we each will stand before him. I pray that God will use this book to conquer our opposition to Jesus, our fear of exposure, and our doubt about his love and forgiveness. The climax of God's love for mankind is seen in perfect measure at the cross. The cross fully exposed our hatred of God when we crucified Christ. However, the cross also displayed God's flood of forgiveness through Jesus' willing death for our sins. Jesus prayed from the cross in Luke 23:34b (WEB): **"Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."** That is the proclamation of forgiveness and salvation for you, me, and all mankind.

The initial pages of this book lay the groundwork for a thorough explanation of my thesis by introducing important concepts, reviewing my previous articles, and beginning at the end with the grand conclusion of Christian salvation found in Romans 11:32.

Flying Impossible!

My thesis is simple. **Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.** However, most of mankind does not believe this good news, even many of those who call themselves Christians. Can any special strategies be used to overcome this disbelief? Consider a history lesson from Wilbur and Orville Wright.

Suppose someone does not believe flight is possible. He tells you that flight is imaginary and we have been fooled. We would call this unbeliever insane! Airplanes are everywhere and we all know about them. However, not too long ago the opposite was true. The Wright brothers were considered insane, or at least foolhardy, to claim that they could fly an airplane.

According to *The Wright Brothers* by Fred Kelly, Wilbur and Orville proved to themselves and their neighbors that they could fly quite well. Good conscience demanded that they tell the United States government of their breakthrough. This discovery was larger than the Wright family and needed to be shared with their countrymen. So the Wright brothers wrote to the United States War Department, hoping to show off their airplane. They received only replies that no money would be granted for flight research until it was proved that fixed-wing horizontal flight was possible. It was possible! They wanted to demonstrate it! They wrote again and again, but only received the same response, unbelief every time.

Magazines likewise banished the idea to the realm of science fiction. How could the Wright brothers persuade the unbelieving? They hatched a plan to 'fly by' the 300th anniversary celebration of the colonization of Jamestown in

Virginia. Many military officers would be present, and the prank would leave mouths gaping. Unfortunately, a mishap during take-off foiled their plans, but they would not give up. After further rejections the Wright brothers moved to their last plan - they turned East, in hopes of discovering a buyer in Europe. Their conscience was clear about serving their own nation first, so they turned elsewhere. This was the winning tactic. Just before a deal was closed with France, the United States came to its senses. The United States War Department learned about the deal the Wright brothers were signing and unbelief quickly dissolved. They invited the brothers to demonstrate and were shocked with the opportunity of the century.

Perhaps we should not be so hard on the disbelieving. Before the Wright brothers, flying was a crazy idea reserved for the eccentric. History is filled with stories of the adventurous trying to fly with all sorts of contraptions. Many lost their lives. Who among us would easily believe that flight was reality at the moment when the impossible became possible? Very few.

Thankfully unbelief was not the inspiration for the Wright brothers or others like them. These visionaries have shown amazing persistence in working hard, questioning tradition, seeing things as they are, humbly learning, changing, applying knowledge, and never giving up. Furthermore, the Wright brothers have taught us an important lesson about strategies for persuading the unbelieving. The invention of flight was so important that they were compelled to use creative means to persuade their audience to believe when reason alone was not enough. In their case, they planned a '*fly by*' to show off the truth, and they also found a constructive use for envy.

The Wright brothers' story is the perfect introduction to this book. We face a similar problem to what Wilbur and Orville solved. Most people did not believe flight was possible, even after the Wrights had proved it. Likewise, most people do not believe that Jesus is their savior, and also the savior of all mankind, even after God has proved it. Apparently reason alone is not enough persuasion here, either. There are certainly limits to the comparison of the Wright brothers' experience and Christian faith. But there is one question that is certainly worth asking.

Are special tactics for responding to stubborn disbelief in Christ *integral* to the gospel message?

Most explanations of the gospel have limited themselves to merely educating their audience with facts about Christ and salvation. But listing facts only teaches the teachable. The gospel is also true for the unteachable! So does Jesus employ special tactics to reach the unteachable?

As we re-examine the gospel, we will also consider the possibility of special Biblical tactics, and the implications of Proverbs 26:4-5 (WEB), which says: ***“Don’t answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.”***

We will also consider the implications of Romans 11:13-14 (WEB): ***“For I speak to you who are Gentiles. Since then as I am an apostle to Gentiles, I glorify my ministry; if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh, and may save some of them.”***

Why Read?

I have introduced my thesis.

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.

I have stated that reason alone is insufficient to persuade people to believe.

Since we hide from God, special tactics beyond education are needed to defeat unbelief and reach the heart of sinners hiding from God’s love.

I have asked if God uses special persuasive tactics.

Are special tactics for responding to stubborn disbelief in Christ integral to the gospel message?

Now I ask, why are you reading this book? I assume you are here because someone recommended it, or you stumbled upon it. However, you are now at least several pages into it, and so I ask, why you are reading? What are you searching for?

I am not asking because I need to know your reasons. You do not need my permission to read. However, it would be good for you to know your own reasons for reading. Some possible reasons might include:

- You are curious.
- You are objectively researching Christian belief.
- You seek safe haven from God’s wrath.
- You seek help with doubts.
- You want to compare our thoughts.

- You want to contrast our thoughts.
- You hope to help my understanding.
- You hope to help your own understanding.
- You are looking for controversy.
- You wish to refute my ideas.
- You do not know why.

Take a moment to reflect.

It would be good for you to know your own reasons for reading this book.

Here is an encouragement to eagerly seek God, from Jeremiah 29:11-13 (WEB),

‘For I know the thoughts that I think toward you,’ says Yahweh, ‘thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you hope and a future. You shall call on me, and you shall go and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You shall seek me, and find me, when you search for me with all your heart.’

Whatever your reasons for reading this book, I invite you now to seek God first with your whole heart. The verse above suggests that God can be found, but only if we seek him with our whole heart.

Previously Stated

Hopefully, you have reflected about your purpose for reading this book and have a good reason to continue. So I invite you to continue to explore my thoughts and I hope you find encouragement there. Books are a trip into the mind of another, as much as that is possible.

The ideas in this book developed their shape while I hammered them out in my previous writings. So my earlier articles may be the best introduction. Please note, however, that my understanding has grown through the decades, so I am currently revising my earlier works to be consistent with the latter.

My *Optimism Out of Control* DGJC.ORG/ZINGERS article titles include:

- *Matthew 16:15-21, Optimism Out of Control*
- *Hosea 1:10, Optimism Out of Control, Part 2: In the Same Place!*

Job's Counselors

I have asked you to consider why you are reading this book. You should ask me why I am writing this book! What is my answer?

I am writing this book to clarify the gospel of Jesus Christ from current confusion.

The Old Testament man, Job, had big questions for God. Three people, speaking volumes, tried to counsel him. After all their words, his questions remained. Likewise, we have a great need to understand Christian salvation, yet divisions and disturbing questions remain commonplace.

Job's fourth counselor, however, was used by God to reach Job's heart. He spoke briefly and with clarity. Now, it would be too bold to suggest that I can stand in his shoes. I certainly have not written briefly. Yet I hope to add clarity and remove confusion at one particular point in the gospel, choosing Elihu as my example. Consider Job Chapter 32 (WEB).

1) So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. 2) Then the wrath of Elihu the son of Barachel, the Buzite, of the family of Ram, was kindled against Job. His wrath was kindled because he justified himself rather than God. 3) Also his wrath was kindled against his three friends, because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job. 4) Now Elihu had waited to speak to Job, because they were elder than he. 5) When Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of these three men, his wrath was kindled.

6) Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite answered, 'I am young, and you are very old; Therefore I held back, and didn't dare show you my opinion. 7) I said, "Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom." 8) But there is a spirit in man, and the Spirit of the Almighty gives them understanding. 9) It is not the great who are wise, nor the aged who understand justice. 10) Therefore I said, "Listen to me; I also will show my opinion."

11) Behold, I waited for your words, and I listened for your reasoning, while you searched out what to say. 12) Yes, I gave you my full attention, but there was no one who convinced Job, or who answered his words, among you. 13) Beware lest you say, "We have found wisdom, God may refute him, not man;" 14) for he has not directed his words against me; neither will I

answer him with your speeches. 15) They are amazed. They answer no more. They don't have a word to say.

16) Shall I wait, because they don't speak, because they stand still, and answer no more? 17) I also will answer my part, and I also will show my opinion. 18) For I am full of words. The spirit within me constrains me. 19) Behold, my breast is as wine which has no vent; like new wineskins it is ready to burst. 20) I will speak, that I may be refreshed. I will open my lips and answer. 21) Please don't let me respect any man's person, neither will I give flattering titles to any man. 22) For I don't know how to give flattering titles; or else my Maker would soon take me away.'

Elihu was bold, humble, and understanding. He spoke the truth in love and hated flattery. That is a good goal for all of us -- and it is my specific goal in writing to you.

Disclaimer

You certainly do not need to agree with me or any particular guru to be a follower of Christ. However, to be a follower of Christ, you do need to actually *follow Christ*. Since Christ is one, then we should expect to become one in our thinking as we each grow closer to him. But today we still remain far from the perfection of Christ, and at times sadly far from each other. The Body of Christ suffers from painful dismemberment. What I am trying to say is, since I can be very wrong at times, I should include a disclaimer.

My propositions might be wrong, but I assert them because I think I am right.

Okay, there is my disclaimer. Each of us will stand before the Lord to give an account. If I or others have led you astray, we will have to give account to God for misleading the misled. Yet, each one of us will also have to give account for our own wayward decisions, and for allowing ourselves to be misled. The one who tempts others off the path is guilty, but one who steps off the path is likewise guilty.

Of course, the one who helps others *onto* the path is instead blessed and rewarded. That is the blessing and reward I seek through my clarification of the gospel. I ask you to compare my teaching with the words of the Bible for the proof of any statement that I make. We should be like the Berean people whom Paul talked to about Jesus. They did not believe Paul because he sounded good or even because he was an Apostle. Instead they compared his words to the Bible. We read in Acts 17:10-12 (WEB),

10) The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Beroea. When they arrived, they went into the Jewish synagogue. 11) Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. 12) Many of them therefore believed; also of the prominent Greek women, and not a few men.

Check God's Word to test for truth!

Start at the End

Anyone making a point needs to consider how to begin, continue, and conclude. We could just dive in and figure it out as we go, but planning can be useful; so my plan is to tell you how I was introduced to grace theology, reveal the fiery question that burned my house down, and share with you my discovery of the Bible's grand conclusion about salvation.

While leading the Allied forces in World War II, Winston Churchill said, "*Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.*" Likewise, this is not the end of my book, but it is the end of the introduction. It is also an excellent time to show you the grand conclusion of the Bible.

FIRST

I first looked to the cross of Jesus Christ for forgiveness the summer before I entered college. I was raised in a churchgoing family, but my sinful behavior through high school drove me to begin a relationship with Christ, based on his forgiveness at the cross. I knew I was a sinner and that Jesus died for sinners, but I still knew very little.

SECOND

The Lord quickly introduced me to grace theology and discipleship. I learned that salvation is completely unmerited and that Jesus had chosen me for salvation even before my decision to trust him. Frankly, I did not want to be saved that way, and a burning question grew in my mind.

The Bible says Christ died for all mankind, but very few are born again, and apparently most are sentenced to eternal Hell. How could he choose me and not others? Am I certain he did choose me?

I did not understand. Most of my friends and the books I read seemed to slide off one side of the issue or the other. Some suggested that God's

grace only predestined a small subset of mankind to eternal life. Others suggested that Christ died for all mankind, but only those choosing Christ with their *free will* were finally saved. However, *free will* proponents appeared to compromise God's grace by saying Jesus did not complete *all* of our salvation; we need to do the *part* of choosing. And the *Limited Atonement* proponents appeared to compromise Jesus' atonement by saying it was for *part* of mankind and not *all*. I tried at different times to find rest in one or the other of those answers, but my questions grew, and they darkened my relationship with Christ.

Furthermore, God's grace exposed a much bigger problem. My initial understanding of my sinfulness was incomplete. Biblical grace exposed that my self-righteousness hated God and I certainly hated my unanswered questions. Yet Christ was my only hope!

I searched for an answer. I read the Bible. I read commentaries. I read books. I listened to other Christians. I argued with God. I avoided the question. I focused on serving. Worst of all, I ignored my questions and just went to church.

THIRD

Eventually the Lord led me to discover and embrace Romans 11:32-36 as the grand conclusion of redemption, grace theology, and the gospel of Jesus Christ. God has helped me to understand this passage and receive it with joy, and through it he has helped me to be honest about my sin and eager to share the good news. My questions about salvation are fully answered, my confusion is erased, and my love for Christ is restored. It may be that you have a similar question to mine. I hope to help you as I have been helped. So I will begin at the end, at the grand conclusion of salvation in Romans 11:32, and explain this important passage of Scripture to you. I do not claim special revelation or insight, but simply open eyes, through Christ's love, to see and accept what is plainly said.

Grand Conclusion

Are you embarrassed about your spiritual questions? Are you scared of looking foolish? Are you scared of being wrong? We often try to hide our ignorance, but we should resist this. There is too much to be lost if we are wrong. There is even more to be gained when we are right with God. Ignoring the hole in our roof directly harms us and our estate. I am often secretive about my questions, but to no positive end. We should boldly ask questions of God and Christian friends. We might think our questions are humbling, but we can take heart in knowing that God thinks every one of our questions are important and provides every answer we need in his

Word. For me, Romans 11:32-36 has become the million-pound anchor for my soul and the answer to my fiery question. It is the grand conclusion of Paul's treatise on Christian salvation.

Romans 11:32 answers the three biggest questions that mankind has ever had or will ever have for God our creator. How did sin enter the world? What is God's purpose in sin and salvation? Who is ultimately saved from God's wrath against sin?

One warning before we continue. These questions are answered clearly and simply, but most people refuse to accept the answers. The reasons that most reject the truth include the fear of man, the loss of investment in other answers, their imaginary god meeting the true God, or rejection of grace in favor of *free will*. Man's natural condition is to hate salvation by grace and instead to love salvation by self. We should instead be thankful that we are not saved by our *free will* choice, but by God's *free will* choice to love us unconditionally. The happy news of the gospel is that Jesus has forgiven us apart from all our choices; in fact he forgave us while we were yet his enemies. As we already discussed, when the obvious is rejected, special tactics may be needed to help unbelievers see what they do not want to see. The truth is still good and true, even for those who reject it.

Our key Scripture, Romans 11:32-36 (WEB), says,

32) For God has bound all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all.

33) Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! 34) 'For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?' 35) 'Or who has first given to him, and it will be repaid to him again?' 36) For of him, and through him, and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever! Amen.

There you have it.

So what do you think? Do you see the answers to our three questions?

The remainder of this book will expand on these concepts at length.

Christendom Confusion



As a new Christian, I learned that not all Christians agree. Sadly we are divided over many things. New Christians need to be nurtured just like newborn infants, but when there are family dysfunctions, newborns can suffer. For example, I read an account of a church family which divided over the shade of green for the new carpet in the sanctuary. Yikes! The tragedy is that when families divide, the children suffer most. Thankfully, God is our Father and not the church! Though the church is a haven for believers young and old, God alone is our perfect Heavenly Father. Nonetheless, it is tragic to think how self-centered, weak, and poor in judgment we Christians and our churches often are.

Christians have also divided over more significant matters. The Protestant Reformation in the 16th century is an example. In that case, there was a sharp disagreement about the gospel message itself. Martin Luther believed one thing while Catholic orthodoxy believed another. Moreover, the protesters could not even come to an agreement among themselves. Further splintering continued. Some followed Martin Luther (Lutherans), some followed John Calvin (Presbyterians), and still others followed Michael Sattler (Anabaptists). Also note that the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church had already divided centuries earlier. Today the Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Anabaptists are not just three groups, but have each divided again, too many times to count. This is just a short account of the “organized” church. We ought to call ourselves the “disorganized” church! Other Christians prefer to follow Christ apart from this confusion, but they are not without their own sin and divisions as well.

My son once said as a young boy, “*It would be great if we could all live in one giant house!*” That was a special season of time for our family. We lived in a rented apartment. It had a large screen door that opened onto a grassy field surrounded by other apartments. Each neighbor had a screen door just like ours, and kids would pour out onto the field every evening and weekend to play kickball and other games. We had fun, but at day’s end everyone

needed to go home. My son thought it would be great if we could all go home to the same house so the fun would never end!

Sadly, because of the divisions, we Christians no longer live in the same house. This is nothing new. Divisions among Christians began in the first century as I Corinthians 1:10-17 (WEB) records Paul pleading,

10) Now I beg you, brothers, through the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11) For it has been reported to me concerning you, my brothers, by those who are from Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. 12) Now I mean this, that each one of you says, 'I follow Paul,' 'I follow Apollos,' 'I follow Cephas,' and, 'I follow Christ.'

13) Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized into the name of Paul? 14) I thank God that I baptized none of you, except Crispus and Gaius, 15) so that no one should say that I had baptized you into my own name. 16) (I also baptized the household of Stephanas; besides them, I don't know whether I baptized any other.) 17) For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Good News—not in wisdom of words, so that the cross of Christ wouldn't be made void.

If Christians began dividing in the 1st century and 2,000 years later the divisions have multiplied into the thousands, what hope is there?

Much.

There is hope because Jesus prayed in John 17:20-23 (WEB),

20) Not for these only do I pray, but for those also who will believe in me through their word, 21) that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that you sent me. 22) The glory which you have given me, I have given to them; that they may be one, even as we are one; 23) I in them, and you in me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know that you sent me and loved them, even as you loved me.

So we press forward with confidence, knowing that the prayer of Christ has been heard. Jesus' prayer is hot on our Heavenly Father's mind as he works his will in this world. Will you and I keep step with Christ and the oneness for

which he prayed? Or will we be the cause of yet another division? Do we need to be confronted with the prophet's words yet again in Malachi 2:10 (WEB), as he asked, ***“Don't we all have one father? Hasn't one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, profaning the covenant of our fathers?”***

So, looking past carpet color disputes, please join me in revisiting the gospel message.

Soteriologies

Soteriology is the study of salvation and the destinies of mankind. It is from the Greek root *soteria*, meaning *salvation*. Wikipedia defines *soteriology* as *“the study of religious doctrines of salvation.”* One can see why this is a particularly important subject. For example, it is said, *“All is well that ends well.”* Religious doctrine may touch on various subjects, but the subject of how to confirm our positive end ought to hold a special place of significance. Jesus asks us in Luke 9:25 (WEB), ***“For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits his own self?”***

The major religions are different primarily because they have different understandings of God and different salvation recipes. The Christian, Jewish, and Muslim religions each have different instructions for a positive end. There are also differences within these major labels themselves. For example, there are Protestant and Catholic Christians. There are Reformed and Orthodox Jews. There are also Sunni and Shi'a Muslims. Beyond that there may even be cultural expectations as to what it means to be Christian, as well as doctrinal and practical expectations. Catholic Christians in the United States see things differently than Catholic Christians in Argentina. Also, the expectations from our contemporaries are not the same as Christians from yesteryear, nor even the same as the Bible itself.

New Christians are often surprised to learn that there are divisions over the gospel. How can one determine if a particular church or individual is close enough to the Bible to be authentic? There are too many variations of Christian salvation to highlight them all in this short book. Furthermore, you certainly do not need one more book explaining why I think I am right and others are wrong. Instead I plan to highlight the two most common views and then propose a model for evaluating and categorizing any understanding of Christian salvation that you may encounter.

In the end, the Bible itself strangely says that you do not need a teacher, but that the Holy Spirit is your teacher -- that is, if you are a Christian. We read in I John 2:27 (WEB),

As for you, the anointing which you received from him remains in you, and you don't need for anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is no lie, and even as it taught you, you will remain in him.

So ask God to give you understanding as you continue your study. If you discover errors in my thinking, please talk to me.

The two most common views of Christian salvation found in various denominations that I want to highlight are Arminianism and Calvinism.

In a nutshell, Arminianism is the belief that Jesus died for *ALL* mankind, but only those individual people who provide the missing *PART* or condition of choosing faith with their *free will* are finally saved to eternal life. Arminianism is named after Jacob Arminius, who supported this view.

Calvinism is the belief that Jesus died only for *PART* of mankind, but he provides *ALL* of salvation to guarantee eternal life for these chosen ones, and God also leads these chosen ones irresistibly to faith in Christ. Calvinism was named after a prominent historical proponent of this idea, John Calvin. Calvinism, sometimes called Augustinism has its roots in the theology of Catholic Saint Augustine.

You may be well acquainted with these different views. You may even be sick of hearing one more word about them! However, consider one last thought. As I compared and contrasted these two views, a model for evaluating any salvation doctrine was born. The model proposes two questions, each with only two answers for a combination of only four possibilities.

Is God the savior of *ALL* or *PART* of mankind?

Does God do *ALL* or *PART* of the saving?

SALVATION EVALUATOR	PART OF MANKIND	ALL OF MANKIND
PART OF SALVATION	?	?
ALL OF SALVATION	?	?

If we use the words *ALL* or *PART* carefully, we can divide every view of Christian salvation into one of these four categories. No one could ride on the fence unless their doctrine was internally contradictory or they simply did not take a position on the subject. This exercise will be very useful to

understand current Christian salvation doctrines, and also useful to explain my own view of salvation.

Please also note that Christian salvation can sometimes refer to salvation from sin and other times salvation to eternal life. In this discussion, however, my four-part matrix is used specifically to categorize the different views of salvation to eternal life.

PART for PART

In this model Christ did *PART* of salvation for *PART* of mankind.

This model assumes that when Jesus died on the cross he only paid for the sins of *PART* of mankind. Furthermore, suppose he only did *PART* of the work so that individuals must meet an additional condition to be saved.



For an extreme example, suppose that Mother Teresa is not within the *PART* of mankind that Jesus forgave. Or suppose she misses the condition needed for salvation. Then even she will not be saved from eternal damnation in the end, regardless of her great goodness. By way of contrast, suppose Hitler is within the *PART* of mankind that Jesus chose to forgive. And suppose he somehow meets the condition needed for salvation. Then he will be saved from damnation to eternal life in the end, regardless of his great evil.

Thankfully, this view *disagrees* with 1 John 2:1-2 (WEB) which explains that Jesus did die for *ALL* mankind.

1) My little children, I write these things to you so that you may not sin. If anyone sins, we have a Counselor with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. 2) And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.

This view also *disagrees* with Ephesians 2:8-9 (WEB), which explains that we are saved by grace apart from any work.

8) For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9) not of works, that no one would boast.

Therefore, the *PART-for-PART* model of salvation is rejected by nearly all followers of Christ.

PART for ALL

In this model Christ did *PART* of salvation for *ALL* of mankind.

Some believe that when Jesus died on the cross he paid for the sins of *ALL* of mankind. Furthermore, he only did *PART* of the work so that individuals must meet an additional condition to be saved.



For example, consider that Mother Teresa and Hitler are both within the *PART* of mankind to whom Jesus *offered* forgiveness, because in this model Jesus died for *ALL* mankind. However, if Mother Teresa does not meet the particular condition required for salvation, because she has sinned even once, she cannot be saved from eternal damnation in the end. However, if

Hitler meets the particular condition required for salvation, typically suggested to be man's *free will* acceptance of Jesus, even though he sinned terribly in many other ways, then he will be saved from eternal damnation to eternal life in the end. Of course, some might say that the condition is simply to be "*good enough.*" Yet how would you measure that with confidence?

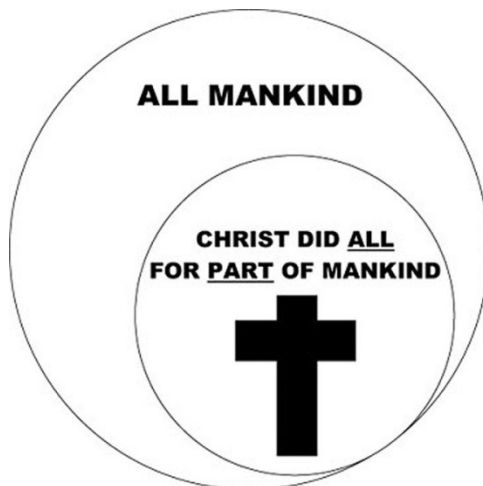
Thankfully, this view *agrees* with I John 2:1-2. However, it *disagrees* with Ephesians 2:8-9. Classic Arminianism fits the description of the *PART-for-ALL* salvation model.

Another verse that has been used to suggest the Arminian view is Galatians 3:2 (WEB). This verse could be understood to imply that our act or choice of faith invites the work of the Spirit. "*I just want to learn this from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by hearing of faith?*"

ALL for PART

In this model Christ did ALL of salvation for PART of mankind.

Based on this, when Jesus died on the cross he only paid for the sins of *PART* of mankind. Yet he did *ALL* of the work so that the chosen individuals simply trust that Jesus has completely saved them.



For example if Mother Teresa is not within the part of mankind that Jesus forgave, then she will not be saved from eternal damnation in the end, regardless of any condition she tries to meet. However, if Hitler is within the part of mankind that Jesus forgave, then he will be unconditionally saved from eternal damnation to eternal life in the end regardless of his great sins.

Thankfully, this view also *disagrees* with I John 2:1-2. It does *agree* with Ephesians 2:8-9, however. Classic Calvinism fits the description of the *ALL-for-PART* salvation model.

A verse that suggests this view might be Romans 9:6 (WEB), which could be understood to imply that God has only chosen a subset of mankind. ***“But it is not as though the word of God has come to nothing. For they are not all Israel that are of Israel.”***

One should also note that the definition of *“faith”* used by Calvinist Christians differs radically from the definition used by Arminian Christians. For Calvinists, Jesus has paid the price for salvation and applied it to your account. It is guaranteed. We are simply invited to *“trust”* in his finished work. It is like a million dollars already deposited into your bank account by your father. Believing does not deposit the million dollars into your bank account, because it is already there! Instead, believing simply changes your life and attitude toward your father.

For Arminians, Jesus has paid the price for salvation, but it is not yet deposited into your account. We must meet the condition of trusting in his work through our *free will*. It is like a million dollars offered, but not yet deposited, into your bank account. In this case, belief is the condition needed to receive the million dollars so you can deposit it in your account yourself. Otherwise the money is not even there!

This illustration may not be perfect, but it at least illustrates the difference between Arminian and Calvinistic *“faith.”*

‘Love Wins’ by Rob Bell

My desire to write this book was born after I read Rob Bell’s book, *Love Wins*, published in 2011. His claim that all mankind is finally saved created a stir among Christians that prompted me to investigate his ideas for comparison with my own. Since you are reading my thoughts, I would also encourage you to read his also, and then compare everything to the Bible.

Do read his book rather than base your conclusions on second hand opinions from me. I do not intend to do a detailed review of his work, quoting his propositions and then defending agreement or disagreement. Instead the purpose of this book is to share my own opinions about salvation. I would rather get into trouble myself for being in the arena than merely critiquing Bell from the sideline! However, here are a few quick thoughts about his book.

First, he has my salute. He has shown an enthusiasm for salvation that prompted him to write a book, speak, and preach! He believed something

strongly enough to do something. He also attempted to explain the riddle of salvation that has divided Christians for millennia. Sadly, most Christians do not even share their faith. Most do not believe anything strongly enough to try to persuade others. Bell did something, at least. Moreover, he recognized a weakness in Christian orthodoxies that has resulted in divisions with no sides squaring perfectly with Scripture, at least to his satisfaction, or mine, for that matter. Our *PART* and *ALL Salvation Evaluator* has exposed that much about Arminianism and Calvinism. So Bell did his own homework and proposed a solution. For that he has my kudos. Frankly, we might debate just how far Bell's errors actually fall from the errors found in Arminianism and Calvinism. One thing is certain, salvation doctrines cannot be so different and all be right! So at a minimum the Arminians, the Calvinists, Bell, or even all three need to exit stage left now that *Bell* has sounded.

That said, I do agree with those concerned that Bell's theology has fallen too far away from Christianity to be accepted as orthodox. For example in Chapter 3, titled *Hell*, he concludes that Hell is not a specific place beyond earth for the punishment of unbelievers after judgment. Instead he says it is the suffering endured in this life and the next for rejecting Christ. Bell sees Hell only as the natural suffering for sinful choices, but not as the active punishment of God upon unbelievers. He is not the only Christian who holds this view, wrong as it is. Yet a careful study of Luke 16:19-31 and Revelation 20:11-15 makes it clear that Hell, called *Hades* in the Greek language, is a place distinct from Heaven and Earth, designed by God for the punishment of unbelievers after their death.

I should also note here that Hades is not the same place as the Lake of Fire, which is an important component of my own view to be explained later. Unfortunately, the English word *Hell* is commonly understood to mean the place of eternal punishment. Yet *Hell* is not consistently translated in most English Bibles, referring sometimes to Hades, other times to Gehenna, and rarely to the Lake of Fire. Please note that if I use the word *Hell* in this book I am referring to Hades and not to the Lake of Fire.

In Chapter 4, titled "*Does God Get What God Wants?*" Bell concludes that since the book of Revelation says the gates of the New Jerusalem "*never shut,*" people will be able to sin in eternity. The open gate implies that people can choose to stay inside and be holy or leave God and sin. However, since the gate remains open, they can always come back at any time throughout all eternity. Whoa! I am so looking forward to the day that God transforms my humble existence into sinless glory with all of God's people around his throne. Bell's interpretation of Heaven does not sound very Heavenly to me, nor does it square with the Biblical picture of the glorification of the redeemed. Bell has been vilified for suggesting a type of universal salvation, but his views ultimately are not even that hopeful! He should not be vilified,

but instead pitied. How does Bell reason out this conclusion? In a nutshell he argues that the heart of God's love is giving people the freedom to choose, even to the point of choosing evil in Heaven. This is an unfortunate definition of love, and strangely also held by many Christians.

A Christian friend once insisted to me that we must have *free will* because God is a gentleman that would never force his grace upon us. To be sure, God does not coerce us, but just as surely he breathed life, uninvited, into the spiritually dead! Spiritually dead people cannot be coerced, but Jesus can choose to breathe life into anyone he chooses... by his grace.

However, I did greatly appreciate Bell's chapter title, "*Does God Get What God Wants?*" While I do not agree with most of Bell's conclusions in the chapter, I am comforted that the title was headed in the right direction. His chapter title should have led us instead to Romans 9:18-21 (WEB). If there ever was a hammer-and-anvil verse in the Bible to transform rebellious men with the sovereignty of God, this is it.

18) So then, he has mercy on whom he desires, and he hardens whom he desires. 19) You will say then to me, 'Why does he still find fault? For who withstands his will?' 20) But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed ask him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?' 21) Or hasn't the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel for honor, and another for dishonor?

God does get what God wants. However, Bell falls far short of seeing the glory that God will get as the savior of all mankind, removing our every blemish in heaven by his mighty hand of grace.

Perhaps God will lead Rob to reconsider. Perhaps you will reconsider as well.

Three Rebuttals

After reading Bell's book, I then read three rebuttals to his salvation theology. His ideas created enough stir for concerned Christians to quickly take up their pens against his heresy. Fair enough. Since the book gained fame among believers and unbelievers alike, his claims ought to be openly compared with the Bible. Otherwise the light of the gospel could be hidden by confusion and could lead many astray. So take a moment with me to briefly consider Bell's three counselors. Again, I do not intend to give them a thorough review, but only touch on a few points. I would recommend that you also read these books for yourself.

Larry Dixon wrote a work which he titled *Farewell, Rob Bell: A Biblical Response to Love Wins*. On page 14 Dixon says that Bell's statements "imply that believing the gospel has no transactional effect upon the sinner, that belief is immaterial to the reality of being in the Father's love." Dixon understands Bell to say that faith does not activate or help to deposit Jesus' payment for our sin into our account. Bell seems to believe that Jesus' payment is applied by God before we believe. Christians, then, are those people who believe in what God has already done for them. Dixon sees this as a heretical error, because he believes that faith does play a "transactional" role in applying Jesus' work to each individual person's account. Dixon and Bell clearly have different definitions of faith. You may remember from our previous discussion that Arminian and Calvinist understandings of the gospel also define faith differently. Considering this point alone, it would appear that Dixon falls into the Arminian category, while Bell falls into the Calvinist category. However, as already explained, Bell is far from an orthodox Calvinist. Also, on page 14 Dixon says, "...Bell disparages belief, arguing that the reality of forgiveness applies to all without their asking for it. How unlike human forgiveness Bell's position is." This is a very strange statement from Dixon. I wonder if he would actually say it again. The Bible explains that God's forgiveness is *decidedly unlike* human forgiveness. We humans typically offer conditional forgiveness. God, however, gives unconditional forgiveness and blessing. That is the evangelical definition of grace. Dixon is certain that Bell is a heretic, but what should we now think about Dixon?

Michael Wittmer wrote *Christ Alone: An Evangelical Response to Rob Bell's Love Wins*. On page 12 Wittmer explains that "evangelicals hold that faith is an open hand, a passive receiving of God's precious gift to anyone who accepts it." Wittmer and Bell also appear to have different definitions of faith. Unfortunately, Wittmer did not more clearly distinguish the difference between *faith* that is trust in the finished work of Christ versus *faith* that is the condition to activate salvation. Wittmer is apparently from the Calvinist camp, but he sounds Arminian at times. His explanations suggest that we can add our own name to the Lamb's Book of Life by taking up the pen of faith, instead of using the eyeglasses of faith to see our name in the Book from before the foundation of the world. Wittmer also expressed concern over Bell's "second chance" theology, which offers hope that unbelievers will repent even after their death. On page 31 he says that "those who assert there is a chance for postmortem salvation inadvertently claim to know better than God what God should have included in his Word." However, Wittmer should know that grace theology teaches us that our spiritual condition does not even allow for a first chance. Hopefully he is not implying that salvation is a chance. There is not one element of chance in the salvation of Jesus Christ, but instead God's determined love is set on each of his chosen ones. Wittmer shares his specific objection to second-chance salvation on page 30: "[Bell] may not want people to use his book as an excuse not to follow Jesus now, but it is easy to see how many could logically draw this conclusion." I hope to discuss the idea of salvation after death, and the

thought that people might use this as an excuse to not follow Christ, later in this book.

Mark Galli wrote *God Wins - Heaven, Hell, and Why the Good News is Better than Love Wins*. Galli's book is my personal favorite. He writes on page 64 that "*what the Bible plainly teaches is that we come to faith only by the gracious intervention of God.*" Galli is clear that we are spiritually dead apart from grace and that only God's grace awakens us to faith. He says on page 72,

[W]ithout the intervention of God, we have about as much hope as a corpse. And that's the gospel. Not that we have an innate free will, but that God in his freedom came to us to rescue us from spiritual slavery. Through the work of Jesus on the cross, and through the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, our wills are liberated. Then and only then can we actually recognize Christ, his love, his forgiveness, his grace. Then and only then can we finally respond in faith.

Well said. Galli then illustrates how Christ brings us to faith with a picture of a drowning man who reaches for help. That example is less well said. His illustration could be improved by adding the miraculous component that the man was fully drowned, completely dead, and then revived to life and pulled from the water! Galli also gives brief treatment to our key Scripture, saying,

Universalists quote many other passages with the word 'all' in them, but in context, most of those really mean 'all Israel', or 'all kinds of people' or 'both Jews and Gentiles' will be saved. One example is found in Romans: 'God has imprisoned everyone in disobedience so that he could have mercy on everyone' (Romans 11:32). Paul has been discussing the place of Jews and Gentiles in the scheme of salvation, so clearly the 'all' here means both Jews and Gentiles - not all within each group.

Galli's treatment of this key verse is too brief for the spotlight it deserves. Curiously, I have never read one Christian work that focused on this verse in detail. The grand conclusion of the book of Romans and the theology of grace certainly deserves at least a decent commentary on this amazing verse. Perhaps there is a work out there already, but I have not found it. So, Lord willing, I hope to exegete Romans 11:32 now.

It would appear that with my book I have the notable position of being Bell's *fourth counselor*. I was not as quick with my pen as the first three due to my schedule and work load, so perhaps the stir has long died down. Yet perhaps the intermediate time has been useful to you, me, and Bell for proper reflection.

Now I hope to help you by clarifying the definition of faith, the possibility of salvation “chances” during and after life, the meaning of Romans 11:32, and strategies for confronting stubborn unbelief.

Other Theologians

Before we charge ahead, let’s review a longer list of notable individuals with opinions about Christian salvation. Theologians of all stripes have taken up their pens to give reasonable explanations of the gospel. Hopefully we all agree that the Bible is the source definition of the gospel. However, it is not wrong to write books that attempt to explain the meaning of the Bible. I am doing it myself right now! But, before going deeper into my thoughts, let me invite you to consider the valuable efforts of others.

We’ve just briefly looked at:

- *Love Wins* by Rob Bell
- *Farewell, Rob Bell* by Larry Dixon
- *Christ Alone* by Michael E. Wittmer
- *God Wins* by Mark Galli

Other books on my shelf about salvation include:

- *All of Grace* by Charles Spurgeon
- *Ashamed of the Gospel* by John MacArthur
- *Knowing God* by J.I. Packer
- *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis
- *Predestined for Hell?* By John Rice
- *The Bondage of the Will* by Martin Luther
- *The Doctrines of Grace* by James Montgomery Boice
- *The Five Points of Calvinism* by David N. Steele
- *The NICNT, The Epistle to the Romans* by Douglas Moo
- *The Sovereignty of God* by Arthur W. Pink

Since Christian Universalism is also part of our discussion, consider:

- *All in All* by A. E. Knoch
- *All You Want to Know About Hell* by Steve Gregg
- *Ancient History of Universalism* by Hosea Ballou

- *Christ Triumphant* by Thomas Allin
- *Destined for Salvation* by Kalen Fristad
- *God's Methods with Man* by G. Campbell Morgan
- *Hope Beyond Hell* by Gerry Beauchemin
- *In the End, God* by John A. T. Robinson
- *Terms for Eternity: Aionios and Aidios...* by Ramelli and Konstan
- *The Calvinist Universalist* by Stephen Campana
- *The Evangelical Universalist* by Gregory McDonald (Robin Parry)
- *The Gospel of God's Reconciliation of All in Christ* by Ernst Stroeter
- *The Greek Word Aion - Aionios...* by John Wesley Hanson
- *The Inescapable Love of God* by Thomas Talbott
- *The Modern History of Universalism* by Thomas Whittemore
- <http://AionianBible.org>
- <http://www.apocatastasis.org>
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apocatastasis>
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Universalism
- <http://evangelicaluniversalist.com>
- <http://www.facebook.com/groups/IbelieveinBiblicalChristianUniversalism>
- <http://www.hopebeyondhell.net>
- <http://www.tentmaker.org>

I have written a short review of many of these books in my article *Book Reviews* in the *Appendix* at the end of this book.

All of the above sources call themselves Christian and hopefully read the same Bible, yet they each have differences in understanding with one another. Several of these differences are great enough that a theologian with one view might label the others heretics. Read these authors for yourself and you will agree that they certainly cannot all be true. The differences are large enough that our eternal fate would be radically impacted if one or the other proves to be true. Now I am not endorsing any of these books in particular, but simply making you aware of the wide range of ideas that professing Christians have. There may be as many different ideas as there are different people in the pews!

Despite the differences, if we strictly apply our *PART* and *ALL Salvation Evaluator* to each of the above theologians, we ought to be able to place each one neatly into one of the four categories previously introduced. However, in some cases the writers do not write precisely or

consistently enough for us to know for certain what they believe. Thus, they may appear to sit on the fence between opinions. This is quite common! Of course one can be a true follower of Christ and still be uncertain about many things. True Christians can still be excellent followers of Christ and yet have many unanswered questions, even concerning matters as weighty as salvation theology. However, two men who did not ride the fence and proposed definite answers are C.S. Lewis and Dr. James Boice.

C.S. Lewis is well known, with a “*coffee-table acceptance*” in Christendom. He says in *Mere Christianity*, page 52,

God created things which had free will. That means creatures which can go either wrong or right. Some people think they can imagine a creature which was free but had no possibility of going wrong; I cannot. If a thing is free to be good it is also free to be bad. And free will is what has made evil possible. Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having.

C.S. Lewis may be one of the most honest philosophers of all time. He openly acknowledged that God submits to defeat in order to allow for the *free will* of man. He says in *The Problem of Pain*, page 127, that “*it is objected that the ultimate loss of a single soul means the defeat of omnipotence. And so it does. In creating beings with free will, omnipotence from the outset submits to the possibility of such defeat.*” He believed that God arrested his own sovereignty to permit men to have *free will* over their own fate and eternal destiny.

Though this view seems problematic, he nonetheless became the contemporary champion of Arminian-style salvation. C.S. Lewis clearly understood that truth cannot be unreasonable, relative, or changeable. Nor does truth sit on the fence between options. So, after reflection, he chose to believe that Jesus did *PART* of salvation for *ALL* of mankind, and that the determining condition of each individual’s salvation rests with their choice of faith by *free will*. Lewis does protect the good news that Christ died for *ALL* mankind. However, he does some Scripture-bending to lessen God’s sovereignty and make room for man’s *free will*. That is his explanation of why some are saved from eternal Hell, while most are not.

On the other hand, Dr. James Boice, perhaps less well-known, says in *The Doctrines of Grace*, page 125,

If Jesus died for all the sins of all men, unbelief included, then all are saved, which the Bible denies. If he died for all the sins of all men, unbelief excluded, then he did not die for the sins of anybody and all

must be condemned. There is no other position, save that he died for the sins of the elect people only.

Boice, like C.S. Lewis, understood that two opposing ideas cannot both be true at the same time. However, in his case he chose to believe that Jesus did *ALL* of salvation for *PART* of mankind, and that the determining condition for each individual's salvation rests with the electing grace of God. This view likewise has problems, as in 2 Peter 2:1 -- which explains that Jesus "**bought**" those who will be sentenced to Hades and also 1 John 2:2 which explains that Jesus' death atoned for the sins of the whole world, both believer and unbeliever. Boice acknowledges these problematic passages, but like Lewis he also does some Scripture-bending to account for his understanding that most are condemned to eternal damnation. Yet Boice does uphold that God's grace alone is to be praised for the salvation of his chosen people, apart from any condition supplied by man.

So how can two respected Christian theologians have such different understandings? Are the mechanics of salvation intended to remain mysterious?

Streams of Thought

We should also review a list of the major organized movements with opinions about Christian salvation. Just as individuals have expressed their views, groups of individuals with shared beliefs have also rallied around their beliefs. The chart below is a basic categorization of the major streams of spiritual thought. The analysis is a generalization and so may not be true for particular churches.

I Marvel that so many professing Christians and even cults say the words that we are saved '*by grace through faith*' yet also have such radically different understandings of salvation. The good news for Jesus' chosen people is that God's grace has forgiven even our misunderstandings.

Streams of Spiritual Thought Charted:

1. Atheism - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atheism>
2. Agnosticism - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agnosticism>
3. Religion - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion>
 - a. Cults - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cult>
 - b. Polytheism - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polytheism>
 - c. Monotheism - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monotheism>
 - i. Unknown God - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unknown_God
 - ii. Known God
 1. God One with Universe
 - a. Panentheism - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panentheism>
 - b. Pantheism - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pantheism>
 - i. Buddhism - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism>
 - ii. Hinduism - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism>
 2. God Distinction from Universe
 - a. Impersonal force - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Absolute\(philosophy\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Absolute(philosophy))
 - b. Personal God - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personal_god
 - c. Deism, not involved - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deism>
 - d. Theism, involved - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theism>
 - i. Islam - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam>
 - ii. Judaism - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judaism>
 - iii. Jesus NOT God
 1. Unitarianism - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unitarianism>
 2. Jehovah Witness <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jehovah'sWitnesses>
 3. Mormonism - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mormonism>
 - iv. Jesus IS God - Salvation by Grace through Faith
 1. Apostolic - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostolic>
 2. Catholic - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholicism>
 3. Eastern Orthodox - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/EastOrthodox>
 4. Protestant - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protestant>
 5. Lutheran - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lutheranism>
 6. Presbyterian - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presbyterianism>
 7. Anabaptist - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anabaptists>
 8. Anglican - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglicanism>
 9. Methodist - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Methodism>
 10. Charismatic - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charismatic>
 11. Other - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_denomination

Certain Knowledge

We also need to consider the certainty of salvation. Most Christians agree that followers of Christ can have certain knowledge of their salvation. Yet how could our understanding of salvation be so radically different from one another with each claiming that they are certain? Someone is claiming to be certain, but just as certainly is confused or deceived!

The Bible confirms in I John 5:13 (WEB) that we can have certain knowledge of salvation.

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

Let's consider our four categories of salvation, each in turn, to see if they reasonably allow for this certain knowledge of eternal life.

PART for PART: REJECTED BY ALL

This view is rejected by nearly everyone calling themselves Christian, so we have not been giving it much attention. Furthermore, it seems doubly impossible that certain knowledge of salvation can be known in this quadrant. If Christ only did PART of salvation for PART of mankind, how could you be absolutely sure that you met the condition required for salvation? You would have to rely on your own evaluation of your performance, yet on judgment day only God's evaluation will matter, not yours. Then, even if you did make the grade since Christ only died for PART of mankind, perhaps you are not even in the winning subset chosen for salvation, even if you met your condition for salvation. For example, the Jehovah Witnesses used to believe that only 144,000 were saved according to Revelation Chapter 7. However, when their own adherents exceeded 144,000, they joined the rest of Christians interpreting that number as symbolic. The point is that certain knowledge of salvation is doubly impossible with this model.

PART for ALL: ARMINIANISM

Arminian Christians claim that *free will "faith"* is the condition that secures their salvation. Jesus did PART of salvation, but left the final PART to be performed by each individual person: the condition of faith. God built the house, but the *free will* act of faith is the key that unlocks the door. However, since faith is the final condition required to unlock salvation, then true security and certainty of salvation is ultimately dependent upon the so

called *free will* act of *“faith”* instead of directly and fully on finished work of Christ. Ultimately the adherents to this view must trust in their *“trust”* for certain knowledge of salvation. Rather than humbly entering Heaven saying *“Christ died for me,”* they will instead boast, *“I trusted Christ!”* They can have no true security with this foolishness because they can never be absolutely sure that their act of *“faith”* is authentic and sufficient to guarantee salvation. They will agree that some are deceived with false faith and are not saved while others have true faith and are saved. However, if salvation doctrine leaves any condition for salvation with man, then man ultimately cannot have certainty of salvation. My Calvinist friends will acknowledge this point.

ALL for PART: CALVINISM

Calvinist Christians claim to have faith fully on and directly in Christ. Their understanding of *“faith”* is radically different from the Arminian Christian. For Arminians, *“faith”* is the condition satisfied by the *free will* choice of a subset of mankind, though salvation is available to all. The question as to why some sinful people would choose faith while others do not is left unanswered by Arminians. However, for Calvinists, *“faith”* is not a condition to win God’s love, but instead an act of obedience commanded for all God’s chosen people, enabled only by the Holy Spirit. In their understanding, *“faith”* does not activate salvation, but instead is the fruit of being born again. In the case of the Calvinist, salvation is only available for the chosen subset of mankind. Only those people targeted by God’s grace will ever come to faith. Some Calvinists argue that possession of faith is proof that you are God’s chosen. But again with this understanding, faith itself becomes the object of confidence rather than Christ himself. Either way knowledge of salvation for the Calvinist requires confidence that they are part of the chosen subset. So, according to reason, they cannot have true security either. Faith must be based on facts and the critical fact we have is that Jesus Christ died on the cross for the sins of ALL mankind. Everything we objectively know according to the Bible is that the work of Christ is equally applied to every single human being that ever lived. Christ has replaced Adam as the new federal head of humanity as explained in Romans Chapter 5. Thus, faith that Christ saved only a portion of mankind is an impossibility and totally unbiblical. Adherents of this view are in fact trusting in their imagination. Again, fear of eternal damnation inspired their imagination to hope that God loves them and the minority, because they think that God hates and damns the majority. How sad! My Arminian friends will acknowledge this point.

ALL for ALL: CHRISTIAN UNIVERSALISM

So at this point in the discussion most Christians will attempt to find middle ground to stand upon between the Arminian and Calvinist views. One man said to me that he is a four and one half point Calvinist. Others will say that

they are not Calvinist, but instead “*Calvinistic*.” I have even heard the term “*Calminian*” and “*Arminisitic*” as attempts to find the middle ground. However, when I introduced my *Four Square Salvation Evaluator*, we agreed that our two questions needed to be answered absolutely with only one of two answers possible. Did Christ do *PART* or *ALL* of salvation for those who are finally saved? If even one condition is required of mankind, no matter how small, then Jesus only did *PART*. Did Christ intend his salvation for *PART* or *ALL* of mankind? The two answers to these two questions now drive us to consider the *ALL* for *ALL* quadrant in our *Salvation Evaluator*.

Only the view that Christ did ALL for ALL of mankind allows for the certainty of salvation that is promised in Scripture. Only this view allows a believing person to say to their unbelieving neighbor with great confidence, “God loves you, me, and all mankind, but the only difference between you and me is that you do not believe it and are in grave danger of punishment for dishonoring Christ, God’s only son who died for us!”

Nit Picky?

If you are new to the various viewpoints of Christian salvation you may be having a growing distaste for the minutia highlighted thus far. You might feel that these distinctions are simply the result of people with too much time or who are too eager to argue. Perhaps we would all be wiser to let God be God and let those who desire to follow Christ simply follow him. This is an excellent thought. The Psalmists also said in Psalm 131 (WEB),

- 1) *Yahweh, my heart isn’t arrogant, nor my eyes lofty; nor do I concern myself with great matters, or things too wonderful for me.***
- 2) *Surely I have stilled and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with his mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.***
- 3) *Israel, hope in Yahweh, from this time forward and forever more.***

Yet, we also need to protect the gospel from false interpretations and explain the gospel to our own generation. I would encourage you to allow your mind to be captivated by the gospel and the questions we have raised. Search the Scriptures for answers to these questions. Do this to make your own election sure and to grow in your love for God and your love for all God’s people.

The gospel is God’s message to you, me, and all mankind concerning our eternal destiny. One cannot be too picky about getting that right.

If you are not new to this discussion you might likewise be sick of the centuries of theology and debate that has not provided a simple solution. So rather than attempt to move Mount Everest to another location on the globe, you might feel that is it wiser to let the **“secret things”** rest with God. Perhaps God does not intend us to understand some of these questions at this time. Moses likewise said in Deuteronomy 29:29 (WEB), **“The secret things belong to Yahweh our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”**

It may be that the answers to the questions I raised have not been revealed. But if they were revealed, would you want to know them?

Turn with me to that question next.

A House Divided

Consider one more interjection before I defend the thesis of my book. When I became a Christian, I was so overjoyed about being restored to fellowship with God. I was also so excited to have the huge pack of guilt removed from my back. I literally skipped. However, it was not long before my joy was sobered with two painful realities. One, I was still a sinner. Two, other Christians were still sinners. I was ready for heavenly fellowship, but instead my eyes were opened to the struggle of rugged discipleship. Wizeden believers sometimes rhyme,

*To live above with the saints we love,
Ah, that is the purest glory;
To live below with the saints we know,
Ah, that is another story.*

We have hard work to do. We must confront destructive sin in the lives of our Christian brothers, for we are our brother's keeper. However, we must also **“take the log out of our own eye”** and deal with our own sin first. Our goal should be joyful, godly fellowship with all God's people. Jesus prayed for it and so we should pursue it.

Yet great divisions remain, as I have already highlighted the division between Arminian and Calvinistic thought. This division specifically highlights just how destructive sin can be -- even within Christendom. One might hope that Christians could agree on something as basic as Salvation. Yet we are reminded that we are ultimately saved by grace and not by our understanding of grace. So it continues to be extremely sad when disagreements and misunderstandings result in division.

One historic example directly related to our theme is the division between the General and Particular Baptists. I attended Baptist churches in the past and so I have some insight into this division. (However, for the record and in keeping with Jesus' prayer for unity, I am not a Baptist, but a Christian.) The division between General and Particular Baptists falls directly on the line between Arminians and Calvinists. So a study of this historic division in the body of Christ may bring understanding to our discussion.

You can read more about Baptists here http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Particular_Baptists and here http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_Baptists.

General Baptists believe that Christ's atonement is available "*generally*" to all mankind, but only those people exercising the *free will* choice of faith are finally saved. They are classic Arminians. In contrast, Particular Baptists, sometimes called Regular Baptists, believe that Christ's atonement only applies to a "*particular*" subset of mankind, referred to as "*the elect*," who are born again to faith. They are classic Calvinists. Of course this is a simple analysis of the division for there are many other points of agreement, disagreement, and variations of thought. Furthermore, there are way more than two camps of Baptists, but many splinter groups and sects historically related to these two larger categories. Baptist Christians suffer from the same disunity found in every other category of Christian fellowship.

Why highlight this division? This division is especially useful to show us how labels and interpretations subtly shift from generation to generation placing band aides over our painful outstanding questions. Historically, the General Baptists did not thrive as well in America; the Particular Baptists did better, giving birth to the denominations we know now as the General Association of Regular Baptists, Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America, Continental Baptist Churches, Sovereign Grace Baptist Association of Churches, Sovereign Grace Baptists, and others. The large well known Southern Baptist Convention remains split on the Arminian / Calvinist debate.

One interesting explanation of the Arminian / Calvinist puzzle has been hammered out in the furnace of Baptist theological debate. Many Calvinist Baptists, because of their strong emphasis on proper Biblical exegesis, have acknowledged the Scriptures I highlighted earlier (Ephesians 2:8-9 and 1 John 2:1-2). They agree that Salvation is ALL by grace. They also agree that Christ's work has atoned for ALL mankind. Yet they think that SOME people are sentenced to eternal damnation while others are saved. So how can this be?

These "*Calvinists*" have proposed that Christ's atonement itself must be understood to be divided into two components. The first level of Christ's atonement is "*general*," toward ALL mankind, but does not actually reconcile anyone fully to God. We might legitimately question what "*part*" of the

atonement does not atone -- if it does not atone, then what does it do? Continuing, the second level of Christ's atonement is "*particular*" toward an elect subset of mankind, and does reconcile them fully to God. They have concluded that this is the answer to why SOME within mankind are not saved, even though the Bible says the sins of ALL mankind are atoned. This view could possibly be called the *General + Particular* view of the atonement.

Wait a minute!

This is starting to sound like the General and Particular Baptists all over again! We are back where we started, except this time instead of a division between Christians, we have divided Christ himself! We are well reminded that Jesus said that a "***house divided cannot stand***" and neither can a divided atonement.

So we see that the Arminian / Calvinist puzzle is no simple matter to explain. Instead, it causes a dizzying array of logic, interpretations, and verbal gymnastics even from thoughtful theologians and has left the body of Christ in a Full Nelson on the wrestling mat with Satan on top.

Christ Dismembered



There is confusion and division in the body of Christ. Though Satan appears to be getting the upper hand, through grace God sees us "*in Christ*" as if all God's people have perfect understanding and unity -- even though we are far from it in any practical sense. It is like God the Son is a giant safe or vault and we are hidden safely inside, protected from God the Father's holy wrath against our sin. However, God still wants us to strive to think and behave with Christ-like unity. We are hidden safely "*in Christ*," but God the Son also intends to live

inside of us transforming us into Christ-like obedient sons of God with him.

Jesus prayed in John 17:20-23 (WEB),

20) Not for these only do I pray, but for those also who will believe in me through their word, 21) that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that you sent me. 22) The glory which you have given me, I have given to them; that they may be one, even as we are one; 23) I in them, and you in

me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know that you sent me and loved them, even as you loved me.

I pray that the hope of God's love and salvation for all mankind could serve the Body of Christ and bring understanding and unity.

A Thought



Our *Salvation Evaluator* matrix has been useful to categorize different streams of thought concerning Christian salvation. When the factors of [PART or ALL] of mankind and [PART or ALL] of salvation are considered carefully, there is no fence riding. You might possibly ride the fence between PART and ALL. You could argue that this subject is similar to the mystery of the Trinity being three in one, or Jesus being both fully human and fully divine. However, the great philosopher C.S. Lewis and the great theologian James Boice both agreed that there is no fence riding, though each from different sides of the fence.

SALVATION EVALUATOR	PART OF MANKIND	ALL OF MANKIND
PART OF SALVATION	REJECTED BY ALL	ARMINIANISM C.S. LEWIS
ALL OF SALVATION	CALVINISM JAMES BOICE	?

We have also shown that the three cases considered thus far all have a dispute with Scripture, more or less. Here are the few Scriptures we considered. 1 John 2:1-2 (WEB) explains that Jesus did die for ALL mankind. Verse 2 specifically highlights that Christ atoned for the sins of believers and unbelievers -- for the church and the whole world.

1) My little children, I write these things to you so that you may not sin. If anyone sins, we have a Counselor with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. 2) And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (WEB) explains that we are saved by grace apart from any work and that even faith itself is a gift of God.

8) for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9) not of works, that no one would boast.

I have also said that all Christians agree that the *PART for PART* combination is bad math. I have shown that the *PART for ALL* model (Arminianism) and the *ALL for PART* model (Calvinism) both dispute Scripture and reason. First, they both claim that adherents can be certain of their salvation. Yet it is impossible that two systems could be so different and yet both be true. Either one OR both of these views is in grave error. Second, since Arminian theologians claim that "*faith*" is the condition that secures their salvation, then their security is ultimately dependent upon their act of "*faith*" instead of directly and fully on Christ. They trust in their trust. Thus they have no true security. Adherents can never be absolutely sure that God agrees that their act of "*faith*" is authentic and sufficient to guarantee salvation. Third, Calvinist theologians do claim to have faith fully on and directly in Christ, but they also claim he only saves a chosen subset of mankind. Thus their security requires confidence that they are part of that chosen subset. They can have no true security either, because faith must be based on facts and the critical fact we have is that Jesus Christ died on the cross for the sins of *ALL* mankind. They are trusting in their imagination. Fear of eternal damnation inspired their imagination to hope that God loves them and the minority, because they think that God hates and damns the majority. Again, how sad!

Curiously, when Jesus was physically present on this earth his ministry challenged both the Jew and the Gentile in different ways. The Jews believed that they were God's chosen people, while also believing that the Gentiles were not chosen. Jesus angered them by loving the Gentiles. The Gentiles, however, believed that good people could touch the divine with religious acts. Jesus angered them by saying, "***I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me***" (John 14:6b WEB).

Two thousand years later, mankind continues to pass by to the left or to the right of the cross of Christ like unbelieving Jews and Gentiles from Jesus' day. But God continues to invite us all to come instead to the foot of the cross. Unfortunately, the hypocrisy typified by the Jew and the false religion typified by the Gentile still obscure our understanding of God's loving grace toward ALL mankind even today.

Hopefully, I have been fair and balanced in my analysis because I have personally served time as both an Arminian and a Calvinist. Yet now I am confident that the grace of God is a whole lot more comprehensive than either Camp Left or Right.

Join me now in considering the *ALL for ALL* combination next.

ALL for ALL

In this case consider the good news that Christ did **ALL** of salvation for **ALL** of mankind. Some believe that when Jesus died on the cross he paid for the sins of **ALL** of mankind and that he did **ALL** of the work so that any individual can simply trust that Jesus has completely forgiven us **ALL** already.



For example, suppose Mother Teresa and Hitler are both within the part of mankind that Jesus forgave. (They are because Jesus died for *ALL* mankind!) Furthermore, since Christ did *ALL for ALL*, unconditionally, Mother Teresa and Hitler are both spared from the Lake of Fire in the end by God's grace and saved to live with God and *ALL* his people in eternity. This is a most curious thought, especially with you and me there as well.

This view agrees with I John 2:1-2 (WEB) which says that Jesus did die for *ALL* mankind.

1) My little children, I write these things to you so that you may not sin. If anyone sins, we have a Counselor with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. 2) And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.

This view also agrees with Ephesians 2:8-9 (WEB) which explains that we are saved by grace apart from any good work.

8) for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9) not of works, that no one would boast.

Christian Universalism fits into this case. Yet, because the Bible is clear about the punishment of unbelievers after death in Hell, most Christians also reject this view. However, for a fair assessment of each quadrant let's take a closer look at the Scriptures.

Romans 11:32-36

Consider a thorough exegesis of Romans 11:32-36 (WEB).

32) For God has bound all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all.

33) Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! 34) 'For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?' 35) 'Or who has first given to him, and it will be repaid to him again?' 36) For of him, and through him, and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever! Amen.

We ought to give our most serious attention and interpretive skill to these verses. I believe this paragraph of Scripture is the grand conclusion of grace theology for three reasons. First, the paragraph is squarely at the end of Apostle Paul's treatise on grace and Christian salvation, a logical place for a grand conclusion to be. These words are not a mere point or transition, but the summation of Paul's entire explanation of grace from Romans 1 through 11. Second, Romans 11:32 is followed immediately by an equally grand doxology of worship (that is Romans 11:33-36) and five concluding chapters which focus on instructions about our response to this grand conclusion, that is Romans 12-16. Third, I have already suggested that Romans 11:32 answers the three biggest questions that mankind has ever had or will ever have before God our creator. Any concluding word about grace and Christian salvation ought to answer our biggest questions. This grand conclusion does not disappoint. Again these questions are:

1) How did sin enter the world? 2) What is God's purpose in sin and salvation? 3) Who is finally saved from God's wrath against sin? Let's dissect this verse for the answers to these three questions.

For God

God is the subject of the grand conclusion of grace theology. He is the subject of the sentence, the person in focus, the actor on the stage of everything. “*For God!*” It is certainly fitting that God would take the place as subject of the grand conclusion of redemption.

has bound

How has God acted? The main verb is “to bind.” So “God has *bound?*” This is curious, and in fact a bit dark and unexpected. Freedom is what we seek, honor, and exalt. Yet, “*God has bound.*”

all

Who has he bound? “*God has bound all.*” We are the direct object, that is *ALL* mankind, even *ALL* creation. But how can there be rejoicing in this dark thought? We might instead prefer to read that God has bound darkness, or bound Satan, or bound all evil. But we read that “*God has bound all.*” We are the object of his binding. What could this mean? And does “*all*” mean *ALL*? Is it only representatives from all categories of men as Mark Galli suggests in his book *God Wins*, or all men generally, or every single human that lived for all time? Perhaps we misunderstand. Perhaps we are *ALL* bound to his goodness or bound to forgiveness.

to disobedience

Darkest of dark. “*God has bound all to disobedience!*” Who is this God? Certainly this must be a mistranslation! Certainly this must be an error from an evil scribe from millennia past! Yet, this is an adverbial clause modifying the verb, “*has bound,*” by answering the question, “*has bound to what?*” But in light of the answer... who cares about grammar? Why would God do that, and how could he possibly be good to do that? Yet if we are reading and understanding correctly, then we now have the answer to our first question.

1) How did sin enter the world? All men are bound to sin by the will of God.

The Biblical answer to the origin of sin is radically different than the answer suggested by C.S. Lewis. As already discussed, Lewis believed that *free will*

was required for a true expression of love. Lewis also believed that giving man *free will* then allowed for mankind's choice of evil. Though Lewis was a most excellent philosopher, he is in grave error on both of these points. God's true loving grace is instead all the greater because he saves us, not out of our *freedom*, but out of our bondage to sin. Lewis' suggestion that *free will* allows for the choice of evil is simply mistaken logic. Actually God himself is the only being that ever lived with a perfectly free will, yet there is no possibility of his choosing evil. A will that is free is truly free! I write further about *free will* in my article, [A Quintessential Defense of FREE WILL](#).

Furthermore, we now also see that "*all*" means every single human that has lived for all time, for Paul is simply restating Romans 3:23. If "*all*" means *ALL* in Romans 3:23, as all Christian theologians agree, then it certainly must mean *ALL* here. Though one might object saying that "*all*" simply means representatives from all categories of men, that is Jews and Gentiles, but not necessarily every individual. At least it would be consistent to say that Romans 3:23 and Romans 11:32 both mean every category of men, but not every individual. We should be consistent because the context for both verses regarding Paul's points about Jew and Gentile being alike under sin are the same. However, Romans 3:23 is easily understood to mean every individual person, just as Romans 11:32 should be understood to mean every individual person, whether Jew or Gentile. If we say "*all*" does not mean each individual, but only each category, are we then saying that there are some people who do not sin? Are some people not bound to disobedience by God? Hardly. The point is that *ALL* who sin, and *ALL* sin, do so because God has ordained it. Plus we now see that Galli is wrong to suggest that "*all*" merely means "*all categories of men*." "*All*" can only mean *ALL* mankind in Romans 11:32 -- that is every single individual Jew and Gentile, even all creation.

Paul did warn us in Romans 8:20 that there is an actor on the stage that subjected creation to frustration. Paul is now telling us plainly in his grand conclusion that it is God himself who has subjected creation to frustration. God is the reason that each individual human that has ever lived for all time is a sinner. This truth can also be confirmed in Isaiah 30:28. So God has bound *ALL* men to disobedience.

Why Lord? How can this be?

that

Thankfully we see the beginning of another adverbial clause to answer the question as to why "*God has bound*." Thankfully God is willing to disclose the reason for binding us all to disobedience. The thought of God's decree

being the reason that we stumble, fall, and disobey seems utterly dark. It is as if we were wickedly fooled and our only hope turned out to be trying to destroy us in the end. If God himself were proved to be evil, what hope could possibly exist? Yet now a light shines through the darkness. God offers an explanation.

But one very important question comes to mind first. The English phrase “*that*” could be heading towards “*allow*” or “*oblige*.” One offers possibility while the other states certainty. The possibility of hope is better than nothing, but certainty is better than everything. So for this phrase, let’s dive into the Greek for more clarity.

The Greek word translated “*that*” is “*iva*.” On page 378 of *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* by Walter Bauer, “*iva*” is defined as “*a result which follows according to the purpose of.*” To further help us, “*iva*” is used several other times in the book of Romans.

Now we know that whatever things the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, that [iva] every mouth may be closed, and all the world may be brought under the judgment of God.

Romans 3:19 (WEB)

and if children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with him, that [iva] we may also be glorified with him.

Romans 8:17 (WEB)

The dictionary definition and the prior context in Romans indicate that “*that*” means “*for the purpose of a certain result.*” Just as the law certainly holds every individual accountable to God, so God’s purpose and result in Romans 11:32 is certain. Just as future glory is certain for God’s children that endure suffering, so God’s purpose and result in Romans 11:32 is certain.

So let’s read his certain purpose.

he might have mercy on

Now that sounds better, much much better. God’s purpose was not to do evil, but ultimately to show mercy. In a nutshell, God could not demonstrate forgiveness if he had nothing to forgive. Now one might still reject such a

god saying that binding us to sin for the purpose of forgiving our sin still seems cruel. Suppose a father chained his son to a boulder and when neighbors asked why, he said so that he could set him free one day. Such a father would be imprisoned. God, however, will not be imprisoned, but instead worshiped by all.

C.S. Lewis also rejected this scripture in *Mere Christianity* when he wrote, “*God created things which had free will. That means creatures which can go either wrong or right.*” The truth about God’s sovereignty over all creation, even evil, was difficult for Lewis to accept, as it is for all of us.

We had concluded above that the phrase “*that*” means “*for the purpose of a certain result.*” However, we now have the word “*might*” to consider. That sounds like “*possibility*” again. Let’s dive back into the Greek. The phrase “*he might have mercy on*” is from the Greek word transliterated “*eleese.*” This special verb means “*to have mercy on.*” This specific verb and its conjugation is used only one time in the whole Bible! The verb tense in the Greek is in the *3rd person aorist active subjunctive singular tense*. The *3rd person singular* indicates that Paul is writing about a single third person, namely God, the actor on the stage of mercy. The *active* tense indicates that the action is not passive but active. God is actively demonstrating mercy. He is not a passive forgiver! The *aorist* tense, sometimes called the “*fairest*” tense was used by the Greeks to denote a general reference to past action. In this case the *aorist* tense refers to the work of our “*Fairest*” Lord Jesus who brought mercy to *ALL* mankind. Christ’s work on the cross forgiving *ALL* mankind’s sin is a finished and completed work. The payment has been made and received by the Father. Finally, the *subjunctive* mood typically indicates action that is... possible or potential, but not certain.

Whoa! Stop the train!

At first glance, this thought seems to mean that God has made mercy possible, but it is only definite for those adding the missing *PART* of faith. Or maybe mercy is definite only for the *PART* of mankind that is chosen for forgiveness. That is the most common interpretation and fits well with either Arminian or Calvinistic theology.

So is my entire thesis unraveled?

According to www.ntgreek.org,

If the subjunctive mood is used in a ‘purpose’ (or in a ‘result’) clause, then the action should NOT be thought of as a POSSIBLE result, but should be viewed as the stated outcome that WILL HAPPEN (or HAS HAPPENED) as a result of another stated action. The use of the subjunctive is not to indicate that something ‘may’ or ‘might’

result from a given action, but it is stating the 'purpose of' or 'reason for' an action. The subjunctive mood in a purpose clause actually functions more like a verb in the indicative mood rather than in the optative mood. It is not stating the possibility or probability of an action, but instead telling the intention of the primary action.

Whew! That is good news... if you are among those bound to disobedience. Romans 11:32 is not speaking about 'possible' mercy, but instead... certain and guaranteed mercy!!!

Yet we still may ask how can God get away with locking mankind in bondage to sin even if his goal is to set us free? Well he is God, so he will do what he pleases. He does not answer to us, but instead we answer to him. And how would we stop him anyway? In fact, Romans 11:32 is not telling us what he plans to do, but what he has already done. Further, God's wisdom in such matters is quite beyond our comprehension. Paul's response is simply to break out in worship with the concluding doxology. ***"How unsearchable are his judgments!"***

Paul also explained earlier in Romans that God's grace is such that his mercy does not merely release us from our bonds, but overwhelms and floods our lives with his goodness. His mercy will finally and totally erase all the pain of our past bondage. We may have many complaints about our trials and bondage now, but we are well advised to hold our tongue. Shortly we will have no complaints, but instead reason for over the top rejoicing and praise for our savior.

Romans 5:16-18 (WEB), says,

16) The gift is not as through one who sinned; for the judgment came by one to condemnation, but the free gift came of many trespasses to justification. 17) For if by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one; so much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ. 18) So then as through one trespass, all men were condemned; even so through one act of righteousness, all men were justified to life.

Furthermore, the earlier picture of a father who chains his son to a boulder and then unchains him later does not capture the wonder of what God is actually doing. God does not simply reach down from Heaven with a key to unlock our bonds to set us free. Instead, his very holy and powerful presence intimately indwells undeserving sinners and empowers us to break the bonds. God shares his supernatural power with us to break the bonds that he ordained. He shares his power with us as the Holy Spirit regenerates individual people, one by one, leading us to faith and victory over sin, sooner

or later, whether today or even in the depths of Hades. The bonds he created are too strong for us, but God designed these bonds to be smashed only through the demonstration of Christ's power at work in and through us! I'll take some more of that power!!!

That is the meaning of Romans 8:37 (WEB), ***“No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”***

That is the meaning of 2 Corinthians 4:6-10 (WEB).

6) seeing it is God who said, “Light will shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 7) But we have this treasure in clay vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves. 8) We are pressed on every side, yet not crushed; perplexed, yet not to despair; 9) pursued, yet not forsaken; struck down, yet not destroyed; 10) always carrying in the body the putting to death of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

That is the meaning of Isaiah 54:16-17 (WEB).

16) ‘Behold, I have created the blacksmith who fans the coals into flame, and forges a weapon for his work; and I have created the destroyer to destroy. 17) No weapon that is formed against you will prevail; and you will condemn every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of Yahweh’s servants, and their righteousness is of me,’ says Yahweh.

People get ready! Let Jesus flex some supernatural power in your life! Live through Jesus Christ!

Ephesians 2:7 (WEB), an often overlooked but favorite verse of mine, also agrees that God acted with good purpose, ***“that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”***

Now we have the answer to our second question.

2) What is God’s purpose in sin and salvation? God decreed our bondage to sin in order to provide opportunity to forgive sin and demonstrate his power at work in us to conquer sin. God is showing off his grace and we happen to be the beneficiaries! He is flexing his

grace muscles. He is modeling his beautiful grace on the world's runway by indwelling sinners.

Awesome! So who are the beneficiaries again?

all.

ALL? *ALL* who? Wait a minute! *ALL* mankind? The parallel construct of this verse demands that this second use of the word “*all*” is equal to the first use of the word “*all*.” That is, it refers to every individual human being that ever lived for all time. That is right. Just as God has bound *ALL* humanity to sinful disobedience, so he has chosen *ALL* mankind for mercy, even *ALL* creation. Though *ALL* mankind is not presently indwelt by the Holy Spirit, *ALL* mankind has already been forgiven at the cross, and one by one, sooner or later, *ALL* mankind will reap the benefits of Christ's mercy. Sounds like the certain guaranteed universal salvation of *ALL* mankind to me.

Praise God for his love for us and our neighbors!

3) Who is finally saved from God's wrath against sin? *ALL* mankind. Looks like our favorite ‘Romans Road’ collection of verses from the book of Romans has a few potholes in it!

The Biblical answer to the scope of salvation is also radically different than the answer suggested by Dr. James Boice. As already discussed, Boice believed that since some men are sentenced to eternal damnation, it is an obvious conclusion that their sins are not atoned. Thus God's grace is really only extended to a subset of humanity. Yet Romans 11:32 could not be more clear, that just as *ALL* are locked in bondage to sin, so *ALL* are granted mercy. Dr. Boice is likewise a most excellent theologian, but in the effort to tie a neat bow on his theological system he has also made a grave error. Read on to discover my explanation of this conundrum.

Of course right now the Arminian Christians may be reading back through my explanation to argue that the usage of “*might*” must mean possibility and not certainty. They may reason that salvation is only possible because each individual must exercise their *free will* to meet the condition of “*faith*” in order to be finally saved. Impossible! Faith is not the condition to God's unconditional love. Instead, Faith is trusting in God's unconditional love. The Calvinist Christians may immediately see the error in Arminian thinking, for salvation by grace is unconditional or else it would be of works. Calvinists may argue that “*all*” must mean every category and not every individual. Again impossible! The only basis for individual personal confidence in God's love is through confidence in his universal love for *ALL* mankind.

Yet both the Arminian and the Calvinist argue that since the Bible teaches that people go to eternal damnation, then it is impossible that *ALL* would be finally saved. That is an excellent point to continue our discussion. So let's turn to re-examine the question of the destinies of mankind in light of additional Scriptures.

Luke 16:19-31

Consider the words of Luke 16:19-31 (WEB),

19) Now there was a certain rich man, and he was clothed in purple and fine linen, living in luxury every day. 20) A certain beggar, named Lazarus, was taken to his gate, full of sores, 21) and desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Yes, even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22) The beggar died, and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died, and was buried. 23) In Hades, he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far off, and Lazarus at his bosom. 24) 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 in anguish in this flame.'

25) But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that you, in your lifetime, received your good things, and Lazarus, in the same way, bad things. But here he is now comforted, and you are in anguish. 26) Besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, that those who want to pass from here to you are not able, and that no one may cross over from there to us.'

27) He said, 'I ask you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house; 28) for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, so they won't also come into this place of torment.'

29) But Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.'

30) He said, 'No, father Abraham, but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'

31) He said to him, 'If they don't listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if one rises from the dead.'

So we see it is certain that the wicked will be sentenced to Hades. So at least the Scriptures are clear that not all are saved from Hades. So are we back to where we started?

Some would attempt to bypass the meaning of this story. One strategy is to explain that the story is simply a parable, a fictional story told to communicate a general truth. However, the account does not have the features of a parable. None of Jesus' parables mention specific individuals by name such as this story does. This story mentions Abraham by name. Also if this were a parable, what would be the general truth taught? The main point of this story is that if the wicked do not repent, they will be sentenced to Hades after they die. The Holy Spirit is not using a parable to teach us about the certainty of Hades. Instead he gives us a real life and afterlife account.

A second strategy often used to dispel the fear of Hell is to teach that Hell is simply the trials and natural consequence of a life lived apart from God both here and in the afterlife. Unbelievers may say with all seriousness that a particular trial was "*Hell*." One might find consolation thinking that they are surviving now without God just fine and so perhaps Hell in the afterlife will also be fine. However, the trials of this life are nothing compared to the judgments of Hell. The Rich man was in anguish! Furthermore, the rich man *died* and was *buried*. This account is not about God's punishments in this life. In fact the account above is given to teach exactly the opposite point about the life and afterlife of the unbelieving. The wicked man had many comforts in his lifetime upon the earth, but after life he was judged and sentenced to Hell for his sin and unbelief where every comfort was stripped away. He begged to come back to warn us!

Hell is not a parable or the natural consequence of sin, but the active punishment of God upon the wicked dead.

One point that should be noted is that the WEB Bible translation properly identifies the Rich man's place of punishment as "*Hades*" though most English translations use the more ill-defined English word "*Hell*."

Revelation 20:11-15

Consider also Revelation 20:11-15 (WEB),

11) I saw a great white throne, and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. There was found no place for them. 12) I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and they opened books. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead

were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. 13) The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works. 14) Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15) If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.

This passage of Scripture, little known and even less taught, helps us understand several important points. First *Hell* or *Hades* is not the same place as the *Lake of Fire*. This is a fact never pointed out to me in a lifetime of Sunday school. Hades appears to be a temporary place of punishment for the wicked. In this passage we see that Hades is emptied of all people and then Hades is thrown into the Lake of Fire empty of all living beings. I've touched base on this subject previously in my article, [Revelation 20:11-15, Optimism Out of Control, Part 5: Hades Gives Up!](#)

The Great White Throne Judgment is instead the final judgment for all of God's creation. It is the final sentence for the redeemed and unredeemed. We certainly have no escape from God's sovereign will now. Nor will there be any escape when all of creation is laid bare before him. Man's supposed *free will* accounts for nothing, but only the free will of Holy God. All creation will stand before the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Jesus will sit on The White Throne arrayed in the brilliance of his glory. Sin and imperfection will not stand in his presence. Only those who are hidden safely in Christ will stand. Every darkness, evil, and any unredeemed will be blasted from his presence with the force of his holy omnipotence. There is no redemption for any sinner outside of the protection of Christ.

The passage above is clear and undisputed. Even if someone endured millennia in Hades for their wickedness and escapes at this point to stand before the Lord of Glory, *IF* their name is not found written in the Book of Life, they will be thrown into the Lake of Fire. There is absolutely no escape from judgment to the Lake of Fire for the unredeemed. There is absolutely no hope for the unredeemed. The Lake of Fire is their destiny.

So we return again to the definition of Christian faith. I have introduced various views of Christian salvation, many of which are in direct opposition to each other. Arminian Christians, following C.S. Lewis, hope to write their own name into the Book of Life with their *free will* act of faith. Yet I have proven that it is not possible to write your own name in the Lamb's Book. "*Faith*" is not a "*pen*" with which to write your name into Jesus' book. Instead faith is the "*glasses*" with which to see your name there from the foundation of the earth. Calvinists claim to wear the "*glasses*" and see their name in the Lamb's Book. Yet somehow they are confident that their

names are written in the Lamb's Book, but equally confident that most are not. Are we still no further in understanding?

Now, consider a very important lesson in logic: the Holy Spirit's use of the word "IF."

If a statement is true, the contra positive is always logically true. But only when the converse is true will the inverse also logically be true. For example:

Statement: *if A then B ~ given as true.*

Contra positive: *if not B then not A ~ logically always true.*

Converse: *if B then A ~ possibly true, but not always.*

Inverse: *if not A then not B ~ true only if converse is true.*

Negation: *if not A then B ~ true if the original statement false, a test.*

Note also in logic that an even number of nots such as "not not A" is the same as A, while an odd number of nots such as "not not not A" is the same as not A. Let's apply this logic to Revelation 20:15.

Statement: ***If anyone was not found written in the Book of Life, he was cast into the Lake of Fire.*** ~ given as true in Revelation 20:15.

Contra positive: ***If anyone was not cast into the Lake of Fire he was found written in the Book of Life*** ~ logically always true.

Converse: ***If anyone was cast into the Lake of Fire he was not found written in the Book of Life*** ~ obviously true in this case.

Inverse: ***If anyone was found written in the Book of Life, he was not cast into the Lake of Fire*** ~ logically true since the converse is true.

Negation: ***There was one found written in the Book of Life, who was cast into the Lake of Fire*** ~ false since God's word is trustworthy so the original statement is tested true.

Hopefully this is not too tedious a return to high school logic. However, our effort has proven the beautiful conclusion that the inverse of Revelation 20:15 is also true.

If anyone was found written in the Book of Life, he was not cast into the Lake of Fire.

I've written more about this concept in my articles [Revelation 20:11-15, Optimism Out of Control, Part 6: If, If, If, If, If, If, If,,](#) and [Revelation 20:13-15, Out of Control Optimism Part 8, Your Name in the Book of Life!](#)

Typically when I propose this concept most people object with the question, "You are not suggesting a second chance are you?" Larry Dixon also expressed a valid concern that Rob Bell was proposing some sort of "second chance" salvation. So let me make one thing perfectly clear: I am definitely not proposing "second chance" salvation. Rob Bell is guilty as charged and I have the exact same concern about his theology. Because he believes that mankind has the *free will* to choose their destiny, he correspondingly believes that each individual's salvation is hanging in the balance, and subject to "chance" and even the possibility of "second chances."

However, the gospel of grace makes it perfectly clear that "chance" has no part in Christian salvation. There is no such thing as a "second chance." In fact there is also no such thing as a "first chance!" Curiously, it would seem that Dixon's very objection to a second chance exposes that he believes salvation has a first chance. Yet if Dixon or any other believes that salvation is by "chance" at all then they have a complete misunderstanding of grace. Salvation by the grace of Christ leaves absolutely nothing to chance. God's determined love is set upon all his chosen people with certainty. That is what makes the good news great news. The final salvation of elect mankind is certain and guaranteed, not because of man's will, but because God has willed it! If salvation included an element of chance, then surely your sin nature and mine would find even the smallest crack to bounce through God's safety net into perdition.

But take heart: there is no falling from the hand of our Heavenly Father as he promised in John 10:28 (WEB), "***I give eternal life to them. They will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.***"

If the grace of God cannot fail in saving his lost sheep in this life, then the grace of God will not fail to save any remaining lost sheep at The Great White Throne Judgment, even those punished severely in Hades for their rebellion. Surely someone saved by grace ought to be thankful for that!

Matthew 25:31-46

Consider Matthew 25:31-46 (WEB),

- 31) But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.
32) Before him all the nations will be gathered, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the***

sheep from the goats. 33) He will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. 34) Then the King will tell those on his right hand, 'Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35) for I was hungry, and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you took me in. 36) I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you visited me. I was in prison, and you came to me.'

37) Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you; or thirsty, and give you a drink? 38) When did we see you as a stranger, and take you in; or naked, and clothe you? 39) When did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?' 40) The King will answer them, 'Most certainly I tell you, because you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

41) Then he will say also to those on the left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels; 42) for I was hungry, and you didn't give me food to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink; 43) I was a stranger, and you didn't take me in; naked, and you didn't clothe me; sick, and in prison, and you didn't visit me.'

44) Then they will also answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and didn't help you?'

45) Then he will answer them, saying, 'Most certainly I tell you, because you didn't do it to one of the least of these, you didn't do it to me.' 46) These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

Theologians debate the timing of Jesus return, whether before or after the Millennium described in Revelation 20:1-6. The timing of his various judgments is also disputed. This subject is relevant to our discussion because it would be helpful to know if the judgment described above is a judgment that sends unbelievers to Hell (that is Hades) before Revelation 20:1-6. Or, is it a judgment that sends the unredeemed to the Lake of Fire after Revelation 20:1-6? We have already explained that Hades and the Lake of Fire are not the same place. Luke 16:19-31 teaches us that unbelieving humans are currently being punished in Hades for their rebellion. So then we should ask: is the judgment described above the sentencing of unbelievers to Hades, the sentencing of the unredeemed to the Lake of Fire, or something else?

One clue is underlined in verse 41 above. Based on the underlined words, I conclude that the Sheep and Goat Judgment is the same event as the Great White Throne judgment also described in Revelation 20:11-15. This passage adds more detail and explains that the Lake of Fire is prepared for... the devil and his angels.

Again this is good news for mankind. Sadly we all have been partners with Satan and his angels in some way or another. We sin because we love our sin. We deserve Satan's destiny in the Lake of Fire. However, God has demonstrated his grace, his undeserved favor toward mankind, by forgiving all mankind at the cross and giving us Heaven for eternity. However, the devil and his angels are sentenced to the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages*. Satan and the demons are the goats on Jesus' left, not mankind! Each of us deserve the destiny of Satan, yet by God's grace alone we are given grace and glory instead. I discuss this further in my article, [Your Theory about the Goats... Is it Really Possible? Matthew 25:31-46.](#)

Revelation 20:10

Revelation is difficult to understand, but we must consider Revelation 20:10 (WEB),

The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet are also. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Only three people are explicitly named in Scripture as destined to the Lake of Fire. They are Satan, The Beast, and The False Prophet.

So how do we determine the nature of the members of this Unholy Trinity: The Devil (Satan / Dragon), The Beast (First / Sea Beast), and The False Prophet (Second / Land Beast)? Are they human beings, demonic beings, or non-being forces?

Everyone agrees that Satan is a demon, a fallen angel. Well, not everyone agrees. Mormons are confused about that, suggesting that Satan is actually Jesus' brother. A few others have defined Satan as the epitome of evil, but that he is in fact not a being, not a person. However, I easily side with the majority, that Satan is a being, a non-human spirit person with mind, will, and emotion. He is the Chief fallen angel actively leading his rebellion against God.

However, what about The Beast and The False Prophet? Revelation 13 introduces both a First Beast from the sea and Second Beast from the land. A comparison of Revelation 13:14 and 19:20 shows that the Second

Beast is later referred to as The False Prophet in Revelation 16:13, 19:20, and 20:10. Thus the Second Beast and The False Prophet are the same person.

Revelation 16:13-14 also shows us that the mouths of The Dragon (Satan), The Beast, and The False Prophet are each the *source* of demonic spirits. This is initial evidence that these three beings share a common nature. This is one argument that they are not human beings, but instead demonic beings. Humans do not beget demons, but Satan, The Beast, and The False Prophet are the source of demonic activity. They are the demon chiefs!

13) I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits, something like frogs; 14) for they are spirits of demons, performing signs; which go out to the kings of the whole inhabited earth, to gather them together for the war of that great day of God, the Almighty.

Revelation 16:13-14 (WEB)

Secondly, we already know that Jesus became a human being to pay for the sins of all mankind and thus I have reasoned that all mankind is spared the Lake of Fire. Jesus did not become an angel and so apparently the sins of fallen angels are not atoned and they will suffer the Lake of Fire. Thus, those sentenced to the Lake of Fire are demons, fallen angels, and not human beings. Otherwise, if they were human, their sins would be paid for and they would not be sentenced to the Lake of Fire. Matthew 25:41, previously mentioned, also clearly states that the Lake of Fire is ***“prepared for the Devil and his angels.”*** Jude 6 and 2 Peter 2:4 also make it clear that fallen angels will be present at the final judgment, hence the goats on Jesus’ left.

Further study could be done to confirm the identity of The First Beast as demonic. Some are certain that The Beast of Revelation is the Roman Empire, Nero, the Pope, or someone else altogether. The image of a beast arising from the sea first appears in Scripture at Isaiah 27:1. Leviathan is also mentioned earlier in the book of Job, but that reference may simply be from the animal kingdom. However, Isaiah’s reference surely points to a larger Spiritual oppressor, perhaps the very same being mentioned in Revelation 13:1. Now, I am not suggesting that demons actually abode in the sea, but this Biblical metaphor illustrates an invisible, but very real, demonic landscape. The tumultuous sea is used to picture the caustic habitat of demons.

In that day, Yahweh with his hard and great and strong sword will punish leviathan, the fleeing serpent, and leviathan the twisted serpent; and he will kill the dragon that is in the sea.

Isaiah 27:1 (WEB)

Now, consider an important concept. The Revelation drama reveals illustrations of real people and interaction between the seen and unseen worlds. I have also shown from Revelation 16:13-14, above, that demons are assigned various tasks in their great war against God and mankind. The “**frog**” demons were sent to rally the kings of earth for war on the yet future Great Day of God. Thus I propose that The First Beast is an actual demon chief alongside of Satan whose evil mission gave rise to the wicked Roman Empire. His evil mission was accomplished through the wicked Roman Empire. Thus he is portrayed with ten horns and seven heads illustrative of the Roman Emperors as explained in Revelation 13 and 17. Yet because The Beast stands alongside Satan and is literally cast into the Lake of Fire with Satan, we know that he is also a demonic being.

Likewise for an early mention of a false demonic prophet we read,

20) A spirit came out, stood before Yahweh, and said, “I will entice him.” Yahweh said to him, “How?” 21) He said, “I will go, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.” He said, “You will entice him, and will prevail also. Go and do so.” 22) Now therefore, behold, Yahweh has put a lying spirit in the mouth of these your prophets; and Yahweh has spoken evil concerning you.

2 Chronicles 18:20-22 (WEB)

Perhaps, this deceiving spirit mentioned in the Old Testament, or another like him, is the demon called “*The False Prophet*” in Revelation 20. Yet identifying the Second Beast with the demonic seems more problematic, at least initially. The First Beast does not seem particularly human, but instead governmental, and so perhaps my proposal that a particular demon empowered Rome does not seem unreasonable. However, the Second Beast instead seems to be more personal and human. In fact, since the Second Beast gets his power from the First Beast he then seems like a human tyrant controlled by a demon, that is by the First Beast. Common candidates for the Second Beast include Nero, Domitian, the Roman Concilia to enforce state worship, the Pope, and numerous others throughout history.

However, just like my proposal that the First Beast was a powerful demon whose work was manifest in the birth and growth of the Roman Empire, so I propose that the Second Beast was a powerful demon whose work was

manifest in the wickedness of a Roman Emperor, perhaps Nero or Domitian. Countless hours of effort have been spent in the effort to determine the identity of the Second Beast, The False Prophet, with the mysterious number of “**666**” given in Revelation 13:18 (WEB).

Here is wisdom. He who has understanding, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. His number is six hundred sixty-six.

The expression “**number of a man**” seems to indicate that “**666**” is the identity of a specific human being. Some efforts at gematria identify Nero as the Second Beast, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Number of the Beast](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Number_of_the_Beast). While this could easily be the case I also propose that Nero, or whoever the actual Second Beast proves to be, was specifically empowered by a demon. Thus the Second Beast demon is finally damned to the Lake of Fire, not the human being he possessed. Though one might question my concern to “save Nero,” I am convinced he is saved by the same blood of Christ that saved you and me. The expression above may also be better rendered “**human numbering**,” meaning according to human calculation. Consider that the mysterious number “**666**” is referenced at the end of a chapter discussing Satan, The Beast, and the False Prophet. Certainly this triple “6” number must point to the terrible nature of demonic power that falls short of God’s perfection in the Holy Trinity. Since “7” is a picture of God’s perfection and completeness, the number “**666**” may point to the climax of evil in the Unholy Trinity. What worse scenario can you image than Satan working through a demonic government working through a demonic tyrant?

Revelation 20:10 then finally confirms that the demonic beings of Satan, The Beast, and The False Prophet are damned to the Lake of Fire for The Ages of The Ages. God is not pronouncing doom to mere movements or governments. How does one throw a movement into the Lake of Fire? How does one torment a government for The Ages of The Ages? Instead the only things ever mentioned as thrown into Hades or the Lake of Fire are people and places. Further, it would seem curious for the Holy Spirit to explicitly highlight the damnation of Satan with one government and one government leader. So, for my last point, the common destiny of the Unholy Trinity is likewise strong evidence for the common nature of these three beings. This is especially so since Matthew 25:41 explicitly says that the Lake of Fire is “**prepared for the Devil and his angels.**”

Read more about my understanding of Revelation in my articles in the [Appendix, Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News!](#) and [Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News! \(Part 2 with Grudem, Riddlebarger, Chilton, Summers, and Ewing\).](#)

Finally consider an extra-Biblical comparison. Just as there are three demon leaders (Satan, the Beast, and the False Prophet), so God himself is three persons (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit). The Bible does not highlight this parallel explicitly, but I mention it for you to ponder. You or I might be tempted to think that the salvation and fate of mankind is uncertain and in question. Too often my (and perhaps your) ministry efforts and actions reflect this uncertainty. However, take a moment and fully rest in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Actually, you are advised to rest in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ now and forever! Our eternal destiny rests fully in his hands. Our salvation is not uncertain! Through his grace he does not consider us his enemies, but his chosen family -- redeemed for all eternity.

However, if we are not born again, our birth nature opposes God because our hearts are bad. We crucified Christ, but Christ loves and forgives us. Fallen angels also hate God, but God has promised to crush the head of Satan. Satan is the true enemy of God in this cosmic spiritual war.

Thus for the demonstration of his grace, God created angels and decreed that some would fall into rebellion and become his enemies destined for the Lake of Fire. Why? Perhaps to help us better understand grace, God decreed a dark frame to contrast his glorious mercy. Apparently grace could not be fully praised and appreciated any other way. The parallels between God's good nature and the evil nature of demons are noteworthy. Consider a comparison of the Holy Trinity with the Unholy Trinity.

Role	Holy Trinity (God is good)	Unholy Trinity (Anti-God is evil)
The Head	The Father	The Devil
The Image	The Son	The Beast
The Voice	The Holy Spirit	The False Prophet

Friends, the salvation of mankind is not uncertain, nor is our salvation in question. But sparks will fly until God throws his enemies (that is, Satan and the fallen angels that follow him) into the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages*.

1 Corinthians 1:17-25

Consider 1 Corinthians 1:17-25 (WEB),

17) For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Good News—not in wisdom of words, so that the cross of Christ wouldn't be made void. 18) For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are dying, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19) For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise. I will bring the discernment of the discerning to nothing." 20) Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the lawyer of this world? Hasn't God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21) For seeing that in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom didn't know God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save those who believe. 22) For Jews ask for signs, Greeks seek after wisdom, 23) but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews, and foolishness to Greeks, 24) but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God; 25) because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

The Bible says that God is so wise that his "foolishness" is wiser than our "wisdom" and that his "weakness" is stronger than our "strength." Since this is in the Bible, Christians would all agree with the words above.

Now suppose God used his foolishness and weakness to expose our foolishness and weakness to remind us of our utter dependency upon him for salvation, and that we are saved by grace and not saved even by our understanding or our choices.

How does this relate to our current discussion? No doubt there are many that are beginning to dispute the propositions of this short book. I do not fault your reaction. It certainly is a radically different approach than the more commonly accepted views of Arminianism and Calvinism. Yet, my proposition does not fit neatly into common Universalism, either. Many Universalists wrongly teach that there is no punishment after death for the unbeliever or that unbelievers are punished temporarily in the Lake of Fire. However, I understand that unbelievers are punished after death in Hades, but that no human being will ever enter the Lake of Fire. Based on the preceding reasoning from Scripture, I believe that ALL mankind, every individual descendant of Adam and Eve, is deeply loved by God and will certainly be saved from the Lake of Fire by the electing grace of God alone.

You may ask why God did not make it clearer. Why are not more aware of this good news? God has made his love for ALL mankind quite clear, but his message is obscured by our hypocrisy and turning Christ into yet another religion. Perhaps the wisdom of God knows best how to lead us sinners from our darkness and dread fear into the glorious light of his salvation. Perhaps

he does not want to cast these pearls before those whose hearts are not ready. Perhaps since he has already made eternal salvation from condemnation for all his chosen people a certainty, his focus is now transformational salvation from sin and our hatred of our God. He has won the decision in the courtroom of Heaven, but now intends to win the decision in each of our hearts. Perhaps we cannot know why God did not make it clearer.

You may also ask why God did not just settle all this earlier in history. That is an excellent question as we consider how God has given us additional pieces of revelation throughout history. Adam and Eve did not even have a Bible, but only the verbal promise that someone was coming, a deliverer. Prophets came and brought the Word of the Lord, the Old Testament, but they were not the deliverer. One day John the Baptist came and announced that someone was here, the deliverer had arrived -- Jesus Christ. His disciples gave us the New Testament. God's word concludes with the words that someone is coming again. The Lord Jesus Christ will return in power and great might for the final salvation of all his people. Until then, we seek to understand his holy Word and obey him as we wait for his return.

Hopefully I have gently exposed the religiosity and hypocrisy that can be found in both Arminianism and Calvinism. The exposure of sin is essential for healing. Doctors cannot heal without a diagnosis, and Christ cannot remove our sin without grabbing the root and pulling it out. That is painful. Yet sin must be pulled out if we are to continue to grow in Christ-likeness and to live for him and others, fully confident in his grace for all.

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

Consider 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 (WEB),

14) For the love of Christ constrains us; because we judge thus, that one died for all, therefore all died. 15) He died for all, that those who live should no longer live to themselves, but to him who for their sakes died and rose again. 16) Therefore we know no one after the flesh from now on. Even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more. 17) Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new. 18) But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation; 19) namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not reckoning to them their trespasses, and having committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20) We are therefore ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God

were entreating by us: we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21) For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

This passage clarifies a few things. Just because Jesus has written every human being's name in the Lamb's Book of Life does not mean everyone is saved in every dimension. Christ has died for all mankind, but not all *live!* God has reconciled all mankind to himself through Christ, but not all acknowledge their forgiveness in Christ. All are forgiven, but not all are saved from the prideful refusal to be happy about forgiveness, and others are simply ignorant of the good news. Most of those in the Lamb's Book, the elect, are still unbelieving, and unless they are graced with faith they will suffer punishment in Hades for their unbelief. The first born nature of rebellion still rules their heart.

We know this to be true for no one is born with faith. Each individual must be born again through the Holy Spirit and come to faith in Christ to know God. Even though the unbelieving elect are saved from the Lake of Fire, they are not saved from unbelief and punishment in Hades unless they repent. Even though their names are in the Lamb's Book of Life they will still suffer punishment in Hades for their rebellion. Furthermore, even many Christians who are saved from Hades are also not saved from sin and the consequences of sin. Even though Christians are blessed children of God and saved from Hades, we can still ruin our earthly lives with sin. Salvation has numerous dimensions including rescue from the Lake of Fire, from Hades, and from sin as I discuss in my article, [SAVED 5X](#). Jesus warned that broad is the road to destruction and many enter through it!

Now what if someone were persuaded that his name is in the Book of Life, yet instead of serving Christ in gratitude, he simply lived like the Devil for his selfish interests? Such a person is certainly the fool mentioned in Proverbs 26:4-5. Such a person could hardly dare to call himself a Christian or a follower of Christ. Regardless of the hope of the Good News, such a person really has no hope. Such a person lives a life of fearful expectation of the coming judgment. Furthermore, Romans 10:9 makes it clear that to be truly saved one must both confess with the mouth and *believe with the heart*. Punishment in Hades awaits everyone without a Christian heart. The Scripture has important words of warning for such a person which I will come to shortly.

Again, the Scripture above confirms that Christ has died for all. These verses even explain that all mankind is already positionally reconciled to God "*in Christ*" apart from faith. Most would teach that each individual is placed "*into Christ*" only as he believes in him. But I understand that those predestined to salvation are never outside of God's grace because they are

always positionally in Christ. However, as each individual is awakened as a new creation, he *realizes* his position in Christ and begins to live in Christ. The elect of God are in desperate need of the salvation of their hearts through the new birth. However, God's gracious purpose for his chosen ones was decreed before we believed, before we were born, and even before creation. See my article *'In' Doctrine* for further discussion.

A related thought is that most Christian theologies suggest that justification, the legal proclamation of our right standing with God, happens per individual either immediately before or after personally trusting Christ. However, I suggest that justification was pronounced for all God's people one time at the cross. Again see my article *Justified!* for more details.

Unfortunately too many professing Christians imagine or have been taught that the *free will* choice of "*faith*" is the activating ingredient in our personal salvation. They imagine "*faith*" to be like a string that reaches from their prayer to Heaven's courtroom to hammer the gavel of their justification.

However, picture this: a venomous criminal with only the courtroom floor between himself and the lawful judge that he hates. If the police were not restraining him and the judge's bench was not so high, he would simply reach out and kill the judge. We know this to be accurate imagery because there was one time in history when the judge stepped down from his bench. We know that God's holy angels were commanded to stand by. The good judge gave himself into the hands of the criminal. Mankind universally conspired to kill the Christ! When will such a venomous criminal ever exercise his *free will* to repent? He does not even want to be saved. He does not want to be at peace with the judge. He hates the judge. He wants to kill the judge! He wants to be his own judge... and the judge of everyone else. But he just cannot reach the gavel of justification across the courtroom floor. The true judge will not relinquish the gavel to the criminal because he is the good judge. The criminal cannot change his heart to begin to love the judge because he hates the judge BY HIS VERY NATURE. He is not free, but locked in bondage to sin. Even if the criminal could suddenly begin to be good, it would not be enough to mend the error of his past rebellion. Even if the criminal would magically transform into Mother Teresa, he still must pay the price for his past crimes. Claims of *free will* decisions for Christ and "*faith*" that "*writes our name in Heaven*" simply miss the heart of grace.

The crux of the matter is that Jesus Christ imputed righteousness to our account while we still hated him and while we loved only ourselves, according to Romans 5:10. The essential point is that there will never be any positive change until God himself reaches inside the individual's life to replace his heart of stone with a heart of flesh. The good news is that Christ alone has sacrificed his body and poured his blood on the Father's righteous bench to proclaim our justification. He did this while we criminals were still

spitting out venom dressed in our rags of self-righteousness. But the sound of Jesus' gavel silences Satan, the prosecuting attorney, who still drones on listing our sins for an easy indictment. All of this transpires before the courtroom audience. God's holy angels are astonished that Christ could forgive us, the very partners of Satan. They never cease to marvel over God's glorious grace toward his redeemed.

Of course most of us do not appear to be venomous criminals... at least not until our self-righteous attitudes are confronted with God's glorious grace and Christ's love for ALL mankind.

If you are an evangelist consider that the purpose of evangelism is NOT to add names to the Book of Life! How can we do that anyway? Instead, consider that the purpose of evangelism is to bring the elect of God from unbelief to belief, from spiritual death to spiritual life, from disobedience to obedience, and from certain punishment with the wicked in Hades to joyful communion with Christ... to receive Christ's finished work on their behalf.

Lastly, 2 Corinthians 5:16 also tells us that we are not to view others from a worldly point of view. The world believes that some are evil, but only those who do good meet a good end. Someone once told me that all unbelievers think that everyone will be saved in the end. Friends, I have yet to meet an unbeliever who thinks that all are saved. They typically believe there are at least enough people worse than them to fill the seats in Hell so that they will not have to go there. Thus on this point, Arminianism and Calvinism both speak from a worldly point of view.

John 10:25-30

Consider John 10:25-30 (WEB),

25) Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you don't believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, these testify about me. 26) But you don't believe, because you are not of my sheep, as I told you. 27) My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28) I give eternal life to them. They will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29) My Father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand. 30) I and the Father are one."

This seems to be a problematic passage for those believing that all mankind is finally saved. Here Jesus tells the unbelieving Jews that they are "*not his sheep.*" The Lord's grave words at the Sheep and Goat judgment used in

Matthew 25:31-46 suggest that there are only two categories of people in the whole world. There are sheep (of the lost and found variety) and goats. Doctrines like predestination and particular atonement teach us that goats do not become sheep, and sheep do not become goats. Sheep are the redeemed people of God, while goats are the unredeemed. So are these unbelieving Jews then goats with no hope of salvation?

Perhaps I have concluded too hastily and we need to drop back to the Calvinist understanding of the gospel.

In fact, this is one of the passages that led me to a Calvinistic understanding of the gospel in the past. The message seems clear enough, so what else could be concluded? The message seemed clear until I read Hosea 2:23.

Hosea 2:23

Consider Hosea 2:23 (WEB),

I will sow her to me in the earth; and I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; and I will tell those who were not my people, "You are my people;" and they will say, "My God!"

This passage is peculiar in that God specifically calls rebellious Israel *"not my people."* But after he has changed their hearts he reverts to calling them *"my people."* We have already said that sheep do not become goats and goats do not become sheep. Yet here those who are *"not his people"*, then become *"his people."* These words parallel Jesus' words of calling the stubborn Pharisees *"not my sheep"*, but those who repented he then calls *"my sheep."*

Why doesn't God call rebellious Israel simply *"my bad people?"* Perhaps God is willing to call a *"lost sheep"* a *"goat"* or actually *"not a sheep"* in order to get their attention. For an extreme example consider that Jesus even called Peter *"Satan"* to his face in Matthew 16:23. Was Peter then actually Satan? Certainly not! So why should we be surprised if he calls the unbelieving Jews, the rebellious elect, *"not his sheep"*, even though they are the *"lost sheep"* of his pasture? Furthermore, our wicked hearts need to be so radically changed that we become new people. We must be born again.

The story is told of a father with a rebellious son. The son rebelled further and further from family values until the father firmly and painfully told the rebel, *"You are not my son."* The ice of those words combined with time and reflection brought the father's son back to his senses and heartfelt repentance. The father received him with open arms weeping with joy over his son.

This strategy, which I call the “*Hosea Strategy*”, is an integral component of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Note also that Paul references Hosea 2:23 in Romans 9:25. Romans Chapter 9 is the most difficult and avoided chapter in the whole New Testament. The chapter is often avoided by Christians because it appears to teach that God hates people and has chosen some people for salvation and others for eternal damnation before they were even born.

However, I suggest that you re-read the Romans Chapter 9 with the insight that God does have special strategies, such as the Hosea Strategy, for confronting unbelief in mankind.

Paul threatens in Romans 9:18-24 (WEB),

18) So then, he has mercy on whom he desires, and he hardens whom he desires. 19) You will say then to me, “Why does he still find fault? For who withstands his will?” 20) But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed ask him who formed it, “Why did you make me like this?” 21) Or hasn’t the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel for honor, and another for dishonor? 22) What if God, willing to show his wrath and to make his power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23) and that he might make known the riches of his glory on vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory, 24) us, whom he also called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles?

Yet Paul promises in Romans 9:25-26 (WEB),

25) As he says also in Hosea, “I will call them ‘my people,’ which were not my people; and her ‘beloved,’ who was not beloved.” 26) “It will be that in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘children of the living God.’ ”

I have written further on this subject in my article, [Hosea 1:10, Optimism Out of Control, Part 2: In the Same Place!](#)

Proverbs 26:4-5

Consider Proverbs 26:4-5 (WEB), which I mentioned in the beginning of this book,

4) Don't answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him. 5) Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.

If God does have special strategies for dealing with unbelief in mankind, does he give us any explanation or instruction to do likewise ourselves? I introduced this book with a story about the Wright brothers and the special strategies they used to persuade others that flight is possible. Believing in flight does have a very practical importance. However, believing that Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of the whole world is infinitely more important. The good news should change the importance and priority of everything. If we truly know God's love, we will be filled with affection for him and love for our neighbor.

Yet sadly, just like people did not believe the Wright brothers, people also do not believe the gospel and reject Jesus and his love. Therefore, Jesus has given us an example in John Chapter 10 of how to confront unbelief as we already discussed. Solomon has also given us an instruction, cited above, for answering foolishness, a special strategy for dealing with unbelief.

Now we see that one reason the body of Christ is ridiculously divided over the gospel is because our unbelief, hypocrisy, and religiosity has blinded us. We have not seen the beautiful truth that Christ is the savior of all mankind. We have interpreted the words of Scripture as if God only ever throws straight fast balls. However, the Scripture above shows us that God also throws curve balls to the unbelieving. I suggest that God's Word is perfectly worded to answer both the foolish and the wise.

It would appear that many, including myself at times, have interpreted Jesus' answers to the foolish as wisdom and so have joined the unbelieving in their folly.

The Word of God truly has laid our hearts bare before his penetrating gaze. Thankfully, there is grace.

Jonah 3

Consider another well-known example of God's special strategies for confronting the wickedness of men. Consider the story of Jonah and the

whale. Most know that Jonah was swallowed by a large fish and dramatically saved. So this '*happily ever after story*' often finds itself in Children's storybooks along with cuddly stuffed whales. However, the whole story is both more dramatic and more joyful than commonly portrayed. Find the book of Jonah in the Old Testament and read it for yourself.

Did you also know that this story reveals yet another tactic that God may employ to graciously move his people away from the destructiveness of evil?

1. God told Jonah to preach against the sin of Nineveh to help them.
2. Jonah did not want grace to come to Nineveh so he ran away.
3. So God stopped Jonah with a storm and a large fish.
4. Then Jonah had a change of heart in the belly of the fish.
5. Then God commanded the fish to vomit Jonah onto dry land...

Now let's pick up the story at Jonah Chapter 3 (WEB),

1) Yahweh's word came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2) "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I give you." 3) So Jonah arose, and went to Nineveh, according to Yahweh's word. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey across. 4) Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried out, and said, "In forty days, Nineveh will be overthrown!" 5) The people of Nineveh believed God; and they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from their greatest even to their least. 6) The news reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and took off his royal robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 7) He made a proclamation and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, "Let neither man nor animal, herd nor flock, taste anything; let them not feed, nor drink water; 8) but let them be covered with sackcloth, both man and animal, and let them cry mightily to God. Yes, let them turn everyone from his evil way, and from the violence that is in his hands. 9) Who knows whether God will not turn and relent, and turn away from his fierce anger, so that we might not perish?" 10) God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way. God relented of the disaster which he said he would do to them, and he didn't do it.

How are we to understand this?

God said, through Jonah, that Nineveh would be overthrown in 40 days. However, Nineveh repented and was not overthrown. So did God lie or misrepresent himself? His word to Nineveh included no condition, just a

flat statement that Nineveh would be overthrown in 40 days -- period. Yet Nineveh was not overthrown in 40 days, but instead spared because of their repentance. Let's consider three possible explanations.

1. **God's threat of overthrow included an unspoken condition.** That is one possible interpretation, however, the Ninevites' words in response suggest otherwise. The Ninevites said, ***"Who knows whether God will not turn and relent, and turn away from his fierce anger, so that we might not perish?"*** So it is clear that the Ninevites were not aware of mercy conditioned on their repentance. In fact they clearly did not know if God would relent even if they repented! From their point of view they were moved to repent for the mere possibility that God might relent and offer mercy.
2. **Jonah spoke of overthrow, but that was not the message God intended.** This is not a valid understanding either. The Holy Spirit makes it clear that Jonah's words were in fact God's words to Nineveh. The Scripture says, ***"Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried out, and said, 'In forty days, Nineveh will be overthrown!' The people of Nineveh believed God;"*** The message of overthrow in 40 days was from God through Jonah.
3. **God threatened powerfully for a guaranteed effect.** A final possibility is that God threatened Nineveh so powerfully that his intended effect, the Ninevites' repentance, was guaranteed. With this model of understanding we suggest that God's *sovereign* plan never intended to overthrow Nineveh in 40 days and that his words were a threat only -- guaranteed to result in Nineveh's repentance. He spoke his threat persuasively to guarantee his purpose. Though, one very very very important caveat to this understanding is that we can only conclude this in retrospect! To respond to any of God's warnings concluding that he is making a mere threat and will not follow through is not recommended. We are advised to repent hoping that God may extend mercy.

So do I propose that God employs this same tactic through the gospel of Jesus Christ?

One way he certainly does not employ this tactic is to merely threaten the unbelieving with judgment and punishment in Hades. Jesus does not simply threaten the fires of Hades; the unbelieving, wicked dead are actually sent there. Some would suggest Luke 16:19-31 is a parable, yet it has none of the elements of a parable. The rich man who refused to help poor Lazarus was sent to Hades fire, as Jesus makes quite plain. Consider also that Revelation 20:5 makes it clear that the unbelieving dead remain dead in Hades while believers live. Thus it is again clear that Hades is not empty,

but filled with the unbelieving. Revelation 20:13 also says that Hades then finally gives up these wicked dead. So again Hades is not empty or how could Hades give up the dead? Jesus also preached hope by saying in Matthew 16:18 that grace would overcome the gates of Hades. Hades needs to be overcome because it is filled with wicked men who have yet to acknowledge their redemption. Why does Christ need to overcome the gates of Hades if no one is being punished there? Paul even joins the chorus in 1 Corinthians 15:55 saying that Christ will steal all victory from both death and Hades! Hades will be finally robbed of all victory when the grace of God proves victorious even for the unbelieving elect currently being punished there. The gospel warnings of punishment in Hades after death for the unbelieving disobedient are not a threat, but certain reality. Friend, take care!

However, we also see that Christ is willing to call his *“lost sheep,” “not my sheep”* in John 10:26. He is also willing to call *“his people,” “not my people”* and his *“loved one,” “not my loved one”* in Hosea 2:23. Now this tactic is very similar to God’s strategy with Nineveh. The strategy is also very fitting. Consider just what an unbeliever really is in the first place. An unbeliever is one of God’s precious creations, deeply loved by God and redeemed by Christ, who rejects the love and forgiveness of our Heavenly Father in order to remain god of his own life. He rejects his election just as Esau rejected his birthright... for a bowl of soup. Jesus is perfectly willing to label these wicked unbelievers as non-elect, not his sheep, not his people, not his chosen. Just like God wanted the Ninevites to fear destruction, so the unbelieving elect can only fear eternal damnation. However, just like the Ninevites repented and were not destroyed, so the love of Christ has already guaranteed the final salvation of all his chosen people. Not one of Christ’s elect can ever stumble into the Lake of Fire, but will be brought to repentance sooner... or later.

Though all mankind is chosen for the atonement of sins, most are not yet chosen to simply believe this good news about their redemption. Yet even so, they are loved by God from before the foundation of the world with a guaranteed home in Heaven.

The story of Jonah and Nineveh is another example of God’s special, gracious strategies to care for rebellious, unbelieving mankind.

Acts 13:48

Consider Acts 13:48 (WEB),

As the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of God. As many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

This verse is commonly cited by Calvinists to defend their view that Christ has only atoned for the sins of a subset of mankind. The verse seems to say that everyone who is appointed to eternal life will believe immediately when they hear the gospel. However, in light of our discussion we see instead that the Holy Spirit is recognizing God's election in those who believed, while at the same time offering no assurance to the unbelieving elect in their rebellion. The elect of God often remain in stubborn unbelief even after hearing the gospel. This verse does not mean that they are not elect and not loved by God, and never will believe. Instead, all the unbelieving elect will believe, sooner... or later. However, no comfort will be given to the wicked until they repent.

The Apostle John uses a similar strategy on the positive side of the equation when he refers to himself as the “disciple whom Jesus loved.” Should we be offended that he singles himself out as the one whom Jesus loved? No. Instead we should wake up, smile, and say “I also am the disciple whom Jesus loves!”

God's special love does not mean that his love is therefore limited. I tell each of my children that they are my favorites. So when I focus my special love on one child, that does not mean I no longer love the others. Instead, I love each of my children in a special way. God, even more so, loves each human being with his special love.

Let's Celebrate!



These observations are a cause for great celebration... at least for believers and me.

As I explained, questions about the extent of God's grace in salvation grew like a dark cloud in my life, clouding my relationship with Christ. I was not sure I would be able to rejoice in Heaven. I needed to agree that Christ had done the right thing in saving some while eternally damning others. Yet I could not and so continued to search the Bible for answers.

In the end, my own hypocrisy and blindness were exposed, but the good news totally erased the pain of my error!

I guess we could feel badly about the sentencing of Satan, The Beast, and The False Prophet to the Lake of Fire. However, for me it was not quite the same concern to think about Satan going to the Lake of Fire as my family member or my neighbor. Furthermore, my own escape from eternal damnation is guaranteed by the same love God has for all mankind. Yet now I can agree that when God sentences an unbeliever to an eon in Hades that he has simply been assigned to a punishment that is fit for his unregenerate nature. Without the new birth, we do truly hate God; Hades is a fitting punishment. Unbelievers would not even want to go to Heaven where God is praised openly all day long. Yet, I also have the hope that the "gates of Hades" will not prevail against the grace of God as I first explained in my article, [Matthew 16:15-21, Optimism Out of Control](#).

We may prefer to hold on to familiar theological systems. We may prefer the company of the majority view. Unfortunately these choices may neglect the truth. Beware. We miss great joy when salvation is tainted with even the smallest work of man. If we supply even the tiniest condition to our salvation then grace is no longer grace. The party is ruined. We also miss great assurance if we limit God's love to an imaginary subset of mankind. How then can we be confident that God loves us unconditionally if he does not love all? If we suggest any limitation to the atonement of Christ then we add hypocrisy to the invitation list. The party is over.

I invite you to a radical reconsideration of your Christian faith... if you have faith. I invite you to believe that Jesus Christ is the Savior of all mankind. In fact your own salvation is wholly dependent upon this truth! So I invite you to believe that the burning passionate love of God for all mankind places all

mankind, from Mother Teresa to Hitler, on equal ground at the foot of the cross. Why join the majority of mankind who continue to cling to self-righteousness of some form or another? Why refuse to believe that **Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind?**

Yet we know that in order to demonstrate his patient grace, God allows the majority of mankind to continue in unbelief. God has ordained the existence of sin and allows mankind's ongoing rebellion against him for one reason only: to show off his grace.

Romans Chapter 11 gives an explanation of the dynamic of belief and unbelief among the elect and explains the future party that is planned when faith is finally awakened in all God's people -- even the hardest hearted. Join me and read the Chapter in full.

Romans 11:1-32

Read Romans 11:1-32 (WEB), again,

1) I ask then, did God reject his people? May it never be! For I also am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. 2) God didn't reject his people, which he foreknew. Or don't you know what the Scripture says about Elijah? How he pleads with God against Israel: 3) "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have broken down your altars. I am left alone, and they seek my life." 4) But how does God answer him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." 5) Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. 6) And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.

7) What then? That which Israel seeks for, that he didn't obtain, but the chosen ones obtained it, and the rest were hardened. 8) According as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear, to this very day."

9) David says, "Let their table be made a snare, a trap, a stumbling block, and a retribution to them. 10) Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see. Always keep their backs bent."

11) I ask then, did they stumble that they might fall? May it never be! But by their fall salvation has come to the Gentiles, to

provoke them to jealousy. 12) Now if their fall is the riches of the world, and their loss the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fullness?

13) For I speak to you who are Gentiles. Since then as I am an apostle to Gentiles, I glorify my ministry; 14) if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh, and may save some of them. 15) For if the rejection of them is the reconciling of the world, what would their acceptance be, but life from the dead? 16) If the first fruit is holy, so is the lump. If the root is holy, so are the branches. 17) But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the root and of the richness of the olive tree, 18) don't boast over the branches. But if you boast, it is not you who support the root, but the root supports you. 19) You will say then, 'Branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in.' 20) True; by their unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by your faith. Don't be conceited, but fear; 21) for if God didn't spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you.

22) See then the goodness and severity of God. Toward those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in his goodness; otherwise you also will be cut off. 23) They also, if they don't continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. 24) For if you were cut out of that which is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree, how much more will these, which are the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

25) For I don't desire you to be ignorant, brothers, of this mystery, so that you won't be wise in your own conceits, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, 26) and so all Israel will be saved. Even as it is written,

"There will come out of Zion the Deliverer, and he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob. 27) This is my covenant with them, when I will take away their sins."

28) Concerning the Good News, they are enemies for your sake. But concerning the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sake. 29) For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30) For as you in time past were disobedient to God, but now have obtained mercy by their disobedience, 31) even so these also have now been disobedient, that by the mercy shown to you

they may also obtain mercy. 32) For God has bound all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all.

33) Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! 34) “For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?” 35) “Or who has first given to him, and it will be repaid to him again?” 36) For of him, and through him, and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever! Amen.

Are you still God’s enemy? Do you doubt? Are you ready to celebrate with God and his family? God has promised to turn away ungodliness from Jacob! God has promised that his gifts and calling are irrevocable! God’s love for the unbelieving elect will not fail! Are you now ready to lay aside conditional salvation? Have you received the unconditional love of Christ?

Lord, give me boldness to make disciples through the gospel of grace!

Final Analysis

In the final analysis both Arminianism and Calvinism wittingly or unwittingly bend Scripture to fit their model of salvation. Of course everyone knows that faith must also be reasonable. Thus we might stretch our interpretations of Scripture to fit the best models available to us. Furthermore, since Arminianism and Calvinism are both considered orthodox and commonly accepted, perhaps that is why followers of Jesus Christ have not been able to find unity even on the critical doctrine of Christian salvation. Yet I am convinced the Biblical view is that Christ is the savior of all mankind. Let’s take one last look at our *Salvation Evaluator* matrix.

SALVATION EVALUATOR	PART OF MANKIND	ALL OF MANKIND
PART OF SALVATION	REJECTED BY ALL	ARMINIANISM C.S. LEWIS
ALL OF SALVATION	CALVINISM JAMES BOICE	CHRIST SAVIOR OF ALL

Let’s note the strengths and weakness of each view.

PART for PART: REJECTED BY ALL

The weakness in this view is seen by nearly everyone and the view is rejected.

PART for ALL: ARMINIANISM

This is the most common view found in Christendom. However, the idea that mankind has a *free will* to choose faith is simply not supported in Scripture and misses the good news that we are saved instead because of God's free will. Many proponents reason that the existence of *free will* is *implied* by the fact that we are commanded to trust Jesus. They reason that if God asks us to do something then we must have the ability to do it. Yet has anyone, except Christ, demonstrated the ability to obey God's commands without sin? Arminian reasoning also neglects the clear Bible teaching that we are spiritually dead unless we are individually made alive by the Holy Spirit. A dead person is not *free* to do anything. We must be born again for spiritual life to begin. Moreover, grace would not be grace if any condition of salvation rested with the individual person. These compromises are bad enough, but the greatest was admitted by C.S. Lewis when he said that God arrested his sovereignty to allow for the "*possibility*" that people would choose or not choose him with their *free will*. Arminianism is guilty of deposing God to make way for *free will* so that man can be god of his own salvation. Adherents of this view are guilty of exalting their *free will* over the glory of God's sovereign grace and are in fact worshiping an imaginary god. Consider the difference between two simple testimonies. One man claims he is saved because he chose Christ. Another man trusts that Christ chose him. Which testimony gives praise to God's grace? Friends, there is no Biblical defense that God is not sovereign or that he ever momentarily ceased to be the God of our salvation. This is good news for us because God's gracious choices are trustworthy!

ALL for PART: CALVINISM

There are very few true Calvinists, but most modify their position in some way allowing for a *free will* choice of faith. Once while in an "*iron sharpening*" session with a brother, he asserted that the two great pillars of the church are God's sovereignty and man's *free will*. I am sure he is not alone in that assertion. But those are hardly the two pillars of the church. The companion truth to God's sovereignty is not man's *free will*, but instead man's *responsibility* for his sin. Some oppose the idea that God is sovereign over both good and evil, claiming that then we would no longer be responsible for our sin. Yet the Scripture is clear in Romans Chapter 9 that both are true: God is sovereign over sin and we are responsible for our sin. Those who continue to object to this truth must simply answer God's question to them in Romans 9:20. Yet, true Calvinists are commended for holding fast to the sovereignty

of God. However, they also hold to the indefensible position that Christ effectively died for only a subset of mankind. As such they undermine the incarnation and the very person of Christ and his vicarious atonement. The critical heart of salvation is that the death of Christ on the cross serves as a substitute for the death we deserve. We all deserve an eternal death penalty for our rebellion against God, but Christ literally died in our place. Holy God cannot overlook justice, but justice was satisfied in our Heavenly trial by the death of Christ. So we ask: did Christ represent all mankind on the cross, or only a subset of mankind? The Scripture is clear in Romans 5 that Jesus has replaced Adam as the new federal head of mankind and so he represents ALL. I have focused on this point in my article, [Romans 5:12-21, Out of Control Optimism Part 7, Many = Many = All = All](#). There is absolutely no Biblical defense to see it any other way. The Calvinist is likewise just as misguided as the Arminian. The Arminian view ultimately deposes God from his sovereign throne, while the Calvinist view undermines the greatest work of God the Son: his incarnation and substitutionary atonement for the sins of all mankind.

ALL for ALL: CHRIST SAVIOR OF ALL

Likewise there are few who believe that Christ will save all mankind. Someone once suggested that the majority of unbelievers are Universalists. However, the truth is that the majority of unbelievers are Arminian or Calvinist in theology. If they believe God exists at all, they think he is a good guy that will save those who make the grade or those who choose God with their supposed *free will*. They believe that everyone has the ability to choose to trust Jesus and live a good life. Since they imagine themselves better than Hitler and other evil people they hope to meet the condition of being “*good enough*” and pass the test. Or if they realize that they failed the test, they somehow imagine that they are the subset of students given the gracious gift of a passing grade while the rest are flunked.

Furthermore, the few Christian Universalists that do exist are not unified, each interpreting the Scripture in different ways as summarized in the Wikipedia article [Christian Universalism](#). This article categorizes Christian Universalists as evangelical, charismatic, and liberal, each answering the difficult question of Hell and eternal damnation in different ways. For example, many Universalists explain away Hell suggesting that Luke 16:19-31 is merely a parable, which we have already concluded is unbiblical.

Three Christian Universalists that have caught my attention are [Madeleine L'Engle](#), [John Wesley Hanson](#), and [Abraham Lincoln](#). L'Engle had a simple confidence that the grace of God would somehow answer our unanswered questions in the end and be victorious for all mankind. Sadly she was rejected by mainstream Christianity for her beliefs. (As an aside, she has always made an impression on me ever since my 6th grade atheist teacher

read *A Wrinkle in Time* out loud to the class.) Hanson on the other hand is a well thought out evangelical Universalist theologian, most noted for his classic work, *The Greek Word Aion - Aionios Translated Everlasting - Eternal in the Holy Bible Shown to Denote Limited Duration*. This classic work is available for free from the U.S. Library of Congress website and also from my website. He was likewise rejected by “orthodox” Christianity. Dr. Heleen Keizer has also written a dissertation proving the same titled, *Life, Time, Eternity - A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo*. You can read her 315 page dissertation online or an abstract of her conclusions from my website. Finally, Abraham Lincoln is known and respected by all, yet few know that he also held to Christian Universalism.

Sadly one can believe variations of Arminianism, Calvinism, or even try to stand on the mystery in the middle and be accepted in most churches today - as long as you believe that the majority of mankind will be eternally damned to the Lake of Fire. This is a most curious and even pitiable indictment of present day orthodoxy. Arminianism and Calvinism vehemently oppose each other, yet adherents could happily attend almost any church while holding either view as long as they agree that most of mankind is eternally damned. How can Christian love of the truth withstand this terrible inconsistency yet be unwilling to consider that Jesus Christ did *ALL* for *ALL* mankind?

I have proved that Arminianism fails to worship God for his sovereignty. I have also proved that Calvinism fails to worship Christ for his incarnation and vicarious atonement. So 1) is there any solid Biblical defense for the position that Christ will save even the unbelieving men he calls “not my sheep?” 2) Is it truly possible that the unbelieving could be punished in Hades, yet be extracted safely and spared from the Lake of Fire? 3) Does Biblical Universalism properly warn the unbelieving of their certain punishment after death?

The answers to these three questions are yes, yes, and yes!

1) YES, there is ample Biblical defense to show that Jesus’ label of “*not my sheep*” does not mean that these people are not elect. As already explained, Hosea 2:23 makes it clear that the same unbelieving people called “*not my people*” are then called “*my people*” when they have repented and trusted God. Another clear passage that is also connected to our Romans 11:32 interpretation is Romans 11:28 (WEB), “**Concerning the Good News, they are enemies for your sake. But concerning the election, they are beloved for the father’s sake.**”

So even though the unbelieving are considered enemies for their rejection of the gospel, they are still loved on account of election. They are the rebellious

elect. Isaiah 53:6 reminds us that we, all mankind that is, are sheep gone astray.

2) YES, there is ample Biblical defense to show that Hades is emptied at the Great White Throne judgment as already explained in Revelation 20:13-14. When the Sheep and Goats stand before King Jesus, redeemed mankind on the right will be finally saved, even to the surprise of the newly believing humans (Matthew 25:37-39), while the fallen angels on the left are banished to the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages*. You may say that this is impossible because the New Testament consistently warns unbelieving humans of their eternal punishment. I hope to speak to that in the pages ahead.

3) YES, Biblical Universalism certainly does warn the unbelieving. Biblical Universalism states quite plainly that the sins of both believing and unbelieving mankind are forgiven based solely on the work of Christ and that nothing can ever separate us from the unconditional love of Christ. However, if unbelievers do not repent from their self-righteousness and trust that Christ has already paid for their sins and the sins of all mankind apart from all conditions, then they will most certainly be punished for the duration in the fires of Hades.

Happy Hypocrites!

The choice is before us.

Years ago someone introduced me to the concept of being a happy sinner. We might think that until we are in Heaven that the trials of this life can serve absolutely no good purpose. We might think that until we are safely in Heaven with Jesus that our eyes should only be filled with tears for our current trials. Surely God does not want us to take sadistic pleasure in our trials. However, an engaged woman spends little time in gloom for not being married! Instead she is busy making preparations because she is soon to be married to the man of her dreams!

Jesus likewise took no joy in the suffering of his cross. But he did look beyond the suffering to the joy he would purchase. Hebrews 12:1-3 (WEB) says,

1) Therefore let's also, seeing we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let's run with perseverance the race that is set before us, 2) looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising its shame, and has sat down at

the right hand of the throne of God. 3) For consider him who has endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, that you don't grow weary, fainting in your souls.

Jesus endured the cross, but he did not enjoy it! The joy he looked forward to was the eternal fellowship he purchased with us, his chosen people, and his Heavenly Father.

Let's strive to get ready, discarding the hypocrisy in our lives as we get ready to walk down the aisle with him and all of God's chosen ones. We will not reach perfection in this life, but for his sake we strive to give him our *"utmost for his highest."* Then on that awesome day our bridegroom will snap his fingers and erase all of our remaining sin, and we will walk down that aisle with him in perfect glory!

Partying Pagans?

Perfect glory awaits all God's people in Heaven, but we are far from that now. So what should we do? Martin Luther said, *"Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly."* Really? Sin boldly?

Yes!

As much as we may strive to get ready for that great wedding day, there is something even more important than making progress in righteousness. Really? Sure, we should make progress in right living. But even more importantly, we must testify to God's grace in our lives, telling the world that even the best Christian is still a sinner till the day he dies. In fact as we get closer to Christ, we are even more aware of just how far away from him we really are. Just how close do we think we are when we compare our lives with Holy God himself? Some unbelievers might have a better sense of their standing than some of us Christians! They might laugh at the idea of Christians trying to imitate God. And it is a laughable undertaking. Yet God commands us to follow him and he empowers us with his Holy Spirit.

The point is that you and I should remember to enjoy and praise Christ our savior even in the midst of our sinfulness.

Paul said in Philippians 2:17-18 (WEB),

17) Yes, and if I am poured out on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice, and rejoice with you all. 18) In the same way, you also rejoice, and rejoice with me.

While in the midst of the agony of pouring out his life to serve others, Paul invited his Christian brothers to be glad. Wise Solomon also says in Ecclesiastes 5:19 (WEB),

19) Every man also to whom God has given riches and wealth, and has given him power to eat of it, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God.

So there is little value in seeking sadness when happiness is a gift of God. There is enough sadness from day to day without hunting for more. Yet Solomon also says in Ecclesiastes 12:12-14 (WEB),

12) Furthermore, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. 13) This is the end of the matter. All has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. 14) For God will bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it is good, or whether it is evil.

We are right to enjoy God and the life he has given us. God does not want us walking around on egg shells pretending that we have not sinned! There is no point in hiding our sin from the Lord. Yet we are also warned to keep God's commands. One day we will stand before him at the judgment and every hidden thing will be revealed.

However, because of grace we can be happy and enjoy God right now in the midst of our struggle with sin. Yet we should also be motivated to obey him and please him. To help you understand this dynamic, imagine a relationship with a perfect father. The perfect father would be good and fun while caring for us in his home. He would also be fair and just in disciplining us as needed.

Now quit imagining because God is our perfect Heavenly Father!

RSVP Review

Yes, God is our perfect Heavenly Father, but are we his good children?

While putting my thesis into words I conducted an informal interview for feedback. Talking out ideas with others can be very useful to develop one's own understanding. Good questions can also be very useful to get to the heart of the matter with others. Jesus asked his disciples questions frequently. So I asked numerous people this question:

What would be your reaction if you learned that the grace of Christ ultimately saved all mankind in the end, both believer and unbeliever?

The following answers expose serious problems in the average evangelical Christian's understanding of grace.

1. *"You have a case of optimism out of control."*

That was one response and the namesake of this book. The response offers a thumbs up for trying, but still only smiles at me as if I were insane.

2. *"That would not be fair after all our effort."*

This response indicates a serious misunderstanding of grace. Biblical grace is at least defined by most Christians as God's unmerited favor toward the redeemed, even if there is disagreement on the details. Some have used the acronym G.R.A.C.E., (God's Riches At Christ's Expense), to define salvation very simply. That being the case, then grace is already *unfair* by definition. We all deserve eternal death for our sin, yet God graciously decided to save his people. How is it then sensible that one saved person could say it is *"not fair"* that another person is also *unfairly* saved - regardless of the circumstance? If even one is saved, that is already unfair. What would be the problem with God unfairly saving a few more or all? It may be that the one quoted above has never really received grace in his heart, but has only memorized the traditional Christian lingo.

3. *"Then there would be no reason to refrain from sin."*

This response is very similar to the one above and likewise indicates a serious misunderstanding about grace. This person must believe that he is saved from condemnation by his efforts to refrain from sin. He must imagine that he has refrained from sin just enough when compared to other worse sinners. He must think that he has made the grade and is saved while the others are condemned. But just where does he draw the line? Just how good do we need to be in order to be saved? Are we saved if we are *"not terrible?"* Are we saved if we are simply a positive number on the scale? Or is it much tougher -- do we need to be almost perfect? No. None of these human scales of righteousness are sufficient. According to God's word and his perfect holiness, absolutely no sin or impurity can stand in his presence. None! Simply trying to refrain from sin is not enough for a sinner to gain Heaven. Furthermore, Christians do not obey Christ because of the threat of Hell, but because of his unconditional love! This person's argument against God's love for all mankind is instead an awkward testimony to his own unbelief and self-righteousness.

4. *“Well I guess that would be okay, whatever God decides.”*

This response is deadpan apathy. Yikes! Understanding grace in one's own life seems like a reason for deep passion and empathy towards others. One would think that seeing grace in another person's life would also be a reason for great joy. The grace of God, when understood -- even minimally -- breaks us out of our self-centered shell to know love for someone else besides ourselves. It is like welcoming a new family member into the household. It is cause for celebration! So how could someone who understands grace, even in the least, have such an apathetic response to the question? It would be like receiving a million dollar inheritance, being cured of cancer, and getting married to the girl of your dreams all on the same day. Then when you learn that the same thing happened to your brother and neighbor you respond by saying, *“Whatever.”* Again, the one quoted above may say he is saved by grace, but deep inside, something in his heart has grown foul.

5. *“That would probably be awesome in heaven, but it is certainly not great now.”*

This ambivalent response is hard for me to understand. On one hand there is an intellectual agreement that this would be awesome. Yet on the other hand there is a very bold confession of a sinful attitude. Perhaps the one quoted is just a painfully honest hypocrite. Perhaps, the question caught him off guard and there was a guarded response. Perhaps there is wishful thinking fighting with doubts. Whatever the reason, the expected high flying joy is definitely having trouble taking flight.

6. *“There must be a compromise between Arminian and Calvinistic thought.”*

Another insisted that there must be a compromise between Arminian and Calvinistic thought. He felt it may not be immediately evident, but there must be ground to stand on between *ALL or PART* of God's role in redemption, or a line to stand on between *ALL or PART* of mankind. However, neither the theologian Boice, nor the philosopher Lewis thought there was ground in the middle. Realistically the only place to stand between those options is 1) do not know, 2) do not want to know, or 3) do not care. Yet most people attempt to straddle the fence, like the one quoted above. Understandably, it is a challenge to our understanding. The Bible is clear that people are punished in Hell, so the *ALL for ALL* combination does not seem like a viable option at first blush. However, are we willing to have hope that the grace of Christ will even conquer the gates of Hell as he promised in Matthew 16:18 (WEB)? ***“I also tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my assembly, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.”***

7. ... [no response, silence, next subject] ...

The most curious response I received was absolutely no response, silence, and a turn to the next subject. I can at least relate to the sinful hearts expressed above because of my own sinful heart. However, to have zero response seems the oddest response of all to me. Perhaps we are so calloused and spiritually desensitized that thoughts of God, judgment, eternal bliss, and eternal damnation no longer evoke any emotion whatsoever. Then again, Jesus faced the same challenge in his own generation as recorded in Matthew 11:16-19 (WEB). His contemporaries would neither dance nor mourn when he spoke the truth.

16) But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces, who call to their companions 17) and say, "We played the flute for you, and you didn't dance. We mourned for you, and you didn't lament." 18) For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon." 19) The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" But wisdom is justified by her children.

Jesus also told a parable relevant to the responses above. The Parable of the Wedding Banquet in Matthew 22:1-14 (WEB) gives us a picture of apathetic responses to a wedding invitation. Verse 3 says **"[the king] sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast, but they would not come."**

Each of the Christians quoted above wants to come to the "wedding banquet" of Jesus. However, the banquet they imagine is not very joyful. There is no celebration of the victory of God's grace over sin for mankind. Instead it sounds more like a poo poo party.

Though, one person replied to my interview question,

8. *"That would be plain awesome."*

This response seems like the only sensible reaction for someone saved by grace.

I know my question and the responses above do not offer any additional Biblical defense for my position. However, they do reveal that the hearts of those professing to be Christians quoted in #1-7 above are not standing on ground more solid than I. In fact, those quoted are standing on very shaky ground. Moreover, the most common evangelical Christian responses were

incriminatingly devoid of grace. The Bible says, **“For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks”** (Matthew 12:34 WEB). The answers from these mouths have exposed some fairly wicked hearts. I can understand each of them too well. All is not lost, however, for these ugly responses barely come close to matching my own sin.

Forgetting what is behind, let’s continue learning about the grace that has covered all. Lord willing we will discover if there are solid Biblical answers to the many objections that Jesus Christ is the savior of all mankind.

Mystery in the Middle

Hopefully I have persuaded you to consider the weaknesses of the popular traditional salvation models. Both Arminianism and Calvinism are reasonable at points, but unreasonable at other points. These facts ought to be enough cause for every Christian to consider the interpretation of Scripture that Christ is victorious in the salvation of all mankind. Yet perhaps you still do not feel comfortable with *ALL of PART, or PART of ALL, or ALL of ALL* combinations of the *Salvation Evaluator*. Perhaps the *Mystery in the Middle* feels safer than parting ways with tradition.

SALVATION EVALUATOR	PART OF MANKIND	ALL OF MANKIND
PART OF SALVATION	REJECTED BY ALL	ARMINIANISM
ALL OF SALVATION	CALVINISM	ALL SAVED

MYSTERY IN THE MIDDLE

However, before you try to find rest in the mystery in the middle, please consider a few more points. First, the majority of Christian thought has always insisted that Christian faith be reasonable. Faith properly defined and understood is confident reliance and trust on factual evidence. Israel was commended for their obedient witness and walk through the sea on dry land. However, later they are rebuked for not trusting God even though they witnessed the incredible first hand fact of his power to deliver.

Christianity likewise requires no “*leap of faith*,” but instead confident trust in the facts of Jesus Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. So Arminianism and Calvinism are at least commended for being coherent reasonable systems. They refuse to stand on mystery. Yet, even so they remain at odds with Scripture.

So please consider again the two questions posed by the *Salvation Evaluator*.

Is God the savior of ALL or PART of mankind?

Does God do ALL or PART of the saving?

Can you find any possible middle ground between God as savior of ALL or savior of PART? Any reasonable model of understanding must make one choice, ALL or PART! Can you find any middle ground between God doing ALL or PART of the saving? Is there any middle ground between UNCONDITIONAL and CONDITIONAL love? Any reasonable model of understanding must make one choice, ALL or PART!

Second, there have been some forms of Christian faith that have emphasized Sacred Mysteries as introduced at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacred_mysteries. Some may argue that the Trinity and Divinity of Jesus fall into the realm of mystery and so salvation is also a mystery. Certainly the knowledge of God himself and his love extends beyond our abilities to comprehend. Paul tells us in Ephesians 3:8 (WEB), that the riches in Christ are “**unsearchable.**” He says again in Ephesians 3:18 (WEB) that Christ’s love “**surpasses knowledge.**” And yet again in Romans 11:33 (WEB), “**How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out!**” Yet these statements are about God himself.

However, are the facts of our salvation also a mystery? Certainly not! The Bible promises that through faith we can have confident knowledge of our salvation. John writes in 1 John 5:13, “**...that you may know that you have eternal life...**” Do we have confident knowledge of our salvation? If we answer yes, then I ask, “*On what basis?*” I have already shown that the Arminian Christian adds human condition into the salvation equation, and thus insecurity. I have also shown that the Calvinist Christian adds self-deception into the salvation equation suggesting that they are loved, but not all. So then is mystery the missing ingredient in the salvation equation?

Friends, the mystery in the middle is the worst of all places to stand! Faith is confident reliance upon the facts of Jesus Christ. How could it be better to ignore the beautiful facts of Christ and his Word in order to stand on the question mark of mystery? Why choose this model of understanding? Should we explain the apparent conundrum of salvation with

the appeal to mystery? We must not trust our salvation and the damnation of others to a mystery! Jesus Christ is not a mystery, but instead he is the mystery revealed! Colossians 1:26 says (WEB), ***“the mystery which has been hidden for ages and generations. But now it has been revealed to his saints.”*** We must trust that Christ loves us and our neighbors, unconditionally! Salvation is neither a mystery nor a paradox as further discussed in my [Appendix](#) article, [Real or Apparent Paradox?](#)

Finally, regarding faith we are reminded,

***Now faith is assurance of things hoped for,
proof of things not seen.***

Hebrews 11:1 (WEB)

Just because we cannot see the things we hope and trust in does not mean they are a mystery! Instead, exactly the opposite is true. Christian hope is founded on the rock solid facts of Jesus Christ!

Wait Another Minute!



So, is that it? Is that my incredibly awesome idea? Yes, that is it. For believing that Jesus Christ is the Savior of all mankind I was accused of having a case of “*optimism out of control.*” I hope I have written rationally enough to persuade you that my optimism is not out of control, but in fact in control and Biblically defensible. More than that, the message that Christ is Messiah and Savior of all mankind is The Message of the Bible. This is the Gospel -- the Good News!

I have suggested a model for evaluating salvation doctrines. I have weighed the pros and cons of the four possible scenarios. I have introduced you to the most common theories of Christian salvation. I have invited you to read the ideas of other respected theologians. I even took a closer look at the views of Bell, Dixon, Wittmer, Galli, Lewis, and Boice. I also explained my own theory.

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind. However, most do not believe the good news and pervert either the scope of salvation or the means of salvation due to hypocrisy, religiosity, or simple ignorance.

Now we turn to answer the many objections that we ourselves and others may have about the good news. We will also consider God’s special tactics to confront unbelief. By the way, what is your response to the good news?

II Thessalonians 1:6-10

Objections? Wait another minute! What about the Scriptures that say unbelievers will be sentenced to everlasting destruction and banished from the Lord for their wickedness? Good question. Consider II Thessalonians 1:6-10 (WEB),

6) Since it is a righteous thing with God to repay affliction to those who afflict you, 7) and to give relief to you who are afflicted with us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, 8) punishing those who don’t know God, and to those who don’t obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus, 9) who will pay the penalty: eternal destruction

from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might, 10) when he comes in that day to be glorified in his saints and to be admired among all those who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

This passage is clear that those who do not know God will be punished with eternal destruction. So even though I suggested that the Arminian and the Calvinist bend Scripture to fit their salvation model, now it seems that I am also bending Scripture and there is no possible way that all mankind can be saved. However, before we conclude too soon, consider a few questions.

Who are those mentioned above who do not know God and do not obey the gospel? Are they unbelieving mankind or only fallen angels? We see from Luke 16:19-31 that unbelieving men are punished in Hades, but later are safely extracted in Revelation 20:13. We also see from Revelation 20:7-10 that fallen angels, demons, are sentenced to the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages*. However, this passage seems to be clearly talking about unbelieving men being punished with *eternal destruction*, not angels only.

So is the punishment described above the temporal punishment of Hades or *The Ages of The Ages* condemnation in the Lake of Fire? Which punishment is in view? If the judgment mentioned above is the Great White Throne judgment at the commencement of eternity, then the Lake of Fire must be in view. However, if it is the judgment at each individual's death or at Christ's intermediate judgments, then the verse above must be talking about unbelieving men being sentenced to Hades or even simply sentenced to the destruction of their wicked earthly lives. Yet can it possibly be Hades because this punishment is described as eternal? That is a good point which leads us to a very curious observation in the Scripture.

Are you ready for a curious observation?

Simply stated, the Hebrew and Greek words translated as '*eternal*' do not always mean forever. "*Aha,*" you say, "*now Jeff is bending the Scripture!*" Yet, consider Deuteronomy 15:17 (WEB),

Then you shall take an awl, and thrust it through his ear to the door, and he shall be your servant forever. Also to your female servant you shall do likewise.

In this verse the Hebrew word for '*forever*' was used to mean the time until the death of the master or servant. Certainly the servant is not bound to his master eternally, even beyond death! This observation causes us to pull our Hebrew dictionary off the shelf. Look for yourself and you will see that there are several valid denotations for the Hebrew word '*olam,*' including '*eternal,*' '*forever,*' and also '*a long time, until.*' I have already written at length about

this in point #9 in my article, *Ten Theological Absurdities*. This may be a new idea for you, so take the time to do your own homework before you shake your head in disbelief.

The Old Testament Hebrew word '*olam*,' translated '*eternal*,' and the New Testament Greek synonym word '*aion*,' also translated '*eternal*' have been mistranslated at times. The Greek word '*aion*,' pronounced '*i - own*,' is translated '*eternal*' and '*forever*' in the New Testament. However, the meaning of '*olam*' and '*aion*' is '*age*' or the '*duration*' of the subject in view. '*Aion*' can also simply mean '*complete*.' For example '*aion*' can refer to the length of a man's life, the temporal time in Hades, *The Ages of The Ages* in the Lake of Fire, and the infinity of God. The subject itself determines the length of time meant by '*aion*.' In fact, the etymology of the present day word '*eon*' descends directly from '*aion*!' This is a critical observation. Our modern New Testament translations have failed to properly communicate the duration of the punishments applied to the unbelieving.

Hebrews 9:26 (WEB) is an example where '*aion*' is properly translated as '*age*' because '*eternal*' simply does not make sense.

or else he must have suffered often since the foundation of the world. But now once at the end of the ages [aion], he has been revealed to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

I had originally hoped to expand on these thoughts myself. However, recently the Lord has blessed me through a reunion with John Wesley Hanson's classic 1875 work titled, *The Greek Word Aion-Aionios translated Everlasting-Eternal in the Holy Bible Shown to Denote Limited Duration*. I was first introduced to this work in college by a good friend, but sadly my memory is largely untrustworthy and I forgot about the essential points made in this book. None-the-less, this classic work is available for free from the U.S. Library of Congress website and also from my own website. This 88 page book is a must read for anyone who agrees or disagrees with my conclusions. There is little point to my adding further to this definitive work. Study this volume for yourself and your faith and understanding of the Bible will be challenged in radically positive ways, if you are willing to let go of tradition and all self-righteousness. Dr. Heleen Keizer has also written a dissertation proving the same, titled *Life, Time, Entirety - A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo*. You can read her 315 page dissertation online or an abstract of her conclusions on my website. You might think it is incredulous to claim that '*aion*' is mistranslated in many Bibles. Unless you are competent in ancient Greek you may not even know how to verify this for yourself. *The NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek in English* is an invaluable resource on my shelf. *Young's Literal Translation* of the Bible is also a valuable resource.

Thomas Talbott also makes a critical observation in *The Inescapable Love of God*. Talbott suggests that 'apo' is also mistranslated in 2 Thessalonians 1:9 as 'from.' Talbott proposes that 'apo' should instead be translated 'at' in this case. So a proper translation would be "**who will pay the penalty: eonian [or complete] destruction at the face of the Lord and at the glory of his might.**" Talbott's proposal then makes even better sense that the unbelieving are punished at the Lord's coming judgment which is the subject in context. Unbelieving mankind will suffer the complete loss and destruction of their wicked earthly lives and ambitions unless they repent. The verse is not saying that the unbelieving are punished with eternal separation from God!

As an aside while discussing grace with a friend, he made an interesting comment to me. He said that people who believe salvation is completely unmerited eventually degenerate to believing that all mankind is saved. He mourned the thought. However, I cannot mourn, but must rejoice!

Will you rejoice with me?

Daniel 12:1-4

Wait! We must also consider Daniel 12:1-4 (WEB). Does this Scripture speak about the eternal damnation of unbelieving mankind?

1) At that time Michael will stand up, the great prince who stands for the children of your people; and there will be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time. At that time your people will be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. 2) Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. 3) Those who are wise will shine as the brightness of the expanse. Those who turn many to righteousness will shine as the stars forever and ever. 4) But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end. Many will run back and forth, and knowledge will be increased.

It would seem that there could be no other conclusion. Part of mankind is saved and the remainder is not. Period. Yet, the meanings of the underlined words above may help us more clearly understand and apply Daniel 12:1-4 and what it teaches about the extent of Christ's salvation.

Your people

The Hebrews words “*ben `am*” are translated “*your people*.” A literal translation would be “*the sons of your people*” or perhaps more briefly “*sons of mankind*.” The natural question is who is this group of people? Possibilities include all mankind, believing mankind only, National Israel generally, every individual Israelite particularly, or believing Israel only. Other Old Testament usage of “*`am*” includes both all mankind and particular people such as the nation of Israel. We also notice that the archangel Michael protects these people, whoever they are. We know from the New Testament in Hebrews 1:14 that angels care for the redeemed and in Matthew 18:10 that children have guardian angels. So it seems clear that “*your people*” means the redeemed people of God. However, this phrase alone does not clearly indicate the extent of those elected to eternal life within mankind -- whether *PART* or *ALL*. We need to look at the larger context.

Your people

The second occurrence of “*your people*” in the English translation above is really the abbreviated “*`am*” in Hebrew. The Hebrew “*ben*” is omitted, but implied as the messenger from God in Daniel’s vision is still talking about the same people group. The messenger says that “*your people*” will be delivered. So we can take heart that the protection of God through Michael, his powerful agent, is effective. Yet we still look for clarity in the passage about the specific number of these people.

Everyone who is found written in the book

Does this phrase clarify or qualify who is meant by “*your people?*” We have already said that “*your people*” are those effectively protected by God, so this phrase is not qualifying, but further clarifying that protection is guaranteed for *ALL* “*your people*.” It would be impossible that *ALL* “*your people*” were protected, but then only *PART* were listed in his book. God is telling us that *ALL* of “*your people*” are secured with each one’s name specifically penned in his book. This is a great encouragement to believers.

Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth

This phrase is most commonly, and perhaps most easily, understood to mean deceased humanity. Old Testament patriarchs would speak about “*resting with their fathers*” and the New Testament speaks about those who “*sleep*” meaning those who have physically died. However, are these multitudes deceased humans only, or are imprisoned fallen angels also included in this group? This is a critical question. We know from 2 Peter 2:4

that the crime of some fallen angels has warranted their early imprisonment, while others remain at large. So it is at least possible that the “*multitudes*” here refers to a mixed group of people, including both humans and fallen angels. I admit it seems odd to speak of angels, who are spirit beings, as sleeping in the dust for they do not have bodies that turn to dust as do humans. Or do some angels have bodies? I have pointed out in my article, *Ten Theological Absurdities*, that one day fallen angels will be embodied. So perhaps it is not so odd that demons will also awake from the dust. Also some theologians are certain that the demons currently imprisoned in Tartarus are the angels that fell into sexual sin with mankind in Genesis 6. Because of this great sin they were specially punished immediately in Tartarus, as explained in 2 Peter 2. If this is true, then these fallen angels do have bodies; it would be impossible to have sex without a body!

Will awake

Whoever the “*multitudes*” are we see that they “*will awake*.” When is the timing of this event and are the saved and unsaved raised at the same time? The answer to this question is most important to our understanding of this passage. The verse seems to indicate that the “*Many...will awake*” together at a single event in the future. Some may dispute that, but let's consider that option first. Events future from Daniel's time include A) the first coming of Christ, B) Christ's coming in judgment upon Jerusalem in 70 A.D., C) the resurrection at Christ's second coming, and D) the Great White Throne Judgment at the commencement of eternity.

The Great White Throne Judgment seems to be the best possible match for this event. In fact just prior to The Great White Throne Judgment there is the resurrection of the “wicked dead.” Unbelieving mankind, now sufficiently punished for their unbelief, and the imprisoned angels are extracted out of Hades and Thalaasa, respectively, for final judgment as explained in Revelation 20:11-15. We know that all humans and angels are removed from their prisons because it is specifically noted that Hades is thrown into the Lake of Fire, empty of all beings, whether human or demonic. Most Christians do not appreciate the significance of this fact as it relates to Christ's final victory in the salvation of ALL mankind. Instead most understand Revelation 20:11-15 to be only the final sentencing of the wicked dead to the Lake of Fire, presuming the group to be humans only. However, Daniel 12:1-4 indicates a specific time in the future when “*multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.*” The Great White Throne Judgment appears to be synonymous with Daniel 12:1-4 which explains that at that time some are resurrected to eternal life and others to condemnation. So Daniel 12:1-4, rather than undermining the argument of this book, instead strongly supports the conclusion that some are saved and some are damned at The Great White Throne Judgment. Contrary to popular salvation

theology, we see that grace allows for the salvation of even unbelieving mankind at The Great White Throne Judgment because they are elect. Yet the Devil and his demons are instead sentenced to the Lake of Fire.

Of course some may argue that the timing of the awakening in Daniel 12:2 is not the same for the saved group and the unsaved group. They may say that deceased believers are raised first to life earlier and that deceased unbelievers are raised later at The Great White Throne Judgment for condemnation. This model, however, does not fit well with the Lord's conversation in Matthew 25:31-46 (the Sheep and Goat Judgment), which I also understand to be synonymous with the Great White Throne Judgment. Daniel 12 and Matthew 25 are clear that the final judgment will have both redeemed and unredeemed people standing before Christ at the same time.

Thus Daniel 12:1-4, Matthew 25:31-46, and Revelation 20:11-15 are all speaking about the same event.

They are each speaking about the final salvation of unbelieving mankind after their extraction from Hades and the condemnation of the Devil and his angels to the Lake of Fire, Matthew 25:41. You may disagree and say that the saved in Matthew 25 do not include the unbelieving elect, that is human beings extracted from Hades. Yet doesn't it seem odd that believers who are already reigning with Christ would have to face the Great White Throne Judgment and question their salvation again before the Lord? Hardly. The sheep who are incredulous at the Great White Throne Judgment are the unbelieving elect extracted safely from Hades and spared from the Lake of Fire by the grace of God alone. They are incredulous that God's grace could save them even after a sentence in Hades. Of course if you are a believer now, then you could never be incredulous about such a thing. You fully understand how God's grace has saved you apart from any act of your will, solely by his electing grace. You also should know that if the grace of Christ has saved us now it certainly can save unbelieving mankind then!

So are you incredulous or do you confidently trust in Christ?

Further note that when Daniel 12:1 says "**Michael... protects your people**" the emphasis could mean "**Michael [the arch angel]... protects your people [mankind]**." Michael says "*your people*" meaning mankind, in contrast to his people, that is angel-kind.

**Some to everlasting life, and
some to shame and everlasting contempt**

Some of the multitudes that “*will awake*” are granted eternal life, while the remainder are sentenced to everlasting contempt as already explained above.

***Those who are wise will shine
as the brightness of the expanse.
Those who turn many to righteousness
will shine as the stars forever and ever.***

Those with wisdom will lead many to righteousness. The gospel clarifies that true righteousness is from God, as explained in Romans 1:16-17. Righteousness cannot be found in man or man’s will. I have argued in this book that both Arminianism and Calvinism fall short of proclaiming this righteousness. The Arminian claims that his *free will* choice of Christ makes the difference. The Calvinist rejects the Arminian claim, but also rejects Christ’s atonement for all mankind.

Dear Reader, I pause to ask you which gospel have you received? Do you believe that Christ died for *ALL* mankind? Do you believe that salvation is *ALL* of grace? Have you been led to the righteousness that is from God? Are you shining with the truth?

Seal the book

Why would the messenger in Daniel’s vision tell him to “*seal up the words?*” Why would God hide the truth? God has chosen to incrementally reveal his redemptive plan through history for his greater glory. I have also suggested in my article that the “*Hosea Strategy*” is a key component of God’s ministry to the hardhearted. Likewise, Mark 4:11-13 explains that Jesus also uses parables for a similar purpose.

The good news is that the fullness of God’s love for mankind is no longer hidden, but completely revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. Do you want rock solid hope for your salvation, as well as good news for all mankind? It can only be found through faith in Jesus Christ.

This study has proved very fruitful for me and I trust for you as well.

John 3:16

John 3:16 is the most famous verse in the entire Bible. And anyone familiar with John 3:16 would naturally say that my entire thesis is unbiblical and unfounded. John 3:16 is commonly understood by all to mean that eternal salvation has been offered, but is only granted to those believing in Jesus.

John 3:16 (WEB) says,

For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal [aionian] life.

Yet is the common translation and understanding of John 3:16 correct? I have argued elsewhere that the meaning of the Greek word 'aionian,' is much richer than the simple translation 'eternal.' Greek studies prove that valid denotations for the word 'aionian' include 'age-during,' 'entire,' 'complete,' 'whole,' and 'unbroken,' but rarely 'eternal' time. A reading list for your own research is posted in my article, [Book Reviews](#). I also invite you to read my articles, [Forever Is Not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!](#) and [Forever Is Not Forever? You Still Gotta Be Kidding Me!](#)

Now please read John Chapter 3 (WEB) with me again, reconsidering the meaning of the Greek work 'aionian.'

1) Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2) The same came to him by night, and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him.'

Nicodemus approaches Jesus at NIGHT to SEE God's Kingdom.

3) Jesus answered him, 'Most certainly, I tell you, unless one is born anew, he can't see God's Kingdom.'

Jesus says that God's Kingdom can only be SEEN by those born from above.

4) Nicodemus said to him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?'

Nicodemus does not SEE.

5) Jesus answered, 'Most certainly I tell you, unless one is born of water and spirit, he can't enter into God's Kingdom. 6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7) Don't marvel that I said to you, "You must be born anew." 8) The wind blows where it wants to, and you hear its sound, but don't know where it comes from and where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.'

Jesus answers again that SPIRIT BIRTH is needed.

9) Nicodemus answered him, 'How can these things be?'

Nicodemus still does not SEE.

10) Jesus answered him, 'Are you the teacher of Israel, and don't understand these things? 11) Most certainly I tell you, we speak that which we know, and testify of that which we have seen, and you don't receive our witness. 12) If I told you earthly things and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?'

Jesus confronts Nicodemus' BLINDNESS and unbelief.

13) No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended out of heaven, the Son of Man, who is in heaven. 14) As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15) that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal [age-during, whole, unbroken] life. 16) For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal [age-during, whole, unbroken] life.

Jesus answers that trust in him is the only way to AIONIAN life.

17) For God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him.

Jesus reminds Nicodemus that he condemns no one but instead saves!

18) He who believes in him is not judged. He who doesn't believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. 19) This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil. 20)

For everyone who does evil hates the light, and doesn't come to the light, lest his works would be exposed.

But those hiding in DARKNESS are condemned because they do not trust Jesus.

21) But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his works may be revealed, that they have been done in God.

Those knowing the truth will come into the LIGHT.

22) After these things, Jesus came with his disciples into the land of Judea. He stayed there with them and baptized. 23) John also was baptizing in Enon near Salim, because there was much water there. They came, and were baptized; 24) for John was not yet thrown into prison. 25) Therefore a dispute arose on the part of John's disciples with some Jews about purification. 26) They came to John and said to him, 'Rabbi, he who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, he baptizes, and everyone is coming to him.'

Many were coming to JESUS.

27) John answered, 'A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. 28) You yourselves testify that I said, "I am not the Christ," but, "I have been sent before him." 29) He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. This, my joy, therefore is made full. 30) He must increase, but I must decrease. 31) He who comes from above is above all. He who is from the earth belongs to the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. 32) What he has seen and heard, of that he testifies; and no one receives his witness. 33) He who has received his witness has set his seal to this, that God is true.

Jesus testifies to what he has SEEN and heard.

34) For he whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for God gives the Spirit without measure.

GOD GIVES THE SPIRIT without measure!

35) The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand. 36) One who believes in the Son has eternal [age-during, whole, unbroken] life, but one who disobeys the Son won't see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

The one trusting Jesus HAS *aionian* life. The disobedient will not SEE life... until their eyes are opened to trust in Christ.

So which valid denotation of 'aionian' is Jesus using in his conversation with Nicodemus? Jesus condemns no one and has forgiven everyone! Jesus said, **"I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly."** (John 10:10b WEB). Friends, Jesus is not selling fire insurance here, but teaching us the truth about the change of heart needed to trust that Christ already loves and forgives us so that we can live a whole, unbroken, completely restored life, both now and forever!

Purgatory?

So is Hades properly understood to be Catholic Purgatory? There are many views in Christendom about the afterlife. Catholic Christians believe in the existence of Purgatory, while Protestants would consider the Catholics to be in error on this point. Catholic doctrine holds to a temporary place of punishment and purification in the after-life for the redeemed. According to Catholic doctrine, all people spend more or less time in Purgatory depending upon the good and bad things they did in this life. For the Catholics, the after-life is a multi-step process until they arrive in Heaven. Protestants, however, emphasize that the afterlife is a single step with one fork in the road and two destinations: eternal Heaven or eternal Hell. Protestants reference Hebrews 9:26-28 (WEB) to prove this point,

26) or else he must have suffered often since the foundation of the world. But now once at the end of the ages, he has been revealed to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. 27) Inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once, and after this, judgment, 28) so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, without sin, to those who are eagerly waiting for him for salvation.

This verse says that people die and face judgment once at the end of their life. This was the teaching I grew up with and feel naturally comfortable with. However, from our study this far I have shown that Hebrews 9:27, while certainly true, does not explain the whole story. At a minimum we see from Revelation 20:13-14 that Hades is in fact a temporary place of punishment. One day Hades will be emptied of all people and then Hades itself will be thrown into the Lake of Fire empty of all people. The Great

White Throne Judgment punctuates this present world and marks the commencement of eternity.

I am not suggesting that the Biblical doctrine of Hell, that is Hades, is like Purgatory or even similar to it. The Catholic Church has taught that one could work or pay one's way out of Purgatory with good deeds and penance. More can be learned about views on Purgatory here <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Purgatory>. However, the Bible does not teach that unbelievers will somehow escape punishment for their rejection of Christ. Certain punishment in Hades is the destiny of all unbelieving men. No one should think that they can conquer Hades, work their way out of Hades, or escape from Hades through any means whatsoever... except by the grace of God. Recently a person was pictured in front of the U.S. Supreme Court during the gay marriage debate with a shirt proclaiming, "*Hell will be fun.*" Luke 16:19-31 makes it clear that the torments of Hades will bring even the hardest heart to immediate regret. There will be no man-made escape for those punished in Hades. The only escape is the grace of God alone.

In a nutshell, Protestants (and Catholics) could benefit by expanding their understanding of afterlife events through more careful Bible study. Is your faith built on the truth of the Bible or the traditions of men?

The Bottom Line

We live in a world that is often only concerned about the bottom line. We want to know if our team won, if the business deal ended in the black, if the goal was reached. We want the headline, and perhaps the summary, but have little time to actually live it or get emotionally involved. We want the college degree now. We want to lose weight now. We want to get rich now. In a nutshell we want the facts so we can get on with our own business and retreat to the comfort of our own homes. However, we do not have the patience to live, work, and breathe for 365 days a year and still be pursuing the same goal as years turn into decades.

Why are our resumes strung with pages of job experience? Why are we so good at making new friends, but not keeping the old friends? Why are so many marriages failing? How could our grandfathers stay with the same woman, visit the same friends, and do the same work for a lifetime? Why do so many begin to follow Christ, yet either bail out or end their days warming a pew? We have been duped by the promises of unscrupulous marketers. Vain promises have drained us of our strength and perseverance for anything different or difficult.

Sadly, Christian evangelists have often done the same thing as the unscrupulous marketers that surround us, myself included. Christian salvation is marketed with the same strategy that Lou uses to sell cars. We get a customer hot for the sale with money burning a hole in his pocket, but he drives away not even knowing what he has purchased.

Warnings like “*Are you saved?*” and “*Pray this prayer*” lead you to believe that you can take action to add your own name to the Book of Life. You have entirely missed the point of grace. You think you have “*bought*” salvation, but do not even know what it is! You have bought, but you have not rested in the Father’s love. You have your fire insurance policy, but you have no fire or passion for Christ. There is no heart for a life of rugged discipleship for our lover.

Instead, true faith is a longing to leave sin and a commitment to righteousness. Open the car hood of your life and check the timing and temperature of your engine! Get to a hospital for open heart surgery to see if you actually have a new heart of flesh or the same old heart of stone! Is the fire of Christ burning in your life or are you just a good (or perhaps bad) church kid?

What if instead you looked at Jesus Christ and received that you have been loved by him from before the very beginning? What if instead you confessed that your eternal destiny is fully in the hands of Christ... period? What if you truly believed that the victory was guaranteed and played for the love of the game and the love of your coach? Then you would be thankful for your eternal destiny and thankful to live for him now.

Another friend suggested that if we told people that Christ had already forgiven all their future sin, then there would be no reason to quit sinning. What an unfortunate understanding! First, this man must think that fear is a more powerful motivator than love. However, love, hands down, is the most powerful force in the universe. Secondly, this man is blind to his own sin, voting a nebulous victory for himself, but without the power of God’s love in his life. My friend’s heart is exposed, not as God’s son, but as a slave to sin. Sin is bad and harmful and this man does not even seem to know it! Why would you prefer to know God as an angry slave master? Why not know him as he actually is, as your loving Heavenly Father?

The point is that Christian salvation is much more than salvation from a bad end, but also salvation from the harm of sin now. Read my article, [SAVED 5X](#), for a larger list of the things we all need protection from. Yes Christ finalized the TRANSACTION for our eternal salvation at the cross. And now Christ fights for our TRANSFORMATION, opening our eyes and leading us to faith, a purposeful life, and Christ-likeness.

It is given that we want salvation for a pleasurable life after death. But do we want salvation from sin now? Do we want to be transformed into Christ-likeness? Do we want to suffer with him for opposing self-righteousness and proclaiming grace? Or, do we just like the style of the W.W.J.D. wristband?

Playing Church

We all agree that a truthful understanding of salvation is essential for the Christian. However, if you have made it this far in my book you are now aware that those claiming to follow Christ can be categorized into at least three opposing views: the Arminian, the Calvinist, and those confident in the victory of grace for all mankind. Of course there are varieties and shades of each, as well as fence sitters. However, let's suppose by some miracle we did all come to the exact same understanding of Christian salvation.

Would we then be one as Jesus is one with the Father, as he prayed in John 17?

I fear that coming closer to agreement on one thing might increase the pressure of the differences on other things. Squaring one corner could expose misalignment on the other corners. Frankly, the unity Jesus prayed for seems like a hopeless endeavor. So we often settle for *"playing church"* rather than pursuing Christ-likeness.

I feel particularly stretched because I have sincere Christian friends in all kinds of church denominations and theological camps. All my Christian friends could not even fellowship under the same roof! And worse, sometimes we are under the same roof, but true fellowship is not happening there either. We need grace.

However, since I dared light a match to the explosive issue of Christian salvation, while the match still burns, let me light a few additional fuses. Specifically, we are commanded to follow Christ, so what should that look like? The whole subject of this book has been how to start a relationship with Christ on the right foot. A relationship with Christ must begin with the confidence that God has, in fact, paid for all of our sin -- past, present, and future -- and the sins of all of his people. However, the Christian life does not stop at the beginning! Now that we have a relationship with God through faith in Christ, we must continue by following him and imitating his words and actions. We are commanded to follow his example. We must do this, not to stay saved or to earn and keep the salvation we already have, but instead simply to please Jesus through obedience to his commands. Obedience to Christ is the mark of the Holy

Spirit's transforming work in the believer's life. So, what should it look like to follow Christ?

As one example, I hold to the view of Christian non-participation in earthly war, as I learned while growing up in a dear Mennonite congregation. Instead, Christians are called to enlist in spiritual war -- the Great Commission! Christ's command for Peter to put his sword away was reserved for the last hour at the critical fulcrum between choosing the kingdoms of this world or the Kingdom of Christ. I have written at length about this in my article, *To Battle with the Sword of the Spirit and Prayer!* Yet while discussing this with a friend, we considered a curious question. Would Jesus have personally pulled the trigger to fire the nuclear bombs of World War II? One brother said, "*Most certainly yes!*"

Wow! Really? So even if we could agree on the weighty matter of Christian salvation, could we then agree on what it actually means to follow Christ? Does national patriotism and mere earthly defense trump fidelity to the mission of Christ? To be sure, God has sanctioned governments to wield the sword. To be sure Jesus Christ is also the sovereign agent behind every event in world history. For example God appointed wicked Rome to destroy Jerusalem in 70 A.D. for their rejection of Christ. Yet those who know they belong to Christ have been conscripted instead to follow the example and commission of Christ into deadly spiritual war. Guns and ammo will never accomplish peace in the Middle East. However, the Bible and prayer are powerful weapons with which to wage war. We are called to leave home, family, farm, job, and country to offer our lives as a sacrifice in making disciples of the nations. Can one do that with gun in hand? Clearly one cannot when following the pattern of Jesus. What part of the word "**not**" do you not understand in 2 Corinthians 10:3-4? Please reconsider and read my article, *Luke 22:26, Major George Buxton Persuades Sergeant Alvin York.*

Where are the recruitment officers for the Lord's army? Where is the passion for Christian mission? We Americans have reduced the highest Christian ideal to honoring those fallen in mere earthly battles for our supposed democratic freedom. Weak "*constitutional*" theology and weak knees have found the American church hiding behind the red, white, and blue. Where is the praise for Abel and Zechariah mentioned in Luke 11:51? Why don't we have a Memorial Day for these men? They and countless others in history past have lost their lives preaching Christ to their own family and neighbors. They demonstrated fidelity to Christ unmatched in our present generation! They carried a cross, not a cross-bow. Remember them well.

Once I suggested that I go to Afghanistan as a missionary. Another said he would not send his worst enemy to that country. Are we then followers of Uncle Sam or of Christ? Christ came to serve those who counted him their enemy. Should we not do likewise, if we claim to follow him? Who is ready

to pull the trigger to drop themselves as a “*grace bomb*” into enemy lands? Jesus dropped himself into our world. Friends, we have walled ourselves into a safe game of “*American church*.” However, the church is called to be the spiritual military camp to serve the nations with the weapons of God’s word and prayer. My view may seem odd or radical to you. I am well aware that I am in the minority, yet certainly not alone. Consider Preston Sprinkle’s book, *Fight*, for further challenge. My own articles *Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News!* and *Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News! (Part 2)* explain our need for Christ-likeness in battle.

As another example, while a young Christian, I favored non-denominational churches because they seemed better suited for outreach. They have a passion for reaching the lost that at least moves them to preach Christ rather than denominational distinctions. Since then I learned that every church has its issues of course, even non-denominational churches. Yet problematic denominationalism led me to write the article, *Should I Stay or Should I Go?* It is a good question to ask when faced with divisions in your own fellowship.

So if we cannot find a satisfactory Christian fellowship to call home, should we start yet another Christian group? Can one more denomination or sect be the source of Christian unity? Hardly! Jesus could have tried to find better men to start his new movement, but where would he find them? Instead he stuck with his weak disciples and set a resolute path to die for all mankind in Jerusalem. Christ determined to love his disciples, the Pharisees, the Romans, and the Greeks -- that is ALL mankind. So we are best advised to stick with him. It is true that Christ’s work divides us into believers and unbelievers, yet his ultimate goal is not to divide, but to weld his chosen people together with love and himself at the center for all eternity. Jesus refused to start another human sect, but instead my article title highlights, *He Went To Jerusalem*.

We near the end of my review of the various views of Christian salvation. The Protestant Reformation from the 16th century sparked a division over the doctrine of salvation that has cascaded into so many divisions that many churches no longer even hold to the views of their namesake. The body of Christ has become a divided mess! Even after reading Martin Luther I do not know if he believed that “*faith*” is the “*pen*” that writes our name in the Lamb’s Book of Life or the “*glasses*” that enable us to see our name written there from before the foundation of the earth. Did Luther think that “*faith*” was the condition that activated salvation? What quadrant would he fall into in our *Salvation Evaluator*? I am not sure. But I know that it is even worse for you and me because in addition to Luther’s opinion and the thousands of others since then, we now also have my opinion to consider. I cannot imagine that more words of men can possibly help untangle the mess.

So are we playing church or are we following Christ? Are we literally trying to walk in the footprints Jesus has left us?

Gospel Foolishness

The heart of the problem with Arminian and Calvinist efforts to codify the gospel is that they do not include gospel foolishness and they depend upon a mistranslation of the word “*aion*.” These models assume that the Bible is written to educate teachable people. These models adopt a purely informational and educational strategy for winning converts that appeals only to the natural mind. Furthermore, these models assume that the gospel can be simply codified. I have written about the challenges of gospel codification in my article, *Revelation 20:11-15, A.M.A.Z.I.N.G. Grace*.

Some Christian traditions even refuse to adopt systematic theologies. They feel that the Scripture has already codified the truth in the most perfect way. But our weak human models of the gospel attempt to interpret the words of the Bible as if the Holy Spirit only ever throws straight fast balls. Yet, we have seen that God is also willing to throw curve balls to the unbeliever’s foolish swing of the bat. Just like the Wright brothers needed special tactics to confront unbelief, so we see that God himself is the author of special tactics. Solomon teaches us how in Proverbs 26:4-5. Hosea lived it with stubborn Israel and his family as recorded in Hosea 2:23. Jesus put it into practice in John 10:25-30. Paul employs it in Romans 9:1-29. Even the great prophet had to swallow a painful pill in Jeremiah 20:7a (NASB),

O Lord, You have deceived me and I was deceived.

Now we see that the Holy Spirit has used some very crafty strategies to pitch curve balls to the Left and Right wings of Christendom. He has deceived us and we were deceived. Three quadrants of our salvation matrix have stepped up to the plate for a big swing and a miss. Fortunately God’s ultimate purpose is not to strike us out and leave us losers. His purpose is to heal us with his grace! However, like a good doctor he also needs to remove the cancer of our pride and hypocrisy for true healing. That is painful. In fact we would not or could not do it ourselves, hence the curve balls.

Specifically, our *Salvation Evaluator* matrix has exposed the hypocrisy of imagining that God chose us but not all men. We are also exposed for the religiosity of thinking that we chose the grace of God with our *free will* while others did not. Friends, only the *will that has been freed* by the grace of God trusts that Jesus has paid for the sins of all mankind. Apparently just as Jesus faced the Right and Left responses of the Jew and Gentile in his day, these mistakes still are with us today.

Of course if we are Christians we may still honestly wonder why he has not opened all mankind's eyes to faith. Why does most of humanity remain unbelieving? Why have only a few believers been called to faith? Three words come to mind: work, witness, and worship. Jesus has left us with work to do, succinctly explained in 2 Corinthians 5:20. Jesus also says we are to witness like him in 1 John 4:17. And Jesus has left us with a grand doxology of worship found in our key verse, Romans 11:32-36.

No doubt there are true believers within both Arminian and Calvinist camps who understand their codifications of the gospel ultimately fall short. There are also good followers of Christ who still have serious questions, even about the gospel. However, there are just as many or more who claim to follow Jesus yet their hope is not based upon the truth. They have not been to the foot of the cross. Instead they stand upon lies that exalt man and debase Christ. They are Christians in name only, not in heart. Thus gospel foolishness is still needed to reach the rebellious elect. We read in 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 (WEB),

18) For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are dying, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19) For it is written,

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise. I will bring the discernment of the discerning to nothing." 20) Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the lawyer of this world? Hasn't God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21) For seeing that in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom didn't know God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save those who believe. 22) For Jews ask for signs, Greeks seek after wisdom, 23) but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews, and foolishness to Greeks, 24) but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God; 25) because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

26) For you see your calling, brothers, that not many are wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, and not many noble; 27) but God chose the foolish things of the world that he might put to shame those who are wise. God chose the weak things of the world that he might put to shame the things that are strong. 28) God chose the lowly things of the world, and the things that are despised, and the things that don't exist, that he might bring to nothing the things that exist, 29) that no flesh should boast before God. 30) Because of him, you are in Christ Jesus, who was made to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and

sanctification, and redemption: 31) that, as it is written, “He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord.”

Just like an insane person cannot be reasoned with, so an unbelieving person cannot be taught the good news without gospel foolishness.

The Arminian boasts in his *free will* choice of God while the Calvinist blindly claims that he alone is chosen. However, the only testimony that will stand is the cross of Jesus Christ, his blood shed for all mankind.

Curious Combo

Since foolishness to the foolish is integral to the gospel message, this creates the possibility of a curious combination of circumstances. Specifically, the religious unbelieving could actually drive other unbelieving toward Christ through preaching pieces of the gospel. The religious unbelieving might teach some true things about Christ that could help others take steps toward Christ. Though if the leader does not know the whole path to the cross, then *“the blind lead the blind”* as Jesus warned.

Consider again Jesus’ words in John 10:25-30 (WEB),

25) Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you don’t believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name, these testify about me. 26) But you don’t believe, because you are not of my sheep, as I told you. 27) My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28) I give eternal life to them. They will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29) My Father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of my Father’s hand. 30) I and the Father are one.”

Now suppose we were Jesus’ disciples standing there without fully understanding Jesus implementation of the [Proverbs 26:4-5](#) and [Hosea 2:23](#) tactics to reach the stubborn unbelieving. We would most likely conclude that those who disbelieve, such as the Jews described above, are truly not Jesus’ sheep. We might also conclude that since Jesus said these people are not sheep, then they can never become his sheep and they are goats for all eternity. We might think they are non-elect, non-chosen, non-predestined. Yet, since we are very concerned about our own skin, we would also be happy to believe that we are Jesus’ sheep. How convenient for us! In fact Peter may have been such an unbeliever in the Olive Garden when he drew his sword to kill the Pharisees. Peter still needed to learn that Jesus also loved the Pharisees and died for them, just as he died for Peter.

Furthermore, if we were Arminian style disciples we would conclude that we are Jesus' sheep because of our good *free will* choice to follow Christ. If we were Calvinist style disciples we would conclude that we are Jesus' sheep simply because Christ chose us and not the unbelieving Jews above. Either way we would be happy, but none-the-less big stinky hypocrites.

Now I boldly ask: if followers of Christ are this confused about God's love for all, are they actually following the Jesus who is and truly believing in him in the first place? This is a good question! Consider one of the toughest verses in the whole Bible in John 6:66 (WEB), ***“At this, many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.”***

It is possible to follow Christ, to serve him, and to even be used by him, yet to be confused about his purpose and eventually turn away from him. Yet, we see that most do not openly turn away, but instead turn to the religion of a graceless Christ.

The grace of Christ forgives a lot more confusion than we might be comfortable with. In fact his grace covers ALL sin for ALL mankind for ALL time. We are often not even aware of just how bad we actually are. We can be offensive hypocrites yet blind to how we hurt others. Yet the fragrance of Christ takes away our offensive sins. His grace also takes away the sins of those who offend us.

Jesus always seems to have the perfect words for every occasion and even for the ideas on this page. He says in Luke 10:19-21 (WEB),

19) “Behold, I give you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy. Nothing will in any way hurt you. 20) Nevertheless, don’t rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” 21) In that same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, and said, “I thank you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in your sight.”

Do you think you are Jesus' sheep because of something you have done? Do you think you have written your own name in Heaven by choosing *“faith?”* That is foul. Are you trying to get people to write their own names in Heaven? That is really foul.

Can you instead repent of your self-righteousness and rejoice through faith that Christ has written ALL his chosen one's names in Heaven from before the creation of the world? That is fragrant grace.

Constructive Envy

I have shown that special tactics are required to help those who persist in stubborn unbelief. The stubborn may have various reasons for rejecting the good news that Jesus Christ is the savior of all mankind. Foremost among them is the spiritual pride of thinking that we are *PART* of a supposed chosen subset forgiven by God, such as the Jews. Or equally crummy, we may imagine that we provided *PART* of the condition to be eternally loved by God, just like pagan religions. Since pride of this nature is bad news, when the stubborn unbelief persists, even further special tactics may be employed.

Paul explains another special tactic in Romans 11:13-15 (WEB),

13) For I speak to you who are Gentiles. Since then as I am an apostle to Gentiles, I glorify my ministry; 14) if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh, and may save some of them. 15) For if the rejection of them is the reconciling of the world, what would their acceptance be, but life from the dead?

Acts 22:1-22 (WEB) also provides an excellent demonstration of this tactic by Paul,

1) “Brothers and fathers, listen to the defense which I now make to you.” 2) When they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they were even more quiet. He said, 3) “I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, instructed according to the strict tradition of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, even as you all are today. 4) I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. 5) As also the high priest and all the council of the elders testify, from whom also I received letters to the brothers, and traveled to Damascus to bring them also who were there to Jerusalem in bonds to be punished.

6) As I made my journey, and came close to Damascus, about noon, suddenly a great light shone around me from the sky. 7) I fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’

8) I answered, ‘Who are you, Lord?’

He said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you persecute.’

9) *“Those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they didn’t understand the voice of him who spoke to me. 10) I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’*

“The Lord said to me, ‘Arise, and go into Damascus. There you will be told about all things which are appointed for you to do.’ 11) When I couldn’t see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.

12) “One Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well reported of by all the Jews who lived in Damascus, 13) came to me, and standing by me said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ In that very hour I looked up at him. 14) He said, ‘The God of our fathers has appointed you to know his will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear a voice from his mouth. 15) For you will be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard. 16) Now why do you wait? Arise, be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.’

17) “When I had returned to Jerusalem, and while I prayed in the temple, I fell into a trance, 18) and saw him saying to me, ‘Hurry and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not receive testimony concerning me from you.’ 19) I said, ‘Lord, they themselves know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue those who believed in you. 20) When the blood of Stephen, your witness, was shed, I also was standing by, consenting to his death, and guarding the cloaks of those who killed him.’

21) “He said to me, ‘Depart, for I will send you out far from here to the Gentiles.’ ”

22) They listened to him until he said that; then they lifted up their voice and said, “Rid the earth of this fellow, for he isn’t fit to live!”

Paul -- actually the Holy Spirit through Paul -- was willing to make constructive use of envy to confront the spiritual pride of the Jews who rejected Jesus as their savior and the savior of both Jew and Gentile. The results as you see were explosive. The Jews hated the thought that both the Jews and the Gentiles were equally needy of grace. The Jews thought God’s blessing was focused only on them and limited to them unless the Gentiles jumped through the hoop. However, Paul crossed the line in reaching out to both Jews and Gentiles with the good news. Though it may appear like Paul is giving up on the Jews, really he is playing his last, but most powerful card through the constructive use of envy.

Paul was willing to risk conflict for the greater good of helping at least some stubborn unbelievers appreciate the foolishness of their unbelief.

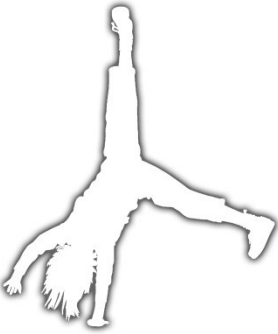
Paul always makes a point of giving the Jews ample opportunity to change their mind and acknowledge Jesus as Messiah. In fact Paul taught that the Jews ought to even have the first opportunity to hear the gospel. Romans 1:16-17 (WEB) says,

16) For I am not ashamed of the Good News of Christ, because it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first, and also for the Greek. 17) For in it is revealed God's righteousness from faith to faith. As it is written, "But the righteous shall live by faith."

However, if stubborn unbelief continued, Paul became a burr under their saddle to get things kicking. You may have noticed that this Biblical strategy is strangely similar to the winning tactic employed by the Wright brothers. When the U.S. government rejected flight, the Wright brothers turned to Europe. Then the U.S. woke up.

Now let's move on to my concluding thoughts.

Eternal Destiny



Thank you for taking the time to read my thoughts concerning the gospel of Jesus Christ. I would be grateful to receive your thoughts and comments at DGJC.ORG/CONTACT. I can think of no other subject that has grabbed my attention as powerfully as the cross of Christ. Hopefully you feel the same way. The love of Jesus Christ and his tender caress in removing the thorns of sin from the hearts of his people is nothing less than pure ecstasy. The hymn writer said it best...

*It was grace that taught my heart to fear...
and grace my fears relieved.*

My incredible thought at the beginning of this treatise was this:

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.

Hopefully I have taken enough time and reasoned soundly enough to persuade you that my optimism is in control and Biblically defended, even if you still disagree with me. And at whatever points you or I are in error or disagreement, I am fully persuaded that the grace of God has covered and will overwhelmingly cover them all.

My view is certainly optimistic for the believer. However, the unbeliever, the one rejecting grace and refusing obedience to Christ's commands, has no confident optimism in his own worldview. The Arminians with their *free will* and the Calvinists with their limited atonement can offer no true assurance or guarantee before Holy God. So while God is constant is his love for all mankind, unbelievers do not know him as the God of grace. Grace is not at the foundation of their salvation recipe so their hearts can only contain fearful expectation of coming judgment, even though their fears are painted over with a thin veneer of religion. How sad!

The Scripture is clear that damnation to the Lake of Fire is the certain destiny of all the unredeemed. It is a matter of fact by definition that the unredeemed are not purchased back by God and thus are lost for all eternity. Yet sadly unbelieving mankind inwardly fears this destiny even though they were already redeemed at the cross and guaranteed a home in heaven.

Yes it is true that Jesus Christ is not the savior of the unredeemed. They are not chosen by him for grace. They are not

graced with repentance. Conscious torment in the Lake of Fire is their destiny for The Ages of The Ages. There is no escape.

So if you reject that Christ paid for the sins of all mankind the only possible hope for any of us is that you are wrong. So why reject your election and wait in fearful expectation? Why deny that Jesus has paid for your sin, bought you back for his very own, redeemed you from condemnation by dying on the cross for you? If you do not consider yourself one of Jesus' chosen people then be warned that damnation is the only destiny of the unredeemed. Only those whose sins are paid for by the blood of Christ are redeemed and purchased back for eternity in Heaven. Friend, Jesus has fully paid for all your sin! You are redeemed! Why not believe? Why live like a pauper when the King of the Universe is your Father?

Consider Hebrews 10:26-30 (WEB),

26) For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more a sacrifice for sins, 27) but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fierceness of fire which will devour the adversaries. 28) A man who disregards Moses' law dies without compassion on the word of two or three witnesses. 29) How much worse punishment do you think he will be judged worthy of who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant with which he was sanctified an unholy thing, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? 30) For we know him who said, "Vengeance belongs to me;" says the Lord, "I will repay." Again, "The Lord will judge his people."

The Scripture is clear that *fearful expectation* is the only possibility for those who refuse to rest confidently in Christ. There is no bending of that Scripture. Furthermore, even the elect of God, those whom Jesus has redeemed, whose sins are fully paid, will be punished in the fires of Hades if they do not repent and receive the grace of Christ.

The warning from 2 Peter 2:1-9 (WEB) says,

1) But false prophets also arose among the people, as false teachers will also be among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master who bought them, bringing on themselves swift destruction. 2) Many will follow their immoral ways, and as a result, the way of the truth will be maligned. 3) In covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words: whose sentence now from of old doesn't linger, and their destruction will not slumber. 4) For if God didn't spare angels when they sinned, but cast them down to

Tartarus, and committed them to pits of darkness to be reserved for judgment; 5) and didn't spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah with seven others, a preacher of righteousness, when he brought a flood on the world of the ungodly; 6) and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, having made them an example to those who would live in an ungodly way; 7) and delivered righteous Lot, who was very distressed by the lustful life of the wicked 8) (for that righteous man dwelling among them was tormented in his righteous soul from day to day with seeing and hearing lawless deeds): 9) the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment;"

Even the unbelieving redeemed will be punished in Hades after this life, unless they repent. Though the Lord has purchased all mankind with his blood, temporal punishment in Hades is certain for unbelieving mankind if they do not repent. I will now conclude briefly with a few quick thoughts about the redeemed and the reprobate while letting the Scripture itself be my conclusion with Revelation 22:7-21.

The Redeemed

A wonderful eternity is planned for the redeemed people of God as explained in Revelation 21:1-7 (WEB) which says,

1) I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth have passed away, and the sea is no more. 2) I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband. 3) I heard a loud voice out of heaven saying, "Behold, God's dwelling is with people, and he will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4) He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; neither will there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more. The first things have passed away." 5) He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." He said, "Write, for these words of God are faithful and true." 6) He said to me, "I have become the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give freely to him who is thirsty from the spring of the water of life. 7) He who overcomes, I will give him these things. I will be his God, and he will be my son."

I am particularly drawn to the fact that Heaven will be a new order, a new arrangement of things. The trials of this life have calloused us to our pitiful condition as we comfort one another with melodramatic words and thin

encouragement such as “*no pain, no gain.*” However, God is not cruel like we might be tempted to think at times. Instead he is a loving Heavenly Father and the brief trials and pain we endure in this life only serve his good purpose. It certainly is not weak to look forward to the day when all pain and mourning are finally taken away. I look forward to the day when we stand with the Lord in glory with every tear wiped away. What a glad day when our Sonship and inheritance is crowned in glory and sin and brokenness are removed forever for all God’s people!

I can hardly wait to be there with you. Will you be there with me? What do you say?

The Reprobate

In contrast to the redeemed, the Lake of Fire is the sentence for the reprobate, the unredeemed who are not chosen for grace. The final words in Revelation 21:8 (WEB) say,

But for the cowardly, unbelieving, sinners, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their part is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.

Review the list of those sentenced to the Lake of Fire. The Lord’s judgment will be certain and swift. He will not punish anyone unjustly, but instead it is the unredeemed wicked who will be damned. Those who pretend to believe should not think that they will escape while they are also cowardly, vile, murdering, and sexually immoral... *if* their sins are not redeemed. Those who are brave and pure, yet who reject the grace of Jesus Christ through their unbelief and false gospels will not escape... *if* their sins are not redeemed. Those outside of Christ will be placed into the blast furnace of God’s wrath for *The Ages of The Ages*.

There will be no escape from this judgment for the unredeemed.

However, those chosen by Jesus Christ for grace, those sinners hidden safely inside of Christ, are secure in the Father’s love. They are commanded to repent and turn away from wickedness as we read in 2 Timothy 2:19 (WEB),

However God’s firm foundation stands, having this seal, ‘The Lord knows those who are his,’ and, ‘Let every one who names the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness.’

Are you loved by the Lord? Do you want to have no doubt that you have been chosen by Christ from before the foundation of the world? Look to Jesus Christ and his cross for the proof. Belief cannot add your name to his Book of Life, but with eyes open to the cross you can know that God has always loved you and will always love you! With the eyes of faith open you can see your name inked in the Lamb's Book of Life from before the creation of the World. Are you a descendant of Adam? The second Adam has redeemed you! Confess his name and strive to please your lover!

Revelation 22:7-21

I end my proofs with the conclusion of Scripture, Revelation 22:7-21 (WEB),

7) *“Behold, I come quickly. Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”*

8) *Now I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. When I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who had shown me these things. 9) He said to me, “See you don’t do it! I am a fellow bondservant with you and with your brothers, the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”*

10) *He said to me, “Don’t seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. 11) He who acts unjustly, let him act unjustly still. He who is filthy, let him be filthy still. He who is righteous, let him do righteousness still. He who is holy, let him be holy still.”*

12) *“Behold, I come quickly. My reward is with me, to repay to each man according to his work. 13) I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.*

14) *Blessed are those who do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city. 15) Outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.*

16) *I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify these things to you for the assemblies. I am the root and the offspring of David; the Bright and Morning Star.”*

17) The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" He who hears, let him say, "Come!" He who is thirsty, let him come. He who desires, let him take the water of life freely.

18) I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if anyone adds to them, may God add to him the plagues which are written in this book. 19) If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, may God take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book.

20) He who testifies these things says, "Yes, I come quickly." Amen! Yes, come, Lord Jesus.

21) The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with all the saints. Amen.

Evangelism & Discipleship



Recently I was asked, “*What are the practical effects of believing that Jesus is the Savior of all mankind.*” My friend does not believe that Jesus is the savior of all, but was simply trying to understand why this is such an important point. I then realized that my book was missing an important chapter on application. My friend’s point is well taken. If there are no practical applications of a truth or even a theory yet to be proved as truth, then its value is quite limited.

However, in this case, the fact that Jesus is the Savior of all mankind is the most practical, useful, purposeful, glorious truth in the entire world. This truth has the grandest impacts on your personal well-being and your relationship to every other person on the planet as well as creation itself. Believing the truth about God’s grace for mankind will pull your head out of the sand and turn your life right side up! You will be able to receive your proper title as God’s child and be a true brother or sister to your neighbor.

Students of the Bible may well note that the book of Ephesians is divided into two parts. The first half teaches the reader truth about God’s love for mankind and, in particular, the church. Careful observers have noted that there is not even one imperative statement in the entire first half of the book. There is not one instruction to action, but only teaching the truth about God’s love for us.

The second half, however, focuses entirely on the actions and behaviors required of Jesus’ followers. God’s Word in Ephesians can be neatly divided into two chapters titled: Belief and Practice. However, my book is lopsided on theory and theology, so hopefully I learn a lesson from Ephesians and promote Christian action. My favorite verse on practical obedience is I John 3:18 (WEB), “***My little children, let’s not love in word only, or with the tongue only, but in deed and truth.***”

If you believe that Jesus loves and forgave you because he also loves and forgave all mankind, then we have important work to do! Love with actions and truth just like Jesus!

In the following pages of application I quote many Bible verses. No doubt you will be familiar with most of them. My goal in quoting them to you is not to simply serve the same meal again, but to invite you to chew on the Scripture with the seasoning that Jesus is truly the Savior of all mankind.

Follow Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So how do we even begin to follow him?

Matthew 4:18-20 (WEB) says,

18) Walking by the sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers: Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 19) He said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers for men." 20) They immediately left their nets and followed him.

We can begin to follow Jesus with great confidence since we know he loves all mankind. We do not have to impossibly determine if we are part of a *chosen sub-set* loved by Jesus. Rather we follow Jesus knowing that we are part of the ***chosen super-set*** loved by Jesus and he asks us to follow him. So we can follow Jesus with great confidence!

Matthew 16:24-27 (WEB) says,

24) Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. 25) For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it. 26) For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his life? Or what will a man give in exchange for his life? 27) For the Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will render to everyone according to his deeds."

We can also be certain that if we do not follow Jesus we have traded the great purposes that God has for our life for... nothing. Since Jesus could not love us more, to turn away from his love to any other thing is a crying shame. Only complete confidence in the love of God for me and you will

embolden us to give Jesus everything he asks. If we want to pretend that we are part of a chosen loved sub-set or that our choice of God's love *plus* his love cinched our destiny, then we do not truly understand God's love. Friends, we must have rock solid confidence that Jesus' love penetrates through our core to have loved us while we were yet his enemies. Without it, we will not be able to give Jesus all that he asks. Furthermore, because his arms are stretched wide his love includes all the Pharisees on his right and all the Pagans on his left. We can have unwavering confidence that he loves us as well, whether we are self-righteous Pharisees or godless Pagans or somewhere in between. His love is fully given to all. What does he ask of us? He wants our entire life -- our complete devotion.

John 6:66-71 (WEB) says,

66) At this, many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. 67) Jesus said therefore to the twelve, "You don't also want to go away, do you?" 68) Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69) We have come to believe and know that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 70) Jesus answered them, "Didn't I choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" 71 Now he spoke of Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, for it was he who would betray him, being one of the twelve.

Following Jesus demands our complete commitment. Our weak human strength cannot provide this level of commitment. Our promises cannot maintain this commitment. Only complete dependence upon the faithfulness of God and his guaranteed love for us can provide this commitment. We may flatter or fool ourselves thinking that we are the chosen subset because we are devoted followers of Jesus. That is radical commitment of sorts, but unfortunately not a commitment to the true Jesus, the Jesus who loves all mankind. Remember it is the Pharisees who were angry with Jesus when they learned that he does in fact love all mankind, including the Gentile "sinners." Friends, as much as we waiver about the love of God toward all mankind, we will also waiver in our commitment to him.

Do not waiver about God's love for you and me! Following Jesus demands one hundred percent confidence in his love for us as well as his love for others. Leave your nets and follow Jesus!

Believe Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to believe in him?

Mark 9:21-24 (WEB) says,

21) He asked his father, "How long has it been since this has come to him?" He said, "From childhood. 22) Often it has cast him both into the fire and into the water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us, and help us." 23) Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." 24) Immediately the father of the child cried out with tears, "I believe. Help my unbelief!"

The boy's father highlights a problem that is common among even the most mature Christians. We ought to believe in God with rock solid confidence, yet even the strongest Christian may have doubts. One response to the thesis that Jesus is the Savior of all mankind has been "*I want to believe, but it seems too good to be true!*" We should join the man above and ask God to help us overcome our unbelief!

Furthermore, some interpret this verse to mean that through "*faith*" we can accomplish whatever we determine. If this is true we would not only have "*faith*" in God, but we would also *be* God! This verse is not saying that we can always accomplish our will, but instead that through faith we can receive and always participate in God's will. In fact this misunderstanding of the meaning of "*faith*" is the heart of this generation's misunderstanding of the very gospel. "*Faith*" is not the condition to God's unconditional love, but instead faith is trust that God already loves us unconditionally! "*Faith*" never added one person to the Lamb's Book of Life, but instead faith opens our eyes to the rock solid fact that God has always loved his people. Do you doubt it? Ask God for help to overcome your unbelief!

Jude 22-23 (WEB) says,

22) On some have compassion, making a distinction, 23) and some save, snatching them out of the fire with fear, hating even the clothing stained by the flesh.

Efforts to tell others that Jesus is their Savior and the Savior of the world are often rejected. Sadly religion, tradition, and avoidance are always more popular than grace. This verse reminds us that the doubting are to be shown mercy. Jesus commands us to believe in him, to trust him with our entire lives. It is a good thing to question the ice before trusting it with your ice skates. Test Jesus and you will find that he does not change with the seasons, because "**Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever**" (Hebrews 13:8 WEB). He will never crack or melt in the heat, but instead is a solid rock! Friends, Jesus is so trustworthy it is a sin to not trust

him, so get your questions answered and your doubts erased! Do not let your doubts turn you away from God.

John 20:24-29 (WEB) says,

24) But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, wasn't with them when Jesus came. 25) The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." 26) After eight days again his disciples were inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, the doors being locked, and stood in the middle, and said, "Peace be to you." 27) Then he said to Thomas, "Reach here your finger, and see my hands. Reach here your hand, and put it into my side. Don't be unbelieving, but believing." 28) Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29) Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen, and have believed."

Even one of the twelve disciples who walked and talked with Jesus for three years doubted. The expression "*doubting Thomas*" lives on 2,000 years later in his honor. Yet this verse highlights Jesus' patience even with the doubting. Jesus is not intentionally obscure, but wants each of us to get to know him through faith. Ask God to show himself to you. But do not ask to see him and then be lazy or sleeping when he makes himself known. Do not ask to see him and then not be willing to shout to the world with Thomas, "***My Lord and my God!***"

Faith is not the condition to God's unconditional love. Faith is trusting that God loves us unconditionally because he loves all mankind. Believe in Jesus!

Trust Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to trust in him?

In the Bible "*trust in*" is basically a synonym for "*believe in*." Since belief and trust are the vital components of receiving God's salvation, let's hit it again.

1 John 1:9-10 (WEB) says,

9) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us the sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10) If we say that we haven't sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Getting turned on to something requires passion. So what can give us passion for Christ? How about total forgiveness of all your sins: past, present, and future? God loves us like the wonderful Heavenly Father that he says he is and so he is trustworthy. Yet some interpret 1 John 1:9 to mean that Jesus only forgives us if we ask. Is this true? I have mentioned elsewhere that Jesus asked the Father to forgive us from the cross, even though no one was asking. Is there more proof?

Romans 5:9-11 (WEB) says,

9) Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we will be saved from God's wrath through him. 10) For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we will be saved by his life. 11) Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Now here is good news, awesome news, that ought to get us totally turned on to Jesus. The death of Christ reconciled us to God, forgiving all our sins, while we were yet his enemies! The love of God was fully given before we were Christians or even acknowledged Christ. The heart of my thesis in this book is that there is no condition to God's unconditional love... not even our faith. In fact it is silly to suggest that "*trust*" is the condition to God's unconditional love. It is silly because God wants us instead to trust that his love for us is unconditional and already given, just like Romans 5:9-11 says! The point is that we must be fully persuaded of God's unconditional love for us to know him as he is and to make him known.

If you believe God loves you on those terms, then you will be passionate to know and make known that he loves all mankind exactly the same way. Logically, to the exact same degree you have doubts about whether mankind's sins are forgiven, you will have doubts that your own sins are forgiven. This is true unless you are hypocritically trusting in a condition to God's love that you supplied. If you are trusting in a condition that you supplied, you may appear to have confidence, but again you are standing on thin ice above the fires of Hades.

Gerry Beauchemin boldly says on page 165 of *Hope Beyond Hell*, “The only way I [or you] can be truly assured I will be saved is if I believe that God saves all [mankind].” Do you claim that God loves you 100%? On what basis? A Christian can be 100% confident that God loves him because God loves all mankind. Robin Parry goes as far to say in *The Evangelical Universalist* that Calvinism has in fact corrupted the morals of its adherents. The Calvinist is 100% confident that God loves him and equally confident that God does not love all mankind. Parry boldly says that such a person has become morally corrupted from a false gospel and false understanding of the nature of God’s love.

Trust is not the condition to God’s unconditional love, but instead faith that God loves us unconditionally because he loves all mankind. Trust in Jesus!

Hope in Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to hope in him?

Titus 2:11-14 (WEB),

11) For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12) instructing us to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we would live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age; 13) looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14) who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify for himself a people for his own possession, zealous for good works.

Christ is returning and Christians are waiting for this blessed hope. Yet most of mankind is not waiting or ready and thus has no hope!

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 (WEB) says,

13) But we don’t want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those who have fallen asleep, so that you don’t grieve like the rest, who have no hope. 14) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

This passage speaks of hope, yet some truths offer no hope. For example, there is no hope for the unredeemed. If sin is not paid for, sinners can have

no hope of salvation, ever. There appears to be no hope for Satan and his demons because apparently their sins are not paid for according to Hebrews 2:16. However, the passage above teaches us that Christians can have great hope because we believe and know that God will resurrect the Christians who have already died.

Now this passage also says that, ***“like the rest, who have no hope.”*** Does this mean that unbelievers will never ever have hope? Certainly not! The passage is speaking about the *“hope”* that we live by through faith. Both the believing and unbelieving redeemed have a glorious eternal destiny waiting for them. Jesus redeemed, paid the sin debt, for all mankind while we were yet his enemies! Believers have received this hope and live by it. However, unbelievers refuse to repent of their self-righteousness and believe that their sins are paid for and so they do not live by this hope. They choose the hard road even though their sins are fully paid.

Christians eagerly await the return of Christ because we know that Jesus loves mankind dearly. Unbelievers, however, shrink back at the thought of facing the Lord of the Universe. Just like Adam and Eve hid in the garden, they hide behind false religion, atheism, and agnosticism. Yet Jesus will return for his people!

Jesus promised in John 14:1-3,

1) Don't let your heart be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me. 2) In my Father's house are many homes. If it weren't so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. 3) If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will receive you to myself; that where I am, you may be there also.

The angels also promised in Acts 1:10-11 (WEB),

10) While they were looking steadfastly into the sky as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white clothing, 11) who also said, “You men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who was received up from you into the sky, will come back in the same way as you saw him going into the sky.”

The point is that our lover, Jesus Christ, is currently away, but he is returning and has told us many things about his future plans to *“make his enemies a footstool”* and to return for his bride, the church, and to consummate eternity with the final salvation of all mankind. Biblical Christianity offers great hope! Do not settle for anything less!

Hope in Christ is not a wish but a confidence that Jesus Christ will reveal his salvation to all mankind in time. Hope in Jesus!

Read Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So why do we read about him and his commands?

Joshua 1:7-9 (WEB),

7) Only be strong and very courageous. Be careful to observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded you. Don't turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. 8) This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success. 9) Haven't I commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Don't be afraid. Don't be dismayed, for Yahweh your God is with you wherever you go.

The Bible is God's Word given to us so that we can learn about his love and care for us. In the verses above God spoke directly to Joshua after Moses died in order to encourage Joshua and guide him as the new leader of Israel. God urges Joshua to be strong and courageous and to meditate on the Bible. Reading the Bible and meditating on God's written message to mankind is vital for us to enjoy the successful Christian living that God desires.

Colossians 3:15-17 (WEB),

15) And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body, and be thankful. 16) Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your heart to the Lord. 17) Whatever you do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father, through him.

We need the message of Christ in our conversation so that we can teach and admonish one another. While our own words and ideas may range from useful to useless, God's words and his message are perfect and wonderfully useful. Paul encourages Jesus' followers to add the words and message of

Christ into our conversation. Read the Bible, meditate on the meaning, and mention the message and words of Christ in your conversation with others.

Hebrews 4:12-13 (WEB),

12) For the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and is able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13) There is no creature that is hidden from his sight, but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account.

God's word is alive and active and powerful to change our lives. We are in need of heart surgery, but what scalpel can be used to perform spiritual operations on our hearts? God's word is compared to a double-edged sword because the Bible is able to cut away the cancer of unbelief in our lives. We must read the Bible to allow the Holy Spirit to change us from our natural love of vice to the supernatural virtue of Jesus Christ.

Read the message of Christ to enjoy the Christian prosperity that God desires for you. Share his message with others in your conversation. Allow the Holy Spirit to operate on your heart with God's Word. Read Jesus!

Talk to Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So how do we talk to him?

Matthew 6:5-15 (WEB) says,

5) When you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Most certainly, I tell you, they have received their reward. 6) But you, when you pray, enter into your inner room, and having shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. 7) In praying, don't use vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their much speaking. 8) Therefore don't be like them, for your Father knows what things you need, before you ask him. 9) Pray like this: "Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. 10) Let your Kingdom come. Let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. 11) Give us today our daily bread.

12) Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. 13) Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.” 14) For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15) But if you don’t forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

God is our loving Heavenly Father and he wants us to talk with him, heart to heart. He wants no facades or religion, but person to person conversation. More than that, he knows us and our needs better than we know ourselves. The point is that we should have great confidence that our conversation with him will never be misunderstood. If there is any concern at all, the concern is that we are not being honest with ourselves. The cure for our hypocrisy is the solemn reminder that we need to forgive others and that we are fully dependent upon God for our forgiveness.

John 14:11-14 (WEB) says,

11) Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works’ sake. 12) Most certainly I tell you, he who believes in me, the works that I do, he will do also; and he will do greater works than these, because I am going to my Father. 13) Whatever you will ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14) If you will ask anything in my name, I will do it.

Wow! God is listening to our prayers and he will answer them! While some have earthly dads with resources to buy them cars and college, we all have a Heavenly dad with infinite resources available for our care. However, we should be reminded that God’s goal for our lives is that we would grow to share in his character. God does always answer our prayers, but sometimes the answer is “no”, as seen in 2 Corinthians 12:8-9.

Romans 8:26-27 (WEB),

26) In the same way, the Spirit also helps our weaknesses, for we don’t know how to pray as we ought. But the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which can’t be uttered. 27) He who searches the hearts knows what is on the Spirit’s mind, because he makes intercession for the saints according to God.

Wow that is even more amazing! Ever felt like you do not even know how or what to pray? This is a very common problem because the truth is that we all find ourselves in situations where we have no idea what the solution could

be. Sin has broken and twisted our lives beyond repair. We should keep praying nonetheless because, if we are Christians, the Holy Spirit is living inside of us and he will lead our prayers.

John 16:23-28 (WEB) says,

23) In that day you will ask me no questions. Most certainly I tell you, whatever you may ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. 24) Until now, you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be made full. 25) I have spoken these things to you in figures of speech. But the time is coming when I will no more speak to you in figures of speech, but will tell you plainly about the Father. 26) In that day you will ask in my name; and I don't say to you that I will pray to the Father for you, 27) for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me, and have believed that I came from God. 28) I came from the Father, and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.

Jesus wants to make our Heavenly Father known to us. Though the Bible may be hard to understand at times, God's purpose is not to be obscure. Instead he has revealed himself to us and plans to do so more and more. Why does he keep us in suspense and why is he taking so long? I don't know. Perhaps our finite minds can only be opened to the infinite God in small increments. Perhaps our sin and need for repentance slows down the progress to see God face to face. Take heart! Jesus is praying for us and working to reveal our good Heavenly Father to us.

Prayer to Jesus and our Heavenly Father is critical to help us get to know God and understand his good purposes for all mankind. Talk to Jesus!

Love Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to love him?

John 14:23 (WEB) says,

Jesus answered him, 'If a man loves me, he will keep my word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our home with him.'

Love for Jesus is not mystical or ethereal! Jesus asks us to show our love very practically by obeying his commands. While the world's notion of love is freedom to please one's self, God's definition of love is commitment to please others. Jesus demonstrated loving obedience to his Father and now asks us for the same loving obedience. Has Jesus won your willingness to give up your self-serving attitudes to instead serve others?

John 21:15-19 (WEB) says,

15) So when they had eaten their breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?"

He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I have affection for you."

He said to him, "Feed my lambs." 16) He said to him again a second time, Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me?"

He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I have affection for you."

He said to him, "Tend my sheep." 17) He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you have affection for me?"

Peter was grieved because he asked him the third time, "Do you have affection for me?" He said to him, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I have affection for you."

Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. 18) Most certainly I tell you, when you were young, you dressed yourself and walked where you wanted to. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you don't want to go." 19) Now he said this, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. When he had said this, he said to him, "Follow me."

Peter had just boasted earlier that even if all the other disciples fell away, he would never fall away. Yet all the disciples did run away and Peter denied Jesus three times! Jesus now confronts Peter about his boast to remind Peter of the value of humility and to restore him to his calling: to feed the sheep of Jesus. Do we love Jesus? Are we better than others? Are we willing to humbly feed Jesus' sheep? Are we willing to feed both the believing and the unbelieving, both the lost sheep and the found sheep? Are we willing to show love to all mankind?

1 John 4:20 (WEB) says,

If a man says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who doesn't love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

Jesus challenges us to show our love for him by loving our brother. God's commands are not burdensome, odd, or unreasonable. Jesus is building a loving family and he commands us to love one another. Are we with excuses like Cain asking, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Or are we committed to saying, "I am my brother's keeper!"

Jesus asks us to show our love to him by obeying him and loving others. Love Jesus!

Obey Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to obey him?

John 8:31-36 (WEB) says,

31) Jesus therefore said to those Jews who had believed him, "If you remain in my word, then you are truly my disciples. 32) You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." 33) They answered him, "We are Abraham's offspring, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How do you say, 'You will be made free?'" 34) Jesus answered them, "Most certainly I tell you, everyone who commits sin is the bondservant of sin. 35) A bondservant doesn't live in the house forever. A son remains forever. 36) If therefore the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."

Jesus has a great promise for his followers. He plans to show us the truth about this life and to set us free! What an awesome promise and hope! This fallen and broken world takes its toll on every person who ever lived causing us to feel burdened and in bondage to pain and trials that we want to shake off, but just cannot. However, there is great hope. Jesus promises freedom. Yet, the freedom of Christ comes with a price... we must obey his teaching. Though the world may offer freedom, true freedom only comes through obedience to Jesus Christ.

Furthermore there is an orderly recipe above. First we must simply obey, even if we do not understand all the reasons for God's commands. We must

submit our will to the will of Jesus. We must honestly understand the difference between what we want to do and what God wants us to do... and then choose God's will. Second, through obedience we will come to know the truth. A master's business can only be learned through obediently serving in his workshop. The same is true with God. Third, through knowledge of the truth we will be set free from our bondage because we will know, understand, and trust in God's loving purposes. There is no other way, but to trust and obey.

1 John 5:1-5 (WEB) says,

1) Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God. Whoever loves the Father also loves the child who is born of him. 2) By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments. 3) For this is loving God, that we keep his commandments. His commandments are not grievous. 4) For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world: your faith. 5) Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Jesus wants no hypocritical claim of affection for him. If we claim to love God we must also obey his commands. In fact, obeying his commands is the only accepted expression of showing our love for God. God is our loving Heavenly Father and because he is our Father and we are his children we also need to obey him. The world understands love to be giving others license to do whatever they want, to please themselves. This is not love, but instead makes us a danger to ourselves. A good parent would not leave his children unsupervised or without direction. God knows that true love will direct his children to do only what is best for themselves and others. Thankfully the commands of God are not burdensome, but are wholesome and good. In fact as we already learned, God's commands are the pathway to learning more and more about God and enjoying true freedom as his sons and daughters. Through obedience we take our station as the children of the King of the Universe. We receive the honorable position of princes and princesses in his kingdom. We also enjoy fellowship as brothers and sisters with one another!

Obey Jesus in order to know the truth and to find true freedom. I am convinced that obeying Jesus' commands is the recipe to help you see that Jesus does in fact love all mankind. Obey Jesus!

Imitate Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to imitate him?

1 John 3:1-3 (WEB) says,

1) See how great a love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God! For this cause the world doesn't know us, because it didn't know him. 2) Beloved, now we are children of God, and it is not yet revealed what we will be. But we know that when he is revealed, we will be like him; for we will see him just as he is. 3) Everyone who has this hope set on him purifies himself, even as he is pure.

Jesus began his ministry with the simple call “*follow me.*” He wants us to learn from him and become like him. I have been baffled by the present animosity that the non-Christian world has toward Jesus. Perhaps they are getting their picture of Jesus from the poor examples of us struggling Christians! Instead, they should read the historic account of Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. If they read about Jesus there, they will see that he is The Champion of love for all. He preaches against hypocrisy and vice. He is kind to the brokenhearted. He condemns no one! Why he is the epitome of valor, the grand gentleman, the hero of heroes! The great Christian hope is that one day our very natures will be transformed so that we will be like him. No longer will we struggle with envy, anger, and hypocrisy. We will be like Jesus effortlessly! Meanwhile, because this is our hope, we strive to purify ourselves to be like him now.

1 John 4:17-18 (WEB) says,

17) In this love has been made perfect among us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as he is, even so are we in this world. 18) There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has punishment. He who fears is not made perfect in love.

In fact the Bible says that if we are Christians, we are already like Jesus in this world. Even though we are terribly poor imitations of Christ, Jesus has given us the assignment to follow in his footsteps. We are like him because we have a purpose in this world to serve God and be like Jesus. Furthermore, if we are Christians we have the Holy Spirit working powerfully within us to accomplish the purposes of God. While we may be painfully aware of our inadequacies, Jesus is nonetheless marching on, working his will both in us and through us. Giving up is not an option! The work of the Holy Spirit will be effective in changing and transforming us. Though no one will ever be perfected in this life, progress will be made in learning to forgive, serve, and love others. So we submit to the Holy Spirit's

work in our lives and we look forward to the end of sin and perfect Christ-likeness in glory.

Imitating Jesus is hard work because our birth nature is not like Jesus. Just as Jesus loved all mankind, we are to share his love with all mankind. Thankfully, the hard work of transformation is not ours alone, but instead it is God who changes us, and so we learn to keep in step with the Spirit. Imitate Jesus!

Share Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to share him with others?

Matthew 28:16-20 (WEB) says,

16) But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had sent them. 17) When they saw him, they bowed down to him, but some doubted. 18) Jesus came to them and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 19) Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20) teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

This passage in the Bible is called "*The Great Commission.*" It is Jesus' last words to his followers. It is our assignment. It is The Great Commission! After giving us his own example of how to make disciples, he then commands us to continue to follow him, to imitate him, and make yet more disciples of Jesus. The Christian faith is not merely reading the Bible and understanding facts about God, but it is sharing Jesus' love with others and asking others to follow Jesus. God's intention is that the good news about Jesus' death on the cross for the sins of *ALL* mankind would be shared with *ALL* mankind. This world is filled with Satan's lies about God, suggesting that God does not love all mankind and that we are condemned. Read Zechariah 3:1-10 to see just how mean Satan can be toward Joshua and also toward us. The Great Commission is our great mission to defeat these lies and be used by the Holy Spirit to bring the good news to *ALL* mankind.

Acts 1:9-11 (WEB) says,

9) When he had said these things, as they were looking, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. 10) While they were looking steadfastly into the sky as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white clothing, 11) who also said, “You men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who was received up from you into the sky, will come back in the same way as you saw him going into the sky.”

Understandably after Jesus gave the Great Commission and then ascended into Heaven, the first disciples were stunned. I personally have never witnessed anyone teach with the authority of Jesus, work miracles, be raised from the dead, and ascend into Heaven. No wonder the disciples were reeling with their heads spinning. So God sent two angels to stop their spinning heads and point them back to their assignment. Friend, God’s love for all mankind is proved without a doubt. Why do you stand there? Go tell your neighbor!

Matthew 22:34-40 (WEB) says,

34) But the Pharisees, when they heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, gathered themselves together. 35) One of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, testing him. 36) “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?” 37) Jesus said to him, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38) This is the first and great commandment. 39) A second likewise is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40) The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.”

But we may still have questions and doubts. Answer your questions! Erase your doubts! Do whatever hard work is needed to get your feet planted on the solid rock of Jesus Christ! Pray! Read the Bible! Show your love for God by obeying his commands! And if you do not know how to begin The Great Commission, then begin (and end) with The Great Commandments above. Jesus keeps it simple for us because there are only two Great Commandments: 1) love God and 2) love your neighbor as yourself. God’s commands truly are not difficult to understand or burdensome. The only challenge is that we must lay down our self-interests in order to be concerned about others.

The good news is too good to keep to ourselves. God does not just love you, but he loves all mankind! Salvation is not personal, but universal! Jesus commands us to join his forces to fight against the

lies of Satan and tell our family, friends, and neighbors about God's love. Share Jesus!

Fellowship with Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So how do we fellowship with Jesus now?

Jesus loves to eat, drink, talk, and laugh with us, his chosen people. He created us for this very purpose. Consider that his first miracle was to turn water into wine at a wedding! We can be so excited that we are promised eternity in the home of this man! Glorious fellowship is promised.

Don't let your heart be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me. In my Father's house are many homes. If it weren't so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will receive you to myself; that where I am, you may be there also.

John 14:1-3 (WEB)

Okay, glorious eternal fellowship sounds great! But how can we fellowship with Jesus in this broken world now? How can we find real comfort from Christ's presence and the presence of his family when so much is ruined by sin? Furthermore, Jesus has been gone for a long time! Yes, but he has left us with the Holy Spirit, our comforter. Also we need to be reminded that because of sin we especially need the fellowship of other real live Christians. Sin often separates us and causes us to personally withdraw. This is not good and so we must fight against this to live openly with Christian friends. Hebrews 10:24-25 (WEB) warns,

Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good works, not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as you see the Day approaching.

Also finding Christian fellowship can be difficult and especially difficult to find Christians who are confident that Jesus loves all mankind. However, we cannot and must not be idle or despair just because something is difficult. Hard work must be done to find and even build godly Christian fellowship. Jesus likewise warned in Matthew 8:19-20 (WEB),

A scribe came, and said to him, 'Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.' Jesus said to him, 'The foxes have holes,

and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.'

So hard work remains to find and build Christian fellowship. However, we must also remember that Jesus invites us to another kind of fellowship in this broken world. Jesus invites us to participate in the fellowship of his sufferings. We can like it or not, but this world is filled with suffering and Jesus invites us to join him in fighting the good fight against evil despite suffering. Though we may be tempted to relieve suffering by “*going with the flow*” Jesus set the example of swimming upstream and invites us to follow. Jesus’ disciple Peter was well acquainted with suffering for wrong doing, but also for right doing.

12) Beloved, don't be astonished at the fiery trial which has come upon you, to test you, as though a strange thing happened to you. 13) But because you are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice; that at the revelation of his glory you also may rejoice with exceeding joy. 14) If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed; because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. On their part he is blasphemed, but on your part he is glorified. 15) For let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evil doer, or a meddler in other men's matters. 16) But if one of you suffers for being a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God in this matter.

1 Peter 4:12-16 (WEB)

Thankfully Jesus’ purpose is not eternal suffering! Jesus never enjoyed suffering, but “***endured the cross***” looking instead to the joy that the cross would achieve. What joy did the cross achieve? The redemption of mankind and glorious eternal fellowship! What joy does our suffering achieve? We can share intimate fellowship with Jesus and through suffering become like him. He suffered because of his love for all mankind and so will we! So we must look to Jesus for strength to endure the cross that he has assigned. We also look forward to that day when we raise our drink with Christ in celebration of victory!

But I tell you that I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on, until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's Kingdom.

Matthew 26:29 (WEB)

Fellowship with Jesus is the best. Fellowship with Jesus right now is comfort through the trials we share with Jesus. And fellowship with Jesus then will be eternal comfort with absolutely no more trials and celebration of the victory he has won in our lives! Fellowship with Jesus!

Prove Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to prove Jesus?

Psalm 34:8-16 (WEB) says,

- 8) *Oh taste and see that Yahweh is good.
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.*
- 9) *Oh fear Yahweh, you his saints,
for there is no lack with those who fear him.*
- 10) *The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger,
but those who seek Yahweh shall not lack any good thing.*
- 11) *Come, you children, listen to me.
I will teach you the fear of Yahweh.*
- 12) *Who is someone who desires life,
and loves many days, that he may see good?*
- 13) *Keep your tongue from evil,
and your lips from speaking lies.*
- 14) *Depart from evil, and do good.
Seek peace, and pursue it.*
- 15) *Yahweh's eyes are toward the righteous.
His ears listen to their cry.*
- 16) *Yahweh's face is against those who do evil,
to cut off their memory from the earth.*

Jesus commands us to trust and obey him and boasts that God is good and there is no better salvation. However, to back up his words, Jesus asks us to prove him -- to test him. He says, "**Oh taste and see that Yahweh is good.**" We are often like finicky children unwilling to eat the food that is before us. I never ate sour cream before I entered college because I did not want to eat anything sour! So then I tried sour cream on a potato and learned that sour cream is creamy! I loved it. I can no longer eat a potato without it! So what lies and misunderstandings about God's faithfulness have we believed and swallowed? Jesus invites us to prove him, to test him, to taste and see that He is good!

John 10:1-5 (WEB) says,

1) Most certainly, I tell you, one who doesn't enter by the door into the sheep fold, but climbs up some other way, is a thief and a robber. 2) But one who enters in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3) The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. 4) Whenever he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5) They will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him; for they don't know the voice of strangers.

Do not follow the voice of a stranger! Our good Heavenly Father has proved his love for us by sending his one and only son, Jesus, to die on the cross for our sins. His love could absolutely not be greater. He challenges us to test his love and erase all of our doubts! He wants our whole heart without reserve and he is confident that he has all the love and forgiveness that we will ever need and more. Do you still have doubts? Taste and see that the Lord is good, but do not follow a stranger!

Romans 10:10-13 (WEB) says,

10) For with the heart, one believes resulting in righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made resulting in salvation. 11) For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in him will not be disappointed." 12) For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, and is rich to all who call on him. 13) For, "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Jesus promises that when we give our lives to him, he will protect and care for us, guaranteeing that we will never be put to shame. Of course this does not mean that we will never have trials. Instead it means that Jesus will be by our side and be our defender through even the worst of circumstances.

Jesus challenges us to test him on his promises because he is so confident that he is and has everything we will ever need and want. Jesus is the best! Prove Jesus!

Revere Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to revere Jesus?

17) When I saw him, I fell at his feet like a dead man. He laid his right hand on me, saying, "Don't be afraid. I am the first and the last, 18) and the Living one. I was dead, and behold, I am alive forever more. Amen. I have the keys of Death and of Hades. 19) Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will happen hereafter;

Revelation 1:17-18 (WEB)

Jesus holds the keys to death and Hades. He appoints the time our death and he raises the dead. He also locks the unbelieving in the punishments of Hades and will empty Hades on the last day. Friends, our destiny is not in the hands of our supposed *free will*, but in the hands of Jesus' will. Jesus is the God of our past, our present, and our future. So we are advised to revere Christ.

Twenty-first century sentiment emphasizes authenticity and sincerity. Pastors preach in jeans. Parishioners sport sweats. Yet, even the actors and actresses in my oldies movie collection are wearing collared shirts with ties and Sunday best dresses. The motto for today is *"get comfortable."* This is not bad in itself. However, if we remember our sin problem, letting it all hang out before Holy God is not honesty, but harlotry, not beautiful, but brazen. We should answer Joan Osborne's question, *"What if God was one of us? Just a slob like one of us?"* Friends, Jesus left Heaven to be one of us, but he was never a slob like all of us. Instead he is a perfect gentleman, the servant of all, the King of the Universe, and the coming judge. He searches our hearts with a fiery eyed love that burns through every idol to melt the hardest hearted.

Jesus' passion for mankind propelled him to warn the unrepentant that judgment is coming. He called us at our worst **"hypocrites," "blind guides," "whitewashed tombs," "murderers,"** and **"snakes!"** He warned unbelievers of sentence to **"outer darkness," "weeping and gnashing of teeth,"** suffering where the **"worm does not die,"** and **"agony!"** Spineless forms of Universalism have lost touch with the reality of human corruption and the consequences that follow without repentance. We are all summoned to stand before the almighty judge of the Universe to give account. Even the most irreverent fool will then revere Christ.

Jesus' eternal love for mankind also promises his people that **"no one can snatch [his sheep] out of his hand."** The love of Christ given to chosen mankind from even before creation is utterly inescapable! The love of God is so wide, long, high, and deep that it **"surpasses knowledge!"** In other words, God's love even partially understood **"blows our minds!"** Just consider the goodness that God has prepared for his people in eternity. **"...Scripture says: 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no**

mind has imagined the things that God has prepared for those who love him' “ (1 Corinthians 2:9 NOG). Just to wet our appetites, the Apostle Paul was caught up into Heaven and was not even allowed to repeat what he heard there. Even the most reverent Christian will then revere Christ even more!

Jesus spoke both words of warning and words of promise. He warned mankind about the consequences of sin in this life as well as the afterlife punishments in Hades. He also promised paradise for the believing as well as eternal glory for chosen mankind. Jesus calls the shots! Revere Jesus!

Worship Jesus

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind!

So what does it mean to worship Jesus?

Isaiah 45:22-25 (WEB) says,

22) Look to me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. 23) I have sworn by myself. The word has gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and will not be revoked, that to me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath. 24) They will say of me, “There is righteousness and strength only in Yahweh.” Even to him shall men come; and all those who raged against him shall be disappointed. 25) All the offspring of Israel will be justified in Yahweh, and will rejoice!

Though most of mankind does not know or follow Jesus, nor are they excited about him... the day is coming when every single human being will bow his knee and shout **“There is righteousness and strength only in Yahweh.”** While presently the majority of mankind knows nothing of the Lord’s grace, the day is coming when all the redeemed will see the Lord face to face. Though the unbelieving will have to suffer shame for their unrepentance, they too will finally repent and join the happy crowd shouting praises to God. Note: worship sometimes gets confused with singing in church services. While singing can be a form of worship, the shouting of praises by the redeemed over Christ’s final victory is more like the loud ecstatic praise at a nail biting come-from-behind victory.

Philippians 2:9-11 (WEB) says,

9) Therefore God also highly exalted him, and gave to him the name which is above every name, 10) that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, those on earth, and those under the earth, 11) and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Again every knee will happily bow in Heaven, on Earth, and under the Earth! Friends this verse is saying everyone will praise God from Heaven, to Earth, to the depths of Hades, under the Earth... that is ALL mankind!

Revelation 5:9-14 (WEB) says,

9) They sang a new song, saying, "You are worthy to take the book, and to open its seals: for you were killed, and bought us for God with your blood, out of every tribe, language, people, and nation, 10) and made us kings and priests to our God, and we will reign on the earth." 11) I saw, and I heard something like a voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousands of ten thousands, and thousands of thousands; 12) saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who has been killed to receive the power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and blessing!" 13) I heard every created thing which is in heaven, on the earth, under the earth, on the sea, and everything in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb be the blessing, the honor, the glory, and the dominion, forever and ever! Amen!" 14) The four living creatures said, "Amen!" Then the elders fell down and worshiped.

Again every knee will gladly and willingly bow in ecstatic response to Christ's victory over sin and death. Get ready!

True worship of Christ is not rote or ritual. Instead, through accurate knowledge of God and persuasion about his love for ALL mankind, we throw our hats to the air in jubilation. Worship Jesus!

Optimism Abstract & Study Guide



The Biblical proofs cited in the body of my *Optimism Out of Control* book were sufficient evidence for me to know that my Optimism was in fact not out of control, but instead was founded on the truth of Scripture and the knowledge of the character of God.

Jesus Christ truly is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.

However, what is sufficient proof for me may not be sufficient proof for you! So I have attached an abstract and study guide below that simply asks questions for you to answer from the Bible. I hope you find the guide helpful in your quest to know God and know his love for both you and others. I pray that these resources help you to be a disciple and make disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Also, while pursuing my own optimistic study, numerous objectors asked hard questions about my hope in Christ. The following appendix contains some of the best objections and even better answers. I hope you continue reading through the [Appendix](#).

Optimism Abstract

Who is Jesus Christ? What is grace? Why discipleship?

Jesus is introduced as our *“Counselor with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world”* (1 John 2:1-2 WEB). Jesus has already forgiven all mankind - believers and unbelievers. *“It is finished”* is the awesome news!

Paul explained, *“There is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace”* (Romans 11:5-6 WEB). Yet God has not chosen everyone for a changed heart to obey Jesus and trust they are forgiven with all mankind. Hard to understand sad news!

Jesus commands us to strive to *“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you”* (Matthew 28:19-20 WEB). Jesus is reaching the world through us. Time to share the good news!

If you are chosen to believe that Jesus has already forgiven all our sin and to follow him, then you have a lot to be excited about. Make it your greatest goal to intimately know him and make him known. He has wonderful plans to change you to become like him and to use you to show God’s love to others.

Where do unbelievers go? How should we respond? When does punishment end?

Jesus comes, *“punishing those who don’t know God, and to those who don’t obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus, who will pay the penalty: eternal (aionios) destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might”* (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 WEB). Those who reject grace will be sentenced to destruction. Hades is their destiny even though their sins are forgiven, Luke 16:19-31. More sad news!

Paul responded, *“I have great sorrow and unceasing pain in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brothers’ sake, my relatives”* (Romans 9:2-3 WEB). Paul would have given away his own salvation to go to Hades for them if he could have. More news of a good man!

Yet Jesus promised, *“I will build my assembly, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven; and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven”* (Matthew 16:18-19 WEB). Can unbelievers be released from Hades? The Greek word *“aionios”* means *“eon,” “duration,”* or *“complete”* and is mistranslated as *“everlasting”* in 2 Thessalonians 1:9. See the YLT Bible. Hades is proved to be temporary in Revelation 20:13-14, so *“aionios”* in Hades is for the *“eon”* of Hades. If you believe then you know even the sin of unbelievers is already forgiven, just like yours. More awesome news!

Finally Jesus says *“to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels’ “* (Matthew 25:41 WEB). However, the *“duration”* of the Lake of Fire is not a mere age, but instead for *“The Ages of The Ages”* Revelation 20:10. Also, contrary to popular religion, the Lake of Fire is ONLY for... THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS. We deserve the same... except for grace!

Do all Christians believe this awesome news?

Paul warns, *“Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision. For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh”* (Philippians 3:2-3 WEB). Many are misled by the mistranslation above, but objectors claim Jesus loves them, but not all, or their *“faith”* is the reason Jesus loves them. Their confidence is in the flesh. Christians should instead simply trust Jesus loves all mankind, but Hades awaits those who reject grace.

Contact Jeff for further discussion at DGJC.ORG/CONTACT

Optimism Study Guide

Does God Limit His Love?

Calvinist Christians follow John Calvin of the 16th century and believe that God loves unconditionally and limits this love to a predestined subset of humanity. *Arminian* Christians follow Jacob Arminius, also of the 16th century, and believe that God offers conditional love to all humanity which is limited by our choice to accept or reject Christ. However, many other Christians believe that God loves all humanity unconditionally, but limits the duration of punishment in Hades for the unbelieving. Each limits something.

The final salvation of all mankind is defended from the Christian Scriptures at DGJC.ORG/OPTIMISM. The question of the character of God and his love for each individual and our neighbor is critical. Bible study, prayer, conversation with Christians, and the Holy Spirit are essential ingredients to learn about God and his love. Following are questions to guide your study as you search the Bible for the truth.

Bible Study Questions

1. Is the love of God a conditional possibility or an unconditional promise?
2. What does the character of God confirm about his love for humanity?
3. What is the significance that God loved us before we loved him?
4. From Genesis on when is the first and further mention of salvation promised?
5. From Genesis on when is the first and further mention of damnation threatened?
6. When are the events described in Dan 12, Mat 25, 1 Cor 15, 1 Thes 4, 2 Thes 2, and Rev 20?
7. What are *Sheol*, *Gehenna*, *Hades*, *Tartarus* (2 Pet 2:4), *Thalassa* (Rev 20:13), and *The Lake of Fire*?
8. What are the denotations of the Hebrew *olam* and the Greek *aion* and *aidios*?

9. Who did the death of Christ make atonement for, according to the Bible?
10. Why does Jesus call unbelieving Israel '*lost sheep*' and even '*not my sheep*'?
11. How is the second Adam, Jesus, similar and different than the first, Adam?
12. Is confidence in God's love equally feasible as a *Calvinist*, *Arminian*, or trusting all are saved?
13. Is confidence in God's love feasible while rejecting his unconditional love for all?
14. Does *faith* change God's heart toward us, or change our hearts toward God?
15. Does *obedience* gain God's love, or show gratitude for his unconditional love?

Four Square Salvation Evaluator

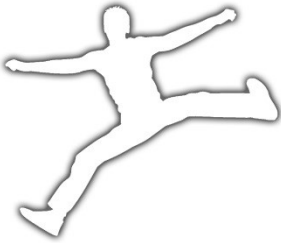
God's love?	Subset of Mankind	All Mankind
Conditional	Unknown?	Arminian?
Unconditional	Calvinist?	ALL SAVED?

Mystery?

Christian faith is not a blind leap or an unknown mystery but confident reasonable trust. God himself is our evaluator, yet is your faith founded on the facts of the person of Jesus Christ? What do you believe?

Contact Jeff for further discussion at DGJC.ORG/CONTACT

Appendix



Admittedly the ideas in this book are controversial... as was Jesus himself.

While many have been able to find fellowship in a tidy theological camp, I have both agreement and disagreement with available traditions. My goal in pursuing Christ has been to be pro-Christ, anti-denominational, thoroughly Biblical, and willing to consider the hard questions. Yet I do not want to be dogmatic and close the door to discussion. The truth does not change with discussion, yet God can use discussion to help both you and I grow in the truth. So, this last chapter is a place to air important feedback and discussion about this clarification of the gospel, as well as additional supporting arguments.

You were already invited to make comments and raise questions on each page of the book online. However, if you prefer to email me questions at DGJC.ORG/CONTACT I will answer them in the online [Appendix](#). I will remove your name to protect your privacy.

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Aion

Most Christian Universalists have observed, as I, that the Greek word “*aion*” is at times wrongly translated “*eternal*” in the English Bible when the meaning can also be “*age*”, “*life*”, “*entire*”, “*complete*”, and “*world*”. To help your own study I have used the <http://www.blueletterbible.org> to find every usage of the Greek words “*aion*,” “*aionios*,” and “*aidios*” in the New Testament.

aion: Strong's G165 occurs 128 times in 102 verses in the Greek concordance.
aionios: Strong's G166 occurs 71 times in 69 verses in the Greek concordance.
aidios: Strong's G126 occurs 2 times in 2 verses in the Greek concordance.

My online chart lists the references to these Greek words in the World English Bible and the Young's Literal Translation along with my notes. This may help your own study of this fascinating word. Download all the New Testament 'AION' verses at...

DGJC.ORG/OPTIMISM/AION

My articles [Forever Is Not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!](#) and [Forever Is Not Forever? You Still Gotta Be Kidding Me!](#) also offer my understanding of this important subject.

Arminian & Calvin Only?

One thoughtful reader asked...

READER>> Why do you only compare Arminianism and Calvinism? There are many other religions and many other Christian denominations. So why do you only focus on the Arminian and Calvinist denominations?

ME>> That is an excellent question. Your question reminds me why this salvation discussion is so difficult. It is too easy to miss prerequisite concepts. First, understand that the labels “*Arminianism*” and “*Calvinism*” are not the names of particular Christian groups or denominations. Instead, these labels originated in history past to describe particular ways of thinking about salvation. There is no church of Jacob Arminius or church of John Calvin, the two men whose names have become attached to these particular views of salvation.

Instead, various Christian denominations and individual Christians throughout history have adopted one view or the other, or attempted modified

views. For example, there are Baptist churches that are Arminian in their salvation doctrine and there are Baptist churches that are Calvinist in their salvation doctrine. There are also Presbyterian churches that are Arminian in their salvation doctrine and there are Presbyterian churches that are Calvinist in their salvation doctrine. There are also individual Christians within Baptist, Presbyterian, Catholic, Methodist, and all kinds of churches with an Arminian or Calvinist view of salvation, perhaps even agreeing or disagreeing with the view of their church or pastor. There are also many Christians who simply follow Jesus and are totally unaware of these distinctions.

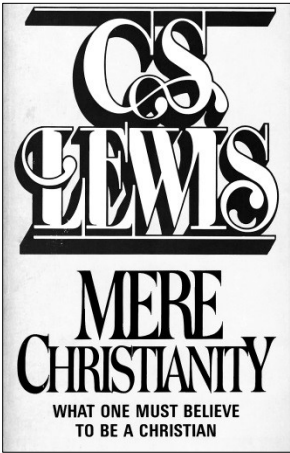
Yet even so, the salvation view of most Christian denominations and individual Christians can be categorized as either Arminian or Calvinist. Do you believe Christ paid for the sins of *ALL* mankind or only a chosen *PART*? Do you believe Christ completed *ALL* of salvation for the saved or only a *PART*? Secondly, understand that Arminianism and Calvinism are the two most common views of salvation found within Christendom. So it is fitting that any book about Christian salvation should also consider these views in the discussion. This book has simply put the magnifying glass of comparison and contrast on Arminian and Calvinist doctrine, regardless of what flavor church denomination you attend. My goal has been to help clarify the gospel of grace to you and point out the strengths and weaknesses of Arminianism and Calvinism, the most popular salvation models currently accepted.

Book Reviews

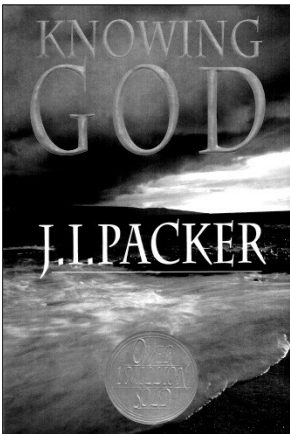
My book has mentioned other authors and their books. Friends have also asked me to read additional books to challenge my understanding. Each of the authors below has attempted to consistently and systematically answer questions about Christian salvation. The variation of conclusions is surprising and even disturbing. Read the books below to learn more about the thoughts of others and of course compare them to the Bible. If you do read each book below you will see that many authors conclude that Christ will save all mankind, though each reason from their tradition. How could it be otherwise? Because of this there is still quite a range of understanding even among those that happily conclude that God saves all. Hopefully the happiness is not ruined by these differences! I have addressed some of the differences in my article, *Yes, but Even Harder Questions*.

My memory is largely untrustworthy, but it is possible that this is my second time reading many of the books below. The thought occurred that a friend recommended some of these books in the past and that while reading these authors I prayed that one day, when I became a more mature Christian, that I might write my own defense of Christ's victory. I certainly have not been faithful to maintain a consistent position through the decades, and worse I

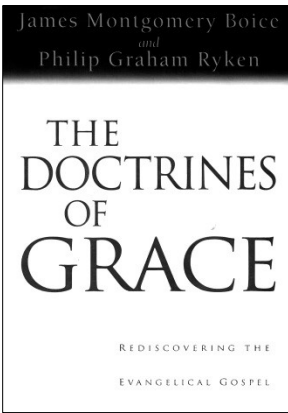
have been quite hypocritical. However, I mention these things so that I can give thanks and confess... to God be the glory.



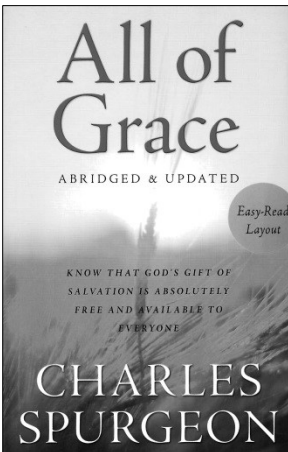
C. S. Lewis wrote *Mere Christianity*, the most popular Christian view today worldwide. He says on page 52, “God created things which had free will. That means creatures which can go either wrong or right. Some people think they can imagine a creature which was free but had no possibility of going wrong; I cannot. If a thing is free to be good it is also free to be bad. And free will is what has made evil possible. Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having.” Lewis is the modern champion of Arminian salvation and orthodoxy, that God loves all mankind, but his “love” respects man’s *free will* to reject Christ and as a result to be damned by God for all eternity. So that is one view of God’s love. My article, [Other Theologians](#), offers further review of Lewis.



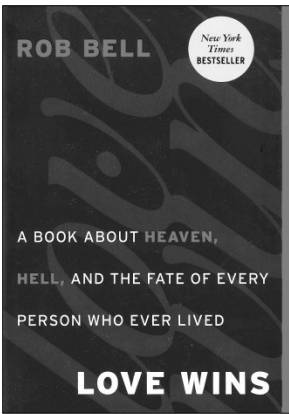
J. I. Packer wrote *Knowing God*. Packer’s excellently worded volume is one of the top books that have shaped present day evangelical thought. Packer’s position is classic Calvinism and he has won many to this way of thinking through his book on salvation theology. The best part about the book, however, is that strictly speaking it is not a theology book in the sense you might imagine. Instead it is simply a book about ‘*knowing God*’ and the life changes that can be expected when one does know God. I am greatly encouraged every time I read the book... except for one point. Packer writes that God certainly does not love all mankind. He follows the traditional explanations that Christ died for all mankind, but only those also specially chosen by God’s grace to be born again will place faith in Christ and be finally saved. The remainder are then instead eternally damned by God’s wrath. Packer makes no mention of the eonian nature of punishment in Hades thus a haunting question remains. Can one who thinks that God does not deeply love all mankind truly know God?



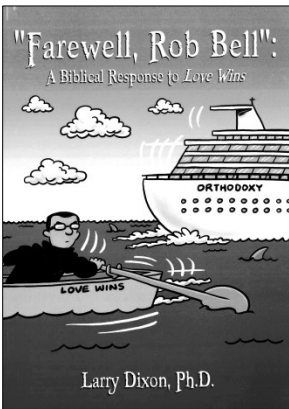
James Boice wrote *The Doctrines of Grace*, a solid defense of Calvinistic salvation. He says on page 125, *“If Jesus died for all the sins of all men, unbelief included, then all are saved, which the Bible denies. If he died for all the sins of all men, unbelief excluded, then he did not die for the sins of anybody and all must be condemned. There is no other position, save that he died for the sins of the elect people only.”* Though Calvinism is not as popular as Arminianism it is a strongly held and defended orthodoxy. Calvinism concludes that God only loves a subset of mankind and his love is guaranteed to win these chosen to salvation while the majority are damned by God for all eternity. So that is another view of God’s love. My article, *Other Theologians*, offers further review.



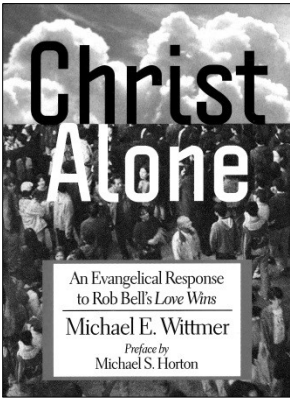
Charles Spurgeon wrote *All of Grace*. Spurgeon, called the Prince of Preachers, is one of the most respected Calvinists in history. He won many to repentance saying, *“Meet me in Heaven!”* I would easily recommend the book, yet it is not without fault. He seems to undermine grace on page 131 saying, *“The Lord does... produce new birth in all who believe,”* but instead only those who are born again can believe in the first place, 1 John 5:1. Yet he also says, *“I will go as far as Martin Luther, in that strong assertion of his, where he says, ‘If any man doth ascribe aught of salvation, even the very least, to the free-will of man, he knoweth nothing of grace, and he hath not learnt Jesus Christ aright.’”* Yet sadly Spurgeon did not understand the temporal nature of punishment and that even the redeemed, if unbelieving, are punished in Hades, 2 Peter 2:1-2. But the redeemed, even if punished in Hades, will never suffer in the Lake of Fire, so his warning to escape wrath can only result in adding human conditions to God’s unconditional love.



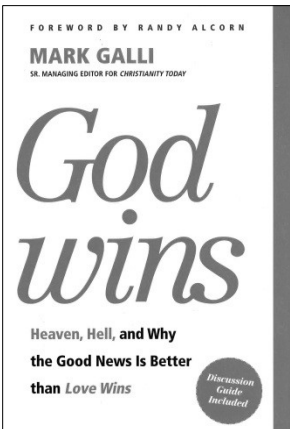
Rob Bell wrote *Love Wins*, an alternate explanation of the gospel. The desire to write my book was born after reading his book. His supposed claim that all mankind is finally saved created a national stir that prompted me to investigate his ideas to compare with my own. The spoiler is that his book is hardly definitive that all mankind is saved, but instead he thinks the saved can still choose to sin and leave God in Heaven. That is yet another view of God's love and power (or lack of power) to transform. Sadly Bell's book also lacks the precision that one might hope for in a theological treatise. My article, ['Love Wins' by Rob Bell](#), offers further review.



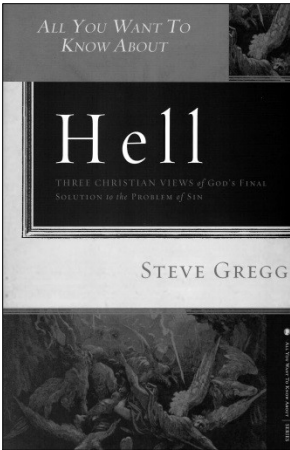
Larry Dixon wrote *Farewell, Rob Bell* to refute *Love Wins*. On page 14 Dixon says, "*These [Bell's] statements imply that believing the gospel has no transactional effect upon the sinner, that belief is immaterial to the reality of being in the Father's love.*" Dixon understands Bell to say that faith does not activate or help to deposit Jesus' payment for our sin into our account. Bell understands that Jesus' payment is applied by God before we believe. Christians then are those people who believe in what God has already done for them, meanwhile the sins of unbelievers are also paid. Dixon sees this as a heretical error because he believes that "*faith*" plays a "*transactional*" role in applying Jesus' work to each individual. My article, [Three Rebuttals](#), offers further review.



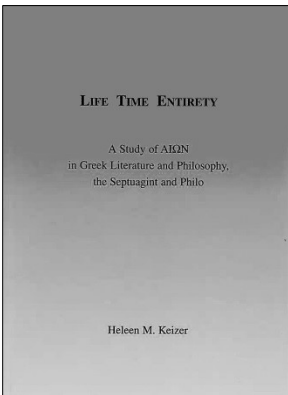
Michael Wittmer wrote *Christ Alone* to refute *Love Wins*. On page 12 Wittmer explains that “...evangelicals hold that faith is an open hand, a passive receiving of God’s precious gift to anyone who accepts it.” Wittmer and Bell also appear to have different definitions of “faith.” Unfortunately, Wittmer did not more clearly distinguish the difference between “faith” that is trust in the finished work of Christ already applied to our account versus “faith” that is the condition to activate salvation. The language of “passive receiving” needs further explanation. Wittmer is apparently from the Calvinist camp, but he sounds Arminian at times. My article, [Three Rebuttals](#), offers further review.



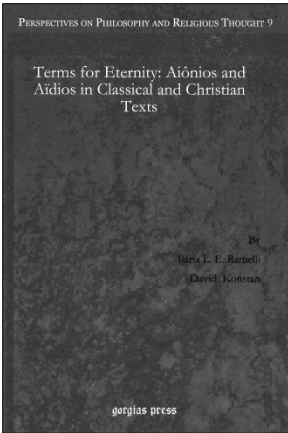
Mark Galli wrote *God Wins* to refute *Love Wins*. Galli says, “Universalists quote many other passages with the word ‘all’ in them, but in context, most of those really mean ‘all Israel’, or ‘all kinds of people’ or ‘both Jews and Gentiles’ will be saved. One example is found in Romans: ‘God has imprisoned everyone in disobedience so that he could have mercy on everyone’ (Romans 11:32). Paul has been discussing the place of Jews and Gentiles in the scheme of salvation, so clearly the ‘all’ here means both Jews and Gentiles - not all within each group.” Galli’s treatment of this important verse is too brief. The grand conclusion of grace theology deserves serious commentary. My article, [Three Rebuttals](#), offers further review.



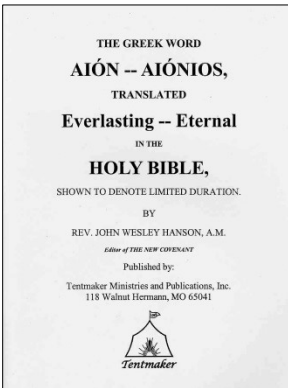
Steve Gregg of The Narrow Path, wrote *All You Want to Know About Hell*. Gregg presents an equitable description of three Christian views of Hell that have been held throughout history. Gregg does not endorse a particular view because he has not taken a position yet himself. Thus one might hope that his analysis is more balanced as a result. The three views of Hell explained in his volume are the *traditional* view that Hell is eternal punishment for the unbelieving, the *conditional* view that Hell is temporary with human immortality being conditioned upon faith, also known as annihilationism, and the *restorationist* view that Hell is temporary with the guaranteed posthumous salvation of unbelieving mankind, also known as Christian Universalism. The big surprise for today's evangelical is that all three of these views co-existed in Christian thought for the first 5 centuries! Gregg cites that of the six major schools of theology in the early centuries of the church four were *restorationist*, one was *conditional* immortality, and the last school at Rome adopted the present *traditional* view while anathematizing the *restorationists*.



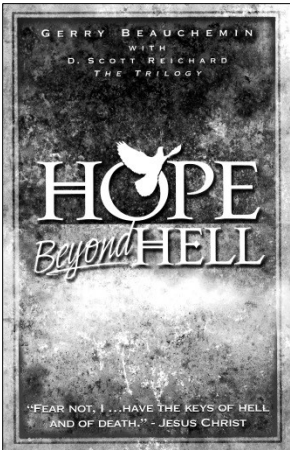
Dr. Heleen Keizer wrote *Life Time Entirety* to explain the meaning of the Greek word “*aion*.” Her 315 page PhD dissertation shows that the Greek word “*aion*” originally denotes “*life time*,” “*duration*,” or “*complete life*,” but not “*eternal*.” This understanding is foundational for those believing that grace is victorious even for the unbelieving. Curiously Dr. Keizer completed her research and dissertation without prior knowledge of John Wesley Hanson's research. You can read her 315 page dissertation online or an abstract of her conclusions on my website. My article, *Forever is not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!*, offers further review.



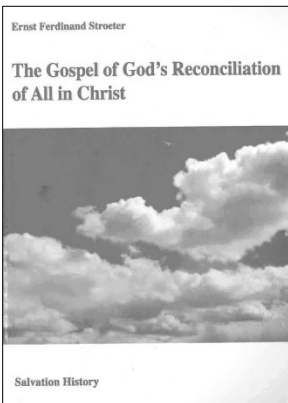
Ilaria Ramelli and David Konstan wrote *Terms for Eternity: Aionios and Aidos in Classical and Christian Texts*. This highly technical volume quotes hundreds of sources from classical literature, the Septuagint, early church fathers, and church fathers after Origen to determine the meaning and usage of *Aionios* and *Aidos*. They conclude that *Aidos* nearly always means eternal in the absolute sense. *Aidos* is used twice in the Bible: Romans 1:20 concerning God and Jude 6 concerning the bonds with fallen angels. *Aionios*, however, has a range of meanings including, “life,” “age,” “generation,” and “eon.” *Aionios* can also mean “eternal,” but only when God is the subject. Ramelli and Konstan concur with Keizer and Hanson and conclude saying, “Needless to say, the ethical implications of this question are profound.”



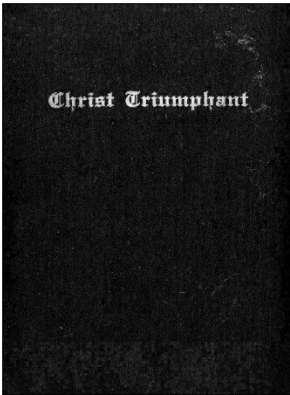
John Wesley Hanson wrote *The Greek Word AION - AIONIOS Translated Everlasting - Eternal in the Holy Bible Shown to Denote Limited Duration*. His classic work planted a seed of thought that gave birth to my optimistic understanding that Jesus is the savior of all mankind. I do not agree with Hanson's interpretation of every Scripture, particularly Matthew 25. Yet, Hanson cleared the way to understand that grace is completely apart from human condition and God does in fact truly love all mankind. This classic work is available for free from the U.S. Library of Congress website and also from my own website. My article, [Forever is not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!](#), offers further review.



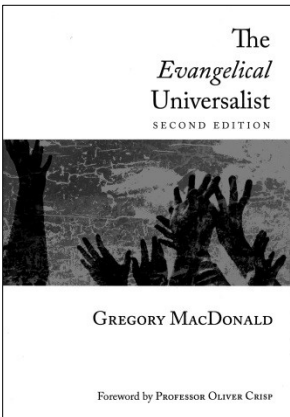
Gerry Beauchemin wrote *Hope Beyond Hell*. He offers four corrections to traditional Hell theology: the meanings of “aion,” “gehenna,” and “apollumi,” and the error of *free will*. On page 82, he happily agrees with the Calvinists that God always accomplishes his sovereign will to save his chosen people and he also agrees with Arminians who believe that God loves all mankind. Like me he has added these two simple facts into the awesome news that Jesus is the savior of all mankind and thus there must be *Hope Beyond Hell* which he proves with Scripture. On page 165 he boldly says, “*The only way I [for you] can be truly assured I will be saved is if I believe that God saves all [mankind].*” I totally agree! Otherwise your “*faith*” is built on something other than grace. Beauchemin is a courageous defender of truth versus tradition.



Ernst Stroeter, a United Methodist pastor, wrote *The Gospel of God's Reconciliation of All in Christ*. He is no weak, liberal, wishful thinker with disregard for Scripture. He offers solid exegesis of Colossians 1:15-20 and the cross of Jesus Christ as proof of God's love for mankind. He says on page 168, “*we must discard the pious illusion that there is safety for us because we became believers - that we are safe because of something we did. We must shed the belief of a personal, solitary faith and learn to rest in a different way in the redeeming grace for all humankind.*” He defends the cross like no other and was persecuted for it. Stroeter does speculate further than I prefer about the salvation of fallen angels and also about eons before Genesis 1:3 and after Revelation 22:21.



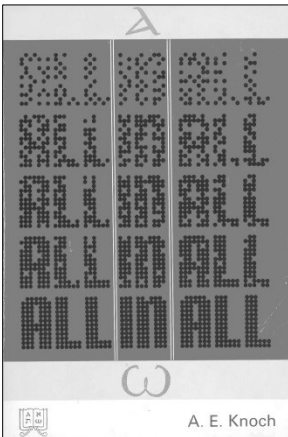
Thomas Allin wrote *Christ Triumphant, The Larger Hope Asserted*. He argues for the final victory of Christ with Scripture, Christian reason, and the testimony of early and later church fathers. He highlights Romans 11:32 and countless other Scripture. He reasons that a god who merely offers love till the point of death followed by eternal damnation, if unbelieving, is not the gracious God of the Bible. He cites Origen, Clement, Gregory, Jerome, and many others as well as church creeds, hymns, and liturgies. Allin insists that God will salt all mankind with fire and condemn the unbeliever to Hades. However, because “*aion*” is temporal these judgments are for purification, not damnation, 1 Peter 4:6. He concludes, “*God shall be all in all!*” - Amen!



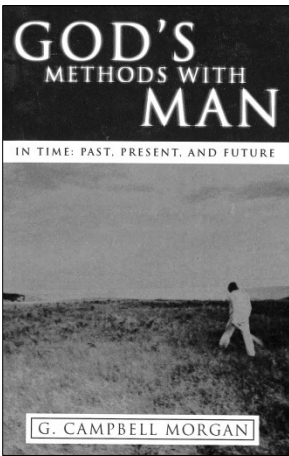
Robin Parry wrote *The Evangelical Universalist* under the pseudonym Gregory MacDonald. Parry reasons carefully as he questions traditional Hell theology. He notes that Calvinism and Arminianism are each reasonable at points, but also unreasonable. They cannot both be true and one is not preferred alone. That is why Christians are so divided over this point! Parry says on page 23, “*To my mind, Christian reason seems to lead either to Calvinist universalism, or away from Calvinism.*” So true! Also Parry and Beauchemin both agree with Hanson, that the “*aion*” of the Lake of Fire is only an age of punishment for unbelievers. Yet I still think a better explanation is that the “*aion*” of Hades is temporary punishment for unbelievers, but the Lake of Fire is for *The Ages of The Ages*, yet only for fallen angels. I highly recommend Parry.



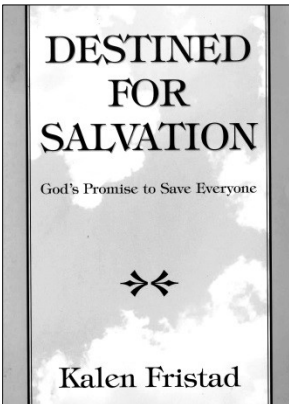
Thomas Talbott wrote *The Inescapable Love of God*. Part I & II are the most readable well stated defense of Christ as Savior of all that I have reviewed. Read it! One would have to turn off all reason and reliance on Scripture to deny his proofs. Part III, however, is more difficult to follow. He argues against a retributivist God, but he should clarify that God's holiness would hypothetically demand the eternal banishment of even the least blemished sinner... were it not for Christ. Thus the believing worship Christ for his sacrifice which now demands our salvation and transformation. This high bar is our guarantee that the redeemed will not bring even our least blemish into glory. Talbott concludes saying Christian faith is the logical wager between hope and despair. Though Christian hope is not a wager, but instead repentance from hypocrisy to confess Christ as our savior and the savior of all mankind.



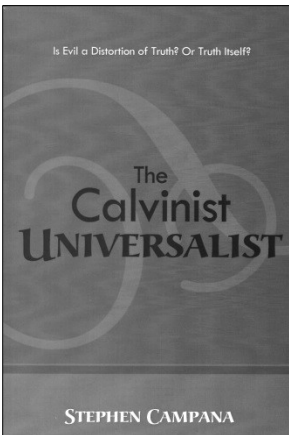
A. E. Knoch wrote *All In All*. Knoch's volume proposes a very interesting model of redemptive history with 5 distinct eons between eternity past and eternity future. I plan to study this further. Knoch's understanding of eon, eon of eons, and the eons of the eons supported his conclusion that all mankind will be finally saved. Knoch also played a key role in the compilation of the *Concordant Bible*. This Bible translates "aion" as "eon" and also consistently translates every Greek word with only one English word to help the reader observe the Holy Spirit's word choices. Knoch has much to contribute to this discussion, but unfortunately he also muddies the waters. His "eonian" theory is tied into the most dogmatic dispensational system I have ever seen. Knoch also parted ways with orthodoxy concerning the Trinity and the deity of Christ. Too bad. More can be learned about Knoch at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolph Ernst Knoch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolph_Ernst_Knoch).



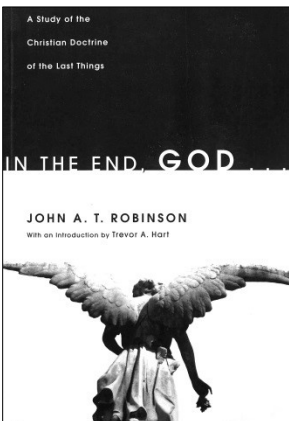
G. Campbell Morgan wrote *God's Methods with Man*, including a chart of the history of redemption. Those with a dispensational flair will be encouraged, while the remainder will be challenged. He makes critical observations of history's "aions." Morgan strongly states on page 135 that, "*Names entered in the [Book of Life] are found there only by virtue of the atoning blood of Jesus Christ.*" This is the good news since Christ died for all mankind (+1)! He also notes that 1 Corinthians 2:7-10 says that the mystery of God's love for ALL mankind is only revealed to the church. God loves ALL, but only the church believes it (+1)! Yet somehow he also concludes that man's will can finally resist grace (-1) and oddly that there is an inner church within the church (-1). Some of Rob Bell's thoughts parallel this book. (Score: 0) My own redemptive history chart can be found in my article, *Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News!*



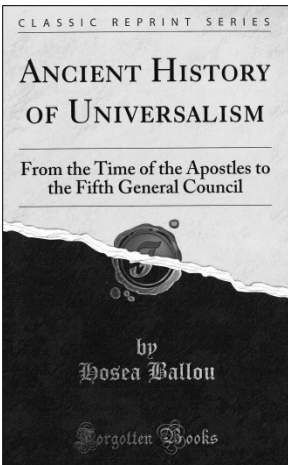
Kalen Fristad wrote *Destined for Salvation, God's Promise to Save Everyone*. Fristad argues for the salvation of all mankind with similar reasons as other evangelicals including that "aion" means age or a temporal duration, that man does not have *free will* to effect God's unconditional love, and that God's judgment, even in Hades, are loving acts toward his unrepentant people. On page 44 Fristad, in the gentlest way, boldly calls belief in *free will* idolatry! He also provides useful chapters on the history of Christian Universalism and strategies for sharing the good news without fear. Fristad does fail to protect the inspiration of Scripture suggesting that Luke 16:19-31 is a parable and that OT Scripture was influenced by the writer's wrong cultural views of God. However, the OT Scripture was God breathed! I recommend the book with caveats.



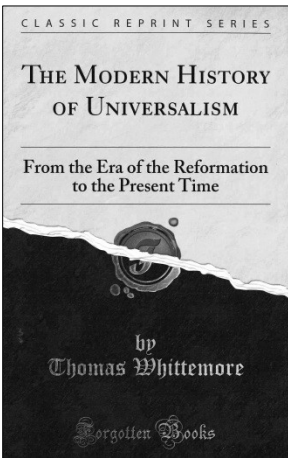
Stephen Campana wrote *The Calvinist Universalist*. He says on page 149, "...the consistent Calvinist will either embrace universal salvation or reject Calvinist election." He also considers my own conclusion that the Lake of Fire is not designed for mankind, but for fallen angels. Like me, he also asserts that mankind's fallen nature was ordained by God, NOT man's supposed *free will*. He proposes mankind was created with a sinful nature, while I propose that God subjected his sinless creation to vanity after the proclamation of 'very good', but before the rebellion of Satan and mankind. Though we agree that sin entered the world because God ordained our fallen natures which now lust to be god. Campana could more careful when describing God's sovereign and prescriptive will. Saying that God "*wanted*" Adam to sin does not best describe God's motives. Instead God "*ordained*" the existence of sin, to create the opportunity to demonstrate his grace, forgiving and leading us away from sin. While I may not agree with all Campana's arguments, he emphasizes an essential component in the defense of universal salvation, the necessity for faith to be reasonable.



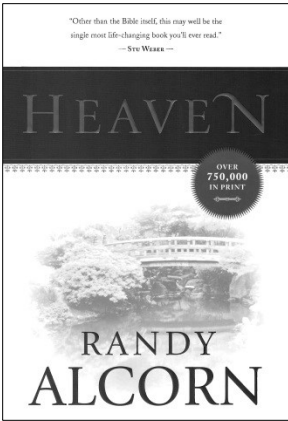
John Robinson wrote *In the End, GOD, A Study of the Christian Doctrine of Last Things*. Robinson offends epistemology and inspiration so gravely with the invention of *eschatological myth* that many will throw the book away after Chapter 5, if they get that far. I nearly did myself! Yet he makes key points in chapters "*The Resurrection of the Body*," "*The End of the Lord*," and "*All in All*." He is accused of arrogance by Trevor Hart for asserting that God must save all mankind because of Christ. On that point I join Robinson! Yet Robinson missed the eonian nature of Hades and instead violates inspiration to explain Scripture. Thomas Torrance also condemns Robinson for saying the gospel includes the *mythological reality* of eternal damnation for the unbeliever. Yet Torrance is self-condemned saying the *mystery of sin* requires the damnation of unbelievers though their sins are atoned! My review continues in my article, [The Good, Bad, and Ugly of John Robinson](#).



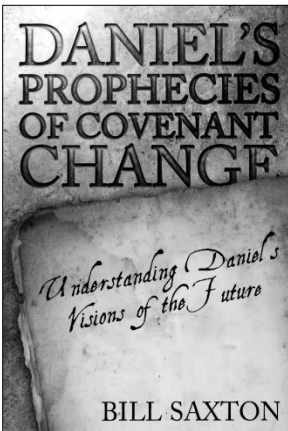
Hosea Ballou wrote *Ancient History of Universalism*. Very interesting! Today an overwhelming majority of Christians understand hope in the universal salvation of mankind to be heretical. However, this forgotten book, originally published in 1885, documents the history of Universalism from the Apostles to the Fifth General Council in 553 A.D.. Read the volume and you will be surprised to learn that many Christians held that Jesus would finally reconcile his entire creation to himself. In fact Universalism prospered until condemned by Catholic politics in 553 A.D. Origen and other early church fathers were strong voices that Christ would be “*all in all*” even saving Satan!



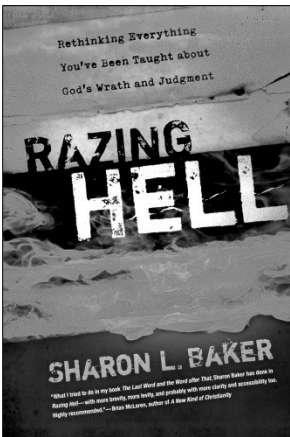
Thomas Whittemore wrote *The Modern History of Universalism*. The most surprising fact in this volume is the ample and consistent witness to Christ as savior of all mankind throughout nearly all of church history. Adherents included Calvinists, Arminians, churchmen, dissenters, Catholics, protestants, Anabaptists, Baptists, Europeans, Americans, and Internationals. Whittenmore suggests that the greatest irony of the Reformation is that many protestants rejected Catholic purgatorial Hell only to embrace it again. Also a hilarious conversation is recorded between John Murray and an objector on pages 323-324 that is worth the price of the book. Murray is the Father of American Universalism. The book concludes with important theological distinctions between various Universalists.



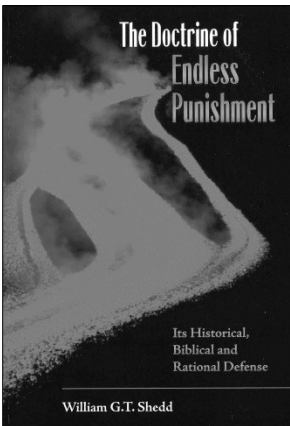
Randy Alcorn wrote *Heaven*. He rejects universal salvation siding with Arminians that “free choice” gains us Heaven. He agrees that the present Paradise and Hell are temporary. He also agrees that the Hebrew “*olam*” can mean finite duration. He uses Colossians 1:20 to assert the complete restoration of all things such as plants, animals, rocks, and stars. He even asserts the final salvation of the unborn and children because “*God in his... special love for children covers them with Christ’s blood,*” page 355. If only his excitement for complete reconciliation would include unbelievers. If “*olam*” can mean finite then the Greek “*aion*” can also mean a finite time in Hell. Alcorn should trust that just like the unborn, “*God in his special love covered all mankind with Christ’s blood.*” As an aside check out page 352 for speculation about sex in Heaven!



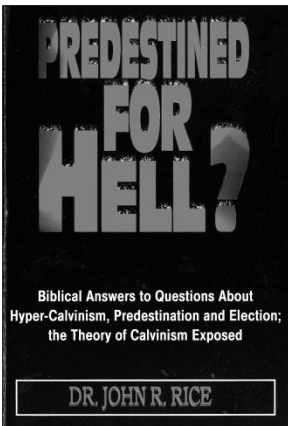
Bill Saxton wrote *Daniel's Prophecies of Covenant Change*. Saxton does not address the scope of mankind's salvation. However, he does give thorough treatment to Daniel's prophecies that relate to my proposed understanding of Daniel 12:1-4, Matthew 24-25, and Revelation. Eschatology is not my strength and so I would be glad take a wide path around these debated and divisive subjects in order to simply enjoy brotherhood trusting God with unanswered questions. Yet the grace of Christ draws me, and hopefully you as well, to search deeply into the prophesied future of mankind's redemption. Saxton does not propose a definite answer to the timing of the resurrection and judgment forecast in Daniel 12:2, but instead a possible dual meaning. Daniel 12 follows closely after Chapter 11 which he understands to detail the life of 1st century King Herod. Yet Daniel 12:1-4 also appears to speak about resurrection and final judgment. Thus Saxton has not answered all my remaining questions, but he does inspire me to strive to perfect my understanding of mankind's redemption with Biblical proofs.



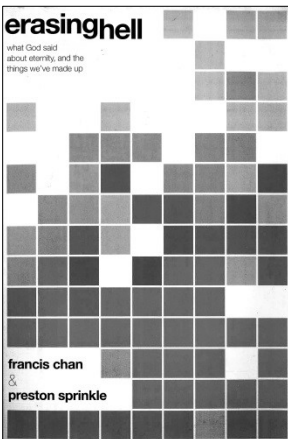
Sharon Baker wrote *Razing Hell* and is accused of Universalism. Yet, she says that people can reject Christ and chose annihilation in the Lake of Fire. She inconsistently says we are forgiven before we repent, but we must receive forgiveness to avoid condemnation. She rejects the idea that Christ's death was needed to propitiate God's wrath because that would make God evil and retributive. Since the Bible does portray God as wrathful, she concludes that these ideas are not inspired, but instead human error. Baker believes that since "aion" is temporal, unbelievers will get a second chance after Hell, kind of like Arminianism X 2. Her book discredits inspiration and of course "chance" salvation, whether first or second, denies the power of God's grace in raising the dead.



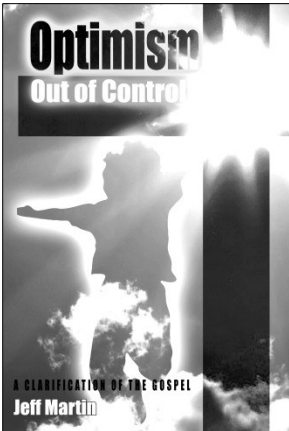
William Shed wrote *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment*, with historical, Biblical, and rational arguments. Shed speaks well against annihilationism and Hell as mere suffering in this life. Yet he says on page 95, "the most dangerous [form of Universalism], is that which concedes the force of the Biblical and rational arguments respecting the guilt of sin, and its intrinsic desert of everlasting punishment, but contends that redemption from it through the vicarious atonement of Christ is extended into the next world." My view exactly! Shed says there are only two "aions," the present and the next. What about the Jewish age, the church age, and the New Heavens and Earth? Shed says if we agree mankind has *free will* then it is proved that eternal punishment is required for unbelievers. Excellent logic, but a bad premise! He also implies that we are saved or damned by our penitence or lack thereof! Mr. Shed, where is the grace?



John Rice wrote *Predestined for Hell?* He was a well-known evangelist and founder of Sword of the Lord publishing. Rice vehemently opposed orthodox Calvinism, yet he labeled himself a Calvinist because he believed in the P of T.U.L.I.P., the perseverance of the saints. Yet he rejected the L, limited atonement. Curiously Rice also staunchly defends *free will* as the reason that any individual is saved, which is classic Arminianism. There is so much misunderstanding about these things and Dr. Rice's book simply adds to the confusion. My own thesis makes it clear that I have both a strong agreement and a strong disagreement with Dr. Rice. I wonder what he would say about the optimistic idea that Jesus really is the savior of all mankind, though unbelieving humans are punished in Hades, but not the Lake of Fire?



Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle wrote *erasing hell*. They wrote a book of concern about modern day evangelicals who have effectively erased the warnings about Hell from their gospel. Chan does well to remind us of the need to warn the unbelieving about the punishment waiting for those who reject the grace of Christ. Yet he also disagrees with those who would hope for any kind of universal salvation of mankind. Curiously at the end of his book, Chan confesses that he cannot definitively say that Hell is eternal. I agree that a gospel that does not warn the unbeliever about punishment in Hell is not the gospel. Yet I also wonder what Chan and Sprinkle would think about the idea that unbelievers are punished in Hades, yet safely extracted out in Revelation 20:13-14?



I, Jeff Martin, wrote *Optimism Out of Control*. Like many above I have defended God's victorious grace in the final salvation of all mankind with Biblical arguments concerning 1) God's free will to save mankind, 2) mankind's lack of *free will* to save ourselves, 3) the meaning of "*aion*", 4) the temporal nature of afterlife punishment, 5) and Christ's atonement of all mankind as the Second Adam and new federal head of all humanity. These arguments are nothing new. My additional contributions to the discussion include the observation that Hades and the Lake of Fire do not the serve the same purpose. Unbelieving man is punished temporally in Hades, while the Lake of Fire is prepared to damn only Satan and his angels for The Ages of The Ages. I also observed the "*Hosea Strategy*" which is essential for a consistent Biblical hermeneutic. Jesus followed the example of Hosea as well as followed his own counsel in Proverbs to speak foolishness to the fool, calling his stubborn lost sheep, "*not my sheep.*"

Conventionally book writers should not write reviews of similarly themed books. The review and conclusion should be left to the audience. So please consider the notes above an introduction to books you may not be familiar with and an encouragement to read them yourself.

But ya gotta accept it!

OBJECTORS>> *BUT YA GOTTA ACCEPT IT!*

ME>> Friends, consider these questions:

WHAT “IT” DO WE HAVE TO ACCEPT?

What is the “IT” that we must accept in order to be a Christian? If I hear correctly, many are saying that we must accept Jesus’ *offer* of forgiveness in order to *be* forgiven. However, there is a fundamental difference in the “IT” that must be accepted. This understanding of “IT” is not true to grace and instead is a condition to God’s unconditional love. Instead, to become a believer, to become a Christian, one must accept that Jesus has already paid for our sins and has already forgiven us from the cross. What is the “IT” that we must accept? We must accept that God loved us *before* we loved him and fully paid for our sins and forgave us *while* we were yet his enemies. Are we willing to repent of *all* our self-righteousness and from every man-made condition to instead receive God’s unconditional love? The history of his cross is proof of this very fact! Read the account yourself. Mankind did not accept Jesus, but crucified him, while he forgave us. But are we willing instead to accept that God loves us and *ALL* his people unconditionally and that Jesus has already forgiven all mankind from the cross before the asking? Or are we like ignorant Peter saying, **“You will never wash my feet”**? Join believing Peter and say, **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”** (1 Peter 1:3 WEB). Friend, the truth of God’s forgiveness given to all mankind is plain to see. Only blindness could obscure our vision. Only a radical new birth through the Holy Spirit can open our eyes.

WHY DO WE HAVE TO ACCEPT “IT”?

When they say *“But ya gotta accept it,”* what is the *reason* that we must accept “IT”? What is the purpose, the goal, the end of this accepting? If I hear correctly they are saying that we must accept the offer of forgiveness in order to be forgiven and thus to escape the Lake of Fire. Fire insurance is their goal. Again there is a fundamental difference in the reason that we must accept Christ. Their understanding of the reason is not true to grace and instead illustrates the addition of a condition to God’s unconditional love. Their understanding falls short of accepting that the elect of God have never and will never be in danger of eternal damnation. Their understanding misses God’s great purpose in salvation. Though they may quickly object, asking then, what is the purpose of Christian salvation anyway? Why do we examine ourselves to see if we are of the faith? Why do we sacrifice time

and money to tell others about Christ? Certainly neither time, nor money, nor all the persuasive speech in the entire world, nor any human condition, can add someone's name to the Lamb's Book of Life! Predestination teaches us that elect mankind's sin has been paid from before the foundation of the world. So then why do we have to accept that Jesus loves us and has already forgiven us if we are already forgiven?

We need to be saved from our corrupt and self-righteous hearts in order to know God as our loving Heavenly Father and begin to fellowship with him! Our hearts need to be changed toward God because God wants to be our friend. God's heart does not need to be changed toward us. He is resolute in his love! Jesus is bringing lost sheep into his fold. We also need the indwelling Holy Spirit to fight against destructive sin in our lives. Furthermore, if our hearts are not changed we will not escape punishment in Hades, nor will we even want to be in Paradise worshiping Christ until we are changed. Are we still like Adam and Eve hiding in the garden behind religion, atheism, or agnosticism? Why not hear God's voice of forgiveness calling our names? Friends, simple confidence that God has already forgiven us and all mankind from the cross will change our hearts and prepare us for joy with Christ and *ALL* his people. We must accept his unconditional love to have a changed heart, to repent of our hypocrisy, to begin fellowship with Christ, and to escape punishment in Hades. Why wait? Yet unbelievers must be warned that even if they waste their lives with religion, destroy their lives with sin, and suffer an age in Hades resisting grace until the very threshold of eternal damnation, even so, not they or any human being for whom Christ died will ever enter the Lake of Fire which is prepared for... the Devil and his angels.

CONSIDER "IT"!

The religious Jews who crucified Christ did so because they hated him. Christ rejected their religion and the Jews hated him for that. Christ also befriended the Gentiles and told them they didn't need the Jewish religion and the Jews hated him for that. Friends, are we modern day "*Jews*" who have made a religion out of "*Christ?*" The gentiles likewise joined in hatred toward Christ for his claim to be the only way to God. Are we modern day "*Gentiles*" whose open minds are closed to the grace of God given only through his Son Jesus Christ? Yes, the name of "*Jesus*" is on our lips and maybe in our worship songs, but have we restricted the love of God from all mankind? Have we said God does not love all mankind along with the Calvinist? Have we added human condition to the grace of God? Have we said God only forgives those who accept Jesus along with the Arminian? If so we crucify Christ all over again no matter how much we praise Christ's name!

Can Such a Minority View Be True?

FRIEND>> How can such a minority viewpoint be true or even worth consideration? Furthermore, Christians have translated and studied the Scriptures for 2,000 years. How can you suggest that there is a mistranslation of the word "eternal?"

ME>> Those are excellent questions. In fact I have asked them of myself quite often over the past year. Let me give reply.

We both agree that ***"narrow is the gate, and restricted is the way that leads to life! Few are those who find it"*** (Matthew 7:14 WEB). However, some have complained that my understanding is not only narrow, but is the minority of an already small minority. The first point is that one should not think of my view as a minority of the minority or a sub-set of the sub-set. True believers have always been a very small minority throughout history. However, the next larger group has been the religious, and then the largest group is the a-religious. So while the repentant stand at the foot of the cross, the self-righteous and the unrighteous fall to the left and the right of true healing. So the paramount question is not how large a particular group is, but instead what is the truth? A second equally important question is whether we are believers, merely religious, or pagan? The body of religious people has always been greater than the body of true believers.

Consider Joshua and Caleb. These two men and their families were the lone believers when the scouts returned from the Promised Land in the book of Exodus. The entire family of Israelites followed the complaining and fears of the unbelieving scouts and thus were excluded from entering the Promised Land. Two people and their families are a pretty small minority out of roughly two million Israelites. In fact Hebrews 3:16 - 4:2 uses this very example to urge those that will listen to place their faith in Christ in the present generation.

You are also right to question my authority to suggest that the word *"eternal"* is mistranslated in the New Testament. I do not have formal training in Greek or Hebrew. I could not even recite the Greek alphabet in order. Yet I have been compelled by grace to answer the question of the extent of God's grace toward not only myself, but also my fellow human beings. Through study of the Greek lexicon on my shelf and critical online resources, I do not only suggest, but assert that the Greek words *"aion"* and *"aionian"* never mean simple eternal time, but instead most definitely mean *"age," "eonian," "entire,"* or *"complete."* This observation alone should be motivation for every Christian to at least reconsider the great question of the final salvation of our fellowman. Everyone in the least acquainted with saving grace and God's unconditional love ought to be driven to muster their greatest energies to

learn about the extent of God's love for others. I do not find tradition a safe place to stand, especially, in light of history. Do you?

Of course if you do not find my Greek research trustworthy, I am not offended. But please check out John Wesley Hanson's classic 1875 work titled, *The Greek Word Aion-Aionios translated Everlasting-Eternal in the Holy Bible Shown to Denote Limited Duration*. This classic work is available for free from the U.S. Library of Congress website and also from my own website. Dr. Heleen Keizer has also written a dissertation proving the same titled, *Life, Time, Entirety - A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo*. You can read her 315 page dissertation online or an abstract of her conclusions on my website. *Young's Literal Translation* also properly translates the Greek word "aion" as "age."

Compatibilism is the Answer? (AKA Molinism)

FRIEND>> Compatibilism is the answer! Your arguments pit God's sovereignty against man's free will. That is the error of your thinking because these ideas can co-exist and they are compatible.

ME>> So you say... and actually *compatibilism* is the majority view held by both the schooled and unschooled theologian alike. A basic explanation of compatibilism can be found at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compatibilism>. Compatibilism really is a variation of the 16th century heresy, Molinism, explained at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Molinism>. Both attack the sovereign grace of God so that man can be god of his own salvation.

Those that hold this view should at least consider the challenge of Martin Luther in his book, *Bondage of the Will*. Frankly, most American Protestants do not even understand the heart of Luther's Reformation and the contest that was at stake for the gospel of grace at that time. Luther strongly stated, "If any man doth ascribe aught of salvation, even the very least, to the free-will of man, he knoweth nothing of grace, and he hath not learnt Jesus Christ aright." Sadly many protestant churches pride themselves claiming to hold the true gospel, while thinking that Catholics fall short. The truth is, however, that both Catholicism and American Protestantism continue to make the same mistake that Luther tried to correct! I find this misguided Protestant finger pointing to be offensive and massively hypocritical. Luther's book, *Bondage of the Will*, is a must read for this generation. I have also written my own short article on the same subject, [A Quintessential Defense of FREE WILL](#).

Why do Christians continue to cling to their own supposed *free will*, instead of clinging to the gracious free will of the Savior? Why would we be so motivated to invent such an odd word as "*compatibilism*" to defend the

incompatible? Why not instead seek the Lord, even pound on the doors of heaven for a better answer? Why not consider the happy truth that Christ willed to pay for the sins of ALL mankind completely apart from our will? The cursing of Peter makes it abundantly clear that *no one* freely willed that Christ die on the cross to pay for our sin except our gracious God himself, Matthew 26:74. Perhaps you are cursing too?

Did John Calvin Originate Calvinism?

READER>> *Did Calvinism Originate with John Calvin?*

ME>> Actually, John Calvin did not originate Calvinistic thought. The roots of Calvin's theology are also evident in the theology of Saint Augustine, a most famous Catholic priest from the 4th Century. This is a very curious fact considering that the Catholic Church then condemned Calvin and some of the Reformers for holding to Augustine's theology in the 16th Century! Sadly Christians have gone back and forth from *Calvinism* to *Arminianism* through the centuries because neither theologies find complete support from the Scriptures. As far as the understanding of Augustine and Calvin, there appear to be some differences, but the essence of "*Calvinism*" is shared by both these men.

Saint Augustine http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustine_of_Hippo
<http://www.theopedia.com/Augustinianism>

John Calvin http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Calvin
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calvinism>

Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News!

READER>> *What is your view of eschatology?*

ME>> *Eschatology* is one of the most difficult and dividing sciences in Christian theology. *Eschatology* is the part of theology concerned with death, judgment, and the final destiny of the soul and of mankind. *Eschatology* is simply the study of future good news! The challenge is understanding and interpreting Biblical prophecy about the future of mankind's redemption. The bold claim of the *Optimism Out of Control* book is the complete and final salvation of all mankind. This claim, if reasonable, must then be consistent with Biblical prophecy about the future of mankind's redemption.

So how and when will Jesus return? What future hope remains for mankind's redemption? G. Campbell Morgan wrote *God's Methods with Man*. He and many others have designed various charts of the history of

redemption. Motivated by these charts and studying the Bible, I propose my own chart of the history of redemption below.

Unfortunately just like other areas of discussion, not all Christians agree. So there are several main veins of thought to consider. They are each oriented around different understandings of Jesus Christ's return with respect to the 1,000 year epoch before the Great White Throne Judgment described in Revelation Chapter 20. The major views are summarized as follows:

- 1) Dispensational Pre-Millennialism, Future
 - a. The literal 1,000 year epoch remains still future.
 - b. Christ will return physically to inaugurate the Millennial Kingdom.
 - c. Old Covenant worship will be revived to fulfill Old Testament prophecy.
 - d. Commended for insisting there is future hope for ethnic Israel.
 - e. Anti-Christian for reviving the Old Covenant after the glorious New Covenant.
 - f. Endorsed by Darby, Scofield, Ryrie, and others.
 - g. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dispensationalism>

- 2) Non-Dispensational Pre-Millennialism, Future
 - a. The literal 1,000 year epoch remains still future.
 - b. Christ will return physically to inaugurate the Millennial Kingdom.
 - c. Christ will reign on earth as New Covenant King to further demonstrate grace.
 - d. Commended for not reading external meaning into Biblical symbols.
 - e. Can neglect the relevance of Old Testament symbols and first century context.
 - f. Endorsed by Spurgeon, Schaeffer, Erickson, and others.
 - g. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historic_premillennialism

- 3) A-Millennialism, Present
 - a. The figurative 1,000 years from Christ's first to second advent, the Church Age.
 - b. Christ will return after the Church Age to inaugurate the New Heavens and Earth.
 - c. Christ reigns from Heaven now and will reign physically on earth then.
 - d. Commended for navigating toward the simplest sensible model.
 - e. Yet if Isaiah 65:20 is the final New Heavens and Earth why is there death?
 - f. Endorsed by Augustine, Hoekema, Riddlebarger, and others.
 - g. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amillennialism>

- 4) Realized Post-Millennialism, Past
 - a. The literal 1,000 year epoch was the Church Age to the Great Schism, 1054 A.D..
 - b. Christ will return in the future to inaugurate the New Heavens and Earth.
 - c. Christ reigns from Heaven now and will reign physically on earth then.
 - d. Commended for similar simplicity with A-Millennialism.
 - e. Stretches the timing of Revelation 20:7-15 from 1054 A.D. to Christ's return.
 - f. Endorsed by some Roman Catholics and others.
 - g. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East-West_Schism

- 5) Post-Millennialism, Future
 - a. The literal 1,000 year epoch remains still future.
 - b. Christ reigns through Gospel Victory to usher in the Millennial Kingdom.
 - c. Christ will return after the Millennium to inaugurate the New Heavens and Earth.
 - d. Commended for great hope and optimism in the power of the gospel.
 - e. Can neglect that gospel progress proceeds at the pace of God's choosing.
 - f. Endorsed by Calvin, Boettner, Rushdoony, and others.
 - g. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmillennialism>

- 6) Variations of the Above Can Include
 - a. Partial Preterism like Christ's judgment on Jerusalem in 70 A.D., Matthew 24:15.
 - b. Prophecies about repentant Israel's special roles still future, Isaiah 66:12.
 - c. Optimistic, pessimistic, or realistic outlooks for the temporal future.
 - d. Ranges of Biblical interpretive methods from literal to symbolic.
 - e. Short and long range prophecy as well as dual fulfillment, Matthew 24:3.
 - f. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_eschatology
 - g. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_eschatological_views

- 7) Full Preterism (all prophecy is fully realized)
 - a. The 1,000 years is the figurative span from Christ's first advent to 70 A.D..
 - b. Christ's second coming was his judgment on Jerusalem in 70 A.D..
 - c. Christ reigns as king in Heaven with no future physical coming prophesied.
 - d. Commended for observing that prophecies may already be fulfilled.

- e. *“Blessed Hopelessness”* for saying that all prophecy is already fulfilled, Titus 2:13.
- f. Endorsed by Alcasar, Preston, Harden, and others.
- g. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Preterism>

The views above are listed on a continuum from Old Testament promises not yet realized to New Testament promises completely realized. The Dispensational and Full Preterist views are understood to fall outside of Christian orthodoxy. Yet since eschatology is such a difficult subject matter Christendom has been more or less accommodating to each of the other views. A more thorough study and explanation could take volumes and even after studying numerous volumes myself I find it hard to determine the matter with the confidence I would prefer.

Ezekiel confronted the pride of the King of Tyre prodding that he was *“wiser than Daniel.”* Yet Daniel had the wisdom to confess after receiving prophetic visions, *“I heard, but I didn’t understand,”* (Daniel 12:8 WEB). I confess that I hear, but do not understand as clearly as I would prefer. Yet Jesus still urges us, *“let the reader understand,”* (Matthew 24:15 WEB). So we seek understanding.

In the end I am convinced that my primary thesis, that all mankind will be finally saved, can be consistently integrated with many of the proposed views above. Though one’s understanding of Jesus’ words *“this age”*, *“the age to come”*, and *“the ages to come”* will of course be different according to one’s preferred framework. We also know that conflicting frameworks cannot all be right. Certainly all of the proposed models above miss the mark to some degree, some more and some less. This is unsettling. I wish I could add a more definite view of eschatology to the defense of my thesis. Yet, even so, my list of proofs in the body of *Optimism Out of Control* are more than sufficient evidence of God’s love for all mankind, at least enough evidence for me.

That said, I will share my current understanding about Christ’s promised return in order have greater appeal to my reader through my transparency. As a simple church goer I held the Pan-Millennial view, that is it would all *“pan out”* in the end. I still hold this view! After coming to faith I initially held to the Non-Dispensational Pre-Millennial Future understanding. Then, frankly while working on this book I moved to the A-Millennial or Church Age understanding. The good news is that the next major event anticipated for both of these views is the return of Christ. So whatever confusion remains now will certainly be cleared up then! Since my understanding has recently changed I ask your patience if you discover inconsistencies in my words.

Several observations have pointed me to the A-Millennial or Church Age model of understanding. *First*, Revelation 20:1-6 does not say anything about the Millennium being a supernatural time of peace, but simply that Satan is restricted from deceiving the nations. Since 1 Peter 5:8 warns us that Satan is prowling around seeking to devour individuals, Revelation 20:3,8 could simply be saying that Satan is restricted from rallying the nations against Christ's people. *Second*, Isaiah 65:17-25 and 66 are explicitly prophesying about the New Heavens and Earth, not a Millennial Kingdom. Admittedly Isaiah 65:20 does not appear to fit the New Heavens and Earth because of its mention of child birth and death. However, the explicit identity of this forecast is not the Millennium, but the New Heavens and Earth. *Third*, Ezekiel's temple and the river that flows from it are clearly a picture of the infinite love, grace, and mercy found in Jesus Christ. A literal display of Ezekiel's temple and river would not even fit on the planet! Models that insist in the revival of Old Covenant temple worship to satisfy Ezekiel's and other Old Testament prophecy have missed the main point of the book of Hebrews. These models also miss the Holy Spirit's use of Old Testament symbol hyperbole to point to the glory of Christ's first advent. *Fourth*, Matthew 24:3 lists two or three questions from the disciples. Thus, it is no stretch at all to see that Jesus' answer includes both partial preteristic statements about his coming judgment on Jerusalem in 70 A.D. as well as his second coming in glory as reigning king at the end of the Church Age. *Fifth*, Jesus warns that blasphemy of the Spirit in Matthew 12:30-32 will not be forgiven in **"this age"** or **"the coming."** Universalists commonly understand that unbelieving humans will suffer in the **"coming age"** of the Lake of Fire, but then eventually be saved even from there. Since, I hold that humans will never enter the Lake of Fire then what is **"the coming"** age? As a Pre-Millennialist the answer was the coming Millennial Kingdom. However, now as an A-Millennialist **"this age"** could instead refer to the end of the Jewish Age, while **"the coming"** is the Church Age. *Sixth*, the living, reigning, and first resurrection of the saints in Revelation 20:4-5 is often understood to be the physical resurrection at a Pre-Millennial rapture. However, the passage is just as easily understood to be the spiritual resurrection to new life as a Christian. Also the Holy Spirit is encouraging us that Christians who are terribly martyred have not lost, but are victors in Heaven until we will meet them again in glory. *Seventh*, while Preterism makes essential points that Christ did come in judgment on Jerusalem in 70 A.D., Full Preterists make a gross error negating Christ's promise to return in the body to consummate the marriage to his bride, John 14:3 and Acts 1:11. So reasonable explanations can be found for the A-Millennial Church Age understanding while defending the universal salvation of all mankind.

Below is my proposed chart of redemptive history with twelve categories of people, eight ages of redemptive history, and the location of these people during each era. Please note that I do not list twelve and eight divisions as if they were special numerical divisions as some forms of Dispensationalism attempt. Instead these categories are simply for illustrative purposes. The

chart shows the distinction between the redeemed and the unredeemed, that is mankind versus fallen angels, as explained in my article, [Revelation 20:10](#). The chart below also shows the distinction between Hades, Tartarus / Thalaasa, and the Lake of Fire, that is temporal punishment versus damnation for *The Ages of The Ages*, as explained in my article, [2 Thessalonians 1:6-10](#). Understanding this is a great hope for those trusting that Christ has paid for the sin of all mankind.

The chart is complex. For the best reading strategy choose a category of people and follow their location horizontally across the ages of redemptive history. Alternatively choose an age of redemptive history and consider the locations vertically down the categories of people.

Age >	Eternity Past	4000 BC Perfect Creation	Fall then No Law	1500 BC Moses Law	0 AD	Holy Spirit Church Age / Kingdom	Great White Throne Eternity Future	?	
People V	Innocence		Sin				Glory		
Father	God's Perfect Union	God's Perfect Union with Adam and Eve in the Garden	Living in Unapproachable Light				God's Perfect Union with All Mankind in the Holy City	A p o c a t a s i s	
Son			Pre-Incarnate		Incarnation				Paradise
Holy Spirit			Omnipresent		Indwelling Believers				
Holy Angels	No Creation No People	No Fall No Death	Serving Mankind for Christ				No Hades No Dead		
Living Mankind			Serving the Savior or Satan on Earth						
Deceased Believing Mankind			Blessed in Paradise						
Deceased Unbelieving Mankind		Punished temporally in Hades							
Imprisoned Fallen Angels		No Fall No Demons	Imprisoned in Tartarus / Thalaasa				Goats Damned to The Lake of Fire Prepared for... the Devil and his Angels		
Fugitive Fallen Angels					Still Fugitive?				
False Prophet Demonic			Rebelling Against Christ Accusing Mankind		Lake of Fire				
Beast Demonic					Abyss until Final Battle				
Satan									

The basis for this chart is several critical observations from Scripture.

First, Hades, Tartarus / Thalaasa, and the Lake of Fire are not the same place according to Luke 16:23, 2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6, and Revelation 20:13-14. Furthermore, both Hades and Tartarus / Thalaasa, a prison for demons being held for future judgment, are temporary locations, emptied of their unbelieving human inhabitants as well as their imprisoned demons at the Great White Throne Judgment. Punishment in Hades is distinct from condemnation in the Lake of Fire because Hades is for an *Age* whereas The Lake of Fire is for *The Ages of The Ages*. Punishment in Hades is also distinct because God cares for the unbelieving humans punished in Hades (Psalm 139:8 and 1 Peter 4:6). However, God does not appear to care for Satan (Genesis 3:15 and Hebrews 2:16), and damns fallen angels to the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages* (Matthew 25:41 and Rev 20:7-10).

Second, Christ has redeemed all mankind, believing and unbelieving, as the second Adam, our vicarious substitute. (See Romans 5:12-21, Romans 11:32, and 1 John 2:1-2.) However, he has apparently not redeemed fallen angels (Hebrews 2:16).

Third, faith does not cause redemption, but faith receives the redemption already given at the cross by the death of Christ (Romans 5:10). Faith is repentance from self-righteousness to receive Christ's righteousness already given (Romans 1:17 and Ephesians 2:8). *Free will choice* is not the condition to God's unconditional love, but a changed heart is happy to trust in God's unconditional love (John 3:3).

Fourth, the believing redeemed will join Christ in paradise after death (Luke 23:43) and will be resurrected at Christ's return to rule with him again on Earth (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 and Revelation 20:4). The unbelieving redeemed will suffer in Hades if they do not repent from their self-righteousness and receive grace through faith (Luke 16:23 and 2 Peter 2:1), and apparently they will stay in Hades until the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:5). Though 1 Peter 3:18-20 and 4:6 might suggest that new life can be realized even for some in Hades. Christians and perhaps all mankind will also need to stand before Christ at the Bema Seat Judgment as explained in Romans 14:10-12 and 2 Corinthians 5:10. I am not sure of the timing of this event or whether it is a personal or group interview with Christ. We should make ourselves ready.

Fifth, the Lake of Fire, the second death, is prepared for the Devil and his Angels, not Mankind, as explained in my article, [Matthew 25:31-46](#). Furthermore, it is wrongly assumed that the judgments in the Bible are for humans only and divide believer from unbelievers, when instead some of these judgments include both humans and fallen angels and divide the sheep from goats (Matthew 25:41, 2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6, and Revelation 20:7-

15). Some conclude that even Satan and his Angels will be redeemed based on the **“all”** of Colossians 1:20. This is a small difference with my understanding. We all can see that the pages of the Bible end with those named in the Lamb’s Book of Life enjoying God’s presence for a blessed eternity. I and many others have also argued that those finally saved are all Mankind by means of Christ’s atonement (1 John 2:1-2 and Revelation 20:15). The pages of the Bible also end with Satan’s head crushed, as promised in Genesis 3:15, and with the fallen angels cast into the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages* (Revelation 20:10). If grace is ever extended to Satan, it is not explicitly stated in the Bible. Obviously the chart above is fairly comprehensive, but it does not include every concept. For example at one point in history Satan had direct access to God’s throne (Job 1:6) but at another point in history he is denied this access (Revelation 12:7-12).

Sixth, Peter said in Acts 3:21 (WEB), **“whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God spoke long ago by the mouth of his holy prophets.”** The Greek word translated as “restoration” is “*apocatastasis*” which Thayer’s Greek Lexicon defines as, “*the restoration of that perfect state of things that existed before the fall.*” Ilaria Ramelli and David Konstan point out in *Terms for Eternity: Aionios and Aidios in Classical and Christian Texts* that “*aion*,” typically translated “*eternal*” in the English New Testament, instead generally means “*age*” or “*eon*.” They also note that the definitive Greek word for eternal, “*aidios*” is only used twice in the Bible: once in Romans 1:20 concerning God and once in Jude 6 concerning the bonds on fallen angels. Since Ramelli and Konstan argue even for the salvation of Satan they conclude that “*aidios*” in Jude 6 must mean transcending the ages, but not finally eternal. They reason that these demons are being “*held for judgment*” and thus there must be an end to these “*aidios*” bonds after their judgment. However, it could also be that these demons with “*aidios*” bonds are held in Tartarus / Thalaasa to be extracted for sentencing at the Great White Throne Judgment and then with the “*aidios*” bonds still on they are cast into the Lake of Fire. Thus they are held for judgment, but the “*aidios*” bonds are not released as they are cast into the Lake of Fire. This is one data point for the argument that fallen angels are eternally damned. Further, if the Sheep and Goat Judgment of Matthew 25 is synonymous with the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20 and with the Great Judgment Day of Jude 6 for the imprisoned angels, then it is clear that the goats are held for judgment and further sentenced to the Lake of Fire. So the “*aidios*” bonds do not end at the Great Day of their judgment, but continue further. How much further? Is the “*apocatastasis*” fulfilled with the final salvation of mankind at the Great White Throne Judgment? Or is there further fulfillment of the “*apocatastasis*” with the salvation of the Devil and his angels sometime after *The Ages of The Ages* beyond the pages of Scripture?

The point is that our lover, Jesus Christ, is currently away, but he is returning and has told us many things about his future plans to “*make his enemies a*

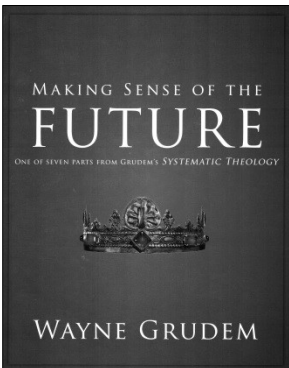
footstool” and to return for his bride, the church, and to consummate eternity with the final salvation of all mankind. Biblical Christianity offers great hope for mankind! Do not settle for anything less!

Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News! (Part 2 with Grudem, Riddlebarger, Chilton, Summers, and Ewing)

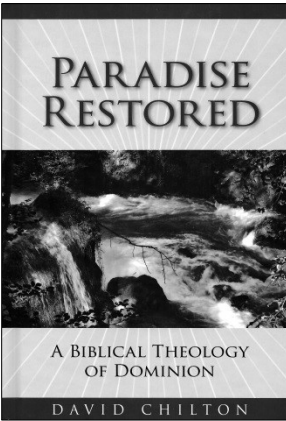
READER>> What is more of your view of eschatology?

ME>> Previously I mentioned that I hold the A-Millennial understanding of future things. I believe that the present Church Age is the Millennial Kingdom of Revelation 20:1-6 and that the second coming of Christ at the Great White Throne Judgment will occur at the end of this present Church Age. The eternal New Heavens and Earth will then begin after that.

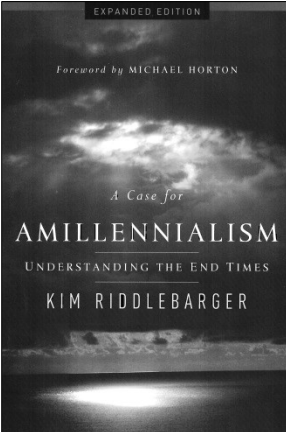
Below are a few books on my shelf from various viewpoints that I recommended for your own study. Of course the hard work of Bible study is always recommended. Yet the books below may be the next best option to inviting Grudem, Riddlebarger, Chilton, Summers, and Ewing to your own Bible study. Also, I have read books on Dispensational Pre-Millennialism and Full Preterism, but do not recommend any below because of their distance from Christian orthodoxy. The works I do list below span the Non-Dispensational Pre-Millennial, A-Millennial, and Post Millennial views. However, you will note after reading them that they do not define one another's labels consistently. Take care not to get ensnared in semantic or camp jargon debate.



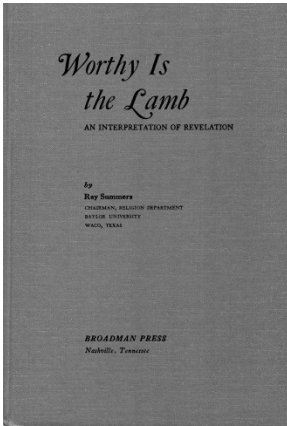
Wayne Grudem wrote *Making Sense of the Future*, a primer on Christian eschatology from a non-dispensational pre-Millennial view point. Grudem is a careful theologian listing numerous Biblical proofs for any position that he holds, including eschatology. For example, he references Psalm 72, Isaiah 11, Isaiah 65, and Zechariah 14 as pointing to a future Millennial reign of Christ on earth. On page 72, Grudem says, “*All this speaks of an age far different from the present age, but short of the eternal state in which there is no more sin or suffering.*” I find much value in Grudem's analysis, though I have recently stepped away from the pre-millennial understanding.



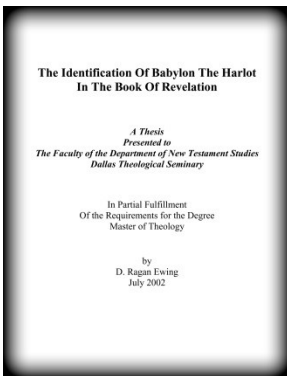
David Chilton wrote *Paradise Restored, A Biblical Theology of Dominion* just as the famed John Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* as well as *Paradise Regained*. Both Milton and Chilton have much to write about Paradise! Chilton's work represents the Post-Millennial view. Yet he explains that the length of the 1,000 years is the figurative time frame of the Church Age, similar to the A-Millennial view of Riddlebarger. So how do they differ? The nature of the Millennial Kingdom proposed by Chilton is more Kingdom-like with a call for Christians to work through civil government to "Christianize" the nations. Chilton emphasizes greater continuity between the Old and New Covenants even suggesting that failed Israel was ex-communicated from the church. However, most Christians would instead say that unbelieving Israel has not joined the church until they bow to personal faith in Christ.



Kim Riddlebarger wrote *A Case for A-Millennialism: Understanding the End Times*. Riddlebarger defends the A-Millennial position, not that "A" means "No" Millennial Kingdom. Instead he explains that the 1,000 years of Revelation 20:1-6 is the figurative length of time for the Church Age, between Christ's first and second advent. His arguments and others persuaded me to adopt this view. For example he notes that Revelation 20:1-6 says nothing about the 1,000 years being a time a peace, but only that Satan is restricted from deceiving the nations. While I might not agree with all Riddlebarger's analysis and assignment of Revelation's symbols, I found his book to be extremely helpful to understand what is happening in the present Church Age.



Ray Summers wrote *Worthy is the Lamb, An Interpretation of Revelation*. Summers defends partial preterist components of Revelation such as the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.. He also defends futuristic components such as the second coming of Christ. Summers adds insight into the methods that are best used when interpreting the symbols and images found within Revelation. He reminds us of the relevance of Old Testament symbols, first century context, and styles found in apocalyptic literature. For example, in the midst of Revelation's war theme, Summers reminds us that first century Christians were especially hated by the Romans because they refused to participate in the state war function. They followed the Lamb! Summers does go further than I prefer when interpreting symbols at a few points, but he adds considerably to the discussion.



Ragan Ewing wrote *The Identification of Babylon the Harlot in the Book of Revelation*. Ewing's effort is not a book per-say, but his doctrinal defense. Ewing wrote his Master's Thesis for Dallas Theological Seminary in 2002 and argues that Babylon the Harlot in the book of Revelation is in fact first century Jerusalem. He meticulously defends both external evidence for a pre-70 A.D. authorship of Revelation as well as internal evidence that identifies Jerusalem as the adulterer that played the harlot with Rome. Ewing also points out that a pre-70 A.D. authorship is not essential to understanding Jerusalem as the Harlot. If authored after 70 A.D. Revelation could then instead be explaining the fate of Jerusalem rather than predicting it. Also Ewing did not mention but could have further noted that Revelation is John's contribution to the same subject matter as Matthew and Luke's Olivet Discourse, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. as predicted in Matthew 24:15-16 and Luke 21:20. Ewing's complete text is available online and also from my website.

None of the authors above appear to have hope for the salvation of all mankind, but they each have much to add to the eschatology

discussion. However, if they did have hope for the salvation of all mankind they could add even more to the discussion. For example David Chilton summarizes the pattern of Scripture as 1) law followed by 2) judgment. This fits the understanding that a few are saved while most are damned. However, the pattern of Scripture is instead 1) law / judgment followed by 2) grace / truth followed by 3) rest / worship, John 1:17. The history of Israel in the Pentateuch follows this pattern with slavery in Egypt, escape from Egypt, and rest in the Promised Land. The entire history of redemption also follows this pattern with the Old Testament followed by the New Testament followed by glorious eternity. Thus, the Revelation of Jesus Christ is the guarantee of joyful victory for mankind over Satan.

Efforts and theories have been multiplied and exponentiated to make sense of John's Revelation, especially Chapter 13 and the famed number of the Beast, 666. I hope to avoid adding my ignorance to the discussion except as it relates to determining the nature of the members of the Unholy Trinity: The Dragon (Satan), The Beast (First / Sea Beast), and The False Prophet (Second / Land Beast). Are they human beings, demonic beings, or non-being forces? Several simple observations may guide our understanding of Revelation.

First, John does not invent Revelation's symbols to communicate a message with his own wisdom. Instead he records what Christ revealed to him in visions about the real interactions between the immaterial and material world, the unseen and the seen, Heaven and Earth. Thus, one would expect the images seen by John to be illustrative rather than photographic. After all, just how does one photograph the awesome glory and majesty of the unseen world? Isaiah saw Heaven's throne, only in part, and was completely undone, Isaiah 6:5. How does one videotape the war between the Archangel Michael and God's Archenemy Satan? Well, it is being fought out in the world around us, but Jesus helps us to see better with the illustrations that he painted for John to share with us. However, just because the paintings are illustrations, even cartoonish, that does not mean they represent the ethereal. Satan is not a fictional or conceptual Dragon, but a supernatural spirit being, a fallen angel, who leads real demons in a real war against God and his people.

Second, the Revelation of Jesus Christ given to John is set on a stage with many of the backstage curtains pulled aside. The drama that John saw reveals the interactions between the immaterial and material world, the unseen and the seen, Heaven and Earth. Thus the people, places, and things in view may be front stage, back stage, or moving between. Wisdom must then be used when interpreting the actors and props seen, whether they are front stage or back stage, that is earthly or Heavenly, or even a combination. Those demanding literalistic or excessive complication in the interpretation of Revelation's drama have missed the context.

Third, we should observe an important pattern shared by the Gospel of John, John's first epistle, and Revelation. Each of his books is introduced with a poetic division of *threes* that is evident as a structural framework for the book. The Gospel of John begins, ***"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"*** (John 1:1 WEB). *Three* dimensions of Christ are listed. Furthermore, John's Gospel is filled with various sets of *sevens*, just like Revelation! Likewise John's epistle begins, ***"That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we saw, and our hands touched, concerning the Word of life"*** (1 John 1:1 WEB). The epistle content is structured around the *three* senses of hearing, sight, and touch! Now, in Revelation 1:4 (WEB) we read ***"John, to the seven assemblies that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from God, who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits who are before his throne."*** Apparently by no coincidence we see the *three* of past, present, and future, and again *seven* spirits! Revelation 1:8 (WEB) says again, ***"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'*** Revelation 1:19 (WEB) also agrees, ***"Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will happen hereafter."*** So while the debate in Revelation often centers on what is first century and what is future, we should also be reminded to consider what was already past! For example we might try to determine what single point in history is referred to by the *Great Tribulation*, when the drama actually on stage is the *Great Tribulation* of Satan's war against God and mankind from Genesis 3:1 to Revelation 20:10. This drama contains the *three* elements of past, present, and future for the 1st century Christians then... and for 21st century Christians now. Thus, first century Christians were encouraged to hold fast by the example of martyrs in their past as we are encouraged to hold on by their example now. Revelation contains a vital message for all Christians during the entire Church Age.

Fourth, the immaterial unseen world is real. It is substantial. It is tangible, though not through physical senses. For example, read 2 Kings Chapter 6 to learn from Elisha about the near presence of the holy angels protecting God's people. Read Daniel Chapter 10 for a rare exchange, the angel Gabriel revealing his and the Archangel Michael's battle with the Prince and Kings of Persia. The veil is briefly removed between the unseen and the seen. Paul also warns in 1 Corinthians 10:20 that the pagan sacrifices of unbelievers are in fact offered to demons! While pagans may be blind to the fact, any idolatry is in fact a victory for Satan. The unseen enemies of God actually rejoice behind the curtain in their victories as people fall to the worship of false gods, or even fall to baser materialism and sensuality.

Fifth, just as Michael and Gabriel had and have specific assignments in the war against Satan, and just as guardian angels are assigned to *their* children, Matthew 18:10, so Satan and his demons attack specifically and

purposefully. Satan and his demons are not nebulous enemies, but are people (though not human) with names, minds, wills, and intent to harm mankind. They strategize, plan, act, and regroup. Just as God commands his righteous angels on the battlefield, so Satan commands his demons.

Now consider Revelation 16:13-14 (WEB),

13) I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits, something like frogs; 14) for they are spirits of demons, performing signs; which go out to the kings of the whole inhabited earth, to gather them together for the war of that great day of God, the Almighty.

Satan knew his time was short because he lost the greatest battle in the first century. Christ conquered all at the cross and now reigns on David's throne as King of Heaven. Satan is doomed and he knows it. Understanding the present Church Age to be the Millennial Reign of Christ, in Revelation 20:1-6, we see that The Beast and the False Prophet are damned to the Lake of Fire since the first century, Revelation 19:20. The defeat and removal of the influence of these demons was the eventual death of the wicked Roman Empire. Ewing's proposal above also makes good sense as we see Revelation Chapter 17 and 18 forecast the destruction of Old Covenant unbelieving Jerusalem, illustrated as the Harlot who rode The Beast. We also see that Satan is temporarily restrained from deceiving the nations from the first century until the very end, Revelation 20:2.

However, just before this restraint happened, Revelation 16:13-14 records that the Unholy Trinity releases three demons assigned to the kings of earth to prepare for the final battle to be fought on that Great Day of the Lord at the end of the Church Age, Revelation 20:7-10. The Beast and The False Prophet are permanently locked up. Satan is temporarily locked up. However, their demon "**frog**" agents have been merking in the mire for 2,000 years in preparation for the final battle when their leader, Satan, is released for one last contest at the end of the Church Age. One does not need to look too far or even have great insight to see the influence of these demon "**frog**" sons of Satan still at work in our world. Obviously, "**frog**" is a metaphor for these demons, perhaps to describe their stealth, quick and deadly accuracy, amphibious adaptability, ability to hibernate, or ability to multiply tragedy like tadpoles. Thankfully, we know that Christ has promised victory!

7) And after the thousand years, Satan will be released from his prison, 8) and he will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the war; the number of whom is as the sand of the

sea. 9) They went up over the width of the earth, and surrounded the camp of the saints, and the beloved city. Fire came down out of heaven from God, and devoured them. 10) The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet are also. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Revelation 20:7-10 (WEB)

Since the introduction of Revelation indicates subject matter that is past, present, and future some have concluded that the symbols of Revelation are not specific, but instead typify various wicked kingdoms and kings through all Church history. Certainly some of the symbols are general in nature, but we see that The Beast and The False Prophet are specifically cast into the Lake of Fire at the beginning of the Church Age Millennium. We also see that Satan is presently bound from deceiving the nations, but that he will be released in the future. These are specific accounts of victory for the first century church, not idealized illustrations. Yet they are also the *founding examples* of victory that Christians have won, and will win through the entire Church Age until the last Great Battle.

Revelation had a critical message for the first century church and has a critical message for the church today! The Christians of the first century faced incredible persecution from both the Jew and the Roman at the inauguration of the New Covenant Christian faith. Revelation guaranteed victory to the fledgling first century church in their dire contest with the adulterous harlot Jerusalem, the demonic empowered Roman government, and the demon possessed Roman Caesar. Christ himself destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and eventually the demonic Roman powers that hated the Church. He bound Satan and threw The Beast and the False Prophet into the Lake of Fire. Victory!

Now, however, the Church to this very day should be both warned and encouraged. We must be warned that Satan, The Beast, and The False Prophet released their demon **“frog”** agents into our present world to prepare for the final battle of Gog and Magog on the Great Day of the Lord which remains yet in our future! The good news is that just as victory was promised to the first century church, so victory is promised to God’s people on that Great Day. Through this radical plan Christ is unifying his one Church because believers through all Church history participate in the very *same* battle! Both the Full Futurist and the Full Preterist miss this critical fact by pushing the message of Revelation fully into the future or fully into the past. Yet God will demonstrate his grace both in and through his obedient Church with the grand finale of the same contest at the end of this present Church Age.

The great contest in the first century was led by Satan using the adulterous harlot Jerusalem, the demonic empowered Roman government, and the demon possessed Roman Caesar. History proves that Satan has employed these same tactics again and again throughout the Church Age with his demon “**frog**” agents. The ongoing influence of demons is evidenced to this day by false religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Mormonism. These demons also build their lairs in the modern governmental infrastructures of Communism, Socialism, Fascism, and even Republics. These lairs then become homes for demon crazed political leaders like Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, and Ho Chi Minh. Of course we are each accountable for our choices, but if we do not choose Christ, then we are pawns and prey for Satan’s destructive schemes of envy, selfishness, abortion, addiction, anger, genocide, greed, homosexuality, perversion, pornography, infidelity, divorce, and pride. Satan’s objective is to destroy by twisting, spoiling, contaminating, perverting, ruining, and breaking everything good that God has created. The hymn writer warns that we live in a “*world with devils filled.*” I have proved in my article, [You are Wrong About Matthew 25:31-46!](#), that the “*ethnos*” gathered before Christ at the final judgment includes both humans and demons, Matthew 25:32 and Revelation 20:13. Thus it is no coincidence that Revelation 20:8 says that when Satan is released he will gather the “*ethnos*” for battle against God’s people. Satan will round up both his demons and unbelieving mankind, who so easily serve as his pawns, to attack God’s people.

So are we following the example of the first century church? Are we following the Lamb? Are we ready to stand in battle like Christ and with Christ? Are we battling mere flesh and blood or are we fighting the good fight against God’s true enemy, that is Satan and his demons?

For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world’s rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 6:12 (WEB)

One thing is clear, Satan’s web of deception will be world-wide with a clear black and white division across the globe. While God’s grace currently endures lukewarm gray spaces in our world there will only be two categories of people on that day: the attacker and the attacked, the wolf and the lamb. There will be no nations to oppose the “*Hitler*” of that day. Satan will be released to round up all the wicked to attack *both* God’s beloved saints and his beloved city. Though God destroyed unbelieving Jerusalem in 70 A.D. the fact that *both* the beloved saints *and* the beloved city will be attacked by Satan on that Great Day yet to come ought to give everyone

pause. God destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D., but he still loves Israel dearly! And so we return to the grand conclusion of Romans.

25) For I don't desire you to be ignorant, brothers, of this mystery, so that you won't be wise in your own conceits, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, 26) and so all Israel will be saved. Even as it is written,

"There will come out of Zion the Deliverer, and he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.

27) This is my covenant to them, when I will take away their sins."

28) Concerning the Good News, they are enemies for your sake. But concerning the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sake. 29) For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30) For as you in time past were disobedient to God, but now have obtained mercy by their disobedience, 31) even so these also have now been disobedient, that by the mercy shown to you they may also obtain mercy. 32) For God has shut up all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all.

Romans 11:25-32 (WEB)

Friend, if you fall short of trusting that Jesus does in fact love all mankind, every individual Jew and every individual gentile, you will be deceived into joining the attacker. Flee your doubts! Leave your false graceless religion! Do not join Satan in attacking Christ's beloved! God loves you and your neighbor! Fight on God's side against Satan and his lies! Stand like a lamb for God's people so the victorious Lamb can be your defender!

Essential Observations

OBJECTION>> *The Optimism Out of Control book is too long and difficult to read. Can you please summarize your essential observations?*

ME>> Yes, I apologize for the length of the book. While defending the truth that **Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind** I may have spent too many words answering objections. I list my essential observations below.

1. The salvation of mankind and the doom of Satan is the gospel.
(Genesis 3:15)

2. Why say God loves his enemies first, if it is merely an offer?
(Romans 5:8-11)
3. Grace by definition is unmerited unconditional blessing.
(Romans 3:23-25)
4. Faith is not a condition to, but trust in his unconditional love!
(Romans 3:3-4)
5. All mankind is atoned by Christ the God-man, the second Adam.
(Romans 5:12-19)
6. God bound all to sin so that he could give mercy to all.
(Romans 11:32)
7. Jesus, like Hosea, sometimes calls his lost sheep, "not my sheep."
(John 10:26)
8. Unbelieving humans are punished in Hades if unrepentant.
(Luke 16:19-31)
9. Hades is not the same place as the Lake of Fire.
(Revelation 20:11-15)
10. Hades is temporal and emptied at the final judgment.
(Revelation 20:11-15)
11. Why defeat Hades, if not to save the unbelieving dead?
(Matthew 16:18)
12. Christians, with Christ, are not judged at the final judgment.
(1 Thessalonians 4:17)
13. Unbelieving humans are at the final judgment.
(Matthew 25:31-46, Revelation 20:13)
14. Unbelieving humans are the sheep on Jesus' right.
(Matthew 25:34-40, Rev 20:13)
15. Some fallen angels are held for future judgment.
(2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6)
16. Fallen angels are at the final judgment.
(Jude 6, Revelation 20:13)
17. Jesus is not the helper of fallen angels.
(Hebrews 2:16)
18. Fallen angels are the goats on Jesus' left.
(Matthew 25:41-46, Revelation 20:10-15)
19. The Lake of Fire is prepared for Satan and his angels.
(Matthew 25:41)
20. Jesus allows unbelieving humans to fear the destiny of Satan.
(Revelation 21:8)
21. Christ's purpose is to show off his grace in kindness toward his chosen.
(Ephesians 2:7)

I hope these points inspire valuable reflection for all Christians.

Perhaps my additional defense of the gospel of Christ's victorious grace was unneeded since there are so many already, some of which are reviewed in my article, [Book Reviews](#). However, I was well into writing *Optimism Out of Control* before realizing the ample existing witness. Yet I do highlight two significant observations, which I have not seen elsewhere. First, I note the distinct intermediate punishments of humans and fallen angels in Hades and Tartarus, and concluding destinies in Heaven and the Lake of Fire, respectively. Second, I note that accurate hermeneutics must recognize that Jesus, like Hosea, sometimes calls his lost sheep, “*not my sheep*”, and is willing to allow the rebellious elect to fear the destiny of Satan. I hope these contributions to the discussion help the body of Christ grow further toward maturity.

Evangelicaluniversalist.com discussion

I joined [evangelicaluniversalist.com](#) discussion to get feedback on my book. However, the forum discussion has since been closed. The feedback was helpful, but also clouded by strange views from other contributors such as reincarnation and Unitarianism. Following are the titles of my posts archived at <http://jeff-martin-reposted.signedon.net>:

[BUT YA GOTTA ACCEPT IT!](#)
[Fallen Angels are the Goats on Jesus' Left](#)
[Is 'free will' faith saving faith?](#)
[The Optimism Out of Control book now for sale](#)
[Pinning down the slippery Arminian and Calvinist](#)
[Real or Apparent Paradox?](#)
[Request for Reviews of Optimism Out of Control](#)
[The Good, Bad, and Ugly of John A. T. Robinson](#)
[There is no punishment after death for the redeemed!](#)
[Universalism + Free Will = One Very Strange Bird](#)
[Wow... so what do you really believe?](#)
[Your Reasoning is Backwards!](#)

Fallen Angels at The Great White Throne Judgment?

OBJECTOR>> Fallen angels will not be judged at The Great White Throne Judgment or The Sheep and Goat Judgment. You are wrong about that. The Goats on Jesus' left are unbelieving mankind that will be damned to the Lake of Fire.

ME>> I certainly respect that we have a different view of these things. However, please consider one more amazing observation from the Scripture. Traditional understanding holds that The Great White Throne

Judgment and The Sheep and Goat Judgment are the final judgments of human beings. Tradition maintains that believers, those who accepted Jesus, are the Sheep on the right, while unbelievers, those who die without faith, are the Goats on Jesus left. Even many Christian Universalists think that unbelieving mankind is sent to the Lake of Fire, but that they are finally released sometime beyond the last page of the Bible. However, others in church history (including myself) differ from this traditional understanding for a number of reasons and now I want to bring one more totally amazing reason to the table. Again, I am convinced that the Lake of Fire is *only* prepared for the devil and his angels and that no human being will ever enter these fires. I am convinced that the final judgment of Jesus also includes the judgment of fallen angels and they alone are the Goats on Jesus' left sent to the Lake of Fire.

First, consider a quick review of my reasons already given. If you have not already read my proof that Jesus is the Savior of all mankind, please start at the beginning of my book, *Optimism Out of Control*.

- Jesus paid for the sins of all mankind, therefore not even one human being can be eternally damned, not even unbelieving mankind, 1 John 2:1-2. If God himself has paid for our sin and his wrath is appeased, who then remains to condemn us? Furthermore, faith does not cause our election to forgiveness, but instead faith trusts that we are already chosen for forgiveness from before the creation of the world, Ephesians 1:4! But are not unbelievers punished after death?
- Jesus does punish unbelieving mankind in Hades after death. However, even in Hades his love for all mankind continues, Psalm 139:8. Contrary to tradition, even unbelievers will be finally released from their punishments to receive salvation, Matthew 16:18 and Revelation 20:13. Jesus deeply loves all mankind, yet there is still punishment in Hades for those who reject the grace of God even though they are already forgiven. Punishment for the unbelieving is promised in 2 Thessalonians 2:9. However, read the YLT Bible to see that the word "*eternal*" is mistranslated from the Greek word "*aion*" and should instead read "*eon*," "*age*," or "*complete*." So unbelievers are punished for the "*age*" of Hades. Love does not remove punishment, but instead God punishes us because he loves us! But does Jesus love the fallen angels also?
- Jesus does not help fallen angels, Hebrews 2:14-16. Therefore demons will suffer the Lake of Fire. Furthermore "*The Ages of The Ages*" of the Lake of Fire is quite different than the "*Age*" of Hades. Jesus' plan from the beginning has been to crush the head of Satan, Genesis 3:15. During the course of history, some demons have already been imprisoned in Tartarus for future judgment, 2 Peter 2:4 and

Jude 6. Scripture then ends with the salvation of the elect, even from Hades, and the condemnation of the Devil and his rebel angels to the Lake of Fire, Revelation 20:10. So when will these fallen angels be judged?

- Jesus' Sheep and Goat Judgment in Matthew 25 strongly appears to be the same as The Great White Throne Judgment in Revelation 20. Since Scripture says that fallen angels are being "*held for judgment*" on "*The Great Day*," the most obvious timing for this judgment is the Sheep and Goat Judgment and The Great White Throne Judgment when Jesus stands all his subjects before him for final judgment. Daniel 12:1-4, Matthew 25:31-46, and Revelation 20:11-15 each appear to be talking about the same event. So the subjects that stand before Jesus at the final judgment will include both the unbelieving humans just released from Hades and the demons just extracted from Tartarus. But how can we be certain?
- Jesus says explicitly that the Lake of Fire is... "***prepared for the devil and his angels***" (Matthew 25:41 WEB). The Lake of Fire is not prepared for humans. Though we deserve the same fate as the Devil and his Angels, yet because of the grace of Jesus mankind is spared damnation. The Devil and his Angels, however, are sentenced to the Lake of Fire. Is there more proof?

Some have objected to my understanding saying that fallen angels will not be present at The Sheep and Goat Judgment or at The Great White Throne Judgment. However, the Scripture is clear that these fallen angels are presently being held for future judgment. Consider,

For if God didn't spare angels when they sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus, and committed them to pits of darkness to be reserved for judgment.

2 Peter 2:4 (WEB)

Angels who didn't keep their first domain, but deserted their own dwelling place, he has kept in everlasting bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day.

Jude 6 (WEB)

The Scripture is clear that these imprisoned fallen angels are being held for judgment at some point in the future. Jude 6 is very clear that the timing of this judgment will be on "***The Great Day***." I have proposed that this Great Day is the same day as The Sheep and Goat Judgment and The Great White Throne Judgment.

However, if that is not enough proof already (and I think it is), consider one last proof directly from Revelation 20:13 (WEB),

The sea [Thalaasa] gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works.

Have you ever thought it curious that both the sea [*Thalassa*] and *Hades* gave up the dead that are in them? Why the distinction? Why both *Thalaasa* and *Hades*? Perhaps the reference to the sea and *Hades* is doubly expansive in order to communicate the certainty that all the dead will be raised. Perhaps the language is slightly poetical or apocalyptic and so should not be pressed too hard for meaning.

Alternatively, the Holy Spirit is at least noting the distinction that people are released from two separate locations to stand before Christ's Throne. Clearly one location is *Hades*, the temporary place of punishment for deceased unbelieving humanity. Could *Thalaasa* then be the place of punishment for fallen angels or perhaps the retreat for fugitive fallen angels?

Consider two possible explanations. First we note that the Holy Spirit borrows the term "*Tartaroo*" from Greek mythology in order to help the first century reader understand that the fallen angels are held in a separate, harsher prison than unbelieving mankind, 2 Peter 2:4. There could be a connection between *Thalaasa* and *Tartarus* in that *Thalaasa* was a Greek goddess whose counterpart *Tethys* was a *Titan* imprisoned in... *Tartarus*. There is also a small parallel between the mythological *Titans* and the speculation that the *Nephilim* were rebellious angels that pro-created with humans in Genesis 6:4, perhaps the very angels imprisoned in *Tartarus*. Now I am *not* saying that the Holy Spirit believed in Greek mythology! However, it may be that the mythological idea of the *Titans* was inspired by the historic *Nephilim*. My main point is that rebels are escorted from both *Hades* and *Thalaasa* which offers further support for the presence of fallen angels at the final judgment.

Alternatively *Thalaasa* could simply refer to the sea. Certainly we should not think that some deceased humans are in *Hades* while others are in the sea! Instead, the sea could just as easily refer to the place of punishment for fallen angels or possibly the retreat for fugitive fallen angels. For example, in Matthew 8:28-34 the Lord helped two demon possessed men by casting the demons into a herd of pigs, which then promptly downed themselves in the sea [*Thalaasa*]. Again, rebels are escorted from both *Hades* and *Thalaasa* which supports the presence of fallen angels at the final judgment.

Note also that Revelation 21:1b (WEB) says, "***and the sea [Thalaasa] is no more.***" This verse always seemed odd to me, that the New Heavens and

Earth would not have seas. However, in the context it seems clear that the meaning is that there will no longer be any place of temporary punishment or retreat for whoever was held in *Thalaasa*, perhaps the demons. The punishing grounds of both *Hades* and *Thalassa* are to be ended! Thus, mankind will be released from *Hades* and finally saved to glory through the grace of God alone. They are the sheep at the Sheep and Goat Judgment, in Matthew 25! The demons, however, are extracted from *Thalassa* to be judged and sentenced with Satan to the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages*. They are the Goats at the Sheep and Goat Judgment! This is good news concerning the final salvation of mankind. This is also good news if you hope to enjoy the ocean on the New Earth!

So there is strong evidence for the presence of fallen angels at The Sheep and Goat Judgment, also called The Great White Throne Judgment. First, these fallen angels are being held for punishment on **“the great day”** (Jude 6). Second, the Lake of Fire is **“prepared for... the devil and his angels”** (Matthew 25:41 WEB). Third, *Thalaasa*, whether a picture from Greek mythology or simply the sea, is clearly a place distinct from *Hades* that is also emptied of rebels for judgment on that Great Day.

If you object to my proposal above you should at least answer these three questions. Why do you think the Holy Spirit distinguishes between the dead in *Thalaasa* and the dead in *Hades* as mentioned in Revelation 20:13? When do you think **“The Great Day”** is for the judgment of the fallen angels, I Peter 2:4 and Jude 6? Why do you think Revelation 21:1 says there is no longer any sea?

So again it is further supported that the Goats on Jesus' left at The Sheep and Goat Judgment (that is The Great White Throne Judgment) *are* the fallen angels to be summoned from *Tartarus* or *Thalassa* to stand before Christ. They are the Goats on Jesus' left sentenced to the Lake of Fire **“prepared for the devil and his angels”** (Matthew 25:41 WEB). Thus by the grace of Christ alone, no humans will ever enter The Lake of Fire! Instead the Sheep on Jesus' right are unbelieving mankind to be released from *Hades* and finally graced with understanding and joy over their Savior and ours, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet be warned by the gospel. Humans who reject grace will be punished in Hades, even though their sins are forgiven, because the God who loves also disciplines! Why test the Lord? Repent and receive the good news that *YOUR* sins are forgiven... because the sins of *ALL* mankind are forgiven!

Forever Is Not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!

Some chide...

SOME>> *Forever Is Not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!*

ME>> You make an excellent point. I had come to the conclusion that “forever” and “eternal” in the New Testament must not always mean “forever” and “eternal” because the context of grace demands salvation satisfaction even for the unbelieving. And so I concluded that the Holy Spirit used the word “forever” and “eternal” to describe the long, but finite time of punishment in Hades for the unbelieving. I also concluded that if Abraham’s faith could reasonably trust that God could “**call things that are not, as though they were,**” then I was not unreasonable to conclude that God could save people from “eternal” punishment in Hell. Furthermore, it is also evident and believed by orthodox Christians that Jesus abolished the “eternal” Old Covenant in his flesh. So I concluded that “eternal” does not always mean “forever” when God is in the picture.

The Lord has, however, recently corrected my understanding. My logic was sound but incomplete. I had already shown that the Hebrew word “*olam*” does not always mean eternal, but instead it means the duration of the subject in view. Every Hebrew lexicon denotes this fact. Yet without much homework I concluded that the same must be true of the Greek word translated “eternal” in the New Testament, the Greek word “*aion*.” Recently the Lord blessed me through a reunion with John Wesley Hanson’s classic 1875 work titled, *The Greek Word Aion-Aionios translated Everlasting-Eternal in the Holy Bible Shown to Denote Limited Duration*. This classic work is available for free from the U.S. Library of Congress website and also from my own website. This 88-page book is a must read for anyone who agrees or disagrees with my conclusions. There is little point to my adding further to this definitive work. Study this volume for yourself and your faith and understanding of the Bible will be challenged in radically positive ways, if you are willing to let go of all your self-righteousness. Dr. Heleen Keizer has also written a dissertation proving the same titled, *Life, Time, Entirety - A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo*. You can read her 315 page dissertation online or an abstract of her conclusions from my website. You might think it is incredulous to claim that “*aion*” is mistranslated in many Bibles. Unless you are competent in ancient Greek, you may not even know how to verify this for yourself. *The NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek in English* is an invaluable resource on my shelf. *Young’s Literal Translation* is also a valuable resource.

Read Hanson’s work for yourself, but here is my brief review:

1. Hanson and Keizer irrefutably prove that the Greek word “*aion*” is a synonym to the Hebrew word “*olam*” and that they both mean “the duration of the subject in view.” Thus “*aion*” can mean the finite duration of a man’s life, the finite duration of the Old Covenant, the finite duration of Hades/Hell, the infinite duration of The Lake of Fire, and the infinite duration of God himself.
2. Hanson applies this definition to his interpretation of Matthew 25:31-46 and concludes that the “*aion*” in view is the Christian age in this world and that unbelievers’ lives are punished and destroyed in this life when they reject Christ. However, he concludes that these believers are saved from punishment in the afterlife through grace in spite of their unbelief. This is a common view in many Christian Universalist circles. They conclude that Hell is the pain suffered in this life by rejecting God’s ways. While this view may be attractive at the level of human reason, I find it to be unbiblical and I do not agree with it.
3. I do agree with Hanson’s definition of the Greek word “*aion*,” but I currently disagree with his application and interpretation of Matthew 25:31-46. The “*eternal fire*” mentioned in Matthew 25:41 certainly appears to be the Lake of Fire spoken of in Revelation 20. This is clear because the Devil and his angels are sentenced to this eternal fire. Yet, I also agree with Hanson that no human beings are damned to the Lake of Fire. So what is the explanation? Hanson simply did not see that the Sheep and Goats standing before Christ at the Great White Throne judgment include both human beings and fallen angels. 2 Peter 2 makes it clear that there are both human beings and fallen angels currently imprisoned in Hades and Tartarus. Hades and Thalassa are then emptied of both unbelieving mankind and the imprisoned angels at the Great White Throne judgment as explained in Revelation 20:13 and Matthew 25:31-46. Human beings are saved on the right, while the fallen angels are sentenced to the Lake of Fire on the left. How could the Holy Spirit be more clear when he says, “***...prepared for the Devil and his angels.***” I’ve explained this more completely in my articles, [Matthew 25:31-46](#) and [You are Wrong About Matthew 25:31-46!](#)
4. Hanson also applies this understanding to verses like 2 Thessalonians 1:9. In this case Hanson is certainly correct that Paul is reminding the new Thessalonian believers that the wicked unbelieving humans will punished at Christ’s coming judgment. However, we also see in Revelation that those punished in Hades are eventually extracted out.
5. Hanson also makes use of the argument that a God of love would never damn human beings for eternity. This argument makes an attractive appeal, but unfortunately it weakens his primary argument about the meaning of “*aion*.” He weakens his argument because the primary characteristic of God to be praised in the salvation of mankind is not his love, but his grace. If Christ had not atoned for the sins of corrupt mankind, then the justice of God could have damned the entirety of mankind without lessening God’s character trait of love in the least. The

perfect love of God within the Trinity would continue on eternally without flaw. We may find it hard to swallow, even as Christians, but we are utterly corrupt in sin and deserve damnation. God would be just to damn us without being unloving at all, that is if Christ had not died. In fact Satan and his demonic followers are people too, yet they will be sentenced to the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages*. However, there is a new justice in town. Christ has freely, without condition, chosen to love all mankind. Christ has atoned for the sins of all mankind; therefore, his grace now demands the salvation of those atoned. One whose sins are paid for absolutely cannot be eternally damned. Never! If the wrath of God is appeased, who then remains to condemn? Friend, who can possibly condemn? No one! That is the rock Christians stand on -- the loving grace of God. However, the unbelieving elect do not yet stand on or live by God's love. They are un-believing! But one day, sooner or later, God will touch his finger of grace to their hearts as well. Why wait? Why suffer? Why burn in Hades to the very brink of the Lake of Fire before believing that the grace of God has already made it impossible for you to be damned or ever be separated from the love of God your Heavenly Father? Believe!

6. Hanson also cites proofs that universal salvation was commonly accepted in the early centuries of the church and that it was not until A.D. 544 that this understanding was condemned and anathematized as heretical. This would be a worthy study to verify. Obviously I already believe that this was the Apostolic view.

Finally, I had suggested that understanding the Holy Spirit's use of "*eternal*" as "*limited duration*" required the faith of Abraham to "**call things that are not, as though they were.**" However, I was wrong about this and again apologize for my haste. I have corrected this in the book. Absolutely, no irrational or miraculous "*leap of faith*" is required at all because the Greek word "*aion*" is often mistranslated as "*eternal*" and "*forever*" when it should be translated as "*age*", "*eon*", or "*complete*." Hanson could have even further supported his conclusion by pointing out that the etymology of our modern word "*eon*" points directly back to "*aion*." So unbelieving humans will most certainly spend an eon in Hades, but an eon is not forever and has a beginning... and an end. Hades will be emptied of all souls and then Hades itself will be tossed into the Lake of Fire, emptied of all souls, never needed again for all eternity.

A shorter explanation of the meaning of "*aion*" can be found at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aeon>. However, it should be noted that though Hanson's work is definitive for me, it is not definitive for everyone. For example at <http://carm.org/what-do-greek-dictionaries-say-about-aionion> Matt Slick argues that Christian Universalists are completely wrong to suggest that the word "*aion*" can refer to anything less than eternal. However, on his one

page argument, Denotation #3 reads as follows, “describes duration, either undefined but not endless.”

Have those who persist in rejecting my thesis truly been to the foot of the cross? Have they seen their religious hypocrisy terribly exposed and completed cleansed by the blood of Christ? Have you received grace?

Forever Is Not Forever? You Still Gotta Be Kidding Me!

SOME>> Forever Is Not Forever? You Still Gotta Be Kidding Me!

ME>> This is an excellent point already briefly discussed in my previous article, *Forever Is Not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!* The main point is that I do boldly say with others that the Greek word “*aion*” and its adjective “*aionios*” are often misunderstood and mistranslated in many translations of the Christian Scriptures. This Greek noun and adjective have a much richer meaning than simple infinite duration. Now if you are not a student of the Greek language you may not know how to determine the truth of the matter.

Two quick steps into the discussion are first: the English word “*eon*” directly descends etymologically from the Greek word “*aion*.” This much is plain to see and perhaps enough to motivate your further study. Friend, you and I both already know that “*eon*” does not mean “*eternal*” but is a long period of time with a beginning... and an end! This fact alone ought to give every Christian pause to reconsider the usage of “*aion*” within the New Testament. Second: the subject of salvation by grace received through faith alone ought to embolden every believer to thoroughly examine the Scriptures to understand the extent of God’s grace even for the unbelieving. If God has saved anyone by grace, why would we be offended that he would save even the unbelieving by that same grace, even after an eon in Hades?

Hoping for better things however, to help your further study I have used the <http://www.blueletterbible.org> to find every usage of the Greek words “*aion*,” “*aionios*,” and “*aidios*” in the New Testament.

aion: Strong’s G165 occurs 128 times in 102 verses in the Greek concordance.

aionios: Strong’s G166 occurs 71 times in 69 verses in the Greek concordance.

aidios: Strong’s G126 occurs 2 times in 2 verses in the Greek concordance.

The large chart attached at DGJC.ORG/OPTIMISM/AION lists the references to these Greek words in the World English Bible and the Young’s Literal Translation along with my notes. This spread sheet could be a useful starting point for your own study.

Other resources to study also include:

- *The Greek Word Aion-Aionios translated Everlasting-Eternal in the Holy Bible Shown to Denote Limited Duration* by John Wesley Hanson, available for free from the U.S. Library of Congress website and also on my own website.
- *Life, Time, Entirety - A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo* by Dr. Heleen Keizer available online or in abstract on my website.
- *Terms for Eternity: Aionios and Aidios in Classical and Christian Texts* by Ilaria Ramelli and David Konstan. Ramelli and Konstan defend that 'aidios' is the only Greek term that always means eternal, used twice in the New Testament at Romans 1:20 and Jude 6.
- ***The NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek in English***
- **Young's Literal Translation** of the Christian Scriptures.
- **Concordant Literal New Testament**.
- **WWW.CARM.ORG** contains articles in opposition to the victory of grace for all mankind. Read <http://carm.org/look-word-aionion> and <http://carm.org/what-do-greek-dictionaries-say-about-aionion> for an alternate view.
- **A longer list of books to consider is available on my website.**

A. E. Knoch proposes in his book *All In All* that the Holy Spirit uses the words "aion" and "aionios" in very distinct and precise ways to refer to five distinct eons between eternity past and eternity future. Knoch insists that "aion" never means eternal. Knoch preferred the term "eon" in the *Concordant Bible Translation* rather than "age" which is used in Young's Literal Translation because "eon" has the useful adjective "eonian" while Young uses the cumbersome "age-during." Knoch also argues that his five proposed "eons" correspond to five "worlds," two of which are the pre-flood and the post-flood world. Knoch also says that these "worlds" are different than the administrations within a particular "eon," such as the Old and New Covenant administrations of grace within the present "eon." Knoch offers a detailed chart of his theory on page 160 of *All In All*. He also makes the assertion that "aion" does not even have to mean "eternal" in verses like Romans 1:25. This Scripture says God is blessed unto the "ages," meaning the "eonian times." Knoch's understanding is actually very reasonable because saying that God is blessed through all the "eons" does not contradict that God is also blessed eternally beyond the "eons." Knoch

makes some very acute observations worthy of every theologian's consideration. His proposed five eons are charted below in parallel with the Tabernacle.

Eternity Future - Post-Eonian			
Tabernacle		Time	
Hollies of Hollies Inner two Hollies	The Holy of Hollies	Lake of Fire Fifth Eon	Eons of Eons Last two Eons
	The Holy	Millennial Kingdom Fourth Eon	
The Court		Present Third Eon, Flood to Return	
The Camp		Second Eon - Gen 1:2 to Flood	
Outside the Camp		First Eon - Creation to Gen 1:2	
Eternity Past - Pre-Eonian			

Dr. Heleen Keizer concludes, at slight variance from Knoch, in her work *Life, Time, Entirety - A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo* that “aion” has been used to mean “eternal,” but even richer than “age” or “eon” the original meaning is “life,” “complete,” or “entire.” Wow! Reread John 3:16 with this understanding!

A thorough study of Scripture will help us understand the meaning of these words and the Holy Spirit's usage in context. The primary denotations and synonyms possible from the above resources and the Greek lexicon are summarized as:

- **eon, eonian:** an age, general or particular, with a beginning and end, not eternal.
- **entire, whole, life, complete, unbroken:** a purposeful whole unbroken life.
- **eternal:** lasting forever in the past and/or the future.
- **world:** the world and human condition during a particular age or circumstance.

Thank you for giving this your very careful attention. Again the large chart attached at DGJC.ORG/OPTIMISM/AION lists the references to these Greek words in the World English Bible and the Young's Literal Translation. This spread sheet could be a useful starting point for your own study.

Knoch's five eon chart above suggests that the last two eons are a Millennial Kingdom and the Lake of Fire Judgment. Knoch points to 1 Corinthians 15:23-28 and 15:50-55 as forecasting the end of the Lake of Fire. However, as much as I agree with Knoch's critical observations about the eons of redemptive history, his eonian model may be shifted one notch to far into the future. I understand 1 Corinthians 15 to point instead to the end of death and Hades judgment for mankind at the Great White Throne Judgment with Satan and his demons cast into the Lake of Fire at the commencement of either the last eon or eternity. Knoch's model also includes a rigid mapping of five eons to five elements of the Tabernacle. That is certainly possible, but my proposed model below is simpler to emphasize the main point: God is demonstrating his grace through various eons within history between eternity past and future. Consider my proposed revision to Knoch's eonian chart below.

Eternity Future (Post-Eonian) Redemption Manifest for Mankind Fallen Angels Damned for the Last Eon or for all Eternity	
Tabernacle	Time
Holy of Holies	Church Eon
Outside the Holies	Eons before Christ
Eternity Past (Pre-Eonian)	

In this simplified model of understanding, the cross of Christ stands as the fulcrum point between the "ages" before Christ and the "ages" after Christ. Hebrews 9:26 points to this understanding.

Finally, two critical verses to examine are Revelation 14:11 and 20:10. The common English translation of both of these verses speak about torment "forever and ever." Reference both these verses at DGJC.ORG/OPTIMISM/AION and your own Bible. You will see that Revelation 14:11 is talking about wicked men, while Revelation 20:10 is talking about wicked angels.

So after all this work is my primary thesis at variance with Scripture? Do wicked men then share the same destiny as wicked angels? Let's take a closer look at these two verses.

Comparison	Revelation 14:11	Revelation 20:10
World English Bible	The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever . They have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.	The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet are also. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever .
Young's Literal Translation	and the smoke of their torment doth go up to ages of ages ; and they have no rest day and night, who are bowing before the beast and his image, also if any doth receive the mark of his name.	and the Devil, who is leading them astray, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where are the beast and the false prophet, and they shall be tormented day and night -- to the ages of the ages .
Greek	καὶ ὁ καπνὸς τοῦ βασανισμοῦ αὐτῶν εἰς αἰῶνας αἰώνων ἀναβαίνει καὶ οὐκ ἔχουσιν ἀνάπαυσιν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς οἱ προσκυνοῦντες τὸ θηρίον καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ καὶ εἴ τις λαμβάνει τὸ χάραγμα τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ	καὶ ὁ διάβολος ὁ πλανῶν αὐτοὺς ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ θείου ὅπου καὶ τὸ θηρίον καὶ ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης καὶ βασανισθήσονται ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων
Subject of Torment	Wicked men branded with the mark of the Beast.	Wicked fallen angels; Satan, the Beast, and the False Prophet.
Length of Torment	εἰς αἰῶνας αἰώνων	εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων
εἰς	into, unto, to, towards, for, among	
τοὺς	the	
αἰῶνας	ages, eons	
τῶν	of the	
αἰώνων	of ages, eonian	
Literal translation	for ages of ages	for the ages of the ages

So are the phrases above identical? The WEB Bible and most English Bibles translate the phrases identically. However, I show above that they are not identical in wording in the underlying Greek. But are they identical in meaning? No, they are not identical in meaning either! The torment promised for wicked men is for a long time, in fact **“for ages of ages.”** This likely points to torment in Hades during the pre-Church Age and the Church Age. However, the torment promised to Satan and his angels is for the definite specific time period of the Lake of Fire, **“for the ages of the ages!”** Notice the absence of the definite article **“the”** in Revelation 14:11 and the presence of the definite article **“the”** in Revelation 20:10. Consider all the possible interpretations of these observations:

- Wicked men share the same eternal torment as wicked angels. Though I have refuted this understanding to my own satisfaction due to the underlying differences in the Greek between Revelation 14:11 and 20:10.
- Wicked men share the same eonian torment as wicked angels. Some Christian Universalists propose that human beings will be punished in the Lake of Fire along with Satan and the demons, and then extracted some time beyond the pages of Scripture not explicitly mentioned.
- Wicked men are punished **“for ages of ages”**, through the church age, even to the brink of the Lake of Fire, while Satan and his angels are punished **“for the ages of the ages”**, the Lake of Fire which is prepared for them, Matthew 25:41. The Lake of Fire is not prepared for human beings.

I have also proposed a more complete chart of these events in my article, *Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News!* Rejoice with me that wicked mankind will be punished temporally **“for ages of ages”** both now and in Hades up to the Great White Throne Judgment. Rejoice also that Satan and his demons, the enemy of God and mankind, will be damned to the Lake of Fire **“for the ages of the ages”** after the Great White Throne Judgment. Finally rejoice that Christ will rule forever.

Thank you for pursuing your own independent study of these things. The implications are incredible and so faithful handling of God’s word is critical.

God is Not a Retributivist!

SEVERAL UNIVERSALISTS>> God is not a retributivist! You seem to have hope that God will be ALL in ALL and finally save ALL humanity, yet you portray God as an angry retributivist against sin and unrepentant sinners. This is a wrong view of God.

ME>> A number of authors listed in my article [Book Reviews](#) have argued that traditional theology is wrong because God is characterized as a retributivist. Their concern is that a God of love would not exact justice by getting even. That is a good point to note. In fact, Jesus himself made the Old Covenant obsolete with his New Covenant. So the **“eye for an eye”** theology never was the final will of God. However, care is needed in our understandings and explanations because many Christian Universalists have seriously stepped out of bounds. They say that the Old Testament depictions of God’s wrath are not Holy Spirit inspired, but instead fallible human interpretation of world events based on a wrong view of God.

So then how should we understand God? Is he a retributivist?

The dictionary explains: *A retributivist advocates the punishment of criminals in retribution for the harm they have inflicted. Retributivists desire requital according to merits or deserts, especially for evil. In the realm of religion, retributivist theology teaches the distribution of rewards and punishments in a future life.*

So what does the word of God say?

First, we remember that the Holy Spirit teaches us in the Old Testament that Cain was placed under a curse for murdering his brother, yet God also was merciful to him, Genesis 4. We also remember that God was grieved over the sinfulness of mankind and drowned the entire world except for eight people, yet God did not stop loving both the living and the dead, Genesis 6 and 1 Peter 3:19-4:6. We also consider that God took the life of David’s child to Bathsheba because of his adultery and murder of Uriah. God then punished David even further saying the sword would never leave his household, yet David continued to be a man after God’s our heart, 2 Samuel 11-12. God punished sinners severely under the Old Covenant.

Second, we might think that the removal of the **“eye for an eye”** penal system has taken away all punishment under the New Covenant. However, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact the demands for obedience and honor to the crucified and risen Lord are now even greater! Jesus himself warned the unbelieving Jews that Jerusalem would be leveled to the ground for their rejection of him as the Messiah, as it then was in 70 A.D., Matthew 24. Ananias and Sapphira learned the hard way that lying to the Holy Spirit in front of the body of Christ will cost you your life, Acts 5. King Herod did not give glory to God, but instead glorified himself and was struck dead instantly, Acts 12. So we see that God remains the same righteous judge presently under the New Covenant as he was under the Old Covenant. 2 Peter Chapter 2 says that God will pay back harm to those that have done harm. 2 Peter Chapter 3 continues that the God who judged the ancient world with flood waters will judge the present world with fire.

Thankfully water and fire are both used to cleanse and to purify. God's ultimate goal is not to destroy sinful humanity with death by drowning and burning. We know this because 2 Corinthians 5:21 (WEB) says, ***“For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*** God himself took the ultimate penalty for ALL mankind's sin. There will be NO eternal judgment and penalty for those for whom Christ died, that is ALL mankind.

Yet, God also understands the depth of our depravity and his fiery love does not mince words or dance around our wickedness with kid gloves. God is perfectly willing to serve just desserts to teach us or even simply to protect his other children.

Consider the words of Isaiah and David,

“Tell those who have a fearful heart, ‘Be strong. Don’t be afraid. Behold, your God will come with vengeance, God’s retribution. He will come and save you.’ ”

Isaiah 35:4 (WEB)

“David says, ‘Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, a stumbling block, and a retribution to them.’ ”

Romans 11:9 (WEB)

Consider also the words of Malachi 3:1-6,

1) “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me; and the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, behold, he comes!” says Yahweh of Armies. 2) “But who can endure the day of his coming? And who will stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire, and like launderer’s soap; 3) and he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi, and refine them as gold and silver; and they shall offer to Yahweh offerings in righteousness. 4) Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to Yahweh, as in the days of old, and as in ancient years. 5) I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against the perjurers, and against those who oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and who deprive the foreigner of justice, and don’t fear me,” says Yahweh of Armies.

6) “For I, Yahweh, don’t change; therefore you, sons of Jacob, are not consumed.

God is the loving Father of us ALL. And though he may pay retribution according to his wisdom, thankfully his fiery love passionately seeks our purification always and will never condemn us eternally.

Have Other Christians Made this Observation?

Another thoughtful reader suggested...

READER>> I know that you want your book, Optimism Out of Control, to stand on Scripture alone, but I think that it would be helpful to include citations from other Christians over the past 2,000 years who have thought what you are thinking. It would remove this objection to your book: “If you’re right, then has this gone unnoticed for 2,000 years until Jeff Martin came along?”

ME>> Excellent suggestion. Thanks. I had already pointed my reader to other sources in my articles Other-theologians and Book Reviews. There are many who have held to various forms of Christian and non-Christian Universalism. Though it is not the conventional understanding, there are noteworthy groups and individuals who have held to Evangelical Universalism, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Universalism.

This article http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_reconciliation also adds further to the discussion with this quote, “George Whitfield in a letter to John Wesley says that Peter Boehler, a bishop in the Moravian Church, had privately confessed in a letter that ‘all the damned souls would hereafter be brought out of hell.’ ” The doctrine that people will be extracted out of Hell as explained in Revelation 20:13 is not well known, but certainly I am not the first to observe it. John Wesley Hanson’s classic 1875 work titled, *The Greek Word Aion-Aionios translated Everlasting-Eternal in the Holy Bible Shown to Denote Limited Duration* also lists other notable Christian Universalists throughout history. Modern evangelical movements that identify with this understanding typically do not prefer the label *Universalist* in order to distance themselves from the Unitarian Universalist movement. Instead they may prefer the label *Restorationist* and use rally cries such as *The Victorious Gospel* and *Greater Grace*. Google those words for more information. Here is also a longer list of evangelical Universalists, though I have not researched the list personally: <http://evangelicaluniversalist.com>.

One might ask why this understanding is not conventional if it is really true. Religion is always more popular than grace. Perhaps professing Christians feel that the available orthodoxies are close enough to the mark

that asking further questions about grace is now taboo. Also Protestantism is so anti-Catholic that the very suggestion that people are extracted out of Hell immediately evokes indignant cries about “*working one’s way out of purgatory.*” Sadly because Catholics and the majority of Protestants think they have been saved by their *free will* choice of faith, they immediately think that I am saying that those extracted from Hell have a “*second chance*” to exercise their *free will* to get back into God’s grace. Hardly. How could someone who understands grace even make these comments? If anyone is extracted from punishment in Hell, it is purely by the grace of God alone, the only way that anyone is ever saved in the first place.

So in answer to your question, yes there are others who have shared similar views throughout church history and today. However, since my work is original and not simply echoing the writings of another, you may not be able to find someone who has added up all the facts exactly as I have. In fact, because I hold a minority view, my interpretation may land in a miscellaneous bucket along with some very unbiblical views.

Lastly since the gospel does speak foolishness to the unbelieving, it may be difficult to easily quantify this view in written theology. In fact historians often debate and struggle to precisely state the beliefs of Christians past. This may be one of the reasons. Like Christ himself, they proclaimed that he is the savior of all mankind, yet also like Christ they warned the unbelieving that they are not his sheep. Historians may struggle to efficiently label these faithful ministers of the gospel. For myself, though I am confident that Jesus is the savior of all mankind, I still assert to those who reject the grace of Christ in favor of their *free will*, their “*religion,*” their “*limited atonement,*” and their “*tainted faith*” that they will spend the duration in Hades. Furthermore, *IF* they are not also saved by the gracious choice of Christ and listed in the Lamb’s Book of Life, then they will also be eternally damned. There is no other salvation than the electing grace of Christ. So neither do I fit neatly into a Universalist camp that neglects the gospel.

So why not believe the good news? Christ *HAS* paid for your sin!

Hebrews 2:16 Does Not Say Fallen Angels Are Damned

Another reader says...

READER>> Hebrews 2:16 Does Not Say Fallen Angels Are Damned

ME>> Let’s look at the passage more closely.

The KJV translates Hebrews 2:16, ***“For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.”***

The KJV translation paraphrases this verse to emphasize the argument that Jesus became a man and not an angel and so Jesus is empathetic to the needs of mankind.

The NASB translates Hebrews 2:16, ***“For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham.”***

The NASB, however, interprets the verse to mean that because Jesus became a man he is therefore the helper / redeemer of mankind and not of angels. Check out the verse for yourself at the <http://www.blueletterbible.org> for further study.

Consider the whole argument flow of Hebrews 2 (WEB) below,

1) Therefore we ought to pay greater attention to the things that were heard, lest perhaps we drift away. 2) For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, 3) how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation—which at the first having been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard, 4) God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders, by various works of power and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will?

Point 1: Pay attention because Jesus is greater than angels.

5) For he didn’t subject the world to come, of which we speak, to angels. 6) But one has somewhere testified, saying, ‘What is man, that you think of him? Or the son of man, that you care for him? 7) You made him a little lower than the angels. You crowned him with glory and honor. 8) You have put all things in subjection under his feet.’

For in that he subjected all things to him, he left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we don’t see all things subjected to him, yet. 9) But we see him who has been made a little lower than the angels, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God he should taste of death for everyone.

Point 2: The world to come is also subject to mankind, not to angels, with Jesus leading the charge in dominion by tasting death for us.

10) For it became him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many children to glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings. 11) For both he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one, for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brothers, 12) saying,

'I will declare your name to my brothers. Among the congregation I will sing your praise.' 13) Again, **'I will put my trust in him.'** Again, **'Behold, here I am with the children whom God has given me.'**

Point 3: Jesus is not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters.

14) Since then the children have shared in flesh and blood, he also himself in the same way partook of the same, that through death he might bring to nothing him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15) and might deliver all of them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. 16) For most certainly, he doesn't give help to angels, but he gives help to the offspring of Abraham. 17) Therefore he was obligated in all things to be made like his brothers, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people. 18) For in that he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.

Point 4: Jesus broke the power of Satan because he is not the helper of sinful angels, but the helper of sinful mankind.

The literal translation of Hebrews 2:16 (WEB) from the Greek is:

English	Strong's	Greek
For	g1063	<i>gar</i>
most certainly	g1222	<i>depou</i>
He doesn't	g3756	<i>ou</i>
give help	g1949	<i>epilambanomai</i>
to angels	g32	<i>aggelos</i>
but	g235	<i>alla</i>
He gives help	g1949	<i>epilambanomai</i>
to the offspring	g4690	<i>sperma</i>
of Abraham	g11	<i>Abraam</i>

In conclusion, it would seem that the KJV is guilty of allowing a bias of understanding to wrongly influence the translation. Hebrews 2:16 is saying that Jesus is not the helper of Satan and his angels. Does the verse go as far to say that the Devil and his angels are outside of the redemption purchased at the cross? Some have interpreted the “*apokatastasis*” of Acts 3:21 and the “*all things*” of Colossians 1:20 to include fallen angels as well. The happy news is that the redemption of *ALL* mankind is explicitly taught in Scripture. As for Satan, the arch enemy of Christ, it is also explicitly taught that Christ is not his helper and his destiny is the Lake of Fire. Is there an end to his condemnation to the Lake of Fire? The Scriptures are silent on that question.

How Can You Say Revelation 21:8 Does Not Apply to Humans?

Another questioned...

READER>> How can you say Revelation 21:8 does not apply to humans? If you say that only fallen angels are sentenced to the Lake of Fire, since when were demons cowardly, unbelieving, vile, murderers, sexually immoral, magicians, idolaters, and liars? This is clearly speaking about human unbelievers.

ME>> This is a most excellent question.

Here is Revelation 21:8 (WEB) again,

But for the cowardly, unbelieving, sinners, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their part is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.

The demonstration of Grace is God’s purpose in creation and redemptive history and so grace should always be the interpretive lens of Scripture. The believing elect, having received grace and being led by the Holy Spirit, are well equipped to interpret the Scripture. The Holy Spirit even says boldly that, “***you don’t need for anyone to teach you,***” for we have an anointing from Him, I John 2:27 (WEB).

To that end I make an observation, the passage says that “***all liars, their part is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur.***” I boldly assert through the interpretive lens of grace that in this case “*all*” does not mean “*all*” in this context. The immediate context and the whole context of Scripture is essential for rightly dividing the word of truth. In my key exegesis of Romans 11:32, I explained that “*all*” does mean all because all mankind are

sinners. Reread my article, [Romans 11:32-36](#) for my complete argument. However, in the case of Revelation 20:8 “all” cannot mean all liars, because everyone is a liar according to Romans 3:4. If all liars are damned to the Lake of Fire then you and I are damned as well. Likewise even Christians are at times cowardly, unbelieving, vile, murderers, sexually immoral, magicians, and idolaters. Yet these sins are forgiven for all mankind through the death of Christ. No doubt even your theology agrees with my logic so far. So in light of all of Scripture, in this case “all” must mean all those outside of Christ, that is the non-elect. Only the non-elect sinners are consigned to the Lake of Fire. However, those predestined for grace certainly are saved from the Lake of Fire even though we are liars and sinners of various types. Do you follow this logic?

So the damned are those whose sins are not paid for, those who owe an obligation to the judge at the Great White Throne Judgment, but have nothing to pay the obligation. However, the sins of all mankind are paid for, according to I John 2:1-2. Thus the only beings remaining with a sin debt are the fallen angels. Coincidentally only fallen angels are explicitly named as cast into the Lake of Fire, that is Satan, The Beast, and The False Prophet. Furthermore, the Scriptures explicitly state that the Lake of Fire is “**prepared for... the Devil and his angels**” (Matthew 25:41 WEB).

But can Revelation 21:8 really only apply to angels? Yes, I’ve already proved that God’s chosen people are also guilty of all these sins, but exempt from damnation due to the fact that our sins are paid! That is the good news!! Fallen angels, however, are vile, but their vileness is not atoned. Jesus became a man and is the vicarious substitute for mankind, but not the angel kind. Consider that Satan is called a murderer and the Father of Lies, John 8:44. Ezekiel 28 also highlights Satan’s idolatry. He worshiped his own beauty and not the beauty of Christ. Yet can we say that angels are cowardly, sexually immoral, and magicians? This seems odd to give these labels to the fallen angels. Yet Satan and his demons are guilty of these crimes even if only because they tempt and applaud mankind’s stumbling in these areas. Consider also that some believe that embodied fallen angels are specifically guilty of sexual immorality in Genesis 6:1-4 and were punished as explained in 2 Peter 2:4. Though I am uncertain of these details, I am certain that fallen angels will be condemned at the Great White Throne Judgment as explained in Daniel 12:1-4, Matthew 25:31-46, and Revelation 20:11-15. In the end, Satan and his demonic following are the only people outside of Christ at the Great White Throne Judgment as they are sentenced the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages*. Finally, Isaiah believed that one day all mankind would bow down in worship before the Lord, Isaiah 66:22-24.

Friend, is your question really a question of Biblical exegesis? Or instead is your question really about how grace is applied to the forgiveness of your

own sins for your own salvation? Are you convinced that your choice of faith has signed the deal for your salvation? Why not trade in your “*personal salvation*” to join the salvation of *ALL* God’s people? Why not trust that Christ signed the deal for your salvation with his blood at Calvary, as well as the salvation of *ALL* mankind.

How Could Anyone Not Believe This Awesome News?

READERS>> How could anyone not believe the awesome news that Jesus is the savior of ALL mankind?

ME>> A good question. Opponents voice reasons that they do not believe Jesus is the savior of all mankind. However, if you agree with the Biblical, rational, and historical proofs in the Optimism Out of Control book you may wonder how anyone could possibly not believe! The good news is so clear! Following are a few reasons to remind us to be merciful to those who doubt.

- Traditional *Christian* understanding, that most of humanity is eternally damned, has a majority following. It can be very difficult to break from majority opinion.
- Even adults are impacted by peer pressure. Concluding at variance with one’s religious community may result in difficult social repercussions and even rejection.
- Suggesting that the Greek word “*aion*” is better translated as “*age*”, “*entire*”, “*life*”, “*whole*”, or “*unbroken*” sounds suspect. Seekers may feel unqualified for Greek studies.
- Most think that after death you go to Heaven or Hell. However, very few know that Hades is temporal, while the Lake of Fire is the final judgment for fallen angels.
- Biblical Christian Universalist fellowship can be very difficult if not impossible to find. Furthermore, few want to join a movement without a local presence.
- True Christian faith will never stand as a peer with the religions of the world. True Christian faith stands alone as radical stance by definition and so has a high cost.
- Salvation granted through the *free will* choice of Jesus Christ appeals strongly to the natural man. However, super-natural new birth is required to see otherwise.

These are just a few reasons why many find it difficult to believe that **Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.**

Keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. And have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.

Jude 21-23 (NASB)

I Do Not Agree

One thoughtful reader writes...

READER>> In summary, thanks for sending your article and reading my response (below). I hope it is helpful and that you can see why I do not agree with your conclusions, based on the Scriptures.

ME>> You are welcome. Fair enough.

READER>> I don't see Scripture indicating that I need to worry "whether I am part of the elect or not." Rather, I just need to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation (Acts 16:31, Rom. 10:9-10, etc). Afterward, out of gratitude for having been saved, I ought to live in line with my new identity (Eph. 4, 5, 2Pet.1:3-11, etc). The question of "whether I am elect or not" will take care of itself. By definition, if I believe in Jesus Christ for salvation and receive His free gift of salvation, I am part of the elect. If I reject Jesus Christ, or believe for a short time and then fall away (1 John 2:19), by definition I was never part of the elect. Regarding "assurance" and "how one may know that one truly believes," 1 John and James deal with that point. Regarding whether God will in fact save those who believe in Jesus, there's no need to worry about that either.... God always keeps His promises, as shown by all of Scripture. But do you know of anywhere in Scripture where people are instructed to try to figure out if they're part of the elect or not? To my knowledge, and as you wrote, Scripture teaches BOTH that God sovereignly chooses people to be part of His elect, and that we humans are morally responsible for our actions (and must believe in Christ to be saved). These two truths are both taught (sometimes in the same verse! 2 Tim. 2:19).

*ME>> 2 Peter 1:9-11 commands us to make our election sure. This is a critical issue in order to insure that those professing Christ actually have saving faith. Many people profess faith in Christ yet revolt against his words, **"you did not choose me, but I chose you."** Many begin to follow Jesus, but turn away when they hear more detail about the truth. Or since faith, repentance, and conversion are too painful they instead convert Jesus into a palatable American. It is important to understand that when Jesus says trust*

me, he is not saying *“Take the action to trust me, perform the work of trusting me, and then I will add your name to the Book of Life.”* Rather he is saying to his elect, *“Trust me, I have written your name in my book from before the foundation of the world.”* These are two radically different understandings of faith. One is salvation by grace, the other by works. More specifically you say that one must believe in Christ to be saved. I agree that faith is required for salvation from sin and salvation from Hades. However, since faith cannot add our name to the Lamb’s Book of Life then actually not even *“faith”* cannot save someone from the Lake of Fire. Only the electing grace of God can pen our name in the Lamb’s Book of Life, the final criterion for salvation from the Lake of Fire, Revelation 20:15. The importance of faith is that trust in Christ enables us to see our name in the Lamb’s Book of Life, to see that our names are already there because God has always loved us! This is the happy news!!

READER>> On the page Gospel Foolishness, you wrote: “The Arminian boasts in his ‘free will’ choice of God while the Calvinist boasts that he alone is chosen.” I would certainly not boast that “I alone am chosen,” and I don’t know of any Calvinist who would do so. Certainly our boast should be in Jesus Christ. If you ask me whether God has chosen a particular set of people for salvation, I would say ‘Yes,’ the scripture informs me that He has. And if you ask me whether I am part of that subset, I would say ‘Yes, that seems to be the case,’ because (to the best of my knowledge) I believe in Jesus Christ and I see the evidences mentioned in 1 John allowing me to “know” that I have eternal life. But is there any self-based pride in this? Absolutely not. Rather (Romans 9:11/context, 11:6, Ephesians 1) my election is all based on God’s unconditional, sovereign, loving, eternal, choice, not based on any goodness inside me. So there is nothing for me to boast about regarding myself. Hence I disagree with your phrase mentioned above, as a straw-man argument.

ME>> Thank you for this correction. You are right that I should not use the same word *“boast”* when addressing the error of the Arminian and the Calvinist. They are both in error, but errors of a different nature. It is the Arminians who *“boasts”* because their salvation is based on their own decision, their own work. But Grace teaches us that this is boastful. However, the Calvinist error is to claim that they are part of an imaginary chosen subset of humanity. This error is more properly labeled *“blindness,”* just as Jesus labeled the Pharisees, *“blind guides.”* I have corrected that language in my article Gospel Foolishness. Above you also say it *“seems to be the case”* that you are part of that chosen subset. This does not sound very certain. Why the reservation? Why not great boldness? Your choice of words proves a critical point made previously in my book: that the Calvinist cannot be 100% certain that they are part of the chosen subset of saved humanity. Please read my article, Certain Knowledge again. I also write more on this subject below.

READER>>As I understand what you are saying, you believe that after death, those who believe in Jesus will go to heaven while those who disbelieve will go to “hell”/“hades”, as a place of “temporary punishment.” Then at the day of final judgment, you believe that God will extend a pardon (because of Christ’s sacrificial death) to every individual human who has ever lived (i.e. every human’s name will be listed in the Book of Life; there will be no one whose name is not in the Book of Life), after which all the humans will go into permanent heaven and live forever with God. You base this on several passages, especially Romans 11:32 (“For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all”) and Hosea 2:23 (“I will say to those called ‘Not my people,’ ‘You are my people’”). All of the passages which are traditionally interpreted as teaching that some humans will end up in everlasting punishment you reinterpret in the following 2 ways: either (1) they are only talking about ‘temporary hell’, (2) they only apply to demons, not humans. Some of this I agreed with, and some I disagreed with, on Scriptural grounds.

ME>> Yes I do believe Romans 11:32 is the grand conclusion of Christian salvation and yes I believe all mankind will be finally saved from the Lake of Fire, though most are not saved from sin, unbelief, and punishment in Hades. However, please note that there is one critical gospel caveat: The foolishness of the gospel warns the unbelieving that those who reject this good news and the grace of Christ that they are not “his sheep” and they will spend the duration in Hades. This sentence still stands for unbelieving mankind whether Jew or gentile.

READER>> ...I disagree with your fundamental premise in the book, that all humans will end up being saved and entering into eternal life. I disagree not for emotional or tradition-based reasons, but for Scriptural reasons, as follows. First, I think that your “four square salvation evaluator” is too simplistic. “Save” (greek sozo) does not always mean save from sin... (1 Tim 2:15) “All” (greek pantas) does not always mean “all (individual people in the world)”... sometimes it means “all (people in a particular group which is being discussed in a context)” or “all (types of people...) or both (types of people)” (Mark 1:5, 4:31, John 3:26, 4:29, 8:2, 12:32, Acts 2:45, 22:15, 26:4, Romans 3:9, 16:26, 1 Cor 10:33, Gal 2:14, Col 3:11, etc) “Have mercy” does not look exactly the same for all people... God’s mercy on some involves giving food/water/rain/family/etc, but God’s mercy upon others involves far more, to the point of opening our eyes to believe in Him for eternal life. (Acts 14:17) Being the “savior of all men” does not necessarily mean that they are always “saved” from Hell or from the lake of fire, or saved to the same destiny, or in the same way, or to the same extent (1 Tim 4:10) It seems that when you read in Romans 11 “..that He may have mercy upon all”, you infer that this means that God will eventually redeem all humans and bring them into heaven... but this conclusion is not required by this verse in its context, and does not fit other passages of Scripture. I agree with Galli’s point that “all”

here in context is referring to “both Jews and Gentiles.” (For example, verses 25-31 are comparing these two groups).

ME>> I am sorry that you think my *Four Square Salvation Evaluator* is too simplistic. In fact I thought the simplicity of this model actually helped the reader to understand the simple errors and difficulties evident in the historic Arminian and Calvinistic debate. Regarding the question of “*saved from what?*”, I address the various dangers we need to be saved from in my articles, *2 Corinthians 5:14-21* and *Saved 5x*. However, the focus of the salvation question in my *Four Square Salvation Evaluator* is only the question of eternal salvation, that is salvation from the Lake of Fire. Since you were confused about that I added further clarification in my article, *Soteriologies*. Likewise, I also address the different possible meanings of the word “*all,*” but as you say we come to a different conclusion.

READER>> *You wrote in [your article] Romans 11:32-36 “We should be consistent because the context for both verses regarding Paul’s points about Jew and Gentile being alike under sin are the same. However, Romans 3:23 is easily understood to mean every individual person, just as Romans 11:32 should be understood to mean every individual person, whether Jew or Gentile.” “easily understood to mean”? On the contrary, the context of Romans 3 is more in favor of a meaning of “both Jews and Gentiles” than “each individual”. I agree with you that each individual has sinned, but that is not the primary contextual point of Rom 3:23. Therefore, Rom 3:23 cannot be used to infer that Romans 11:32 is talking about every individual person.*

ME>> I am surprised that you say this. The larger context of Romans 3:23 begins by quoting Psalm 14:3 saying, **“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.”** The meaning of the Psalm and Romans 3:9-23 is commonly understood by all Christians to say that each individual human being is guilty of sin, not merely all types of people. I am merely pointing out that the larger context of Romans allows me to conclude that Romans 11:32 can also be interpreted to mean every individual human being without doing any violence to the rules of interpretation. However, the definitive proof is the means Jesus used to make payment for mankind’s sin. He became a man and is identified as the new federal head of all humanity in Romans Chapter 5. He does not represent part of humanity, but the entirety of humanity. By the very nature of how he paid for sin, the sin payment must apply to all mankind -- that is every individual human being that ever lived or will live. He did not pay for the sins of some with cash or a mere token, but he became a man and thus the vicarious substitute for all! One cannot simply apply his death to part of mankind because he became the substitute for all mankind. To do so would be to somehow divide Jesus’ body into a part that died for some, and a part that did not die for others. How could we do that when instead his body was broken for all his people?

READER>> A related verse is I John 2:1-2, "the whole world" in context being "not only Jews... also people from every tribe and nation... but not necessarily EVERY person from every tribe and nation". For example, John 12:19, etc.

ME>> That is curious. I understand John to be saying that Christ is the atoning sacrifice for not only our sins, meaning not only believers, but that Christ is also the atoning sacrifice for unbelievers as well. The "us" and "them" under the New Covenant is no longer Jew and gentile, but instead believer and unbeliever.

READER>> (Also, God's "binding us to sin" does not mean that He "caused" us to sin... rather that He "ordained"/"allowed" such... There are multiple levels of causality, not only a single level. (Genesis 50:20, etc). I'd highly recommend reading Bruce Ware's two books on this: "God's Lesser Glory" and "God's Greater Glory.")

ME>> I am not sure if your debate is with me or with the Bible on this point. I also agree that God has not soiled his holy hands with the works of Satan. It was Satan who tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden, certainly not God. Yet the Bible clearly says that God himself is finally responsible for both the origin and the purpose of sin as explained in Isaiah 30:28, Romans 8:20, and Romans 11:32. God is not a tempter, but Satan none-the-less, evil though he is, still serves God's sovereign purposes. Specifically, God decreed the existence of sin in order to demonstrate his grace. Though admittedly if you reject this you are on the side of the majority for most are unwilling to swallow this truth. However, at least take note that I stand with the great theologians Martin Luther, Jonathon Edwards, and many others concerning God's sovereignty over sin.

READER>> On Hosea 2:23, this is a very important verse. It is important to recognize the historical context. God had made an eternal covenant / promise to Abraham and his descendants in Genesis 12 and following. In Deuteronomy 27-30, God told His people that even if they were punished to the point of diaspora (28:63ff, 30:1-6), eventually He would bring them back... because God's covenant with them was permanent. He would never permanently let them go. Then when Israel sinned and was eventually sent into exile, many of the prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.) still foretold (based on the promises in Genesis-Deuteronomy) that God would bring them back. So when Hosea presented his prophecy, this was not a general case... it was not saying that "in general, God always relents and allows evildoers back into his presence, after a temporary of punishment." Instead, it was a very special "not-my-people"... God had temporarily "disowned" them (in the sense of ceasing to bless them physically as a nation) because they had disowned Him... but He had never forgotten about them or about His promise (Hosea 11:8). Paul then quotes this in Romans 9:25-26 to show that the Gentiles

were now included as promised... but again, the fact that the Gentiles would be included was LONG foretold... even back to Genesis 3:15, 12:3, etc, and certainly Isaiah 42:4/Matt 12:21. So again, Hosea 2:23 / Romans 9:26 / inclusion-of-the-Gentiles is not a general "principle" (so I think your "Hosea Principle" is incorrect), but a specific prophecy and fulfillment about certain people / groups that God had predestined for salvation. In your book, you take Hosea 2:23 out of context and apply it to the unbelievers, in your hope that God will call them "My people" in the end... but this directly contradicts the other Scriptures (see below) that explain exactly what God will do with those unbelievers: consign them to the lake of fire forever. Thus your application of the "Hosea principle" leads you to contradict the clear teaching of other scriptures, and I respectfully and earnestly appeal to warn you that this is very wrong.

ME>> Romans 4:16 explains that the promise to Abraham does not follow the physical lineage of Abraham, but instead the spiritual lineage of Abraham, to all those who share the faith of Abraham. Of course we would need further conversation to outline the impact of this promise as it relates to this life, to Hades, and to the Lake of Fire. Furthermore the gospel makes it clear that the doctrine of predestination guarantees God's faithfulness to both chosen Jews and chosen Gentiles. Romans 11 also explains a relationship between the belief and unbelief of the Jews and Gentiles that results in a curious dynamic of envy that propels all people to Christian faith. The conclusion of redemptive history is not further distinction between Jew and Gentile, but in fact the tearing down of the dividing wall. The Jews were merely the starting point of God's plan to bring salvation to the entire world as explained in Isaiah Chapter 49. Thus the Gentile world has much to learn about both the character and methods of God through his dealings with Israel.

Regarding your disagreement with the "Hosea principle" you may have a point to make in that my language could be more precise. It is certain there is particular Biblical language to explain the special relationship that God had with Israel under the Old Covenant. There is also particular language to describe the special relationship he has with believers under the New Covenant. However, I do not want the fact that I am neither a "Dispensational Theologian" nor a "Covenant Theologian" to detract from my main point. My main point is that God uses strong language that appears to rule out any possibility of salvation for both unbelieving Jews and unbelieving Gentiles. Then when evidence of repentance is found, God warmly calls both believing Jews and Gentiles his children. This is seen in the language of Hosea toward the Jews when God calls them, "not my people," then calls these same people, "my people" after they repent. This is also seen in the language of Jesus toward the Syrian Phoenicia Greek woman in Mark 7:24-30. Jesus pitched a hard fast ball saying that his help was unavailable to her. He even joined the hypocritical Jews in referring to her as a gentile "dog." It is hard for me to believe that Jesus even said that! Perhaps he only

said it ironically as a rebuke to the Pharisees. Regardless, she understood him to call her a gentile “dog” and his words caused the woman to humble herself even further. As a result of her acknowledgement that she did not deserve his help, Jesus then poured out his grace healing her daughter. The point is that the “Hosea principle” is most certainly a “modus operandi” that Jesus employs with both the Jews and Gentiles to test our hearts and bring our hard hearts to repentance when needed. Romans 11:29 certainly guarantees God’s faithfulness even to the unbelieving Jews mentioned in Romans 11:28. The verse also explains the reason for God’s faithfulness to unbelieving gentiles in Romans 11:30. God is the faithful savior of both the unbelieving Jews and gentiles.

READER>> Regarding your page 2 Thessalonians 1:9... Here you say that 2 Thess 1:9 “everlasting destruction” refers to temporary punishment, because of Deut 15:17. It does not make sense to me that you are using an argument about the Hebrew word (“olam”) to interpret 2 Thess 1:9 (written in Greek, not Hebrew), a completely different language and culture... and especially that there are no contextual clues that this “everlasting destruction” in 2 Thess 1:9 is “temporary.” Something to consider -- How could God have possibly made it any more clear about the “everlasting/eternal destruction” that is coming for unbelievers? If you seek to use the argument that from Deut 15:17 “everlasting” means “temporary,” how then could God ever make clear to you or other people that this really does mean everlasting/eternal/forever? In fact, if you persist in this line of reasoning, what prevents someone from taking other (Greek) words meaning “everlasting” in the NT (such as John 3:16!) and applying your Deut 15:17 Hebrew ‘olam’ argument to it, and coming to the conclusion that our eternal life is also only temporary? Or that the devil’s eternal torment in the lake of fire is also temporary? In the case of certain Old Testament usages of “olam” indicating “for a long time” rather than truly “forever/everlasting,” the reason we know that such is the correct meaning of “olam” is that we see other verses which indicate the “end” of the time period in question. (e.g. Jer. 25:9 uses “olam” about an “everlasting desolation,” and then verse 12 clarifies that this period is only 70 years). But 2 Thess 1:9 has no such qualifiers.

ME>> Good point. Hebrew and Greek are different languages and the Old Testament and New Testament are from different times and cultures. Yet consider these three good points.

FIRST) there is Old Testament Biblical precedent for the grace of God abolishing / fulfilling / satisfying the “everlasting” as he did with the Sabbath command and numerous Old Testament everlastings including the Old Covenant itself. When God satisfied / fulfilled / abolished the eternal commands of the Old Covenant he truly accomplished the impossible (impossible for us, but possible for him). Thus it is not so radical to consider that God could do the same in the New Testament time period.

SECOND) the New Testament does say that the “*gates of Hades*” will not overcome the work of the church in Matthew 16:18. This statement is more than wishful thinking. This is a promise. The promise is even prominently linked to the first public acknowledgement of Jesus as Messiah. The promise specifically offers hope beyond Hades. So if God has achieved the impossible in nailing the Old Covenant to the cross in public spectacle as explained in Colossians 2:13-15, then why are you so incredulous that the grace of God can bring an end to Hades? In my book I simply proposed a Biblical interpretive model that explains how this is possible. Furthermore, Jesus says in Matthew 10:28 that body and soul are destroyed in Hades. Yet Revelation 20:13 says unbelievers are extracted alive, out of Hades. By “*destroyed*” Jesus must not mean ruined beyond hope of his grace, but that the potential to live for Christ, hear the words “*well done my faithful servant*”, or avoid great punishment is missed.

THIRD) both the Arminian and Calvinist models of salvation fall short of reason at different points. Because they fall short and because faith must also be reasonable, we must be willing to consider alternate models. The model I have proposed certainly does not have any more weaknesses and I think has greater strengths. Furthermore, the model I propose remains faithful to two critical gospel facts, 1) Jesus became a man and through his death he became the substitutionary atonement for ALL mankind, and 2) salvation is ALL of grace with no work of man even remotely accepted. Calvinism fails at point 1 and Arminianism fails at point 2. As for your argument that “*everlasting*” cannot have multiple meanings in the New Testament without also allowing for the end of Satan’s doom, the end of Heaven, or confusion, consider the Old Testament use of “*olam*” which also has multiple usages in the Old Testament. Context is needed to determine the meanings of words. In fact it is proven through John Wesley Hanson’s scholarly work that the Hebrew “*olam*” and the Greek “*aion*” are synonyms and mean the “*duration of the subject in view.*” I have added a brief review and copy of Hanson’s work on my website. Dr. Heleen Keizer has also written a dissertation proving the same titled, *Life, Time, Entirety - A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo*. Read her 315 page dissertation online or an abstract of her conclusions on my website.

READER>> You wrote in Certain Knowledge “Some Calvinists argue that possession of faith is proof that you are God’s chosen. But again with this understanding faith itself becomes the object of confidence rather than Christ himself. Either way knowledge of salvation for the Calvinist requires confidence that they are part of the chosen subset. So, according to reason, they cannot have true security either.” I disagree... Calvinists can have security, exactly as 1 John describes. When a Calvinist looks back at his life and notices the various changes that 1 John describes, he realizes that his “faith” is real and he can know that he has eternal life. His faith is placed in

Christ and His promises, not in these life changes. But the life changes give him 'assurance' and show him that his faith is genuine.

ME>> Confidence in Christian salvation can never be gained by *"looking back at our life!"* This is the reason the Gospel of John typically uses *"believe"* in the present active tense. One might easily fool oneself into such confidence by referencing some transcendental experience from the past. Yet life experience can only ever offer subjective proofs. Even if we could look back and testify to miracles, a changed life, or angel sightings, even these are totally insufficient for confidence in salvation. Grand as they may appear, they are mere tokens that can also be possessed by the unbelieving. Jannes and Jambres performed real miracles in rebellion against Moses, II Timothy 3:8, and they thought they were in the right. Bill's Story in Alcoholics Anonymous has truly helped many reform and leave a life of alcoholism, even though acknowledging a higher power, but still without saving faith in Jesus Christ. And as for angel sightings, both Mohammed and Joseph Smith lay claim to that, yet without saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Christian assurance can only and must only come through confidence in the gospel facts and promises found in the person of Jesus Christ. So again I say that anyone who believes that the atonement is limited in scope will correspondingly be limited in assurance of salvation. However, they may have deceived themselves into such assurance. Consider, if I tell you that I paid for all the oranges in a basket and that you can have one for free, then you can pick any orange with great confidence knowing that it is already paid for. If you have faith in my promise, then you will happily pick an orange, any orange. If you do not have faith you are still free to pick an orange because they are still paid, but you refuse. Now suppose I tell you that I paid for particular oranges in the basket, but not others, and only I know which oranges I paid for, then how will you determine which orange to pick out of the basket for free? What objective fact do you have to lay claim to a particular orange? In this case, claim of *"faith"* can only be a pretense because it cannot be founded on an objective fact. Calvinistic orange picking can only be a form of Russian Roulette.

READER>> Regarding your page Matthew 25:31-46 I didn't understand your argument on verse 46. Were you saying that this "eternal punishment" is the same thing as the temporary punishment of Luke 16? It seems that you did not finish explaining on this page how this "eternal punishment" fits with your theory that no one will end up in the lake of fire.

ME>> I never said no one ends up in the Lake of Fire. In fact I said quite the opposite. All the unredeemed are sentenced to the Lake of Fire with no escape from this judgment. Matthew 25:31-46 makes it perfectly clear that the Devil and his angels will be sentenced there for *The Ages of The Ages*. I was merely pointing out that this passage does not say anything about

humans being damned to the Lake of Fire, but only the goats on his left, which I have proved to be the Devil and his angels. Yet, for the extreme demonstration of his grace, God apparently allows the unbelieving elect to follow Satan to the very precipice of the Lake of Fire. But will the rebel elect succeed in their mission of self-destruction? Not a chance with the grace of God on watch!

READER>> You wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 "These verses even explain that all mankind is ALREADY positionally reconciled to God 'in Christ' apart from faith. Most would teach that each individual is placed 'into Christ' only as they believe in him. But I understand that those predestined to salvation are never outside of God's grace, because they are always positionally 'in Christ.' However, as each individual is awakened as a new creation, then they realize their position 'in Christ' and 'live in Christ.'" I disagree. The phrase "the world" here (in context and in the light of other scriptures) could mean "men and women from every nation"...the phrase and context does not require it to mean "every individual". As to which of these two are in view, although the local context might allow both meanings, I think that if you look at the context of other Scriptures (such as listed below), it is more accurate to take it as "men and women from every nation."

ME>> I will double check my statement that all the elect are positionally "in Christ" before they place faith in Christ. I know that this understanding is not standard. However, if anyone agrees to the doctrine of predestination in the least then there must be an acknowledgement of some sort that the elect are ultimately protected from the wrath of God from before the creation of the world. As for whether "all" means every individual human being, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 makes it clear that it is in fact the entirety of humanity. It does not make sense to say that God died for "all types of people," and therefore "all types of people died." The "all" in this verse is parallel proving that because Christ died for every individual human, therefore every individual human is proved to be spiritually dead apart from spiritual rebirth. I expand on this point in my article, 'In' Doctrine.

READER>> You wrote in Let's Celebrate "As I explained questions about the extent of God's grace in salvation grew like a dark cloud in my life, clouding my relationship with Christ. I was not sure I would be able to rejoice in Heaven. I needed to agree that Christ had done the right thing in saving some while damning others. Yet I could not and continued to search the Bible." I have likewise struggled emotionally with this, but have "solved my problem" in a different way than you. I have to admit that God knows better than I do... and if (for example) my dear friend for whose salvation I pray every day is eventually sentenced by God to eternal destruction in the lake of fire, I have to trust that God knows best and that I will be able to rejoice in His wisdom and goodness when I get to heaven, even if God doesn't grant my

request for my friend's salvation... and even if I cannot now imagine how I will be able to rejoice if my friend is not saved.

ME>> That is a possible conclusion as well, but it is lacking the passion demonstrated by Paul in Romans 9:3. Salvation by grace, when truly received, emboldens one to stand before his maker and say, "How could you save a disgusting, wicked, wretch like me and leave even one other person unsaved?" And then wait for the answer.

READER>> *Regarding your page RSVP Review. Here you seem to be arguing that because God saving everyone would be a cause for celebration, therefore it must be true. This is an appeal to an emotion, not scripture. If someone responded without enthusiasm for your incorrect Scriptural interpretations, you here describe their lack of enthusiasm as "callousness" and "standing on shaky ground" and "devoid of grace," simply because they were not expressing happy emotions when you presented your view to them. This is a very dangerous line of reasoning. Instead, we ought to go with the Scripture, not with what makes us happy or emotionally satisfied. I realize that in your other pages you give arguments from Scripture. But here on this page, you give an emotional argument, and one that I think is very dangerous.*

ME>> My concluding paragraph on that page makes it clear that I am not saying something is true because the thought results in a celebration. However, I am saying that my question did expose that the majority of professing Christians interviewed turned to works salvation as a defense of their belief and attitude. That is not good. Rather than coming to terms with pure grace, they have comfortably taken credit for a portion of their salvation adding condition to God's unconditional love. That is not good at all. The majority found peace concerning the damned by claiming to merit their own salvation in some way. Thus I agree that my interview question is very dangerous. I could get in a lot of trouble for exposing that kind of hypocrisy.

READER>> *Here are some more verses which indicate to me that many humans will end up in the lake of fire in the end. It seems you did not discuss these verses: [Daniel 12:1-2, Matthew 7:13-14, John 3:36, John 5:28-29, Rev 14:9-12, and Revelation 21:8ff.] Also, I realize that you consider many of the "judgment verses" below as applying only to the "temporary hell," not the final/permanent lake-of-fire judgment. However I see no Scriptural evidence that people who are in the temporary hell will be spared from going into the final/permanent lake-of-fire judgment, so I think these verses below about Hell also contradict your view (that all humans will eventually be saved), [Matthew 5:29-30, Matthew 7:21-23, Matthew 8:11-12, Matthew 13:41-42, Matthew 22:11-14, Matthew 25:30, John 15:6, and Luke 13:22-28.]*

ME>> Thank you for highlighting these verses. You are right that I do not think that all these verses are speaking about condemnation to the Lake of Fire. Plus we must consider that Jesus warns and threatens the unbelieving elect even though they are never in danger of the Lake of Fire. However, Jesus does damn the non-elect reprobate to the Lake of Fire. Jesus may speak the same careful words to one group, the other, or even simultaneously to both. You must at least concede that much to me. You say, *“First, I think that your “four square salvation evaluator” is too simplistic. “Save” (greek sozo) does not always mean save from sin”*. Let me clarify about salvation: I understand there are at least five things the Bible tells us we need to be saved from. The short list is salvation from 1) harm, 2) sin, 3) a fruitless life, 4) Hell (Hades), and 5) the Lake of Fire. I write at length about this in my article, [Saved 5x](#). Now, you accused me of being too simplistic, but when you list all these verses above and suggest they are only talking about salvation from number 5, the Lake of Fire, you are the one being too simplistic. You have inspired me, however, to add a comprehensive study of the various afterlife destinies referenced in your verses and the remainder of the New Testament. Lord willing I will make progress in my article, [Salvation: Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How](#) and my article, [Forever is Not Forever? You Still Gotta Be Kidding Me!](#) The most troubling passage that you highlighted to me is Daniel 12:1-4.

1) ‘At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. 2) Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. 3) Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. 4) But you, Daniel, roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge.

I have found fault with both the Arminian and Calvinistic system of Christian salvation, others may find fault with me as you have done. Certainly I am not the Holy Spirit, so my interpretations can also be wrong. I keep my hope in the grace of Christ alone. I also openly appeal for help from the grace of Christ and interpretive wisdom from the Holy Spirit. With their help I also hope to add a page about Daniel 12:1-4 in this book as well. Lord willing I will do so. I do thank you for reminding me about it and for praying for me. This passage could be interpreted to unravel my thesis. Or perhaps the passage speaks of the salvation of man and the condemnation of Satan and his followers. It is important to note that 2 Peter 2:4 makes it clear that the present nether world, Hades, also has a compartment called Tartarus. Tartarus currently contains particular fallen angels who were

punished in a special way, whereas other demons still roam freely. The point is that demons will also be among those extracted from Hades / Tartarus at the end of time to face their final judgment as explained in Revelation 20:13. This fact may be relevant to interpreting Daniel 12:1-4 which I hope to do in my article, [Daniel 12:1-4](#).

Dear reader, I do thank you for taking the time to give me all your valuable feedback. It was an essential exercise to put my beliefs to a real life test. I hope we can continue the dialogue. Currently I just finished reading *Erasing Hell* by Francis Chan. Chan glosses over the distinction between Hell / Hades and the Lake of Fire, a vital component to my salvation model. He also improperly makes Hell to be synonymous with The Lake of Fire at times when he does mention it. It is true that the common understanding of Hell is final damnation. However, Biblically, Hell is the temporal punishment in Hades. The Lake of Fire, however, is condemnation for *The Ages of The Ages* after the Great White Throne Judgment. Chan also says something very interesting on page 86 of his book, *"The debate about Hell's duration is much more complex than I first assumed. While I lean heavily on the side that says it is everlasting, I am not ready to claim that with complete certainty."* This is a curious statement by someone writing a book with the main point that people have erred greatly saying that Hell is temporal or punishment in this life. I think I should write Mr. Chan a note pointing him to the good news in Revelation 20:14. Hell is a real and certain punishment for the unbelieving. However, the good news is that Hell / Hades is finally tossed into the Lake of Fire, *empty*, never to be needed again, forever. Then those extracted from Hell / Hades, both humans and fallen angels, will stand before the Lord of glory for their final judgment. If anyone's name is not found in the Book of Life they will be cast into the Lake of Fire for The Ages of The Ages.

Friend, do you want to know with certainty that your name is in the Book of Life? Do you want more confidence than *"it seems to be the case?"* You cannot add your name yourself. You cannot gain confidence through your own decisions. Instead, through faith in Christ, through eyes opened by the Holy Spirit, you can see your name printed in the Lamb's Book from before the foundations of the world, though of course only if you are one of Jesus' chosen.

So I guess the pertinent question is who has the unbiblical optimism? Can your choice of *"faith"* add your name to the Book of Life? There is no optimistic future through that means. Grace teaches us that we did not choose Jesus, but that instead he chose us. Your definition of *"faith"* falls short of the true confidence we can have trusting that Christ loved all his chosen ones before we loved him.

Is all mankind elect? NO!

One Pastor strongly objected...

READER>> *Is all mankind elect? NO!*

ME>> Dear Pastor,

Thank you for your study of election that you emailed to me. Thank you also for taking the time to fully understand my view. I have no desire to break with tradition unnecessarily. When one does break with tradition, there are often misunderstandings. Yet you have not misunderstood. Second, thank you for not ignoring this difference. I was short sighted in thinking that the difference did not matter or could be overlooked. Third, thank you for your faithfulness to Regular Baptist tradition which has many good components. Fourth, thank you for humbly praying that if I am wrong the Lord would correct me, but also that if you are wrong that the Lord would correct you. We both need the Lord and stand by his grace alone.

Sadly after reading your study below, I continue to disagree with your interpretation. Yet happily, I still understand the Scripture to teach that all humankind is elect and will be finally saved from the Lake of Fire. I am also compelled to be the Lord's servant and warn those who reject grace that they will be punished for the duration in Hades. Again, I do not have any desire to break with tradition unnecessarily. Yet after studying your objections I have become even more certain that Jesus is the savior of all mankind. There have been others in history that have held this view as well as contemporaries with whom I am initiating fellowship. However, we are a fellowship with "*no place to lay our heads.*"

I have written at length in my book, *Optimism Out of Control*, to defend my understanding. Of course you have read this already and disagree. I would invite you to invest the effort to read it one more time. It would also be important for you to read my answers to other objections in the *Appendix* of my book. I hope to answer your important objections below. My first goal in doing so is to hold myself accountable to be faithful to the Scriptures. My second goal is to invite you to join my understanding and re-forge partnership in making disciples. What a wonderful mission calling lost sheep to trust that Jesus loves them, has forgiven them, and wants to transform them into his image.

Since the minority has broken with tradition on this point, the majority could easily dismiss this view as suspect without any research or reconsideration needed whatsoever. Yet I hope to defend that Christ is the savior of all mankind with Scripture. To that end, I begin by saying that your

misunderstanding of Scripture and grace are easily repaired with five corrections.

FIVE CORRECTIONS TO TRADITION

1) Hopefully we agree that only the elect, those chosen by God's grace without any condition satisfied by man, are *predestined* to His good purposes. Yet you reduce election to only or primarily address our eternal state. Consider that Jesus elects nations, groups, and individuals to *various* good stations, some temporal and others eternal. One could be elect or not elect in one dimension while being elect or not elect in another dimension. For example, Israel was specially chosen as the ancestry of Christ and the guardian of the Old Testament Scripture, Romans 9:4-5. Yet God has also specially chosen to love other nations, Isaiah 19:24. The Twelve were specially chosen as Apostles, John 6:70. Yet God has also specially chosen to work in the lives of all believers, 1 Peter 2:4-5. Christians are alone chosen for repentance and receiving forgiveness, Romans 2:4. Yet Christ also chose to forgive all mankind, even the unbelieving unrepentant, from the cross, Luke 23:34 and 1 John 2:1-2. The Scriptures do not speak of only one "*election*," but numerous. Ephesians also makes this plain when the Holy Spirit says in Ephesians 1:11, "*we were also chosen*." If we were "*also*" chosen, then there is more than one dimension to election. The context of grace enables believers to interpret rightly and boldly. Christ elected to forgive *ALL* mankind from the cross from before the creation of the world, Ephesians 1:3-10. However, *NOT ALL*, but only some are elected to receive and believe the fact that they are forgiven apart from all conditions before they die, Ephesians 1:11-14. Christ's death has already reconciled God's heart to all mankind, past tense! Since we are reconciled (past tense), how much more will those who live be saved from sin by his life, Romans 5:10.

2) Hopefully we both agree that only the elect, those chosen by God's grace without any condition satisfied by man, are *saved* from a bad end. Yet you make salvation to be primarily single-dimensional so that salvation from Hades is equal to salvation from the Lake of Fire. Consider that if Jesus elects nations, groups, and individuals to various good stations, then he also saves nations, groups, and individuals from various bad stations, again both temporal and eternal. One could be saved or not saved in one dimension while being saved or not saved in another dimension. One generation of Israelites was saved from slavery in Egypt, Micah 6:4. Yet, many Israelite generations were not saved from slavery, but died as slaves in Egypt over 400 years, even though they also were loved by God, Genesis 15:13. Even those Israelites that God did save from slavery were saved only due to His gracious choice and no merit of theirs, Deuteronomy 9:6. Noah and his family were saved from the flood, 1 Peter 3: 20. Yet, the remainder of mankind was not saved from the flood, even though they also were loved by

God, Genesis 6:6 and 1 Peter 3:18-20. David asked for salvation from lying lips, Psalm 120:2. Yet, Ananias and Sapphira were not saved from lying to the Holy Spirit, or from punishment, even to the loss of their lives, though they were Christians and saved from Hell, Acts 5:1-11.

Christians, because we have received forgiveness, now have reconciled hearts to God and are saved from the power of sin, Romans 6:1-4, from fruitless lives, 2 Peter 1:4, and from punishment after death, Luke 23:43. Yet those who reject grace are not saved from the 'aion' (duration) of punishment in Hades, Luke 16:19-31. The fire of Hades is a fit punishment for their hardened hearts. So though there is one faith, Ephesians 4:4-6, there are many dimensions to salvation. Again, the context of grace enables believers to interpret rightly and boldly. No doubt we agree that Christian salvation is a package deal that saves from both sin and judgment. Yet we disagree about how the Lake of Fire fits into the package. David said he could even go to Sheol and not be outside of God's love, Psalm 139:8. Jesus taught that the gates of Hades will be finally defeated by God's grace, Matthew 16:18. So even the redeemed will be punished in Hades if they continue to reject grace, 2 Peter 2:1. Yet the redeemed will not go to the Lake of Fire, Romans 11:32, Revelation 20:15. The gates of Hades will be defeated!

3) Hopefully we agree that Greek studies are helpful and a word can have several valid denotations and different applications. As just proved above, the same Greek word translated "*salvation*" can be applied to salvation from sin, futile purpose, harm, Hades, and the Lake of Fire. Likewise the Greek word "*aion*" is used to describe the duration of different epochs. For example "*aion*" in Romans 16:25 indicates the "*duration*" of the earth to the present time, while "*aion*" in Romans 16:26, one verse later, indicates the "*eternal*" God. Matthew 28:20 likewise speaks of the end of "*aion*," this "*age*." Other non-eternal uses of "*aion*" include Matthew 24:3, Luke 16:8, Luke 20:34-35, John 9:32, Acts 3:21, Romans 12:2, 1 Corinthians 1:20, 2:6-8, 3:18, 10:11, 2 Corinthians 4:4, Galatians 1:4, Ephesians 1:21, 2:2, 2:7, 3:9, Colossians 1:26, 2 Timothy 4:10, Hebrews 6:5, 9:26, and Hebrews 11:3. John Wesley Hanson's classic work proves that "*aion*" means the duration of the object in question whether finite or eternal. Septuagint usage proves that "*aion*" is synonymous with Hebrew "*olam*" which can mean temporal or eternal. Read Hanson's work from my website. (Though I do not agree with Hanson's application in Matthew 25:31-46.) Dr. Helena Keizer's dissertation proves the same: *Life, Time, Entirety – A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo*. Read her 315 page dissertation online or read an abstract of her conclusions from my website. The English word "*eon*" even descends etymologically from "*aion*!" Yet you and tradition chose "*aion*" to mean "*eternal*" in 2 Thessalonians 1:9. Why?

The context of grace is a better interpretive tool than tradition when choosing between valid denotations. If you are convinced that you are saved from eternity in the Lake of Fire because of your *free will* choice of Christ, then you have little need to answer the question as to why you chose Christ while the majority did not. You give your *free will* the credit. Or if you are persuaded that Jesus set his special love on you and paid for your sin while also not loving others and not paying for their sin, then again there is little need for Greek studies. You have missed the beauty of the cross that paid for the sins of all, as highlighted in particular by the Pharisees' hatred of Christ for extending grace to the Gentiles. Yet Jesus loved both the Pharisees and the pagans. He forgave us all from the cross even though *no one asked* for forgiveness.

4) Hopefully we both agree that Jesus identified the unbelieving Jews as, **“not his sheep,”** in John 10:26. Yet you interpret Jesus' words to mean they were not elect and never would be elect. You conclude that they are not sheep, or even lost sheep, but instead goats. You conclude that these Jews whom Jesus spoke to are eternally passed over by God's love and damned with hatred by God for eternity. Yet, consider from point #1 in this list that election is not a single dimensional concept. Just because these particular Jews were apparently not elected to believe (at least as evidenced at that moment) does not mean that Jesus did not elect to pay for their sin, or that they did not believe later. And if you agree that they could believe later, then you must also agree that they were predestined from before they were even born and thus ultimately always God's sheep, albeit, lost. Simply, Jesus is willing to confront stubborn lost sheep by saying they are **“not his sheep.”** Jesus is employing the pattern of Hosea 2:23 to confront the stubborn unbelief of these Jews. Certainly you do not interpret Hosea 2:23 to mean that God's love for his people is *“off again”* and then *“on again!”* God's eternal love for his people is eternally constant according to Jeremiah 31:3. Yet God clearly says in Hosea 2:23 that the unbelieving are, **“not my loved one,”** and then again after their repentance they are, **“my loved one.”** How is this to be understood? Romans 9:13 likewise quotes Malachi 1:1-3 saying that God hated Esau. So does God only love a small subset of mankind while allowing his hatred and wrath to damn the majority for all eternity? Or does God simply offer love to mankind, but only those who reciprocate are spared from damnation? There is a better answer as explained in Romans 11:28. Jewish unbelievers and all unbelievers are enemies of the gospel because of their rejection of Christ, yet they are loved on account of election. *ALL* mankind is loved by Christ because they are *ALL* elect, yet they remain enemies of the gospel until they are converted and place faith in Christ.

5) Hopefully we both agree that true Biblical faith must be reasonable and maintain integrity with both the Scriptures and logic. The *Four Square Salvation Evaluator* was designed to help people think through the Biblical and logical questions needed to properly understand salvation by grace. Yet

after reading your objections below I am having trouble figuring out just what your view is, whether Arminian or Calvinist. I am very clear that you object with my understanding. Yet, both Boice and Lewis concluded that there is no middle ground between Arminianism and Calvinism. Could I ask you to explain your specific view in more detail? For example, Boice boldly believed that if God loves you at all then there is absolutely no escape from his love and determination to bring you safely to final salvation. I believe exactly the same. However, since he neglected the distinction between Hades and the Lake of Fire and the meaning of “*aion*,” he then concluded that God does not love, nor will ever love the majority of mankind who are damned. This is an unfortunate error.

On the other hand Lewis boldly believed that God makes an offer of love to every individual, but for love to be true love, God must allow each individual’s *free will* choice of faith to be the determining factor in their final salvation. He has my respect for being clear on this point, though I strongly disagree with his view of the character of God’s love. He also did not appreciate the distinction between Hades and the Lake of Fire and so concluded that most of mankind is damned because they do not accept Christ with their *free will*. Lewis also offers no Biblical explanation as to why a few repent and most do not because his view is not Biblical. Lewis missed the point of grace: God loved us first while we still hated him. I can also respect a third person who has doubts and is struggling to understand how all these things add up. He has simple faith in Christ and knows that Christ is the judge of the whole Universe and he trusts God’s judgment without telling God he cannot extend saving grace to all mankind. This person also has my respect. However, you have objected strongly to my understanding that all mankind is elected to salvation from the Lake of Fire. You have said that God simply cannot save all mankind! Yet I am struggling to completely understand how you yourself have answered the important questions raised in my book.

Please consider these five points and my request for further explanation of your view of grace. In the meantime, I am concerned that your view does not have both feet planted on the bedrock of God’s grace. I began to be aware of this when you said, “*surely you believe in free will*” and also, “*but God uses means in salvation.*” Do you then believe that our *free will* is the deciding factor in our final salvation as Lewis did? Perhaps I misheard. You did use the metaphor, “*it is a free gift, but you have to write your name on it.*” With a proper understanding of grace we should instead say, “*God has written our names all over his free gift, but we must repent of all self-righteousness before we will be willing to receive it.*” We are rebellious children with terrible attitudes, yet with a Father who has written our names all over his gifts to us. However, until we repent we will not receive his gift! In your objections below you observe that Isaiah 53:6 says that Christ died for all sin and that according to John 3:16, Christ died for the world. You conclude that since “*the Bible teaches all of the above and so must we!*” Your words betray a

curious confession. You are certain that some are saved including yourself, yet the most you can say about Christ's death for ALL is that *"the Bible teaches it and so must we?"* It sounds like you are saying, *"I trust that Christ paid for my sin and so I am spared damnation, and even though I do not understand how it works, Christ also paid for the sins of all mankind, but most of them are going to be damned."* That is not good. You gravely urge your own audience to take action to escape the Lake of Fire. Yet your tone could only result in persuading fearful people to *"pray a prayer"* or meet a *"condition"* to *"write their name on the gift."* Instead, we are calling lost sheep not to reach up, but to fall down on their knees and repent of all self-righteousness to receive the gift already given. It would seem we really do have two different gospels and partnership with this difference would be difficult as you already know.

Your points are listed in gray below and my comments follow, referencing my points 1 through 5 above.

PASTOR'S POINTS HIGHLIGHTED WITH MY ANSWER FOLLOWING EACH POINT

1) Is all mankind elect? NO (Note- "elect" is from the Greek word "eklektos" which has four variations in the NT and is used a total of 55 times; the below is an exegetical summation of the above answer)

All mankind is not elect in every dimension. For example most of mankind is not elected to trust in Christ, but the wrath of God is still appeased for all mankind through the death of Christ. #1

a. Specific individuals (e.g. Ishmael; Esau) not chosen- the "children of God" are the "children of promise" (Rom. 9:8) according to "God's choice" (Rom. 9:11).

Esau was not elected for a believing heart or to be the ancestor of Christ, but he was chosen for his sins to be paid, along with all mankind. #1

b. Only a "remnant" of Israel was "chosen" the rest were hardened (Rom. 11:5-6); there is coming a day when "all Israel" will be saved (Rom. 11:25-32).

Most of Abraham's physical descendants are not chosen for faith. However, the day is coming when Christ's atonement for all mankind will be believed by all. #1

c. God has chosen some not all (I Corinthians 1:26-31).

True, only some are chosen to become Christians. Nonetheless, the sins of all mankind, believing and unbelieving, are still chosen for forgiveness. #1-2

d. Those whom God chooses He predestines to adoption and redeems through Christ's blood and makes them know the mystery of His will and gives to them an inheritance and seals them with the Holy Spirit (after believing in the Gospel of salvation)- who is the pledge of the believer's inheritance (Eph. 1:3-14; also see I Peter 1:1-2; note - although "elect" is not used in Rom. 8:28-30 the teaching is similar).

The blessings highlighted in Ephesians 1:1-10 are not the result of faith nor do those versus say any such thing. Instead these are the blessings granted to all the elect before faith, but only the believing elect are able to see these blessings. Ephesians 1:11, however, transitions to a second dimension of election, namely that the Ephesian Christians were chosen for belief to the praise of God's glory. #1. It is the same today. God's decision to pay for the sins of all mankind remains the great finished work of Christ for all mankind, yet very few are chosen to believe it.

e. Only believers in God's "living stone" which is "choice and precious" in God's sight are identified as a "chosen race" (I Peter 2:4-10).

Agreed. Believers are specially chosen and elected to believe and are the 'chosen race' mentioned in this verse. The unbelieving elect are not given this title. #1

f. Only those who have a "faith of the same kind" and a "true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory" can be "diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing" (II Peter 1:1-11).

Certainly. Only believers who acknowledge their election can make their election certain. Unbelievers, however, cannot see God's eternal love for them. They are blind to the blessings they have in Christ because they refuse to believe. #1

g. The Lamb, the Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him: "the called and chosen and faithful" will defeat the "beast: who was and is not and is about to come" and "those who dwell on the earth whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world." (Rev. 17:8-14; also see Rev. 13:7-10).

Agreed. Only believers stand with Christ during this time. #1-2. More at 3.b.

2) Some other verses that indicate that not all mankind is elect:

a. John 6:37, 44, 55- “all that the Father gives Me will come to Me...” – the fact that many do not come to Jesus indicates that they are not given to Jesus by the Father.

Agreed. God the Father, for the demonstration of grace, has not chosen to bring even most of mankind to faith in Christ. Yet that does not change the fact that his eternal wrath against their sin is still propitiated by the death of Christ. And if their sin is propitiated from God’s wrath, then who can possibly damn them? These unbelieving are deeply loved by Christ even though they remain unbelieving. However, only those chosen for faith come to Christ in humble repentance. #1-2

b. John 8:47- “...for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God.”

Agreed. These Jews were apparently not chosen for faith, at least at that time. #1

c. John 10:26-28- “But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow me...and they will never perish...”

Agreed. These Jews were not chosen for faith, but instead unbelief. If they persist in unbelief, if God does not open their eyes, they will be punished in Hades. #1

d. Acts 13:48 (first missionary journey; at Pisidian Antioch; following the “word of the Lord” on the second Sabbath) - “When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.” – the fact that not all believed indicates that not all (in that assembly) were appointed to eternal life.

Are you saying that this verse means that if someone hears the gospel and does not believe immediately that it is proved that they are not elected to salvation from the Lake of Fire? Do you side with Calvin in saying that their sins were never paid or with Lewis in saying that they never reciprocated love for God? I heard the gospel multiple times over multiple years before my eyes were opened to the truth. A better understanding of this verse is that the Apostles and the Holy Spirit are confronting unbelief just as Hosea did in Hosea 2:23 and Jesus did in John 10:26. #4. This Scripture could also be distinguishing between the destinies of the unbelieving to the fires of Hades versus the believers to paradise, since the Greek word translated eternal is ‘aionios’. #2-3

3) Is every man's name written in the Lamb's book of life? NO

This is the point upon which we disagree. #1

a. Following GWT judgment unbelievers are in the lake of fire- Rev. 21:7-8; 22:15. (Note- there is not one NT example of the Greek word "apistos" and its three variations [57 total usages] being used to describe angelic beings rather only human beings.)

Revelation 21:8 places eight sins on parallel footing. They are cowardice, unbelief, vileness, murder, fornication, sorcery, idolatry, and lying. Notice that the sin of unbelief is not even listed first by way of importance. Furthermore, because the sin of unbelief is included in the list as a peer with the sin of lying, we can legally conclude that the unbelieving truth teller and the believing liar will both be sentenced to the Lake of Fire. You and I are both liars yet the verse gives no indication that belief will exempt us from the verdict of damnation for our lying since unbelief is equal with lying on this list. Your whole emphasis seems to be that your "faith" has saved you from damnation to the Lake of Fire. However, this verse is not purposed to drive people to reach up and provide the "condition of faith" to be saved from the Lake of Fire. Impossible. Instead this verse is purposed to drive the lost sheep down on our knees to the foundation of election and trust that Christ has loved us from before the foundation of the world and paid for all our sin even though we are still liars and many of the things on this terrible list. The religious may continue to fool themselves into thinking their "faith" or self-righteousness is sufficient to exempt them from the condemnation of this verse. However, the truly believing boldly trust that only the electing grace of God will exclude us from this damnation because all mankind is guilty of these sins. You are in great error in your understanding of this verse. Your argument that "apistos" is never used to describe fallen angels is weak as an argument from the absence of evidence. I have written further about this verse in my article, [How Can You Say Revelation 21:8 Does Not Apply to Humans](#). The purpose of Revelation 21:7-8 is the final condemnation of the non-elect, fallen angels, and also as a warning to unbelieving elect humanity who persist in rejecting grace to drive them to faith. #4.

The key question that stands before us then is what is election? Months ago I mentioned the concept of the "unbelieving elect" and you seemed surprised and confused by the expression. Perhaps you think that since faith is required for salvation from the Lake of Fire that election is born the moment someone believes? However, election is clearly a reality from before the foundation of the world for each of God's chosen ones. Election is not merely God foretelling the future as to who will exercise their *free will* and make the good choice of faith. Election is his rock solid eternal decree. God's chosen ones are elect even before faith and thus are the "unbelieving elect" until faith, Romans 11:28.

b. People who dwell on the earth whose names are not in the Lamb's book of life worship the "beast of the sea" in opposition to God and His saints- Rev. 13:1-8 (also see Rev. 17:8).

Thank you for calling these verses to my attention. I can see how they lend to your interpretation. However, the Scripture and character of God's grace both support my understanding and so the clear Scripture should be used to interpret the less clear. Here are two possible explanations. First, Revelation 13:8 and 17:8 are not clear on the specific identity of those not written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Fallen angels could be in view. I understand Isaiah 66:22-24 to explain that fallen angels will live embodied upon the earth in the future. I write about this on number 8 of my article, *Ten Theological Absurdities*. Some theologians believe that angels lived embodied upon the earth in the past, so why not the future? However, I would not hinge my conclusions on speculation about embodied angels on the earth. Second, Exodus 32:33 suggests that someone's name can be blotted out of the Lamb's Book of Life. I understand this to be God speaking foolishness to the fool, Proverbs 26:4-5. If the names of the predestined can be blotted out then salvation is dependent upon human condition or a capricious God. Ultimately it is impossible that God's love and eternal plans for his chosen one will ever change such that names are blotted out of the Lamb's Book, or else grace would not be grace. Furthermore, it is demonstrated that God says to the unbelieving elect that they are not his sheep or acknowledged in the Lamb's Book, even though they are listed there because he later warmly calls the repentant, "*my people*." These verses could easily be explained by #4.

c. How many enter the new Jerusalem?...”but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life” in contrast to those who are “unclean...who practices abomination and lying.” Rev. 21:27

Are you saying that the elect are not impure and no longer do anything shameful or deceitful? The verse is not an exhortation to be good enough to somehow write our name in the Lamb's Book of Life through a *free will* decision of faith. You and I are both at times impure and do shameful things. This verse is purposed to encourage the believing elect that our sin cannot follow us into Heaven! That is awesome news! The verse also stands as a warning to the unbelieving elect to drive them to receive their election and forgiveness already given through faith in Jesus Christ. The verse is not intended to drive people to the work of conditional salvation. That is impossible. #1

4) Are there “unbelieving” elect upon physical death and/or at the beginning of the GWT judgment? NO

Psalm 139:8, Matthew 16:17-20, Matthew 25:31-46, Romans 3:3, Romans 11:28-32, 1 Peter 3:19, 1 Peter 4:6, and 2 Peter 2:1 all add up to show that God's love will not fail even for those who remain unbelieving at physical death and are punished in Hades. Furthermore, I think it interesting that the rich man in Hades called Abraham, "*Father*" and Abraham called him "*child*." It is not enough information to conclude that he was elect based on that alone, however, these affectionate titles are most curious if you think that the rich man is finally damned. 1 Peter 3:19 indicates also that Christ preached to those in Hades. What did he preach? 1 Peter 4:6. Furthermore, I've already mentioned that David thought he could even go to Sheol and yet not be outside of God's love, Psalm 139:8. Jesus also taught that the gates of Hades will be finally defeated by God's grace, Matthew 16:18. It is a fearful thought that those who reject grace will be punished in Hades even though their sins are completely forgiven, but better a fearful truth than the imaginary thought that religion can save us. Revelation 20:13-14 makes it clear that Hades is emptied and Matthew 25:31-46 gives the most complete account of the Great White Throne Judgment to come. Here are my thoughts on that in my article, *You Are Wrong About Matthew 25:31-46*. Of course the majority of the Scripture is focused on calling people to repent and trust in the love of Christ so we do not have a huge window into the world of those already passed. Yet we do know some things. 2 Peter 2:1-2 also makes it clear that false teachers will be sentenced to Hades even though they are redeemed. Boice goes to great lengths to deny the truth of this verse because it does not fit into Calvinism.

a. Election is always in conjunction with God's "salvation" call experienced through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the Gospel (Ephesians 1:3-14; Romans 8:28-30; Romans 10:14-17)

Yes, I see where the confusion is. I have already explained that Ephesians 1:3-10 says absolutely nothing about faith as the cause of election. Rather Ephesians 1:11-14 explains that faith is the receiving of forgiveness and of election already given. Note that Romans 8:28-30, the great chain of grace, says nothing about faith as a component of final salvation. There is no condition or even response of man listed in this great chain, but only the unconditional love of Christ for all his chosen people. If there were even the smallest condition dependent upon us, we would all be lost! I have written further here that justification is a work already finished at the cross, yet received as each one comes to faith as explained in my article, *Justified*. Romans 10:14-17 is our exhortation to tell the lost sheep the good news that their sins are already paid for, yet no one will believe apart from also being elected to believe. The prideful rejection of grace and unconditional love is evident in every generation. #1

b. John 6:37, 44, 55- "all that the Father gives Me will come to Me..."

Yes! If someone is a Christian, it is because he was chosen for belief. #1-2

c. Jesus' sheep hear His voice and follow Him- John 10:27

Yes! If someone is a Christian, it is because he was chosen for belief. #1-2

5) Is salvation by grace independent of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the Gospel? NO

Yes, this summarizes our greatest difference. You proclaim either that Christ provided for the possibility of salvation for all, or the certainty of salvation for a few. You then urge people to either provide the missing condition of faith, or to simply trust that they are one of the chosen few. Which do you proclaim again? Yet Jesus proclaimed that the sins of all mankind are fully paid apart from all our works and even our response of faith, Luke 23:34. And if our sins are paid, then the wrath of God is fully satisfied against all mankind. Thus we urge both the self-righteous and the unrighteous to believe the good news, while warning those who reject grace that they will be punished in the fires of Hades. Jesus warned about Hell because of his passionate love to spare the unbelieving from the fires of Hades. Once again, certainly not everyone is saved. That is, very few are saved from unbelief to Christian faith, transformed lives, and avoiding punishment in Hades. Faith is essential for all these blessings. The vast majority are not saved from punishment in Hades. Yet, based on the atoning sacrifice of Christ alone, the sins of all mankind are already paid for and thus not even God can damn them to the Lake of Fire. His decision has already been made.

a. The God of all grace (I Peter 5:10) is also the God of the Gospel (Romans 1:16-17) which is His power that leads the elect to saving faith (Romans 10:17).

The emphasis of Romans 1:16-17 and the arguments that follow in Romans concern salvation from sin and in particular religious hypocrisy. You will note that Romans does not mention Hades or the Lake of Fire one time! Those that believe Christ has already paid for our sin are transformed by the power and loving grace of God. #2. Now I am not saying that salvation from the Lake of Fire is not the grand conclusion of salvation or that we don't deserve to be eternally damned. However, I am saying that the main point of Romans is not fire insurance, but calling the believing elect to salvation from sin and to a transformed life. Romans 1:16-17 well notes that the power of the gospel is only for those who believe that their sins are forgiven. The remainder of mankind, who do not believe, even though their sins are also forgiven, are not saved from sin or a hardened heart toward God, and so cannot enjoy living in God's love.

b. Grace and faith are “friends” that work together in the saving operations of God- Eph. 2:8-9; Romans 9:6-10:17; Eph. 1:3-14

Absolutely. Grace does it all and Biblical faith trusts that all has been done by grace! However, when you speak, I think you are making faith to be some sort of activating ingredient in God’s love toward us? Faith does not change God’s heart toward us in the least nor his eternal destiny for the elect. However, faith does change our heart toward God. When you say grace and faith are friends, from your viewpoint, it sounds like you are saying grace and faith “work together” to save the individual. If that is what you are saying, then you have stepped away from Biblical faith to an understanding of faith that really is a work or condition provided by man. That is a dangerous thing to do. Paul wrote the book of Galatians to confront an entire church that had fallen away from a right understanding of grace. Galatians 3 does not highlight fine theological argument, but simply a crucified Christ. A right understanding of grace and the end of religious striving proceed from this fact. #1-5

c. It is the “word of God’s grace” (Acts 20:32) that brings “new birth” to those who hear and believe (Acts 11:15-17; I Peter 1:22-25); the “new birth” that is required for one to see/enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3,5).

Exactly. Only those chosen for faith enjoy the confidence that their sins have been already paid. Only those chosen for faith have been born again to a new heart. #1

6) Is faith a “work of man”? NO

Are you saying that faith is not “work” because it is granted only by God’s grace? I agree. Or are you saying that everyone has a *free will* to meet the condition of faith, but this condition supplied by man is not considered a “work”? If so you have compromised grace. Luther’s book *Bondage of the Will* is helpful reading to correct that error.

a. Faith is a necessary part of the operations of the saving grace of God- man is saved by grace through faith: both of which are part of the gift of God- Eph. 2:8-9.

Faith is evidence of the new birth and the beginning of a new and good heart towards God. There is no salvation from sin or exemption from Hades without faith. #1

b. Apart from faith man does not experience justification (Gen. 15:6; Romans 3:23-26) nor the new birth (John 1:12-13); nor does man have life/eternal life (John 5:24; I John 5:11-13).

Are you saying that faith initiates the new birth? I John 5:1 makes it clear that faith is the result of the new birth rather than vice versa. Regarding justification I understand that justification was completed at the cross such that the acquitting gavel has already pronounced our justification in Heaven. Now the Holy Spirit, God's great evangelist, is persuading individuals to receive our justification. I have written about this in my article, *Justified*. Biblical faith is not the activator of God's love for his people or else grace would not be grace. The false gospel says, "*trust Christ and you can be born again and forgiven.*" The true gospel says, "*You are already forgiven by Christ and only those born again will trust Him.*"

c. "Saving" faith is faith that hears the Gospel and "believes in the heart that God raised Him from the dead" and "confesses with the mouth Jesus as Lord (Romans 10:5-13); saving faith is also a "works-producing" faith (Eph. 2:10; James 2:14).

Amen! Certainly one cannot claim to have a heart changed toward God without faith that produces loving works. Salvation from sin means that real progress is made in leaving sin behind. However, once again if the doctrine of predestination is true in any sense whatsoever, then faith plays absolutely no part in adding our names to the Lamb's Book of Life or saving us from the Lake of Fire. No condition provided by man can save us from the holy wrath of God, but only the electing grace of God and the finished work of Jesus Christ. #2

7) Are fallen angels before God at the GWT judgment? NO

I believe some fallen angels will be judged there, 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6.

a. The false prophet and the beast are not there- Rev. 19:20. (Note- if the false prophet and/or the beast are men then "not all men are elect.")

Yes, as you say, The Beast and The False Prophet are already in the Lake of Fire before the Great White Throne Judgment. However, I also believe that The Beast and The False Prophet in Revelation are demonic. Read more in my articles, *Revelation 20:10*, *Fallen Angels at the Great White Throne Judgment*, and *Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News! (Part 2 with Grudem, Riddlebarger, Chilton, Summers, and Ewing)*.

b. The devil is not there- Rev. 20:10.

Agreed. He is already in the Lake of Fire before the Great White Throne Judgment.

c. The resurrected dead (unbelievers) are there; angelic beings do not experience “physical death” thus will never experience any kind of resurrection. (Note- the GWT judgment is the final judgment upon unbelievers; believer’s final judgment is the “Bema” seat judgment of II Cor. 5:10.)

We have a difference here. I believe that both unbelieving mankind and fallen angels are extracted from Hades and Thalassa to stand before the Great White Throne judgment. 2 Peter 2:4 makes it clear that some fallen angels are already locked up to be judged later. When are they judged? I believe they will be judged later at the Great White Throne judgment. These unredeemed angels are also the people on Jesus’ left in Matthew 25:31-46. Whether the imprisoned angels are “*resurrected*” or not I do not know, but Revelation 20:13 makes it clear that both Hades and Thalassa are fully emptied.

d. According to II Peter 2:4, “God did not spare angels when they sinned but cast them into hell (from the Greek word “tartaroo” which is literally translated as tartarus) and committed them to pits (from the Greek word “siros” which refers to a cave/pit) of darkness reserved for judgment.” Whether or not “tartarus” and these “pits of darkness” are one and the same as “hades” (Rev. 20:13-14) is a matter of discussion however there is no sense of these angels dying physically and thus being resurrected unto judgment at the GWT judgment. If these angels are in Hades then they remain there when Hades “gives up the dead” (Rev. 20:13) as well as when Hades is “thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:14).

To say that fallen angels will not be judged at the Great White Throne Judgment is to conclude more than is possible. The account of the Great White Throne Judgment in Matthew 25:41 makes it clear that these unredeemed fallen angels will stand before Christ for final judgment and be cast into the Lake of Fire, where Satan had already been tossed as you pointed out above. Note also that Matthew 25:41 explicitly says that the Lake of Fire is prepared for “*the devil and his angels.*” The Lake of Fire is not prepared for mankind who has been completely redeemed by the death of Christ. Instead the Lake of Fire is for the unredeemed, the fallen angels. Hebrews 2:14-16 also makes it clear that Jesus is not the helper fallen angels. They are unredeemed. However, 1 John 2:1-2 makes it doubly clear that Jesus did die for all mankind, the redeemed, whether

believing or unbelieving. Please read my article, *Fallen Angels at the Great White Throne Judgment.*

8) What is the “eternal state” of those who do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior?

a. ”Perish”- John 3:16 (note- Christ’s sheep will not perish- John 10:28).

Yes, the unbelieving will perish in the fires of Hades. Traditional interpretation assumes that the perishing is eternal. However, that is not the case for three reasons. First, the Greek word “*apollymi*” translated “*perish*” in John 3:16 is used numerous places in the New Testament to mean catastrophic loss, but not eternal loss, such as Matthew 2:13. Herod sought to kill Jesus, but even Herod knew he could not eternally destroy anyone. Second, the Greek word “*aionios*” translated “*eternal*” in John 3:16 might be referring to eternal, but could also refer to “*complete*” or “*whole*” life of Christian restored to fellowship with God. The Greek word “*aionios*” can mean “*age*,” “*epoch*,” “*duration*,” “*complete*,” and “*eternal*.” Thus believers live and reign during the Church Age and enjoy whole life, while unbelievers perish in the fires of Hades. Third, notice that a careful reading of John 3:1-21 states the positive that believers are saved from perishing, but there is no mention of Hades, the Lake of Fire, or eternal punishment for the unbelieving! This passage could even be understood to teach that believers are saved from the destruction of sin for a restored whole life, while the lives of unbelievers are destroyed by sin. Yet I do believe that the unbelieving are punished in the fires of Hades. #3

b. “Eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord”- II Thes. 1:9 (note- “destruction” is from the same word family as “perish” in the Greek- the Greek word “*apolluo*” [“*apollyon*”- Rev. 9:11]).

Again “*apollymi*” does not necessarily mean eternal destruction as just explained above. Furthermore “*aionios*” does not always mean eternal, but can mean “*age*,” “*duration*,” or even “*complete*.” Thus, those who reject their election will be punished for the duration of Hades and suffer complete loss. The contexts of the Scriptural passage, of the subject, and of grace are all required to properly interpret the meanings of “*apollymi*” and “*aionios*.” Furthermore there is strong evidence that “*from*” should be translated “*at*” in my article, *2 Thessalonians 1:6-10.* #3

c. “Destruction”- II Peter 3:7 (note above).

Agreed. The lives of unbelievers will be destroyed by the fruit of sin and punished in the fires of Hades by the wrath of God. However, this word alone does not require eternal destruction as already explained. There are

other types of destruction such as the destruction from the consequence of sin and the destruction found in Hades.

d. “Wide gate and the broad way” lead to “destruction”- Matt. 7:13 (note above).

Yes. Sadly for the purposes of his grace God only brings the few to trust that their sins are paid for while the self-righteous persist in rejecting the good news. Rather than cling to Christ, they cling to their cement life preserver. The good news is so plain and simple at times it is almost maddening to explain to unbelievers that they can trust that Christ has already paid for all their sin. Too often we cling to tradition, fear, rebellion, or ignorance instead of clinging to Christ.

e. Those who do not “receive the love of the truth so as to be saved” will “perish”, II Thes. 2:10 (note above).

Yes, unbelievers will perish through the consequences of their sin as well as punishment in Hades.

f. Eternal fire and punishment- Matt. 25:41, 46.

I understand that Matthew 25:31-46 is speaking about the Great White Throne Judgment at the precipice of the Lake of Fire. Thus, I believe that the unredeemed on Christ's left are the fallen angels, while the redeemed on his right are the unbelieving humans, both just extracted from Hades. Those on Christ's right are given grace, while those on his left are damned to the Lake of Fire for The Ages of The Ages. Thus I agree with you that “*aionios*” in this case might be eternal based on the context of the passage. Note that Hanson, whose work I referenced above, tries to interpret this judgment to be other than eternal, but as I mentioned I disagree with his understanding. Though, I have considered the possibility of “*apokatastasis*” that would include even that final salvation of the demons from the Lake of Fire. Check out the chart in my article, *Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News!*

Note also that the salvation of those on his right is not a second chance! Salvation was never a chance in the first place! Since Christ has already served as the vicarious substitute for all mankind, even the sins of the wicked, unbelieving humans in Hades are completely paid. The wrath of God is propitiated and it would be impossible that they could be damned to the Lake of Fire. For the same reason that I cannot go to the Lake of Fire, since Christ paid for my sin, they likewise cannot go to the Lake of Fire because their sins are paid... whether they believe it or not. Who will damn them if God himself has already paid for their sin? The salvation of the redeemed is based solely on the work of Christ at the cross. To assert

otherwise is to impugn grace with a condition. To add condition to grace is to follow the path of 2 Peter 2:2.

g. Lake of fire and brimstone- Rev. 20:15; 21:8 (the “second death”); 22:15 (“outside”).

Yes, certainly the Lake of Fire is for The Ages of The Ages and the sentence of Satan and his demon following.

h. “Eternal death” (I John 5:11-13; by implication).

The phrase “*does not have life*” could easily be understood to mean “*has not yet*” believed or received their eternal life. You also would agree that an unbeliever does “*not have life*,” YET. In fact this understanding is consistent with the Holy Spirit’s goal to drive people to faith in Christ.

i. The “wrath of God”- Col. 3:6.

Yes, the wrath of God is upon the unbelieving, even though their sins are paid and they are deeply loved by God. This wrath is not eternal wrath, or even fatherly wrath, since the unbelieving are not yet his children. Instead this is Holy wrath against sin and the sinful nature of the unregenerate. It is the wrath that burned against me while I lived in unbelief.

j. “Die in their sins”- John 8:24.

Yes, the unbelieving die in their sins, remain unregenerate, and enter the fires of Hades as a fit punishment for creatures that hate the God of love and his grace. Some others suggested that I taught that the time in Hades was a way to “*work*” one’s way back into God’s grace. I have taught no such thing, but instead that the fires of Hades are a fit punishment for the unbelieving who are unregenerate and hate God by nature. Those in Hades hate grace and the truth that God loves them equally with all mankind. Jesus words “*die in their sins*” does not say anything about eternal death, but only that they remain unregenerate as they pass from this world.

9) Must a man believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior before physical death to enter into God’s Kingdom? YES

Yes, most certainly. Unbelievers do not reign in Christ’s Kingdom, as discussed in Revelation 20. Yet Christ’s Kingdom is still not the end of this world. The final judgment at the Great White Throne Judgment is not until the commencement of eternity when the grace of God is proved finally victorious even for the unbelieving humans punished in Hades.

a. Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3, 5); one is “born again” by “receiving Him (i.e. Christ)”/”believing in His name” (John 1:12-13).

Exactly, without faith one cannot see the truth. However, just because some cannot see God’s love for them does not mean that God does not love them. That would be like a child who hides his own eyes and then thinks his parents cannot see him. There is no hiding from the love of God. I’ve written some about that in my article, *John 3:36 Offers No Optimism*.

b. “It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment” (Hebrews 9:27).

Yes. There is judgment and giving account to the Lord at each one’s death. However, this verse or the surrounding context says absolutely nothing about the Lake of Fire or eternal judgment.

10) Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ:

a. Christ died for all sin- Isaiah 53:6

Yes!

b. Christ died for the world- John 3:16

Yes!

c. Christ died for His church- Eph. 5:25

Yes!

d. Christ died for me- Gal. 2:20

Yes!

e. Christ’s death is appropriated by those who believe- Romans 3:21-26 and not appropriated by those who do not believe (I Peter 2:7-8).

Yes! Believers receive the blessings of God’s love because we believe it. The unbelieving reject God’s love and their election and suffer because of it. My favorite passages on this subject are Romans 5:17 and 2 Corinthians 5:15. Both passages make it clear that Christ loves all mankind and has paid for all mankind’s sin, but only those who believe are able to *LIVE* for God! Just because someone rejects God’s love does not mean that God

stops loving them. A mere offer of love from God is totally silly. However, those who reject God's love will be punished severely. The "appropriation" of God's love does not cause God to love us. He loved us while we hated him. Romans 5:10 even goes further to say we were reconciled to God through Christ while we were yet his enemies, before we had faith! So the "appropriation" of Christ's death changes our hearts toward God, but God's heart toward us was determined long before that.

I began the paragraph with a "yes" of agreement, but I do not think we agree. It seems you are saying that we must apply the payment of Christ's death to our account ourselves through faith. If I understand properly, you are saying that salvation is grace plus the human condition of faith, an unfortunate perversion of simply trusting Christ.

f. The Bible teaches all of the above and so must we!

As already stated, above your words betray a curious confession. I am confident that Christ has paid for my sins, because he has paid for the sins of all mankind. Yet you seem confident he has paid for yours with uncertainty about all mankind. Each one must personally receive God's love to have a changed heart toward God and be saved from our terrible sinful nature. However, there is no such thing as a personal atonement. Instead, Christ gave his heart for a whole people, that is all mankind. Christ did not die for individuals, but Hebrews 10:10 says "*once for all*".

11) A few verses that indicate the fact of "assurance of salvation":

Yes, only believers can have assurance.

a. Gal. 3:26- "For you are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."

Yes, only believers are given and receive the title of Sons of God.

b. Eph. 2:8- "For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."

Yes, salvation from a corrupted heart and punishment in Hades is realized through faith. Since the Scripture is clear that God loved us even as enemies apart from faith, we can say that faith played no part in saving us from his eternal wrath, but instead faith is the receiving of the gift already given.

c. I John 3:2- "Beloved, now we are children of God..."

Yes, only believers are children of God, though God is a prolific adopter!

d. I John 5:13- “these things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

Amen!

12) Basis of “assurance of salvation”:

a. witness of God’s word- I John 5:11-13

b. witness of God the Holy Spirit- Rom. 8:16

c. witness of the new creation in Christ- II Cor. 5:17

Yes, agreed with all this.

13) NT verses re: “Hades” (total of eleven; Greek word is “hades”): Matt. 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:24, 27, 31; Rev. 1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14.

Yes, I think we agree that Hades and the Lake of Fire are not the same place, though you conclude that destiny to the one requires destiny to the other.

14) NT verses re: “Hell” (total of twelve; Greek word is “geenna”- most pronounce as “gehenna”): Matt. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6

I am not sure if Gehenna and Hades are synonyms. Hades is definitely a location that houses souls after death. It is possible that Gehenna, the trash pile, may emphasize the destruction of sin in this life. I hope to study that further.

15) What about the following verses?

a. Romans 11:32- “...that He may show mercy to all.”

i. “All”- both Jew and Greek

ii. “All”- “all Israel” (11:26)

You once taught that this verse means that a future generation of Israelites will all be saved. You are right that the majority of Romans 11 is speaking about the salvation of the Jews. However, Romans 11:30-31 swings the conversation back to both Jew and Gentile. Thus Romans 11:32 stands as Paul’s grand conclusion of the *entire* argument of the book of Romans concerning the redemption of both Jew and Gentile. My book exegetes this verse.

b. I Timothy 4:10- “...living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.”

- i. “All men”- Jew and Greek; male and female; slave and free
- ii. “All”- doesn’t always mean “all in absolute totality” (e.g. “...the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth...” in Eph. 1:10 does not apply to rebellious angels unless one wants to extend universalism to angelic beings as well)

Certainly all does not mean all in every context. However, the context of grace helps the believer to properly interpret Scripture. In the case of 1 Timothy 4:10 the Holy Spirit’s use of “*especially*” is a very curious expression that best fits with my understanding. Believers are especially saved from sin, though all are saved from damnation! It makes no sense to say believers are especially saved from damnation while unbelievers are not saved at all.

c. I John 2:1-2- “And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.”

- i. “World”- similar to usage in John 3:16
- ii. Christ’s atonement does satisfy the just personal wrath of the thrice holy God regarding the sin of all men; a “satisfaction” which is appropriated through faith

Your understanding as stated above would put you clearly out of even any Calvinist camp. The work of Christ is apart from any condition provided by man and to state otherwise is to add works to the grace of God. The work of Christ is completed and finished only for the elect of God. Though your biggest dispute with me is the scope or extent of election within mankind, I feel that the much greater difference between us is our understanding of Biblical grace and faith. Though I may misunderstand what you mean by “*appropriated*.” If you mean “*activated*” or “*made effective*,” then yes, you have added works to grace. If you mean “*receive grace already given to our account such that our heart is changed toward God, though God’s heart is already determined*,” then we happily agree.

This question needs to be answered first before there is any fruit to be born in discussing the scope of election. Biblical grace must be understood, swallowed, and digested before anyone will be happy to learn that Christ also loves all mankind as well. Until the unconditional electing grace of God is received, all efforts to reach God or save one’s self will be the mere religion of man. It has been said there are only two religions in the whole world, the “*do*” religion, and the “*done*” religion. The “*satisfaction*” of Christ is a finished work already granted to the elect with no appropriation needed whatsoever. The heart of God is decided and now he seeks to win the hearts of his lost sheep, Isaiah 30.

d. Romans 5:12-21

i. Adam is the federal head of all those who are born (in sin)

Yes.

ii. Christ is the federal head of all those who are born-again (through faith in Christ)

No. Rather, the passage says that Christ is the new federal head of all mankind as concluded in Romans 5:18-19.

e. II Corinthians 5:19- "...God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself..."

i. If all are reconciled then why the need to "be reconciled" (5:20)

This is a most excellent question! Perhaps this is the discussion point that God can use to bring us together. Many have an eastern religion worldview with good and evil pitted against each other like a Yin and Yang and the future in the balance, including the salvation of any particular individual. However, this is not a Christian worldview. The Scripture tell us of a God who has determined to show off his grace in the salvation of his particular people. Through the cross of Christ he accomplished the impossible of maintaining his perfect Holiness, Justice, and Love in the most amazing way. No device of man could have imagined it or foreseen it. Furthermore, he increased the odds against himself to further show off his grace decreeing that each of his chosen ones is born opposing him by their birth nature. He did this so that he can show off his grace, miraculously bringing us to receive his love, one by one. Every single one of his chosen ones is already reconciled to God through Christ as far as God's heart and his eternal plans for his redeemed. Meanwhile our hearts are not reconciled to him until the Holy Spirit works his miracle within each individual, one by one. Though many religions are in competition with the Holy Spirit, he will not be defeated, nor will he lose one! We need to be reconciled to God because God has determined to show off his grace in converting his enemies into loving sons. We are already reconciled to God for his part and there is no escaping his love. However, until we become a Christian, we are not reconciled to God as far as our heart is concerned. Sadly most people die physically in unbelief, not having received God's love.

ii. If we are the righteousness of God in Christ then why the need to "become the righteousness of God in Him"...(5:21)

As already explained above with Romans 5:10-11 as my proof.

f. Summation- these verses highlight that:

i. Salvation is available for all men (with no discrimination- i.e. nationality; gender; social standing; etc.).

Salvation is not a possibility or merely available, but a certainty for the elect. If salvation is a mere availability, we all are lost. There is no hope ever!

ii. Man must believe to enter into this salvation.

Faith is certainly required to be saved from a heart hardened toward God. However, faith does absolutely nothing to change God's loving heart toward the elect. God's love and grace is unchanging, unconquerable, and unending!

iii. Believers have the responsibility to appeal to men to be reconciled to God!

I appeal that you would know that God has loved you from before the foundation of the world. Your blessed eternal destiny is guaranteed apart from all conditions. Do you deny this election? Saving faith in Christ is the eye glasses enabling you to see God's eternal love for you. We must leave self-righteousness to receive his righteousness. Be reconciled to God!

CONVERSATIONS WORTH NOTING

One of my favorite questions is to ask people whether they think God forgives us before or after we ask. I believe that Christ has forgiven all mankind without anyone asking, Luke 23:34. This is the heart of grace. Grace is not mere theology, but instead history. Mankind nailed Christ to the cross and while we remained his enemies, Jesus prayed to the Father asking for our forgiveness. Praise God! The good news is that we are already forgiven! Any other answer is simply the religion of man reaching up to God. I mention all this because in casual conversation, a church attendee asserted that most certainly we are not forgiven before, but only after, we ask for forgiveness. I was stupefied. I did not argue, but this is not the gospel of grace that I received or teach.

Two others asked if I compromised truth to accommodate my unbelieving loved ones. Of course I do have a great concern about the destiny of the unbelieving. My great hope is that Christ also died for them just as he did for me and it is now impossible for the redeemed to be damned. Yet, those who reject the grace Christ will be punished in Hades, even if they are our family, friends, enemy, or even our Pastor.

Another insisted that *free will*, though not taught, is implied by Scripture as the answer to the Calvinism / Arminianism wrangle. He is right that *free will* is not taught in Scripture, but quite wrong that it is implied. Instead, the bondage of the will to sin is plainly taught. Again I did not argue, but reflected that Biblical teaching is needed on this point to properly give glory to God. Luther taught that to claim to be saved by free will was an affront to grace and confirmation of one's unbelief. Spurgeon also agreed.

Another church attendee suggested that it does not matter if one believes as I, plus what you believe, because then you just have extra insurance. However, you and I understand that this is not true. Our understandings not only differ on the scope of election, but even more primarily, we appear to differ on the definition of saving faith. I would like to understand your view more completely before saying too much because I have not been able to figure out if you are squarely Arminian or Calvinist. I am neither, but you also disagree with me. It seems to me that some of your objections compromise the grace of God and add a condition to God's unconditional love. You seem to say on one hand that Christ died for the sins of everyone, but in name only. Then you say he died effectively only for the sins of believers. I see no Biblical support for the idea that Christ's death is divided into two categories. The death of Christ was a single gracious act to give his life as an atoning sacrifice for all His chosen people. The cross of Christ is a finished work making payment for sins. One should not say we are saved by the finished work of Christ and then say we need to "*appropriate it*" or "*sign it*" or even "*believe it*" in order for his work to be finally effective. Christ's work on the cross was completed apart from anything we could possibly add. I hope to talk with you further to understand your view more fully.

Another suggested that since God only effectively died for a small subset of mankind we really cannot know who these chosen ones are until they come to faith in Christ. If that is true, then logically there is no way that anyone can say that Christ effectively died for them either. On what basis could they say it? On a condition they provide? On subjective experience? Feelings? They could claim to have special revelation beyond the Scriptures that their sins are atoned while also claiming that the sins of a majority of mankind are not atoned. But the facts from Scripture are simple. Christ became a man and died a vicarious death on the cross as the new federal head of all mankind. Why is there resistance to the good news that Christ loves and has effectively paid for the sins of all mankind? My clarification of the gospel is faithful to Scripture, logically sound, and resonates with God as the benevolent gracious Father that he claims to be.

Another church attendee said if all mankind is saved from the Lake of Fire, then there is no reason for him to stay with his wife or to be

good. Unfortunately his unbelief is exposed as he does not know God as a loving Father, but only as the giant policeman in the sky.

Another also said if all are saved, then why do we invest all this effort in following Christ? This very question exposes a misunderstanding about grace and the reasons that we pursue Christ. The question implies that we are saved by what we do. I guess if we think that God is the giant judge in the sky, then we will also think that our status with him is based on our performance. If we think that our salvation is conditional, based on a condition that we have to supply, then we will think that our salvation is dependent upon the effort we invest. However, returning love to God who first loved us is the reason we serve Christ. We also respect his hand of punishment, but with no fear of damnation. This same person also claimed that the vast majority of unbelievers think everyone will be saved. My experience with evangelism is that most unbelievers are like the Jews who think that evil people are eternally damned, but they will be saved because they have met the condition to be good enough.

Recently someone told me that they felt both Arminianism and Calvinism go further than can be Biblically supported. I feel the same. Unfortunately, debates between these two camps could be compared to two school bullies fighting about who God loves after both failed an exam about love. The dubious middle ground between these two camps offers no safe haven either. I invite you to read my book again and see that there is no compromise between these two systems. I then invite you to consider that I have reasonably and Biblically answered all your objections above, as well as glorified Christ as the God of all grace. The cross of Christ has unconditionally purchased eternal salvation for *ALL* his people and he will not lose one of his chosen, though many will be punished in Hades for their unbelief.

OTHER IMPORTANT POINTS WORTH NOTING

1) Beginning from Genesis 1:1 you will get deep into the Old Testament before there is even a possible reference to eternal damnation. There is not even one reference in Genesis which brings you to 1,806 BC. If we assume a creation date of 4,000 BC then 2,194 years of human history passed without one warning about eternal damnation. That is more than one third of human history! God did make it clear that a redeemer was coming in Genesis 3:15 to reverse the works of Satan. God revealed enough that men began to call on his name, Genesis 4:26. But the silence about eternal damnation seems very strange. You might argue that since salvation is all of grace, then God is not even obligated to warn the wicked of the great danger before them or even to tell us the means of escape. However, that does not fit well with the nature of our loving God and his mission to save mankind. The point is that God himself is not anxious or worried about the

eternal destiny of mankind because our destiny lies fully in his hands and not our choices. He is not on the street selling fire insurance in a panic to change the destinies of men. Instead our destinies were written from before the foundation of the earth. He does not warn the first third of human history about eternal damnation because human beings can never go to the Lake of Fire. Praise to Jesus.

2) I've also wondered about your view of the unborn and infants. Many Christians believe that the unborn and infants are granted salvation apart from faith. Do you believe this is the case or do you believe people cannot be saved until they make a volitional profession of faith? If you do believe eternal salvation hangs in the balance for the unborn and infants then having children could be viewed as a form of Russian Roulette with damnation. Why risk it? Perhaps you believe in an "*age of accountability*" or a "*covenant*" to Christian parents, but then you also believe there is salvation apart from faith. Yet, you object strongly to the idea that there is any salvation from the Lake of Fire apart from a volitional choice of faith in Christ. The Bible never discusses an "*age of accountability*" or "*covenant*" to Christian parents. However, the gospel proclaims that the sins of all mankind are fully atoned, including the unborn and infants. Hopefully Christian parents tell their kids the good news!

3) There is at least a small irony that I agree with Arminians on one point and Calvinists on another point, yet they often divide. They are united in their opposition to the idea that Christ saves all mankind. So then is the test of orthodoxy that some human beings must go to the Lake of Fire *regardless* of the salvation recipe? Whoa! Jesus Christ is the God of all grace!

4) I heard someone say, "*God loves you unconditionally, but...*" I heard another say, "*Christ died for sinners, but...*" Or again, "*It is a free gift, but...*" I laughed, then I cried. There are no "*but's*" after grace. Instead, after our sin, there is "*...but God who is rich in mercy!*"

5) Evangelical churches boast about the "*finished work of Christ.*" This is a beautiful phrase. Yet, I see that it means different things to different people. I believe that the death of Christ signed the guarantee for every one of his chosen people and it actually is a finished work. However, you say that grace is not finished until "*faith*" is added. Why not, instead, simply trust in God's truly finished work on the cross?

6) It is short sighted to claim that Christ loves you, while claiming that he did not die for all, or only nominally died for all, or even being uncertain about others. It is also short sighted to claim to "*appropriate*" or "*apply*" the work of Christ to yourself. The first is an offense to the atonement and the second an offense to grace.

7) Faith that claims to be the condition for salvation from the Lake of Fire is not Biblical faith resting in the grace of God and resulting in a transformed heart. Faith defined as a condition to God's eternal love is a human work that ultimately rejects grace, rejects God's unconditional love, and cannot save from hypocrisy. Currently I am reading the book *Hope Beyond Hell* by Gerry Beauchemin. His website is www.hopebeyondhell.net. I was not aware of his book before writing my own, but it is evidence that the message of grace is propelling many to question traditional thoughts about eternal damnation. Of course his book is simply the word of man, but then again so is tradition.

I am confident that the Lord is at work. If he happily brings us together again in the future, here is a draft statement of faith that could be a starting point for us.

WE BELIEVE...

1. In one true God, existing eternally as one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, John 14:9-21, who is in essence spirit, John 4:24, light, 1 John 1:5, and love, 1 John 4:8.
2. That the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments are the unique, inerrant, inspired Word of God in the original autographs, and the final authority in all matters of faith and conduct, 2 Tim 3:16.
3. In the sovereignty and active rule of God in creation, the fall, history, revelation, miracles, prophecy, redemption, and final judgment, Romans 8:20-21.
4. That man was created by God in His image, but that since Adam's fall, all men are sinful and by nature deserve God's wrath, Ephesians 2:3.
5. That Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, fully human and fully divine, eternally existing as God, yet born in time of a virgin, and that He lived a sinless and perfect life, 2 Timothy 2:5.
6. In the historic death of Jesus as the full and only atonement, guaranteeing loving forgiveness for the sins of all mankind, in His bodily resurrection from the dead, and in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, 1 John 2:1-2.
7. That all mankind is justified by the loving grace of God and redeemed on the basis of the death of Christ, which is received through faith, Ephesians 2:8-9.
8. That the Holy Spirit is the effective agent in regeneration, bringing individuals to faith and transformed lives, 2 Corinthians 3:18.
9. In one universal church, Christ's Body, to which all believers belong, and in particular churches accountable to God, led by elders who rule in

doctrine and discipline, while acknowledging individual conscience, 1 Timothy 5:17, 1 John 2:27.

10. That believing mankind is rewarded in paradise after death, while unbelievers suffer punishment in Hades after death merited by their sinful nature and their rejection of the grace of Christ, Luke 16:19-31.
11. In the future, visible, physical return of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory, Titus 2:13.
12. In the final resurrection of redeemed mankind to the enjoyment of God forever, and the damnation of those excluded from the Book of Life to the Lake of Fire prepared for the Devil and his angels for the ages of the ages, Matthew 25:31-46 and Revelation 20:10.

ALTERNATIVELY, CONSIDER A SIMPLE OUTLINE OF CHOICES

This could help me to better understand your beliefs. Then I could either be persuaded to your understanding or persuade you to my understanding. Here are six possibilities to consider.

1. Victorious Gospel

- a. Christ's death satisfied the wrath of God for all mankind.
- b. Believers are saved from sin to paradise, unbelievers are punished in Hades.
- c. All mankind is saved from the Lake of Fire, prepared for the Devil & his angels.
- d. This view is faithful to Scripture and faithful to the character of God's grace.
- e. Both feet are planted solidly on both the depth and breadth of God's love.

2. Calvinism

- a. Christ's death satisfied the wrath of God for a subset of mankind.
- b. The Holy Spirit effectively brings the chosen subset to repentance and faith.
- c. Those punished in Hades are also damned to the Lake of Fire.
- d. This view is like the Jews who claimed to be elect while gentiles are not elect.
- e. One foot is planted on the depth of God's love, but the other foot on hypocrisy.

3. Arminianism

- a. Christ's death potentially satisfies the wrath of God for all mankind.
- b. Individual people exercise their *free will* to accept Christ and then are saved.
- c. Those punished in Hades are also damned to the Lake of Fire.
- d. This view reminds me of the graceless religions of the gentile world.
- e. One foot is planted on the breadth of God's love, the other on human condition.

4. Mediation

- a. Christ's death satisfies God's wrath effectively for some, nominally for the rest.
- b. Two mediating methods
 - i. The Holy Spirit effectively brings the chosen subset to repentance and faith.

- ii. Individual people exercise their free will to accept Christ and then are saved.
 - c. Those punished in Hades are also damned to the Lake of Fire.
 - d. This view is really Calvinism or Arminianism in disguise or double mindedness.
5. Simple faith and the Victorious Gospel is wrong
- a. Simple faith that all people are sinners and Christ died for sinners.
 - b. Sinners are invited to trust Christ, but avoid debate and theology.
 - c. The Victorious Gospel is wrong because unbelievers are certainly damned.
 - d. This view is unfair to call the Victorious Gospel wrong without Scripture.
 - e. One foot appears to be planted on God's love, but the other on tradition.
6. Simple faith and the Victorious Gospel may be right
- a. Simple faith that all people are sinners and Christ died for sinners.
 - b. Sinners are invited to trust Christ, but with ignorance of the extent of God's love.
 - c. The Victorious Gospel sounds hopeful, and they may want to learn more.
 - d. This view appears interested in Scripture and grace more than tradition.
 - e. One foot appears to be planted on grace, but no certainty of who God loves.

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE?

I have been admonished to argue no further. So I will break fellowship with Arminianism and Calvinism in pursuit of Christ. Perhaps, openness about these differences will allow us to discuss God's grace more openly in the future. I would enjoy that very much.

Is “Free-Will” Faith Saving Faith?

And now I ask myself another hard question...

SELF>> Is “free will” faith saving faith?

*ME>> I have consistently italicized the expression *free will* throughout my entire book. You may have guessed that I have no faith in our *free will*. I have written at length about the idea in my article, *A Quintessential Defense of Free Will*. Now the big remaining question: is the gospel at odds with the idea of *free will*? If someone claims to have effected their salvation from the Lake of Fire through their *free will* choice of faith, does that qualify as saving faith? Will this “*free will faith*” transform their hearts from self-righteousness as well?*

Historically Calvinists have differed in their answer to this question. Consider two extremes from respected theologians in the past. Cornelius Van Til, a respected Reformed theologian, maintained a very accommodating view that Arminian Christians ought to be welcomed as brothers even though he had a

radically different understanding of grace than they. He was quoted as saying, “*Arminians are good Christians and better-behaved Christians than many a Calvinist.*” Though, Van Til was not consistent in his accommodation. Read about Van Til here http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cornelius_Van_Til. However, Augustus Montague Toplady, an Anglican cleric and writer of the hymn, *Rock of Ages*, was a major Calvinist opponent of John Wesley’s Arminian faith. Though Wesley is also respected by Christendom for his contribution of many hymns in our hymnals today, his *free will* understanding of salvation was rejected as thoroughly anti-gospel by Toplady. Read about Toplady here http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustus_Toplady.

So what is a Christ-like view of this? Let me offer my opinion with four propositions.

1.

No doubt the big concern that established orthodoxies have with my happy thought that Jesus is the savior of all mankind is ultimately that they do not believe he is the *effective* savior of all mankind, though each for different reasons. Perhaps, their concern is that I might cause people to miss their true salvation recipe. However, I propose that the biggest problem is a step before answering the question about the extent of salvation. There is a much bigger concern than answering the question of the percentage of humans beings actually saved by Christ. Ultimately God himself will determine the extent of his grace.

Yet each of us will individually give account to the Lord and the real concern for each of us is answering the question, what constitutes saving faith for even one person in the first place? What is the essence of saving faith? Religious people of all persuasions agree that one might *profess* faith, but what really matters is to *possess* faith. If we understand the wrath of God against sin, we must be zealous to possess saving faith to be ready stand before the judge, Jesus Christ.

2.

We can see why common religious models reduce the focus of Christian salvation to rescuing human beings from eternity in the Lake of Fire. We want to avoid eternal suffering! We may not be so concerned about the sin in our character that we have become so comfortable with, but we do want eternal bliss. So what salvation recipes can we pick from?

Arminians view the salvation of each individual as “*in the balance*” and yet to be determined by each individual’s *free will* choice of faith and obedience. Limited atonement Calvinists view salvation as certain for the

chosen few, but they say we cannot know who the chosen ones are until particular individuals are persuaded to have “*faith*” that Christ died for them. The reason they cannot know who is chosen is because they also believe that Christ did not make payment for the sins of all mankind, but only some. Therefore, their elect are an invisible subset not indicated with any observable sign so they cannot know who they are. Regardless, the common focus of both of these models is the provision of fire insurance.

I propose instead that the focus of the Great Commission is NOT selling fire insurance, but the radical transformation of the individual from self-righteous pride and hypocrisy to Christ-like humility and service, that is salvation from sin. The gospel declares that God has already paid for all the sins of all mankind and commands us to repent and believe it. The fate of the elect is *already* guaranteed and written in the Lamb’s Book of Life from eternity past, Ephesians 1. No one’s eternal destiny is “*in the balance,*” but only in the hands of Christ. Faith in Christ is not a pen to write your own name there, but instead the eye glasses to see your name already written there by Christ. Jesus has made the ground level at the foot of his cross for all humanity.

Our Heavenly Father’s purpose is to demonstrate his grace, having forgiven the sins of all mankind -- both the believing and the unbelieving. This understanding empties faith of all works and removes all conditions from grace so that the praise goes to Christ alone for the salvation of His people. Faith cannot add anyone’s name to the Lamb’s Book of Life, but only open our eyes to the fact. The point is that we are saved by grace which is received through faith. Faith does not effect our salvation from eternal fire, but it does effect a change in our self-righteous hearts.

Anyone who agrees with the Biblical doctrine of predestination must also agree that the names in the Lamb’s Book of Life are a definite list of people already determined and penned from before the foundation of the world. Believers are those who simply trust that their name is there through faith in Christ. Unbelievers then are those who reject their election, such as Esau. Those who die without faith will be punished in Hades, even though their sins are completely paid.

These wicked unbelievers maintain their own self-righteous distinction from the remainder of sinful humanity and reject the precious blood of Christ, no matter how religious they may appear. Thus they will not escape punishment in the afterlife for their crimes against Christ. They reject their own election, yet even so I believe that their election by grace will not fail to extract them from Hades and finally save them from the Lake of Fire in the end as I have already fully explained, Romans 11:28.

You might ask why I would bother to jeopardize my respected position in religious circles to insist this point. As a Christian, I have been entrusted with an understanding that I am saved by grace alone and seek to be faithful to the message that the only difference between me and the unbelieving is that I believe our sins are already paid for and forgiven while they do not believe it. The point is that God hates religion! Why not quit “*playing church*” and be my Christian brother?

3.

In light of these facts, do the Arminian Christian and the Limited atonement Calvinist possess saving faith? If predestination has already guaranteed salvation from the Lake of Fire for the elect apart from works, then the only question remaining is: are the Arminian Christian and the Limited atonement Calvinist saved from the sin of self-righteousness and saved from punishment in Hades? Have they received the grace that exterminates self-righteousness? Or will they join the unbelieving and be punished in Hades for holding to “*forms of religion*” that miss the real deal?

It seems clear from the New Testament that all that is required is simple repentant faith in Christ to be saved. So a true Christian might sport any label provided that his heart is bowed before Jesus. Grace must allow for the fact that the heart can be true while the head is still confused.

Yet the New Testament also places a knife edge along the line of salvation by grace which IS saving and salvation by works which IS NOT saving. Those who reject their election and the grace of God in favor of straw will be punished for the duration in Hades.

Again, God hates religion! As such, the Arminian Christian cannot answer the question as to why they chose Christ and others did not without suggesting a work of man such as their *free will* choice of faith. Their definition of “*faith*” is NOT simple trust in the finished work of Christ for all His people, but instead it is a “*faith*” loaded with works that supplant grace as the condition of salvation. Their faith / work plus the supposed “*general*” offer of salvation to all mankind is their hope. How can their heads be bowed maintaining this view? Their theology openly confesses that they themselves made the difference in their salvation and not the precious grace of Christ. They are rejecting the grace of God in favor of religion. We are warned that Hades is a fit punishment for those who reject grace.

Perhaps the Limited atonement Calvinist definition of “*faith*” passes the bar. Limited atonement Calvinists are persuaded to have “*faith*” that Christ died for them, while they also believe that Christ did not die for all. They suggest that we cannot know who the elect are until specific individuals place faith in Christ. Stop. Read that sentence again a couple times. Ultimately by

their own confession these people are logically saying that they cannot have confident knowledge that they are elect, either. What special revelation, in addition to the Scriptures, do they have to confidently claim that Christ paid for their sins and did not pay for the sins of others? Christian faith is rooted in the truth of Scripture and historic fact that Christ became a man and vicariously atoned for the sins of *ALL* mankind through his substitutionary death. Assurance must stand on this objective fact and nothing else. Calvinist "*faith*" is not faith built on the rock of Jesus Christ, but built on a hypocritical self-deception. Again, we are warned that Hades is a fit punishment for those who reject grace.

4.

Yet there is such a thing as a good Calvinist. I once shared my view of Christian faith with a friend. I explained that true faith is merely receiving what Christ has already finished for His people. True faith does not change God's heart toward us, but radically changes our heart toward God. He then said the terrible thing about my view is that everyone who believes it eventually concludes that all mankind is saved from the Lake of Fire. I've never received a better compliment in my entire life! So I'll take the label of a good Calvinist because I also believe that the atonement is "*limited*." Jesus' love is limited to all mankind, but he has not atoned for the sin of fallen angels who will be cast into the Lake of Fire.

My last proposition is that those who are born again, have truly received grace, and possess true faith must not maintain ambivalence or objection to the idea that Christ paid for the sins all mankind. Friends, mankind's salvation is also the salvation of each individual, Romans 11:16. Join me and happily embrace the salvation of all God's people!

If the first fruit is holy, so is the lump. If the root is holy, so are the branches.

Romans 11:16 (WEB)

Will you reject your election by grace to salvation in favor of religion and conditional salvation? Why not laugh and rejoice trusting that your sins are already forgiven as well as the sins of all mankind?

Is Revelation 21-22 About The Church, The Last Age, or Eternity?

SOME>> Is Revelation 21-22 about The Church, The Last Age, or Eternity?

ME>> Excellent question. Revelation 21 begins,

1) I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth have passed away, and the sea is no more. 2) I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband. 3) I heard a loud voice out of heaven saying, "Behold, God's dwelling is with people, and he will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4) He will wipe away from them every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; neither will there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more. The first things have passed away."

5) He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." He said, "Write, for these words of God are faithful and true." 6) He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give freely to him who is thirsty from the spring of the water of life. 7) He who overcomes, I will give him these things. I will be his God, and he will be my son. 8) But for the cowardly, unbelieving, sinners, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their part is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

Revelation 21:1-8 (WEB)

Most Christians understand this Scripture as the commencement of eternity after the final judgment. However, some Universalist Christians understand Revelation 21-22 as instead the final age or eon before eternity. Others from a Full Preterist viewpoint even understand these chapters to be about the New Covenant Church and not about either final judgment or eternity.

Full Preterists have concluded that all Old and New Testament prophecy is already completely fulfilled. The term Preterism comes from the Latin *praeter*, meaning "past." Thankfully Preterists have observed that there are New Testament prophecies concerning the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. that are in fact past. Unfortunately Full Preterists have gone too far in concluding that all prophecy is fulfilled including the return of Christ and the resurrection. They miss the "**blessed hope**" and promise of Christ in Acts 1:11, John 14:3, and Titus 2:13. Thus they interpret the images in Revelation 21-22 as only about the Church during the present New Covenant Age.

Alternatively some Universalist Christians understand Revelation 21-22 not as the beginning of eternity, but instead as the final age of purification for mankind, after which salvation is then realized. The final judgment described in Matthew 25:31-46 and Revelation 20:11-15 is understood by some to

sentence unbelieving mankind to the second death in the Lake of Fire. Yet, since 1 Corinthians 15:55 promises the end of death they conclude that there is also salvation from the second death. Thus if human beings are sentenced to the Lake of Fire, the common Universalist position must find proof that they are safely extracted from the Lake of Fire later. To accomplish this they consider Revelation 21-22 as a chronological account of an age beyond the Church Age. Revelation 22:12-17 (WEB) is then understood as further appeal for repentance after the Great White Throne Judgment to those suffering in the Lake of Fire.

12) "Behold, I come quickly. My reward is with me, to repay to each man according to his work. 13) I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. 14) Blessed are those who do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city. 15) Outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. 16) I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify these things to you for the assemblies. I am the root and the offspring of David; the Bright and Morning Star."

17) The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" He who hears, let him say, "Come!" He who is thirsty, let him come. He who desires, let him take the water of life freely.

This common Universalist understanding seems strained to me. First, there is not one other Scripture that suggests an age of fallen existence beyond the Church Age. Instead Revelation 21-22 paints a summary picture of both our glorious eternity when every tear is wiped away and our present glorious church. Thus, I join most Christians in understanding the Bible's final chapters to speak about the commencement of eternity after the Great White Throne Judgment. Consider, 1 Corinthians 15:55 (WEB) says "**Death, where is your sting? Hades, where is your victory?**" Paul is forecasting the end of Hades and death as also recorded in Revelation 20:14 and 21:4. This is the promise of the end of death and the end of punishment in Hades for mankind! However, there is no mention of the end of the second death for those not listed in the Book of Life.

So how then can I hold to the universal salvation of all mankind? What is missed by traditional Christians and also by many Universalist Christians is that the Lake of Fire is not prepared for mankind, but is prepared for the Devil and his angels as indicated in Matthew 25:41. Fallen angels are held for judgment, extracted from Tartarus / Thalassa, and are also present on that Great Day as shown in 2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6, and Revelation 20:13. The fallen angels are the goats on Jesus' left, not mankind!

Thus I agree with those who see elements of the New Covenant Church in the images of Revelation 21-22. The angel says to John, **“Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb!”** (Revelation 21:9 WEB). The angel also shows John the river of the water of life and the tree of life which is for **“the healing of the nations”** (Revelation 22:2). These things appear to be a picture of the Church and healing grace during the Church age. What healing would be needed in glory? Yet, the New Heavens and New Earth also promise in Revelation 21:4 (WEB),

He will wipe away from them every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; neither will there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more. The first things have passed away.

And I also agree that Revelation 21-22 explains our glorious eternity when every tear is wiped away. Yet, we do not need to look too far to see that tears are not yet wiped away. The Old Covenant has passed away, but the effects of the fall still remain. We are too often faced with the painful realities of death, mourning, crying, and pain. The final chapters of Revelation give us both *hope* and *help*. The description of eternal glory with every tear wiped away gives us *hope*, Revelation 21:4. The description of the New Covenant church also gives us *help* until Jesus returns, Revelation 22:7-21. God’s Word concludes with hope for the *now* and the *not yet*, but *soon*. The end of Old Covenant Jerusalem and the birth of the New Covenant Jerusalem, the Church, brings hope *now* beginning in the first century. The victory of Christ reigning in every situation brings hope *now* to Christians of any time period. The promise of glory in the New Heavens and New Earth in Christ’s presence when every tear is finally wiped away brings hope for the *not yet*, but Christ is coming *soon*.

Jesus himself introduces the Revelation of the past, present, and future saying, **“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty,”** (Revelation 1:8 WEB).

Maranatha!

Isaiah 65:25 says that even Satan will be restored

Another objected...

Reader> [You originally said that Satan and his angels are eternally damned. However consider] Isaiah 65:25, 11:6-10. There are several other scriptural passages indicating God will bring even the ultra-rebel dragon back into loyalty, too.

Me> Let’s consider those passages.

Isaiah 65:25 (WEB),

'The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. Dust will be the serpent's food. They will not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain,' says Yahweh.

The emphasis of this verse seems to be that in the future God's people will be completely safe from all harm. On that we are agreed. However, does the verse promise happiness for the serpent? The Hebrew word for dust, [aphar], can also be translated "garbage." So what is in view here? Is this a happy restoration for the serpent or a humiliating defeat with his mouth full of garbage?

Isaiah 11:6-10 (WEB),

6) The wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat; The calf, the young lion, and the fattened calf together; and a little child will lead them. 7) The cow and the bear will graze. Their young ones will lie down together. The lion will eat straw like the ox. 8) The nursing child will play near a cobra's hole, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. 9) They will not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of Yahweh, as the waters cover the sea. 10) It will happen in that day that the nations will seek the root of Jesse, who stands as a banner of the peoples; and his resting place will be glorious.

Again here is the promise of complete peace in all God's creation, to the degree that vipers are no longer a danger, even for infants. So is this verse simply speaking about vipers or is Satan also in view? The mention of "den" and "nest" suggest that Isaiah is simply talking about vipers in the animal Kingdom rather than Satan himself.

The focus of my studies for the *Optimism Out of Control* book was and still is God's victorious grace for all mankind, created in God's image, and redeemed at the cross. The observation that the Lake of Fire is prepared for the Devil and his angels, and not prepared for mankind has also been an important point in my arguments. This understanding is critical to understand who is in fact actually sentenced to the Lake of Fire at the Matthew 25:41 Sheep and Goat Judgment.

However, after entering the larger discussion about the extent of God's grace in all creation, I was surprised to learn about the debate over the salvation of Satan himself. Thus I have pursued further study below. As for using Isaiah 11:6-10 and 65:25 for proof that even Satan himself will be saved, it seems like an awkward stretch to me. Depending on these verses to make such a

case may do more harm than good concerning the main point. Such a stretched argument may undermine the credibility of the essential point: that Christ is the effective savior of mankind. Christ is explicitly victorious in the redemption of all mankind at the cross, but Isaiah 65:25 certainly is not explicit about Satan.

Please consider these related articles on my website:

[Revelation 20:10](#)

[Fallen Angels at The Great White Throne Judgment?](#)

[How Can You Say Revelation 21:8 Does Not Apply to Humans?](#)

[You are Wrong About Matthew 25:31-46!](#)

[Hope in Jesus](#)

For myself, with bold humility I say that Christ must finally save all mankind because he has already proven his intent to do just that at the cross. Actually it is not me saying it, but Christ has committed himself already and proclaimed the good news himself from the cross. Furthermore, he commands us to believe it and give our lives to telling others the good news! This good news is so certain that the main thing that gets him angry now is if we do not believe it and live accordingly.

As for Satan and his angels, I am also certain from God's word that they are sentenced to the Lake of Fire, which is prepared for them for *The Ages of The Ages*, that is the "**The Aion of The Aion**," Matthew 25:41 and Revelation 20:10. Can the grace of God bring an end to Satan's damnation for *The Ages of The Ages*? Certainly! Will he? I do not know.

Isaiah 66:22-24 Cannot Include Fallen Angels

Another reader says...

READER>> You mention the end of Isaiah 66 -- this is the verse Christ quotes in Mark 9 / Matt 18 (and earlier in Matt 5's parallel warning if I recall correctly) involving Gehenna. So now you can have fun deciding whether this applies to the Lake of Fire judgment or not after all. ;) But from Isaiah's own perspective it applies to humans being slain at the coming of YHWH and the survivors being appalled by it; there's a parallel scene in Ezekiel or Jeremiah... where God gives instructions on how the survivors will have to send teams out for years to properly collect and bury and / or burn the dead, and how even after that's done some people will be assigned to check for remaining bones and flag them for proper removal and burial later. Isaiah doesn't go into anything like that detail, but he's quite explicit about them being the corpses of men (iysh) who transgressed against God.

ME>> Let's look at these passages more closely.

Isaiah 66:22-24 (WEB),

22) "For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me," says Yahweh, "so your offspring and your name shall remain. 23) It shall happen that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh will come to worship before me," says Yahweh. 24) "They will go out, and look at the dead bodies of the men [enowsh] who have transgressed against me; for their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind."

You note that the Hebrew word "enowsh" is used to describe those who rebelled. "Enowsh" means man, mankind, or mortal man, so at first glance it would seem that this passage could not be referring to the destruction of fallen angels. So what event is then in view?

The reader above believes that this passage explains the corrective hand of Christ upon his human enemies at his pre-Millennial return. The reader also apparently believes that this event is synonymous with Ezekiel 39. Is that the case? Ezekiel 39 does mention God judgments, but his presence in the flesh is not explicit. Ezekiel does not mention the New Heavens and Earth and thus also seems to point to earlier events.

It should be noted that the Hebrew word "enowsh" was also used to refer to the angels who visited Abraham in Genesis 18. So apparently the word does not always mean mortal man, but can also mean embodied angels. So it would not break any rules of interpretation to apply it to fallen angels in Isaiah 66:24.

Furthermore, Isaiah 65 and 66 is one of the few places the Old Testament explicitly references the New Heavens and the New Earth. So the New Testament parallel event seems to be Revelation 20 and 21 just before the commencement of eternity. I have proposed that Daniel 12:1-4, Matthew 25:31-46, and Revelation 20:11-15 are all talking about the same event: the final verdict for both mankind and fallen angels. Isaiah 66:22-24 seems to point to the same event with Satan and his demons' final rebellion against God and mankind. Satan and the demons meet their certain defeat, while all mankind looks upon the carcasses of the rebel angels with loathe, Revelation 20:7-10. Now it also seems clear that Satan does tempt humankind into battle against the camp of God at that time. However, this does not require that those humans who join the final rebellion with Satan are then finally lost to the Lake of Fire. I still hold that Satan and his demons receive the sentence to the Lake of Fire which is prepared for them while mankind, even

unbelieving mankind, receive grace -- solely on the basis of Christ's vicarious atonement. Finally, I have proved in my article, *You are Wrong About Matthew 25:31-46!*, that the "ethnos" gathered before Christ at the final judgment includes both humans and fallen angels, Matthew 25:32 and Revelation 20:13. It is no coincidence that Revelation 20:8 says that when Satan is released he will gather the "ethnos" for battle against God's people. Satan will round up both his demons and unbelieving mankind who so easily serve as his pawns.

It was objected that Mark 9:42-50 uses the same expression "***their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched***" as found in Isaiah 66:24.

Mark 9:47-50 (WEB),

47) If your eye causes you to stumble, cast it out. It is better for you to enter into God's Kingdom with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into the Gehenna of fire, 48) 'where their worm doesn't die, and the fire is not quenched.' 49) For everyone will be salted with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. 50) Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, with what will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.

Mark 9 certainly is not a warning to demons, but to unbelieving humans. There are several possibilities. One possibility is that I am wrong about Isaiah 66 and that the prophet is speaking only about the punishment of wicked human beings. In this case perhaps Isaiah is writing about earlier events. However, the New Heavens and Earth language seems to point to the final battle just before the Great White Throne judgment. In either case, understanding "enowsh" to mean only wicked human beings does not necessarily undermine my primary thesis that all mankind will be finally saved. Though, my proposed model of understanding would need to be refactored.

Another possibility is that in Mark 9 Jesus is comparing the punishments of human beings in Hades with the even more severe punishments reserved for fallen angels in the Lake of Fire. Jesus may use the same language, "***their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched,***" because the punishments are similar, even though Hades is temporal.

Finally, Jesus may simply allow wicked unbelieving mankind to fear the judgment that will come upon the fallen angels, the non-elect, even though all mankind will be finally saved from the judgment reserved only for fallen angels in the Lake of Fire. This pattern is evident a number of places in Scripture. It is more than reasonable to let those who reject Christ's

atonement think they have the destiny of the unredeemed. In fact it is the best wakeup call possible for the hardhearted unbelieving elect.

Regarding the salvation of fallen angels, I had proposed that Satan, The Beast, and the False Prophet are all fallen angels. These three beings are the only people explicitly mentioned by name as being thrown into the Lake of Fire. I have written further about this thesis in my article, [Revelation 20:10](#). The same reader above also objected, saying that The Beast and The False Prophet are human. However, after reading Revelation again I stumbled upon verse Revelation 16:13. This verse communicates that these three beings share of common nature of being the SOURCE of evil spirits and the spirit of demons. Humans are not the source of the demonic, but instead humans are attacked and possessed by the demonic. This seems like further evidence that these three beings are the demonic leaders of the rebellion against God with Satan as their ring leader.

I also finished reading *Terms for Eternity: Aionios and Aidios in Classical and Christian Texts* by Ilaria Ramelli and David Konstan. They defend that “*aion*” means “*age*” or “*eon*” as many would agree. However, they also note that the definitive Greek word for eternal, “*aidios*,” is only used twice the Bible: once in Romans 1:20 concerning God and once in Jude 6 concerning the bonds on fallen angels. Since Ramelli and Konstan argue even for the salvation of Satan they conclude that “*aidios*” in Jude 6 must mean transcending the ages, but not finally eternal. They reason thus because these demons are being “**held for judgment**” so there must be an end to these “*aidios*” bonds after their judgment. However, it could also be that these demons with “*aidios*” bonds are held in *Thalaasa* to be extracted for sentencing at the Great White Throne Judgment and then with the “*aidios*” bonds still on they are cast into the Lake of Fire. Thus they are held for judgment, but the “*aidios*” bonds are not released as they are cast into the Lake of Fire. Further, if the Sheep and Goat Judgment is synonymous with the Great White Throne Judgment and with the Great Judgment Day for the imprisoned angels, then it is clear that the goats are held for judgment and further sentenced to the Lake of Fire after their extraction from Tartarus / Thalassa. So the “*aidios*” bonds of fallen angels do not end at the Great Day of their judgment, but continue on through *The Ages of The Ages* in the Lake of Fire.

That all said, I want to do further study concerning the Biblical arguments for an “*apokatastasis*” that could include the salvation of even the fallen angels sentenced to the Lake of Fire. Can anyone point me to further resources on the meaning of “*kolasis*” from Matthew 25:46? Some resources indicate “*punishment, torment, etc.*” However, I know others have argued that the word only means loving correction or correction with a goal to restoration. Actually the only other Biblical use in 1 John 4:18 does not mean loving correction, but merely the fruit of fear, that is torment. Perhaps the

arguments for the meaning of “*kolasis*” as only corrective punishment are stretched because of the conclusion that human beings are sent to “*aion kolasis*.” If we think human beings are sent to the Lake of Fire, but hope they are later saved, then we need to understand “*kolasis*” as corrective. However, if the goats on Jesus’ left are fallen angels only, then the puzzle pieces fit together more easily.

Thanks for the comment above. After reflection, I continue to hold that the Lake of Fire is prepared only for the Devil and his angels. However, I may be agnostic about the duration of the torment to be endured in the Lake of Fire by the Devil and his angels. The Scriptures obviously begin with rebellious Satan tempting mankind into the fall and end with all mankind redeemed with every tear wiped away and Satan and his angels in torment in the Lake of Fire. Revelation 20:10 says Satan will be sentenced to the Lake of Fire for “*The Aions of The Aions*.” So when is the end of “*The Aions of The Aions*?” If there is an end to Satan’s damnation it is after the last page of Scripture.

John 3:36 Offers No Optimism!

Another thoughtful doubter suggested...

ANOTHER>> John 3:36 offers no optimism, so you are in error to suggest otherwise. Furthermore, you err in thinking that sinful man does not deserve the wrath of God. The Bible never indicates that the wrath of God will be abated for unbelievers.

ME>> That is an excellent point of discussion. John 3:36 (WEB) says,

One who believes in the Son has eternal life, but one who disobeys the Son won’t see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

Let me first point out a couple of observations, then conclude with a couple of questions back to you. First, is this verse saying that unbelievers will not be *granted* eternal life because of their unbelief, or is this verse saying that unbelievers simply cannot see eternal life because of their refusal to accept forgiveness? No doubt you say the former, while I say the latter. Note that in defense of my understanding the verse says, “**won’t see life.**” Secondly, consider a few observations.

Certainly you must agree that God loves the unbelieving elect before they place faith in Him. Thus faith has no transactional impact on our election. Faith changes our heart toward God, but not God’s heart toward his chosen. If we agree that this is true, then this verse must be understood to

mean that the unbelieving elect cannot see God's love for them, even though it is already guaranteed. After all no one is born believing. Romans 5:10 and I John 4:10 explain this concept well. So even if we disagree on the extent of election within mankind, we must still agree that the unbelieving elect move from a point of *NOT SEEING* their promised destiny, to *SEEING* their promised destiny when they trust Christ. Since transforming faith is the subject of John Chapter 3, that can be the only meaning of **"won't see life"** in John 3:36.

You might argue that earlier in Chapter 3 Jesus says that unbelievers are **"condemned already."** So you might say that faith moves a person from a place of condemnation to a place of forgiveness. Yet elsewhere we see that sinful man's reconciliation to God has happened even before repentance and faith, Romans 5:10. So how are we to understand the unbeliever's status of condemnation? John 3:17 and Romans 8:34 make it clear that Jesus has no condemnation for his chosen people -- not ever. Therefore, the condemnation of the unbelieving elect is a condemnation of their unbelief or a condemnation of their unregenerate nature, but certainly not an eternal condemnation. Ephesians 2:3 explains that we as unbelievers were objects of wrath, **"because of our nature."** However, the elect were never even potentially objects of eternal wrath, even during our unbelief. Of course this is not because we didn't deserve eternal wrath, but because of God's grace.

Matthew 13:11-17 quotes Isaiah, making the point that not all of God's chosen people are also chosen to see and believe. So these unbelieving elect cannot see life. They cannot see God's love. They cannot see God's grace. These lost sheep continue to reject God's grace and reject that their sins are already forgiven and instead turn to religion in an effort to add to the finished work of Christ through some action, work, or choice of their own. God is quite angry with this unbelief and his anger toward their rebellion will continue if they do not repent, even though he loves them dearly.

You say that the wrath of God is never abated for unbelievers. I agree that the eternal wrath of God is never abated or even offered to the non-elect, however, the eternal wrath of God is *already* propitiated for both the believing *and* the unbelieving elect. This is the very meaning of I John 2:2. Romans 3:3-4 also makes it clear that God's faithful salvation of his chosen people is not conditioned on our faith. These verses make it clear that Christ has chosen to pay for the sins of all mankind, period. Of course faith certainly changes our heart toward God. However, God's loving heart towards his chosen people is resolute whether we are in belief or unbelief.

Paul's concluding argument in Romans 11 also makes it clear that God's gifts and call are irrevocable and so will prove effective even for the unbelieving elect. Now to clarify, this does not rule out that God is angry with

the disobedience of the unbelieving elect. These rebels certainly do not see life while they persist in unbelief and they will be punished in Hades unless they repent. In fact Hades is a fit punishment for their self-righteous unregenerate natures. However, because of election, God's wrath toward them does not conclude with the Lake of Fire. Just like Romans 11:28 beautifully explains, they are enemies on account of their rejection of the gospel, but loved on account of election.

You might also point out that Revelation 21:8 specifically says that the vile *and* the unbelieving will be consigned to the Lake of Fire. However, I will check-mate with the thought that eternal damnation can only apply to the non-elect. This is easily proved because you and I are still both vile sinners even as Christians, yet our hope is that our sinful selves are hidden safely in Christ with all the rest of the elect. Even Christians are guilty of the sins listed in Revelation 21:8 and yet we and all mankind will be spared from the Lake of Fire because Jesus has chosen to pay for our sin. The sin of the non-elect, fallen angels, however, is apparently not paid for by the sacrifice of Christ, according to Hebrews 2:16. Therefore the Lake of Fire is their certain destiny.

So you are right that John 3:36 offers no optimism... for the unbelieving. You can tell the unbelieving elect directly that God has already forgiven them until you are blue in the face and they will continue to disbelieve and labor to somehow activate their salvation. John 3:36 is a simple statement of fact to these unbelieving. As long as they continue to prefer disbelief and religion they will not be able to see their destiny as God's elect. That is, they will not see their promised, guaranteed destiny until the Holy Spirit opens their eyes.

Unfortunately, some who profess Christ often sing the hymn, "*There is a new name written in Heaven and its mine.*" These misguided people imagine that they somehow met the condition for salvation through some work of their own. However, the grace of God is unconditionally given to all his people. They miss the great joy of trusting Christ and knowing that our names were written in Heaven from before the foundation of the world! There are absolutely no new names in Heaven, but instead only the names penned with God's burning love from before the creation of the world. Yet many religious people still contrive alternate confidences for themselves without the rock of Christ as a foundation.

Hitting closer to home, you suggest that I err in thinking that sinful man does not deserve the wrath of God. Au Contraire! I wholeheartedly believe that sinful man deserves the eternal wrath of God. In fact I believe this more than you do. I would even suggest that you offend grace by saying that the death of Christ is insufficient to propitiate the wrath of God without personal faith added to sign the transaction. Christ alone is the only sufficient sacrifice to satisfy the justice of God and propitiate his holy wrath. The transaction for

our salvation was a deal signed between the Father and the Son alone. Faith adds absolutely no transactional value to Christ's work. The death of Christ completely signs, seals, *and* delivers salvation to every single one of his chosen people. Thus evangelism is an invitation for the elect to believe this good news! Faith is simply the reception of this gift, already given, which happens only if the Holy Spirit softens our hardened hearts and opens our blind eyes.

Here is a good question for both you and me. Do we agree that even the sin we committed today is enough to damn us if we were outside of Christ? Do we also agree that even the continuing faith of a believer is insufficient to appease God's wrath? So when we distrust and disobey God as Christians, do we then get confidence by reminding God that we do in fact trust him and that he should continue to accept our faith (or lack of faith)? Or instead, do we remind ourselves that Christ died for the sin we commit even as Christians and continue to thank him for his finished work and promise to us? True and saving faith must be built on the solid rock of Jesus Christ and his finished work alone. This finished work is salvation already guaranteed for each of his chosen ones. The believing take great joy in this optimistic gospel! Unbelievers, however, remain under God's wrath and will continue to reject their election in favor of their religion... and thus cannot see life.

John 5:28-30 Offers No Optimism!

AGAIN>> John 5:28-30 also offers no optimism, so you are still in error.

ME>> That is another excellent point of discussion. John 5:28-30 (WEB) says,

28) Don't marvel at this, for the hour comes in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice, 29) and will come out; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment. 30) I can of myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is righteous; because I don't seek my own will, but the will of my Father who sent me.

The first questions we need to ask of this Scripture is when is this judgment, who is being judged, and what is the duration of the judgment? We agree that judgment is certain, but what is the nature of the judgment? Traditional theology concludes that only the judgment of human beings is in view.

It may take you time to study and time to reconsider, yet I hope that this book has at least introduced you to three very important concepts. First, the Hebrew "*olam*" and Greek "*aion*" are best interpreted as "*age*" or the "*life*" of

the noun in view. Thus, we see that God is working out his plan of redemption through the “ages,” and not merely in one epoch. Thus the judgment of John 5 could point to a number of points in the future. Second, when interpreting passages about judgment we need to consider that fallen angels may be in view just as much as unbelieving men. John 16:11 and the judgment of Satan is a reminder of that important point. Jude 6 also reminds us that fallen angels are being held for judgment on that “**Great Day**.” Third, since “*aion*” usually does not mean eternal except when referring to God and perhaps the Lake of Fire, we must consider that at least some of the after death judgments are not eternal, for example the punishments of Hades.

That said, I think this passage is speaking about the Sheep and the Goat judgment, synonymous with Great White Throne Judgment. This final judgment will save the remainder of mankind just extracted from Hades and condemn demons to the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages*. This seems clear because a resurrection to both death and life is in view. It is important to note that the confirmation of the salvation of the believing elect has already happened for Christians through faith and at the Rapture! So if there are both saved and unsaved at the Great White Throne Judgment, who else would it be except the confirmation of the salvation of the unbelieving elect and the damnation of the non-elect fallen angels?

Not Written in the Book of Life from Creation?

SOME>> *Wait! Some are not written in the Book of Life from the creation of the world!*

ME>> Good point. Consider Revelation’s mention of the Book of Life.

He who overcomes will be arrayed in white garments, and I will in no way blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

Revelation 3:5 (WEB)

All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been killed.

Revelation 13:8 (WEB)

The beast that you saw was, and is not; and is about to come up out of the abyss and to go into destruction. Those who dwell on the earth and whose names have not been written in the book of

life from the foundation of the world will marvel when they see that the beast was, and is not, and shall be present.

Revelation 17:8 (WEB)

I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and they opened books. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works.

Revelation 20:12 (WEB)

If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:15 (WEB)

There will in no way enter into it anything profane, or one who causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Revelation 21:27 (WEB)

If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, may God take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book.

Revelation 22:19 (WEB)

These Scriptures could lead one to believe that one's name could be blotted out of the Book of Life and thus eternally damned... that is if one does not consider grace and Christ's strategies with the hardhearted.

Consider one of the earliest mentions of the Book of Life with Moses.

31) Moses returned to Yahweh, and said, "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made themselves gods of gold. 32) Yet now, if you will, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out of your book which you have written."

33) Yahweh said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book."

Exodus 32:31-33 (WEB)

King David also sang about the Book of Life in Psalm 69:28 (WEB),

Let them be blotted out of the book of life, and not be written with the righteous.

Daniel likewise was taught about The Book in Daniel 12:1 (WEB),

At that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince who stands for the children of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who shall be found written in the book.

What do we observe about the Book of Life?

First, we observe that names must be written from the foundation of the world or you cannot be saved. Thus faith does not add one's name to the Book of Life, but instead simply trusts that it is so.

Second, it initially appears like one's name can be blotted out from the Book of Life because of sin. So can a name written in The Book from the Earth's foundation then be removed? If so then no hope remains!

Third, Moses expressed a willingness to be removed from the Book of Life himself, if God would not forgive his fellow Israelites. In this way Moses expresses a Christ-like heart and passion for the forgiveness of others or at least a frustrated fidelity to his fellow Israelites.

Fourth, only those named in the Book of Life at the Great White Throne judgment will be saved from the Lake of Fire.

What interpretive models are possible?

Model A: Every human being is listed in the Book of Life initially, but sinning can permanently remove your name. Everyone starts a winner, but most will still lose, A.K.A. pure works salvation, but reverse.

Model B: Only a sub-set of human beings are listed in the Book of Life initially and sinning can permanently remove your name. Not everyone starts a winner and even most of the winners will still lose, A.K.A. uncertain works salvation.

Model C: Only a sub-set of human beings are listed in the Book of Life, and sinning can never blot your name (the elect cannot be blotted out, but are only threatened). Not everyone starts a winner, but the subset chosen to win, will win, A.K.A. Calvinism.

Model D: The Bible never makes one mention of names being added to the Book of Life, but, predestination aside, one can still hope to add your name by trusting Christ. No one starts a winner, but a few will defeat the odds and win, A.K.A. Arminianism.

Model E: The Bible never makes one mention of names being added to the Book of Life, but, predestination aside, everyone will add their name eventually by trusting Christ. No one starts a winner, but *time* is the recipe to win everyone, A.K.A. Arminian Universalism.

Model F: Every human being is listed in the Book of Life initially, but sinning can remove your name to suffer temporarily in the Lake of Fire. Everyone starts a winner, but most will still lose, but only temporarily, A.K.A. Traditional Universalism.

Model G: Every human being is listed in the Book of Life initially and nothing will ever remove your name from the Book of Life. However, Christ is willing to preach fear to the rebellious elect even labeling them, **“not my sheep,”** (John 10:26 WEB) or threatening to **“blot”** sinners from The Book. Furthermore, Christ will punish even the redeemed in Hades, albeit temporarily, 2 Peter 2:1. Thus, the Lake of Fire is prepared only for the Devil and his angels who are not listed in the Book of Life, but unbelievers also fear this destiny. All humanity starts and finishes a winner, but most do not act like winners and suffer like losers due to their rejection of grace until the glory of God’s grace is finally and irresistibly revealed to all mankind at the Great White Throne judgment, A.K.A. the thesis of Optimism Out of Control.

Thus Model G is my choice for the best interpretive model. Further, defense can be found in my article, *Special Strategies and Interpretations?*

Thankfully the heart of Moses was a taste of the greater heart of Christ our Savior! Jesus does not blot our names from the Book of Life, but instead blots out our sins!

I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake; and I will not remember your sins.

Isaiah 43:25 (WEB)

Moses boldly confronted God, appealing for Israel's forgiveness, but Christ even more boldly confronted all sin and sacrificed himself for all!

For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (WEB)

The point is that the heart of Christ is poured out for the salvation of all mankind and he has and will accomplish his goal. Even Moses understood these things under the dim light of the Old Covenant. Christ was formed in Moses enough that he had great boldness to appeal to the God of Heaven with the facts, *"You cannot forgive me, if you do not forgive them!"*

So how can we enlightened 20th century Christians under the glorious New Covenant settle for a mere *"evangelical"* fire insurance policy? Do we have Moses' and Christ's broken heart for our fellowman? Consider Paul's rebuke to the Galatian church.

My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ is formed in you— but I could wish to be present with you now, and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

Galatians 4:19-20 (WEB)

One Verse a Theology Does Not Make... So 95+ THESES!

OBJECTOR>> *You make too much of one verse with Romans 11:32. One verse cannot prove that God loves all mankind!*

ME>> You make an excellent point that one verse cannot build an entire system of truth. However, I would add that one verse cannot build an entire system of truth... that is at contradiction with the remainder of the Bible. **HOWEVER**, one verse can speak truthfully and powerfully. One verse can speak truth that cannot be compromised by any other Scripture. One verse can speak the grand conclusion of the Bible and the history of redemption just as Romans 11:32 has done.

However, to entertain your objection I join Martin Luther who posted 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church of Wittenberg and offer you a second 95 Theses. Each of the 95 points below challenge tradition with a question or verse that cannot be answered without adding either human condition or blind hypocrisy to the grace of God.

SCRIPTURE TELLS 'ALL'

1. 1 John 2:2, *"And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the WHOLE world."*
2. 2 Corinthians 5:14, *"For the love of Christ constrains us; because we judge thus, that one died for ALL, therefore ALL died."*
3. Acts 3:21, *"Whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of ALL things, which God spoke long ago by the mouth of his holy prophets."*
4. Genesis 12:3, *"I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who treats you with contempt. ALL the families of the earth will be blessed through you."*
5. Genesis 3:15, *"I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and HER OFFSPRING. He will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel."*
6. Isaiah 66:23, *"It shall happen that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, ALL flesh will come to worship before me," says Yahweh. "*
7. Philippians 2:10, *"That at the name of Jesus EVERY knee should bow, of those in heaven, those on earth, and those under the earth."*
8. Psalm 22:27, *"ALL the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to Yahweh. ALL the relatives of the nations shall worship before you."*
9. Revelation 5:13, *"I heard EVERY created thing which is in heaven, on the earth, under the earth, on the sea, and EVERYTHING in them, saying, 'To him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb be the blessing, the honor, the glory, and the dominion, forever and ever! Amen!'"*
10. Romans 11:16, *"If the first fruit is holy, so is the LUMP. If the root is holy, so are the BRANCHES."*
11. Romans 11:32, *"For God has bound ALL to disobedience, that he might have mercy on ALL."*
12. Romans 3:23-24, *"For ALL have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus;"*
13. Romans 5:18, *"So then as through one trespass, ALL men were condemned; even so through one act of righteousness, ALL men were justified to life."*
14. Zephaniah 2:11, *"Yahweh will be awesome to them, for he will famish all the gods of the land. Men will worship him, everyone from his place, even ALL the shores of the nations."*
15. Zephaniah 3:8-9, *" 'Therefore wait for me,' says Yahweh, 'until the day that I rise up to the prey, for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour on them my indignation, even all my fierce anger, for all the earth will be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. For then I will purify the lips of the peoples, that they may ALL call on Yahweh's name, to serve him shoulder to shoulder.' "*

WORDS HAVE MEANING

16. "AGAPE", especially with respect to God, means certain, guaranteed, unconditional "Love" period!
17. "AION" and "AIONIAN" means "Eon" and "Eonian", even more precisely the "*duration*" or "*life*" of the subject in question or "*whole*" and "*complete*", Romans 16:25-26.
18. "ALL" may not always mean absolutely "All", but "All" does mean "All" if there is not a very specific reason against it!
19. "APOLLYMI" translated "*perish*" in John 3:16 means catastrophic loss, but not necessarily eternal loss, for example Matthew 2:13.
20. "FAITH" means to trust in, depend upon another and so faith itself then CANNOT be a condition to our confidante's guarantee, that would be utterly ridiculous!
21. "GRACE" is the unmerited favor of God, his unconditional love towards his chosen people.
22. "HADES" is the TEMPORARY place of punishment for unbelieving deceased humanity, Matthew 16:18, Luke 16:23, 1 Corinthians 15:55, and Revelation 20:14.
23. "TARTARUS" is the TEMPORARY place of punishment, deeper than Hades, for imprisoned fallen angels, 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6.
24. "THALAASA" in Revelation 20:13 refers to the prison "TARTARUS" of 2 Peter 2:4 or the retreat of some fallen angels as fully explained in my article, *Fallen Angels at the Great White Throne Judgment*.
25. "THE LAKE OF FIRE" is prepared for the Devil and his Angels and NOT humanity! Matthew 25:41 and Revelation 20:10, 21:8.

TRADITION TRAPS EVEN THE BEST

26. WHY not give Scripture the trump card over tradition?
27. WHY not oppose tradition in light of the overwhelming evidence?
28. WHY not recognize the future judgment of fallen angels in 2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6, and Matthew 25:31-46?
29. WHY not reconsider the distinction between Sheol, Gehenna, Hades, Tartarus, Thalaasa, and the Lake of Fire?
30. WHY not reconsider the mistranslation of 'AION' and 'AIONIAN'?
31. WHY not trust that God's unconditional grace and love is truly without condition for all mankind?

LEARN HISTORY OR BE DOOMED TO REPEAT IT

32. Are you AWARE of the large number of Christian writers that have promoted the salvation of all mankind?
33. Are you AWARE of the significant Universalist movements in the early history of the United States?

34. Are you AWARE that hope for all mankind lost much ground when the Bible was not available in the common tongue?
35. Are you AWARE that hope for all mankind was commonly accepted before the 5th century?
36. Are you AWARE that hope for all mankind was rediscovered when the Bible became available in the common tongue after the Reformation?
37. Are you AWARE that many early church father's advocated the salvation of all mankind?
38. Are you AWARE that NO early church creed condemns the salvation of all mankind?

ARMINIANISM REDEFINES FAITH AND GRACE

39. IF God's unconditional love is conditioned on our faith, THEN why do the Scriptures emphasize that God loved us first while our hearts hated him?
40. IF mankind's sins are fully atoned and God's wrath is propitiated by Christ's blood, THEN how can anyone be held guilty for their sins eternally?
41. IF most of those who God's loves are damned eternally, THEN how good and effective can God's love really be?
42. IF my faith '*applies*' Christ's blood to my guilt, THEN how am I different than an Old Testament priest applying the blood myself?
43. IF my will is already '*free*' before Christ, THEN what does it mean that Christ sets me '*free*'?
44. IF my will is '*free*', THEN why does the Bible say that apart from grace I am '*dead*' and '*bound*' to disobedience?
45. IF you claim God also loves those in the Lake of Fire, THEN how can anyone be saved from the Lake of Fire by the same love?

CALVINISM BLINDS PEOPLE WITH HYPOCRISY

46. IF 'ALL' can mean absolutely 'ALL' in at least one use case, THEN why do you insist it does not in this particular case?
47. IF Jesus became the Second Adam, the new Federal head of ALL humanity, THEN how was Christ sacrificed on the cross for only PART of humanity?
48. IF election can speak of various appointments, THEN why not agree that all mankind is elected to forgiveness, but not all are elected to believe it?
49. IF God did not chose all mankind, THEN how is knowledge of salvation by grace objectively possible? On what basis? What is the object your faith?
50. IF God does not love all mankind, THEN how can you be objectively certain that God loves any particular person?
51. IF God does not love all mankind, THEN how can you be objectively certain that God loves you?
52. IF the redeemed can never be punished after death, THEN why are redeemed false teachers punished in Hades, 2 Peter 2:1-9?

MISUNDERSTANDINGS KILL RELATIONSHIPS

53. MISTRANSLATION of *'aion'* easily accounts for much of the confusion in Christendom.
54. The fearful voice of tradition and its MISUNDERSTANDINGS has drowned out the truth of God's love for all mankind.
55. The incredible patience of God easily allows for grave MISUNDERSTANDINGS within his church as history shows.
56. The judgments of angels are easily MISSED in Scripture because these people are hidden from our material eyesight.
57. The religious tendency of the human heart easily explains the favor of Arminian and Calvinistic MISGUIDANCE.
58. The unavailability of Scripture in the common tongues easily accounts for reliance on tradition and MISUNDERSTANDING through the Middle Ages.
59. God apparently allows these blatant MISUNDERSTANDINGS to save the Pearl of Great Price for those who earnestly seek him.

TRADITION TRADES REASON FOR IGNORANCE

60. HOW are the unborn and infants saved without your required volitional decision to trust Christ?
61. HOW can Christian conscience or reason find a gracious purpose for eternal damnation?
62. HOW can your *'faith'* be the condition to God's unconditional love, when true faith is trust that God's love is unconditional?
63. HOW can God *'love'* a person till their death, but switch gears and damn them eternally if they die before repentance?
64. HOW can Jesus be the Savior of the world if most of mankind is damned?
65. HOW can most Christians be so apathetic in evangelism if they truly believe most of mankind is damned?
66. HOW can the first mention of eternal judgment in Scripture be as late as Daniel 12:2 if God is so concerned to save us from the Lake of Fire?
67. HOW can you have confidence that Jesus forgave your sin while at the same time saying he did not forgive others?
68. HOW can you ignore and even accept the major contradictions between Arminianism and Calvinism?
69. HOW can you overlook the distinction between Gehenna, Hades, Tartarus, Thalassa, and the Lake of Fire with the use of one word, *"Hell"*?
70. HOW can you say those in Heaven suffer no pain over those you claim are lost for eternity when even the wicked rich man in Hades agonized over his lost brothers?
71. HOW can you stand on Arminianism, Calvinism, or the question mark in between?

72. HOW could the Bible possibly be clearer about God's unconditional love for all mankind?
73. HOW is Christ sovereign over salvation if the sinful will of a rebellious man is able to ruin God's desire that he be saved?
74. HOW is Christ the victor if those that Satan tempts and accuses vastly outnumber the redeemed?

ALL MANKIND IS LOVED BY GOD!

75. IF Christ paid for the sins of any man, THEN he paid for the sins of all mankind!
76. IF Christians have testified to God's love for all mankind throughout history, THEN God has provided his witness!
77. IF human conscience testifies that the fate of any individual and all mankind alike rests in the final verdict of God alone, THEN God has provided his witness.
78. IF the Atonement demonstrates that his cross is a finished work with all mankind represented in his vicarious death, THEN God has provided his witness.
79. IF the Early Church Fathers openly testified to their confidence in the salvation of all mankind, THEN God has provided his witness.
80. IF the Incarnation shows that Christ became a man and stands as the Second Adam and the new Federal Head of all humanity, THEN God has provided his witness.
81. IF the Scriptures testify plainly to God's unconditional love for all mankind, THEN God has provided his witness.

HADES GIVES UP FINALLY

82. 1 Corinthians 15:55, *"Death, where is your sting? HADES, where is your victory?"*
83. 1 Peter 3:18-20, *"Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit, in whom he also went and PREACHED TO THE SPIRITS IN PRISON, who before were disobedient, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, while the ship was being built. In it, few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water."*
84. 1 Peter 4:5-6, *"They will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For to this end the Good News was PREACHED EVEN TO THE DEAD, that they might be judged indeed as men in the flesh, BUT LIVE as to God in the spirit."*
85. 2 Peter 2:1,9, *"But false prophets also arose among the people, as false teachers will also be among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master who BOUGHT them, bringing on themselves swift destruction... The Lord knows how to deliver the godly*

out of temptation and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment.”

86. Mathew 16:18, *“I also tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my assembly, and THE GATES OF HADES WILL NOT PREVAIL against it.”*
87. Psalm 139:8, *“If I ascend up into heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in SHEOL, behold, you are there!”*
88. Revelation 20:13-14, *“The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and HADES GAVE UP THE DEAD who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works. Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.”*

MODERN WITNESSES WRITE

89. Read *Christ Victorious* by Thomas Allin
90. Read *Hope Beyond Hell* by Jerry Beauchemin
91. Read *Life Time Entirety* by Dr. Heleen Keizer
92. Read *The Evangelical Universalist* by Robin Parry
93. Read *The Gospel of God’s Reconciliation of All in Christ* by Ernst Stroeter
94. Read *The Greek Word AION* by John Wesley Hanson
95. Read *All You Want to Know About Hell* by Steve Gregg

MORE THAN 95!

96. Read *The Inescapable Love of God* by Thomas Talbott
97. Read *God’s Methods with Man* by G. Campbell Morgan
98. Read *Destined for Salvation, God’s Promise to Save Everyone* by Kalen Fristad
99. Read *All In All* by A. E. Knoch
100. Read *Ancient History of Universalism* by Hosea Ballou
101. Read *The Modern History of Universalism* by Thomas Whittemore
102. Read online about the “Victorious Gospel” and “Larger Hope”

Pinning down the slippery Arminian and Calvinist

A Question>> I logically understand your thesis that Christ is the Savior of all Mankind and would like to believe it. However, I just cannot let go of the centuries of Christian scholars who have defended both Arminianism and Calvinism. Why would I want to change?

A Reply>> I can fully understand why it is difficult to let go of either Arminianism or Calvinism. These systems have existed for centuries and so have a long history of acceptance. These systems have also been written about over and over again. They have been discussed, debated, and refined. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of those who profess Christ

as Savior have adopted the rhetoric of one of these systems, albeit with some adjustment here or there. So there may be little reason to consider a radical change that would rock the boat of your particular Christian community. There may be little reason, except for one reason. If the systems of Arminianism and Calvinism do fall short of truly accepting the grace of Christ as I have proposed, then you will meet with the wrath of God for your unrepentant self-righteousness instead of commendation as you currently suppose.

Would you be willing to walk through an outline of possible understandings? Which camp would you place yourself in below?

1. Victorious Gospel

- a. Christ's death satisfied the wrath of God for all mankind.
- b. Believers are saved from sin to paradise, unbelievers are punished in Hades.
- c. All mankind is saved from the Lake of Fire, prepared for the Devil & his angels.
- d. This view is faithful to Scripture and faithful to the character of God's grace.
- e. Both feet are planted solidly on both the depth and breadth of God's love.

2. Calvinism

- a. Christ's death satisfied the wrath of God for a subset of mankind.
- b. The Holy Spirit effectively brings the chosen subset to repentance and faith.
- c. Those punished in Hades are also damned to the Lake of Fire.
- d. This view is like the Jews who claimed to be elect while gentiles are not elect.
- e. One foot is planted on the depth of God's love, but the other foot on hypocrisy.

3. Arminianism

- a. Christ's death potentially satisfies the wrath of God for all mankind.
- b. Individual people exercise their *free will* to accept Christ and then are saved.
- c. Those punished in Hades are also damned to the Lake of Fire.
- d. This view reminds me of the graceless religions of the gentile world.
- e. One foot is planted on the breadth of God's love, the other on human condition.

4. Mediation

- a. Christ's death satisfies God's wrath effectively for some, nominally for the rest.
- b. Two mediating methods
 - i. The Holy Spirit effectively brings the chosen subset to repentance and faith.
 - ii. Individual people exercise their free will to accept Christ and then are saved.
- c. Those punished in Hades are also damned to the Lake of Fire.
- d. This view is really Calvinism or Arminianism in disguise or double mindedness.

5. Simple faith and the Victorious Gospel is wrong

- a. Simple faith that all people are sinners and Christ died for sinners.
- b. Sinners are invited to trust Christ, but avoid debate and theology.

- c. The Victorious Gospel is wrong because unbelievers are certainly damned.
 - d. This view is unfair to call the Victorious Gospel wrong without Scripture.
 - e. One foot appears to be planted on God's love, but the other on tradition.
6. Simple faith and the Victorious Gospel may be right
- a. Simple faith that all people are sinners and Christ died for sinners.
 - b. Sinners are invited to trust Christ, but with ignorance of the extent of God's love.
 - c. The Victorious Gospel sounds hopeful, and they may want to learn more.
 - d. This view appears interested in Scripture and grace more than tradition.
 - e. One foot appears to be planted on grace, but no certainty of who God loves.

May God speak to your heart and lead you to receive his grace and unconditional love toward both you and your neighbor, apart from any human condition.

Real or Apparent Paradox?

One thoughtful reader suggested that...

READER>> [Perhaps the different vantage points of those emphasizing God's sovereignty and man's free will only cause Calvinism and Arminianism to appear to be contradictory. Or perhaps in lofty matters, such as this, real paradox is allowable. For example, Skolem's Paradox in the area of mathematics or the wave-particle duality of light in physics could likewise illustrate real or apparent paradox. Or perhaps when the subject matter becomes increasingly complex theories may naturally compete because no one theory can digest the whole - jlm].

ME>> I was hopeful that the *Four Square Salvation Evaluation Model* was sufficiently simple, or atomic in logic, that it could rule out the argument of the paradoxical. Yet, the question has been raised and so it would be good to consider the possibility of real and apparent paradox.

I did suggest in my article, *Nit Picky?*, that the Bible does not reveal all truth to us, only the truth that God deems sufficient for us to live a life of faith and please him. One might argue that it is possible that the answer to the apparent contradiction between Arminianism and Calvinism is not revealed in Scripture. That is not my conclusion for two reasons.

One, the New Testament says repeatedly that the gospel has revealed, that is explained, the mystery that was kept secret, Romans 16:25. Nowhere does it say that the gospel introduced further mystery. The gospel opens the box of understanding God's grace. It does not close it!

Two, the main thesis of my clarification of the gospel is that apparent contradiction in gospel truth is not because there is real paradox in gospel truths, but because the gospel speaks truth to the believing and foolishness to the unbelieving. The truth itself is not paradoxical, but disbelieving Christ certainly is paradoxical! Consider the paradox of men looking into the sky, unable to see or be thankful for the beautiful shining sun. Yet the paradox is understood when we also observe that the men are blind and clouds of sin obscure the view. So the paradox is not with God or truth, but between our ears and in our hearts. Neither Arminian nor Calvinistic models appreciate that fact. They both make the mistake of assuming that God reasons with the unreasonable. But God is a wiser parent than that.

Is it possible that both Arminian and Calvin expressions of the gospel each have components of truth sufficient to capture a truthful, though incomplete, picture of the gospel? Since they are from different vantage points and each incomplete, perhaps there is only the appearance of contradiction. I summarized that Calvinism tells us that God performed *ALL* of salvation for *PART* of mankind. Arminianism in contrast says that God performed *PART* of salvation for *ALL* of mankind. These models do not simply appear contradictory, but they are contradictory! Perhaps the true Biblical model on this question is a third option that disagrees with both Arminianism and Calvinism. Yet what would it be?

Does the Bible teach that Christ's death on the cross is intended for *ALL* mankind or only *PART*? It seems to me that there can only be one plain answer. Mathematically it can only be the whole set and if not the whole set, then it is a subset. Does the Bible teach that salvation is *ALL* of grace or only *PART* of grace plus man's *free will* choice? Again it seems to me that there can only be one plain answer. Use a telescope or a microscope to see the active ingredient and if it is not singular, then it is plural.

In my article, *Soteriologies*, I attempted to simplify the analysis of the question. Is it possible that both Arminianism and Calvinism each see an incomplete picture of the gospel from their vantage points? I do not think that is possible since each model proposes to be a complete picture that is contradictory with the other. If one or both models would stop short of proposing a complete model giving allowance for the other model to see from its vantage point, then there might be hope. However, as it stands, Arminianism and Calvinism are a "*house divided*" that cannot stand together. Furthermore, in the body of this book I have exposed each of their individual errors so neither model can stand independently either. Though these models both hit the truth at some points, they also each fail at other points.

Second, since the subject matter of God and salvation is so lofty, is real paradox then a possibility? I've argued above that the paradox between Arminianism and Calvinism is more than an apparent paradox. After all,

there are questions unanswered by the historic orthodoxies with 2,000 years of the greatest theological minds in history applied to the problem. The paradox remains and if possible we must hope for an explanation, or in the end simply wait or accept the possibility of real paradox. Now some have argued that we should be willing to accept paradox as a reasonable answer. (That could be considered a funny statement to accept para-dox as reason-able.) For example, we do see evidence of other real paradoxes such as Skolem's Paradox in the area of mathematics and the wave-particle duality of light in physics. Yet are these real paradoxes or only apparent paradoxes?

The word paradox is the combination of "*para*" meaning alongside and "*dox*" meaning "*orthodox*" or truth. The idea is that there can be contradictory truth alongside truth. So is that possible? Certainly there are paradoxes around us every day. However, most of these paradoxes are only apparent. Typically, if we gain more information the appearance of paradox is explained away. Yet some paradoxes remain. Is it because they are truly and finally inexplicable? Or is it because we yet wait for more information? I believe that ultimately there can be no paradoxes from God's vantage point for he is perfect truth and love. He knows and sees all from the loftiest vantage point. There is most certainly not contradictory truth alongside truth in the mind of God. I conclude this based on the character of God and the veracity of his revealed word. However, just as surely, none of us will ever see the universe perfectly from his vantage point, because we will never be God!

Yet God has revealed truth to us and thankfully the world around us makes more and more sense to those believing God's Word. How exciting that Jesus would call us his friends and make his Father's business known to us, John 15:15! And for the things that we do not yet understand or perhaps never will, we can also be excited and simply worship God while we wait. Finally, the perfection of God and his gospel make it plain to me that there is never paradox in the truth observed, but unfortunately there remains paradox in the unbelieving observer. Paradox in the unbeliever? Yes. How can anyone hear the good news and see the beautiful face of Jesus Christ and not fall in love immediately and offer undying commitment? Yet we turn from Christ all the time. Why? That is the paradox of unbelief that requires the special attention of gospel foolishness.

*Many claim 'truth is a paradox,'
they boast their 'God is not in a box.'
Many say 'answers one cannot see,'
they attempt harbor in Gospel 'mystery'.
Yet the Bible reveals, Christ chose to die for all,
He authored the Book of Life, can we reach that tall?
Very few find great hope in this truth observed,
they are happy to trust, obey, and never swerve.
Yet the many mix 'truths' with their god locked in errors,
foolishness is needed for those double-minded observers.
How to reach the rebellious chosen, lost from God's keep,
Jesus calls them home saying... you are not my sheep.*

~ Foolishness for the Foolish by a Fool for Christ ~

Roman Hell Fire?

I ask myself...

SELF>> By the way where is Hell and the Lake of Fire in the Book of Romans?

ME>> Self, that is an excellent question. The Book of Romans is Paul's premier thesis on the subject of Christian salvation. One would expect a thorough explanation of eternal destinies outlined in this work. What does Romans have to say about Hades / Hell? What does Romans have to say about the Lake of Fire? Curiously, the book of Romans does not mention Hell or the Lake of Fire explicitly even one time! However, on the positive side Romans does speak about Eternal Life. Romans does speak about God's judgment of physical death for the wicked behavior of the unbelieving in Romans 1:32. Romans also speaks about justification resulting in freedom from condemnation to eternal death. I just found it curious that Romans does not explicitly mention Hades or the Lake of Fire.

My theory on that is that the larger focus of Romans is the positive hope of the gospel, the invitation for all mankind to believe, and the power of the gospel to transform and save people from... sin. If you are looking for a fire insurance policy for protection from the Lake of Fire, do not read the book of Romans. You will not find fire insurance there. The book of Romans is written to awaken the unbelieving elect to the awesome guarantee they already have in Christ. The book of Romans is also written to save the believing from the dread effects of our sinful nature.

The key application from the gospel of grace for God's people is **"BE TRANSFORMED."**

Salvation: Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How?

FRIENDS>> You've made a big deal about the fact that Hell and the Lake of Fire are not the same place. You have also raised a lot of other questions that I never thought about before. Why?

ME>> That is an excellent question. We Christians make many mistakes. One mistake we make is failing to ask questions and working hard to seek answers. Perhaps we are afraid of the unknown and so hold even more tightly to our traditions. A second mistake is that we fail to introduce the questions to others and point them to the answers. Perhaps we are afraid of rejection. The worst case of this scenario is that the blind are leading the blind. We sell people answers, and they buy it, with neither party knowing what the truth is. We warn people about the judgment to come, but we have no practical knowledge of the invisible world around us and the future appointments and destinies explained in Scripture. So let's briefly consider the who, what, where, why, and how of salvation.

Who needs to be saved and from whom?

Transgressors need mercy from the Judge or they will continue to suffer the consequences of transgression and will reap condemnation. We sinners, that is all mankind, need mercy from Jesus or we will be ruined by our sinful choices and be condemned, Romans 6 and Revelation 22.

How can we be saved and how did Jesus do it?

How can we be saved from sin's consequences and from condemnation? Salvation for a transgressor requires repentance. A transgressor can only be saved from sin by ceasing to sin. If our head hurts from hitting it against a wall, if we stop hitting the wall, then we will get immediate relief. The problem is we transgressors transgress because we love transgression. We must repent, but our hearts are so hard that we will only repent when God places his seed of change in our life, 1 John 3. More importantly pain isn't the only consequence of sin, but also condemnation and eternal death. There is no erasing our transgression. We are guilty and damnation is required without exception. The good news is that Jesus Christ became a man and took our penalty for us, dying on the cross. Now there is a new exception! There is absolutely nothing the elect of God can do through our own effort or failure to activate or deactivate this wonderful gift from God. Instead the work of Christ stands completely finished for all God's people and is already freely given to us. But only through the new birth will individuals receive this good news and find true joy.

Where are the possible habitats and destinies of living beings?

God is. He is spirit and does not live in **space time**, Exodus 3 and I Timothy 6. Created beings came into existence in the beginning of creation and we live in **space time creation**. Humans and animals live on the **earth**, Genesis 1. Angels and demons (fallen angels) are **everywhere**, though invisibly, 2 Kings 6. Jesus, God the Son, took on flesh in 4 A.D., lived and died on the **Earth**, was raised to life, and now is at God the Father's right hand in **Heaven**, Hebrews 1. Some of the fallen angels may have actually lived and sinned on the **Earth**, Genesis 6 and Jude 6, but now are imprisoned in **Tartarus (Thalassa)**, 2 Peter 4 and Revelation 20:13. Other fallen angels are also restricted from **God's presence** in Heaven at some point in history, Revelation 12. **Paradise** or **Hades** is the place people go after they die, **Hades** being a temporary place of punishment for unbelievers. The rich man and other unbelievers like him are punished in **Hades** immediately after they die, Luke 16. Abraham and other believers like him are rewarded in **Paradise (Abraham's Bosom)** immediately after they die, Luke 16. There is a **Gulf in Hades** between **Hades** and **Paradise**. The Beast and The False Prophet are the first to be thrown into the **Lake of Fire** in Revelation 19. Satan is temporarily chained in **The Abyss**, Revelation 20. Satan is then released from **The Abyss** for God's final demonstration of God's grace and then Satan is finally thrown into the **Lake of Fire** for **The Ages of The Ages**, Revelation 20. The abode of the dead has the compartments of **Paradise** and **Hades** which is eventually emptied of all humans and angels and thrown into the **Lake of Fire**, empty! **Hades** is only a temporary holding area. **Tartarus**, the temporary holding place for some fallen angels, is also emptied and will be no more, Revelation 21:1. The **New Heavens and New Earth** is then revealed as the final dwelling place for redeemed humanity and the righteous angels to fellowship eternally with God, Revelation 21. The **Lake of Fire** is the destiny of Satan and his fallen angels for The Ages of The Ages, Matthew 25:41. So the places living beings have been or will be found include:

- Outside space time - God
- Inside space time - Creation
 - Earth - here
 - Heaven - up there
 - Third heaven mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:12
 - The Abode of the Dead - temporary holding place for deceased humanity
 - Hades / Hell - punishment for unbelieving humans
 - Paradise / Abraham's Bosom - reward for believing humans
 - Tartarus / Thalassa - temporary prison or retreat for some fallen angels
 - The Abyss - special temporary punishment for Satan
 - The Lake of Fire - destiny of the non-elect, the fallen angels
 - The New Heavens and Earth - eternal destiny of the elect, mankind

Why did sin enter the world and why did Jesus give us grace?

The key verse of my thesis answers that question easily. Romans 11:32 (WEB), **“For God has bound all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all.”** Ephesians 2:7 (WEB), an often overlooked verse, also explains the reasons for God’s decision to extend grace, **“that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”** Simply put, God decreed the existence of sin in order to show off his grace. Boy did He hit a homer!

What is next?

You or I may be overwhelmed with the truth about God’s grace. Our questions resulted in answers that resulted in even greater questions! Our minds could easily be blown away by God’s amazing grace. The original disciples, no doubt, felt the same way as Jesus gave them the Great Commission and left them as he ascended into Heaven right before their eyes. So Jesus sent angels to provide simple instruction while they stood there with their mouths hanging open.

‘You men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who was received up from you into the sky, will come back in the same way as you saw him going into the sky.’

Acts 1:11b (WEB)

Translation, get to work making disciples and keep an eye peeled toward the sky.

So Simply Sin Since the Savior is Sovereign?

OBJECTION>> *You have made a big deal about God’s sovereignty, man’s free will (or lack of free will), and grace given to all mankind. So shall we simply sin since the Savior is sovereign?*

ME>> That is one possible reaction to the gospel. In fact, Martyn Lloyd-Jones said,

First of all let me make a comment, to me a very important and vital comment. The true preaching of the gospel of salvation by grace alone always leads to the possibility of this charge being brought against it. There is no better test as to whether a man is really preaching the New Testament gospel of salvation than this, that

some people might misunderstand it and misinterpret it to mean that it really amounts to this, that because you are saved by grace alone it does not matter at all what you do; you can go on sinning as much as you like because it will redound all the more to the glory of grace. That is a very good test of gospel preaching. If my preaching and presentation of the gospel of salvation does not expose it to that misunderstanding, then it is not the gospel.

So the reaction from the unbeliever toward the good news is that he now has the license to sin to his heart's content. And that is the heart of the problem. His heart is black and can only be made content with more sin. He is blind to the fact that sin is bad and God is good. The response of the believer, however, is to cry out to God for help to leave our love of sin. We are sick of sin's destruction and wish we could push the button to end all sin forever. However, God alone is sovereign with exclusive authority over the existence of sin. Praise the day when he pushes the button!

So, yes, grace is a license to sin, but not like the unbeliever thinks. Grace is God's promise that our sin will never separate us from the love of God and that no matter how many times we fail, we can always return to the Lord, free from condemnation. Furthermore, since God is sovereign over even the evil in this world we can trust that he has a good purpose even for painful circumstances. This is a powerful license, but since the unbeliever does not understand that sin is bad, he views grace as an *opportunity* to sin further. The believer, however, has had his fill of sin's consequences. The Psalmist understood this exactly when he said

***If you, Yahweh, kept a record of sins,
Lord, who could stand?
But there is forgiveness with you,
therefore you are feared.
I wait for Yahweh.
My soul waits.
I hope in his word.***

Psalm 130:3-5 (WEB)

The unbeliever does not understand that his own nature is bound to sin and that in fact he cannot even choose not to sin. Oh, certainly he might pause a sin or two from time to time. However, if he truly had *free will* he could decide to never sin again. Why not if his will is truly *free*? Try it yourself. Learn the perfect law of the Lord. Compare his ways with your ways until you are made aware of your flaws. Love his way in your heart. Then use your *free will* to decide to never sin again. Friends, this is

not possible. Only one man in the history of the world ever exercised his free will to live a perfect life, free from all sin, the God-man, Jesus Christ.

So then since God is sovereign and our will is not free, then is God to blame for my sinful choices? No. God answers this question in Romans 9:14-24 (WEB),

14) What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? May it never be! 15) For he said to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." 16) So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who has mercy. 17) For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I caused you to be raised up, that I might show in you my power, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." 18) So then, he has mercy on whom he desires, and he hardens whom he desires. 19) You will say then to me, "Why does he still find fault? For who withstands his will?" 20) But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed ask him who formed it, "Why did you make me like this?" 21) Or hasn't the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel for honor, and another for dishonor? 22) What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath made for destruction, 23) and that he might make known the riches of his glory on vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory, 24) us, whom he also called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles?

Thankfully Jesus is sovereign over all, including his grace! He is sovereign over the existence of sin. He is sovereign over the final end of sin, one glorious day in the future. And he is sovereign over the grace given to mankind. He has a good purpose for everything and his loving hand holds all. Join me looking to the day when Jesus removes all sin forever and perfect loving fellowship with God and each other begins!

Special Strategies and Interpretations?

Another careful reader asked...

READER>> [You propose that a proper understanding of the gospel includes special strategy and interpretation. For example, you say that "eternal" is not always eternal. You say that Jesus calls unbelievers "not His sheep," but they really are elect, lost sheep. You say that even though the Bible says God hated Esau, that he really loved him. You say that wisdom gives one

answer to the fool and another answer to the wise. Really? What is the end of re-interpreting the Bible to defend your own unbiblical views? - jlm]

ME>> This is perhaps the most important question that could be asked of my thesis. It is my singular goal to be thoroughly Biblical. To adopt a view apart from the Scripture offers no real hope. There would be absolutely no point to it. Suppose you or I received a court summons in the mail. We could try to imagine the letter to be an invitation to Disney World. However, our interpretation would make no difference when the police arrived to escort us to the judge. Likewise, hiding behind silly interpretations will not protect the remaining self-righteousness that will be stripped away when final judgment is made based solely on the righteousness of Christ. We might like to imagine Heaven to be a giant Disney World in the sky that everyone is invited to attend with *free will faith* as their ticket.

However, this fictional understanding of salvation misses the whole point of grace. Heaven is the destiny of all those predestined for salvation, and these righteous are invited to *live by faith*. Heaven is not an eternal Disney World vacation, but an eternity of worshiping Christ. If all someone has is fire insurance they definitely will not find comfort adoring Jesus for an eternity. Sure everyone hopes for a happy afterlife, but only the believing are eager to worship Christ our savior. So really what matters is not our imagination, but the truth. Thus any special or unusual interpretation about salvation is only justified if it is also justified by Scripture itself.

Does wisdom give one answer to the fool and another answer to the wise?

Yes, according to Scripture in Proverbs 26:4-5, wisdom answers the same question differently for the wise man and the fool. For example, John 1:11 begins hopefully, making it clear that all mankind belongs to Christ. However, when foolish unbelief is evident Jesus tells the unbelieving that they are **“not His sheep”** in John 10:26. Gently I ask on what basis do you have confidence that you are elect? Think carefully before you say you met the condition of *faith* therefore you must be elect, because Christian faith must be founded on Biblical facts. What Biblical fact do you have to confirm that you are elect, while even one other human being is not? Your answer may expose that in fact you do not have Christian faith.

Does God love Esau even though Romans 9:13 says he hated Esau?

Many verses say that God loved the world. John 3:16 is a well-known verse that you are no doubt familiar with. Arminians understand these verses to mean every individual within mankind is loved by God, though sadly they also think that salvation is only secured through God's love PLUS man's faith. Calvinists, however, properly understand that salvation is through God's loving grace alone, simply received by faith. Yet they are also

convinced that God does not love all mankind because they think not all are saved. Since his saving love can never fail they conclude that those not saved are specifically not loved by God, such as Esau whom God hated. They interpret "all" to mean, not every individual, but instead every "category" of human.

Now, I have never heard a Calvinist evangelize by saying, "*God might love you OR you might be one of those hated by God.*" That would be pure silliness. Yet it is a proper application of their understanding. So what is a better understanding? Scripture itself states in Romans 11:28 that the unbelieving are "***ENEMIES as far as the gospel is concerned, but LOVED as far as election is concerned.***" This Scripture answers your question precisely. In fact the answer to your question is part of the whole concluding argument of the book of Romans! Your question is an excellent one, given complete attention in Paul's Magnum Opus.

So again the Scripture defines the boundary for our interpretations. Again gently I ask if you believe that God does hate the many and love the few, then on what basis do you conclude that you are loved? Maybe like Esau you are hated for rejecting the gospel, but still loved on account of election. Or do you believe that he loves all, but eventually hates the people who reject him? Certainly you do not believe that God could love anyone that he damns for all eternity! How could he love them when it is within his power to save them? Yet, the elect, though deserving damnation, are shown grace, God's unmerited determination to love and forgive those who hated him! Friend, God is fishing for men and you may have just swallowed the fish hook of His grace! From personal experience I suggest you give up the fight.

Are the unbelievers Jesus calls "not His sheep" really elect?

I grew up in a congregation that avoided the subject of predestination because it was a fearful doctrine. I have since grown to love this doctrine. Anyone who understands the doctrine of predestination also understands that God's determined love has already been decided for the elect not only before they have believed, but also before we were born, and even before the world was made. The Scriptures remind us in many places that God loved us BEFORE we loved him.

However, that does not mean I was a Christian before I was born again. My heart was not regenerate. I did not have the Holy Spirit. I did not have faith. I was not yet given the right to become a child of God, even though I was elect. (Infant baptizing Christians make a grave mistake in receiving Christ on behalf of their children.) The Scriptural defense for this understanding is all over the New Testament and very clearly spelled out in Hosea 2:23.

Now God's knowledge of me and heart towards me was constant through the whole period of my unbelief. Yes, I was an object of wrath for my part because of my rebellious nature and hatred of God. But God did not eternally hate me, nor any unbelieving elect, ever, though his wrath remains on the unbelieving. However, my knowledge of God and my heart toward him radically changed when I received his forgiveness from the cross. Through repentance and faith I obtained salvation from my sin nature and from punishment in Hell for my unbelief. In time I also grew to understand the salvation of the elect from the Lake of Fire. Now you may think instead that your *free will choice of faith* adds your name to the elect. Friend, unfortunately that is not saving faith, but is instead works salvation.

How can "eternal" not always mean eternal?

I had come to the conclusion that "*forever*" and "*eterna*" in the New Testament must not always mean "*forever*" and "*eterna*" because the context of grace demanded salvation satisfaction even for the unbelieving. And so I concluded that the Holy Spirit used the word "*forever*" and "*eterna*" to describe the long, but finite time of punishment in Hades for the unbelieving. I also concluded that if Abraham's faith could reasonably trust that God could "***call things that are not, as though they were,***" then I certainly was not unreasonable to conclude that God could save people from "*eterna*" punishment in Hell. Furthermore, it is also evident and believed by all orthodox Christians that Jesus abolished the "*eterna*" Old Covenant in his flesh. So I concluded that "*eterna*" does not always mean "*forever*" when God is in the picture.

The Lord has, however, recently corrected my understanding. My logic was sound, but incomplete. Please forgive me for that. I had already shown that the Hebrew word "*olam*" does not always mean eternal, but instead it means the duration of the subject in view. Every Hebrew lexicon denotes this fact. Yet without much homework I concluded that the same must be true of the Greek word translated "*eterna*" in the New Testament, the Greek word "*aion*." I had planned to do further homework to prove this for myself.

However, recently the Lord has blessed me through a reunion with John Wesley Hanson's classic 1875 work titled, *The Greek Word Aion-Aionios translated Everlasting-Eternal in the Holy Bible Shown to Denote Limited Duration*. I was first introduced to this work in college by a good friend, but sadly my memory is largely untrustworthy and I forgot about the critical points made in this book. None-the-less, this classic work is available for free from the U.S. Library of Congress website and also from my own website. This 88 page book is a must read for anyone who agrees or disagrees with my conclusions. There is little point to my adding further to this definitive work. Study this volume for yourself and your faith and understanding of the

Bible will be challenged in radically positive ways, if you are willing to let go of all your self-righteousness.

Dr. Heleen Keizer has also written a dissertation proving the same titled, *Life, Time, Entirety - A Study of Aion in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo*. You can read her 315 page dissertation online or an abstract of her conclusions from my website. You might think it is incredulous to claim that “*aion*” is mistranslated in many Bibles. Unless you are competent in ancient Greek you may not even know how to verify this for yourself. *The NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek in English* is an invaluable resource on my shelf. *Young’s Literal Translation* is also a valuable resource.

Will you not at least concede the point that, if the grace of God has forgiven a rebel like you, then his forgiveness could also extend just as easily to unbelieving mankind since Christ is their Federal head and savior also? The application of grace is in fact in his power alone. The good news is that the death of Christ demands the salvation of mankind, as well as the punishment of the unbelieving who reject his grace! However, the punishment of the unbelieving is not eternal, but governed by God’s loving grace.

Certainly you must agree that your faith does not add to the work of Christ which is freely given to both you and all mankind. Do you agree? Perhaps the problem is not that I lack a Biblical defense for these radical views, but I respectfully ask if you are lacking a radical Biblical faith.

There is No Punishment After Death for the Redeemed!

CALVINIST>> There is No Punishment After Death for the Redeemed!

ME>> I wish that were true.

I understand that the Calvinist way of thinking insists that there is no punishment after death for anyone whose sins have been paid for at the cross. This way of thinking is why you come to the conclusion that Jesus did not die for all mankind, because you know that people are punished after death. Yet, you too quickly conclude that the answer is that Jesus did not die for all mankind and that he does not love all mankind. Furthermore, to hold to your understanding, you offend many of Scriptures.

Consider these four plain Scriptures.

1 John 2:1-2 (WEB) says,

1) My little children, I write these things to you so that you may not sin. If anyone sins, we have a Counselor with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. 2) And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.

Jesus did pay for all mankind's sin - the believing and the unbelieving. He paid for our sin whether we believe it or not! How could this verse be plainer?

2 Peter 2:1-10 (WEB) says,

1) But false prophets also arose among the people, as false teachers will also be among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master who bought them, bringing on themselves swift destruction. 2) Many will follow their immoral ways, and as a result, the way of the truth will be maligned. 3) In covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words: whose sentence now from of old doesn't linger, and their destruction will not slumber. 4) For if God didn't spare angels when they sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus, and committed them to pits of darkness to be reserved for judgment; 5) and didn't spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah with seven others, a preacher of righteousness, when he brought a flood on the world of the ungodly; 6) and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, having made them an example to those who would live in an ungodly way; 7) and delivered righteous Lot, who was very distressed by the lustful life of the wicked 8) (for that righteous man dwelling among them was tormented in his righteous soul from day to day with seeing and hearing lawless deeds): 9) the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, 10) but chiefly those who walk after the flesh in the lust of defilement and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries.

Yet false teachers, even though they are bought, redeemed, and their sins fully paid, will be held under punishment for the Day of Judgment. How could this verse be plainer? How could this truth be worded more clearly than it already is? The answer is that it could not be worded more clearly, but instead Calvinist theology is at odds with the Scripture itself.

Jesus also said in Luke 12:47-48 (WEB),

47) That servant, who knew his lord's will, and didn't prepare, nor do what he wanted, will be beaten with many stripes, 48) but he who didn't know, and did things worthy of stripes, will be beaten with few stripes. To whomever much is given, of him will much be required; and to whom much was entrusted, of him more will be asked.

The pie in the sky thinking about God's forgiveness does not square with the Biblical picture of Jesus' wrath against sin and the punishments he has planned for the unbelieving redeemed... and perhaps even for the believing. Yes, God does forgive and has forgiven all, but he also punishes those He loves, as made clear in Psalm 130:4, Hebrews 12:10, and throughout the Scriptures! The proper posture for God's people is to brace ourselves for our interview with the Holy Righteous Creator Redeemer Judge of the entire Universe, confessing that we have sinned greatly and trusting that our sin is fully paid at the cross.

Instead of offending these Scriptures above why not simply change your mind, and agree that the unbelieving will be punished in Hades even though their sins are paid? Why not also change your mind and agree with me that the atonement of Christ will finally be effective in their salvation after they have served their sentence in Hades? Could tradition and the influence of denominational camps be influencing your judgment?

Jesus promised in Matthew 16:17-20 (WEB),

17) Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18) I also tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my assembly, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. 19) I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven; and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven." 20) Then he commanded the disciples that they should tell no one that he was Jesus the Christ.

The gates of Hades will be defeated! Why not believe?

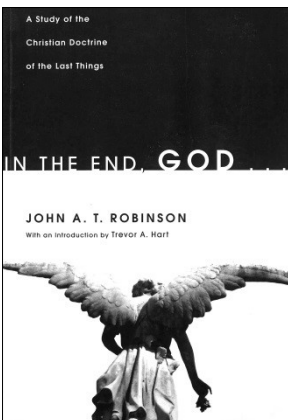
The Good, Bad, and Ugly of John Robinson

Objectors to my hopeful conclusions about salvation have asked me to review other books in order to win me back to traditional theology, that is that

few humans are saved while most are eternally damned. I have taken up the challenge and have posted various [Book Reviews](#) on my website. I thought it was a fair suggestion to allow myself to be influenced by Christians of different conviction. However, I thought it would also be fair to review books by those also holding to the salvation of all mankind in order to compare our reasons. Perhaps error in their reason would win me back to tradition, or truth in their reason would confirm my conclusions.

I have found that there is quite a range of thought even among those confident in the final salvation of all mankind. In fact, sadly, the divisions between them in faith and fellowship might even be deeper than between those of traditional Christianity. Yet, most have observed, as I, that “*aion*” is at times wrongly translated “*eterna*” in the English New Testament. Some are silent about the salvation of fallen angels, while others have concluded that even Satan will be saved, to which I am not yet persuaded. Most have respected and protected inspiration and strove for reasonable interpretation of the given Word, but some have even violated the Holy Spirit suggesting that difficult verses are better explained as human error. Many have even further differences of various natures, no doubt influenced by the traditions and experience from which they came.

I wanted to give my review of Robinson special attention because his book includes a concept that could wrongly be considered the same as one of my own conclusions. I have said that integral to the gospel are [Special Strategies](#) to reach the heart of the unbelieving as mentioned in my articles, [Flying Impossible](#) and [Proverbs 26:4-5](#). Robinson has *similarly* said that the gospel includes the *mythological reality* of eternal damnation for the unbeliever. Though I have significant points of comparison with Robinson, I want NO part of his assertion that the Holy Scripture contains *mythological reality*. Instead, the only myths that have ever existed are the myths in the mind of unbelieving man. For further explanation read my brief review of Robinson’s work following.



John Robinson wrote *In the End, GOD, A Study of the Christian Doctrine of Last Things*. Robinson offends epistemology and inspiration so gravely with the invention of *eschatological myth* that many will throw the book away after Chapter 5, if they get that far. I nearly did myself! Yet he makes key points in later chapters: *The Resurrection of the Body*, *The End of the Lord*, and *All in All*. He is accused of arrogance by Trevor Hart for asserting that God must save all mankind because of Christ. On that point I join Robinson! Yet Robinson missed the aionian nature of Hades and instead violates

inspiration to explain Scripture. Thomas Torrance also condemns Robinson for saying the gospel includes the *mythological reality* of eternal damnation for the unbeliever. Yet Torrance is self-condemned saying the *mystery of sin* requires the damnation of unbelievers even though their sins are atoned!

Robinson's book is terribly difficult to read as well as the essays in response by Trevor Hart and Thomas Torrance. I confess that I only understood 50% of any of it, at best. So I will keep my review to the main points in simple outline form. If I have misunderstood Robinson, Hart, or Torrance, please contact me and I will correct this article immediately. Yet as much as I understand Robinson, his theology can be outlined in the proverbial Good, Bad, and Ugly.

1) The Good

- a. Robinson asserts on page 73, "*In Adam all die; but in Christ all are made alive. That is the divine 'nevertheless,' beyond all hope or merit. It rests on no condition or virtue or spirituality, but solely on the unconditional love of God.*" He is accused of arrogance for this statement. I will gladly take my place beside Robinson and assert the same! Confidence that Christ has paid for my sin and the sin of my neighbor equally is not arrogance, but humility.
- b. Robinson says on page 29, "*Every truth about eschatology is ipso facto a truth about God.*" He emphasizes that our conclusions about the culmination of the history of redemption reflect the very character of God. How true! Beware that when teaching about future things we proclaim either our faith in the God who IS --or-- our faith in the god who is NOT!
- c. Robinson quotes Matthew 25:31-33,46 on page 94, saying the Bible speaks, "*On the one hand, universal restoration; on the other a clear division between the saved and the lost.*" Robinson insists that we cannot deny the Scriptural truth of eternal damnation. For that he is commended. Objectors to the salvation of all mankind likewise see the clear parallel construct of Matthew 25:31-46 which saves the sheep eternally on the right and damns the goats eternally on the left. Some Christian Universalists say that since the word "*eternal*" is "*aion*" in Matthew 25:46, then this judgment cannot speak about eternal damnation, but instead age-during punishment. Robinson does not follow that reasoning, nor do I. The word "*aion*" can also mean eternal when the subject in view is eternal, so this line of Universalist reasoning is not strong enough. Nearly all Christian Universalists agree that the "*aion*" of Hades is temporal because Hades ends in Revelation 20:14. However, as far as we can conclude from the revealed word, the "*aion*" of the Lake of Fire is instead "*The Ages of The Ages*" because no end is explicitly mentioned, just as the "*aion*" of God and his faithful love are

eternal. Many Christian Universalists further argue that the “*kolasis*” of Matthew 25:46 means “*discipline*” so this judgment is not damnation, but instead corrective. Yet the only other New Testament use of “*kolasis*” in 1 John 4 is not loving correction, but fearful judgment. It may be the case that even Satan’s time in the Lake of Fire is corrective and ends eons past the end of Scripture. However, there is a much stronger and more important argument to be made that is missed by Robinson and many Universalists. Now to the Bad and the Ugly.

2) The Bad

- a. Though Robinson uses reasoned argument in defense of his position, in order to explain the whole of Scripture he says that the truth of the gospel does not “*rest on logic.*” I certainly agree that truth cannot rest on corrupted human logic. I also agree that salvation cannot rest on having a logical understanding. However, independent of our thoughts, the truth itself must rest on the perfect logic and reason within the Godhead, which God reveals to believing mankind to some degree. To cut out the importance that gospel truths also be reasonable opens Robinson to grave errors. There is no paradox in the mind, plans, and Word of God.
- b. Furthermore, Robinson tries to bridge the gap between the certain universal salvation of all mankind and the Scriptures he understands to speak about the eternal damnation of unbelieving mankind. To do so he undermines the Holy Spirit as the author of Scripture assigning it to human authors who speak *eschatological myths*. He says on page 28, “[*Eschatological statements in the Bible*] are *neither inerrant prophecies of the future nor pious guesswork.*” Though Robinson says his proofs do not rest on logic, his whole book is an effort to make *logical sense* of the Bible which appears to contradict the salvation of all and the damnation of many. He then illogically explains perceived contradictions in Scripture by saying Scripture does NOT contain inerrant prophecy. Whoa, stop the train! If the Biblical prophecies of future hope and future judgment are not inerrant, what basis remains to establish anything Christian?
- c. Robinson simply needed more information to add up the facts more reasonably. Yet, he is not necessarily guiltier than me. In a similar way, in the first version of Optimism Out of Control, I concluded that the New Testament usage of “*eterna*” must mean temporal when the grace of God is in view. I concluded that unbelievers are sentenced to “*eterna*” punishment, but the overwhelming evidence of Scripture, grace, and the character of God must somehow find a way to end this “*eterna*” punishment. I was further persuaded because Jesus found a way to end the “*eterna*” Old Covenant and replace it with the New Covenant. I was even further persuaded because Abraham, the father of faith, trusted that “**God... calls things that are not, as**

though they were.” Finally, I noticed that the inhabitants of Hades are extracted out in Revelation 20:14. That was enough for me... initially! Similar to Robinson, I allowed grace to interpret the word “*eterna*” mythologically. However, we both missed the observation made by nearly every proponent of universal salvation, that “*aion*” should not be translated “*eterna*” in many cases because it means “*age*” or the “*life*” of the subject in question. I should not have interpreted “*eterna*” in a mythological way, but translators also should have used the word “*eon*” instead! I guess my main difference with Robinson is that God allowed me to correct my error. Read more in my article [Forever is Not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!](#)

- d. One last observation that Robinson and many of my contemporary Universalist friends have missed is that the Lake of Fire is “**prepared for...THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS.**” Matthew 25:31-46 is commonly assumed to be the judgment of believing and unbelieving mankind. However, I would argue that an explanation more consistent with the rest of Scripture is that the “*ethnos*” standing before Christ are unbelieving mankind just extracted from Hades and the imprisoned demonic fallen angels extracted from Tartarus / Thalassa. Christians might think that we are the sheep on the right. True, we are sheep. However, the physical reunion of Christians with Christ has already happened earlier through faith and also at the rapture by sight! The incredulous response of the sheep on the right does not sound like us Christians because we have already gone through this incredulous response to become Christians in the first place! Instead, this response is from unbelieving mankind just extracted from the fires of Hades, joyful to learn that Jesus has accepted anything good they ever did by his grace alone for their salvation. These are the lost sheep reclaimed on the right. Further, 2 Peter 2:4 also makes it clear that only fallen angels are held in Tartarus, the deepest pit of Hades. The Holy Spirit does not believe Greek mythology, but he understood the word usage of his audience. Hades refers to temporary punishment while Tartarus refers to a deeper pit from which there is no escape from condemnation and further judgment. So Hades is emptied of unbelieving mankind and Tartarus is emptied of fallen angels, demons, the goats on Jesus’ left at the Great White Throne judgment. The demons are then cast into the Lake of Fire... **“PREPARED FOR THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS.”** Read more in my article, [Forever is Not Forever? You Still Gotta Be Kidding Me!](#)
- e. Robinson also spends pages and pages of words trying to protect the *free will* of man using similar language as C.S. Lewis. They both conclude that God’s love cannot be love unless it is freely received. I can hardly believe that someone who is born again could even say that. They both neglect the true condition of man apart from

regeneration of the individual by the Holy Spirit. We are dead. We hate God and grace. The truth is that apart from grace we are not free, but instead *locked* and *bound* to sin. Robinson gives a nod toward this fact by noting the “*surd*” irrational nature of sin. So instead it is only the finger of God upon each individual’s life that sets us free to rationally take our position as God’s child. I just do not understand Robinson and the majority of Christendom’s persistent defense of *free will*... unless of course their faith is upon their own supposed decision for God instead of receiving *God’s* prior decision for us.

3) The Ugly

- a. Robinson clings with a two finger hold to the good news that Christ has paid for, has redeemed, has absolved all mankind from the guilt of sin and thus will be finally and eternally saved. However, the witness of this good faith is nearly ruined by missed observations and his mistreatment of reason and Scripture. Furthermore, the usefulness of his hope is totally ruined by his suggested application for those who hope to minister the good news. Robinson says on page 112, *“To the man in decision -- and that means to all men, always, right up to the last hour -- [eternal] hell is every way as real a destination as heaven. Only the man who has genuinely been confronted by both alternatives can be saved. To preach Heaven alone, as it is asserted the universalist must, is to deny men the possibility of salvation. For salvation is a state of having chosen; and, in the moment of choice (and no man can ever say: ‘I am safe, I have chosen’), both alternatives are existentially as real. Eternal life is only for those who have passed through the valley of decision.”* This suggested application for Christian ministry, ugly as it is, is at least consistent with his belief in the *eschatological myth*. One might well ask Robinson how he can assert and hope in eternal salvation for himself and all mankind while he remains merely an existential subject himself? How did he break out of the bubble of his proposed existential model to find hope to say with certainty that all mankind is saved and that eternal damnation is really an *eschatological myth*? The point is that Robinson’s recipe falls woefully short and anyone “*saved*” through his gospel would carry the baggage of neutered reason and a mythologized Bible. The Ugly.
- b. You might accuse me of the same errors because I have said that integral to the gospel are *Special Strategies* to reach the heart of the unbelieving as mentioned in my articles, *Flying Impossible* and *Proverbs 26:4-5*. I will agree that some difficult Scripture can only be explained through the employment of Robinson’s “*myth*”... if you will. I do not like the term, but to highlight one common thread with Robinson, I will use the same word. Robinson is dead right that at some points theologians on all sides cannot build a systematic theology of salvation and remain true to the objective statements of

Scripture. Something must budge. Some weakness is found at the extremes of Calvinistic, Arminian, and perhaps even Christian Universalism when compared objectively with Scripture. So back to the point: are the Pharisees who rejected Christ his sheep, lost sheep, or goats? The objective statement of Christ to these self-righteous rebels is that they are not sheep, not even lost sheep. So there is a perceived contradiction. Christ says these Pharisees are *not* his sheep and so apparently he did not die for them, though elsewhere the Bible plainly says Christ died for all and that all mankind are the sheep of his pasture. What is the truth? Calvinists bend one way saying Christ did not die for all mankind. Arminians bend the other way saying Christ died for all mankind, BUT we must apply the atonement to ourselves through faith. Robinson's answer is that this perceived contradiction of Scripture is explained by *eschatological myth*, and that these unbelieving Jews are paradoxically both destined for salvation and damnation at the same time. Sorry John, I cannot go there. Instead I believe they are *lost* sheep based on Hosea 2:23. My answer, as fully explained in my article *Special Strategies and Interpretations*, is that instead it is the mind of the unbeliever that contains the *myth*. The Holy Spirit's inspired Word speaks to the believer and the unbeliever according to either the truth or *myth* that is present in their own thinking. Proverbs 26:4-5 (WEB) says, ***“Don't answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.”*** Jesus answers the unbelieving Jews according to the *myth* that was in their own head! However, there is no *myth* in God's head or the Scriptures! Jesus loves all the Jews and all the gentiles, all mankind, even the rebellious! We are all his sheep whether we are lost or found. However, when the unbelieving Jews persisted in their stubborn rejection of their shepherd, Jesus answered them according to the foolish myth in their own head saying, ***“you are not my sheep.”*** This strategy is clearly outlined in Hosea Chapter 2. Since the unbeliever has not yet trusted that his sins are already fully paid at the cross, then eternal damnation is the destiny he inwardly fears, despite how religious or boldly *“Christian”* he may appear. Yet despite their unbelief, their sins also remain fully paid. There is absolutely no paradox in the Scripture, the Gospel, or the mind of God, as explained in my article, *Real or Apparent Paradox?*, but only in the mind of the unbeliever, especially the religious unbeliever.

My clarification of the good news to mankind is instead, believe! Your sins are forgiven! Meet me in Heaven! Do you deny that Christ is your Savior? Why? He IS your Savior! Be thankful that Christ has paid for your sin because the destiny of all those not saved by Christ is the eternal Lake of Fire. Why anger the Lord and hear him say, ***“You are not my sheep?”*** Yet you must be warned that even if you give your life to religion, destroy your life

with sin, and suffer an age in Hades resisting grace until the very threshold of damnation, even so, NOT YOU OR EVEN ONE of those for whom Christ died will ever enter the Lake of Fire which is **“prepared for... the Devil and his angels.”** Why wait? Why destroy your life with sin? Testify that Christ is your Savior! Be transformed by the Holy Spirit! However, *IF* Christ is not your Savior and the Savior of all mankind as you say, then nothing can save you from eternal damnation.

Robinson's gallant effort illustrates the true plight of sinful man. We are in utterly desperate straits: you, me, and Robinson. Apart from grace we are dead with eyes sealed shut to the truth of God's unconditional love. However, when our eyes are opened to even a ray of the shining light of truth we cling to it with all the muscle and tenacity of a desperate mountain climber. Even if we hang by a two finger hold at the last precipice of Mount Everest, we cannot let go of the truth we have seen. We are sinners in desperate need of forgiveness, and in Christ there is forgiveness for sinners! Our hands and feet may not find stable ground to answer all the questions we might have. (Not because stable ground does not exist, but thorns, thistles, and Satan's schemes obstruct the way.) So we hang on to what we know with hands and feet struggling. Such is a good description of Robinson... and perhaps even ourselves. Were we to see my mountain climber metaphor enacted on film, we would be clutching the edge of seats and the man with the two finger hold would be praised in the end! For the Lord himself will lift us to final safety, the dark glass will be removed, we will see him face to face in glory, and he himself will praise our faith in spite of our failings.

Though I feel Robinson has erred greatly, I find great kinship with his assertion that the work of God in Christ *must* bear the fruit of the salvation of all mankind. Though Robinson is accused of arrogance for this assertion, he is woefully misunderstood by his wicked unbelieving critics. For his assertion that God must save mankind is rooted in the fact that God himself determined to do it and has already accomplished the absolution of all our sin at the cross of Christ. Since God himself has already paid for the sins of all mankind, then who remains to condemn? Friends, no one. No one. On this key point Robinson clings to the very heart of Christian salvation and hope.

If we acknowledge Robinson's grave errors and commend his tenacity for God's unconditional love, we will see that the greater arrogance is not Robinson's, but in fact Hart, Torrence, the Calvinist, the Arminian, and the religious. They claim that their sins are forgiven, with at best hypocritical doubt or likely condemnation for the remainder of humanity. What is the basis for their faith? It is not founded on the bedrock of Christ! If the grace of Christ for *ALL* mankind is not the hope of these arrogant, then it can only be a human condition that they themselves have supplied. That is the

arrogance of the religious. Take care! Arrogant rejection of grace of this kind is just the sin for which the fires of Hades burn.

Universalism + Free Will = One Very Strange Bird

The feedback I have received for my *Optimism Out of Control* thesis, even from objectors, has been extremely valuable. The hard questions of others have driven me to pray for God's leading and to God's word for confirmation of the good news that truly **Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.**

THE MOST CURIOUS OBJECTION>> *However, of all the objections received the most curious is from those who also claim that all mankind is finally saved, yet who hold to man's free will, while objecting that God willed the salvation of all mankind by his gracious sovereign choice.*

ME>> Wow! I just do not get that. The great confidence we believers have that Christ will be finally victorious in the salvation of all mankind is rooted in the fact that the Godhead willed it to be -- in spite of our rebellion! God has prophesied in his Word that he will accomplish his mission to save of all his people. We can have great confidence that Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind because GOD HAS WILLED IT TO BE! GOD'S WILL IS THE GUARANTEE THAT IT WILL HAPPEN!

I am happy to receive this good news as well as happy to part ways with traditions that place the security of salvation in the hands of human decision. There is no security in taking anything from God and putting it in the hand of man. This is the difference between mere pew sitting religion and true relationship with Christ.

Unfortunately, however, brokenness has followed us even into the fellowship of those concluding that Christ does in fact love all. As already mentioned, parting ways with tradition will likely land one in a miscellaneous bucket with some very unbiblical ideas. For example, I've encountered some holding to reincarnation as an alternative to Hades. How is this different from Hinduism which also believes Jesus is god and all will be saved? Yet Hebrews 9:27 says otherwise. I've encountered others who place more weight on human presupposition and tradition than the exegesis of Scripture. How is this different than any man-made religion? Jesus spoke directly about this in Mark 7:13. The most curious combination of all is to claim that all mankind will be finally saved... because of *time* plus the *free will* of man! God's offer of forgiveness, plus enough *time* is their winning salvation recipe. Where is the grace? Universalism plus the *free will* of man has got to be the strangest bird of all time.

Imagine a father with ten unruly children. Not one of the children wants to go to bed, yet the father has determined that it is bed time. So the father begins his work to round up the rowdy bunch. One is turned with a simple plea while another with persuasion. A third heads upstairs with a warning and yet another with a threat. Several more hold out and receive spankings and discipline of various sorts. One refuses to sleep even when forcibly placed in bed. The point is that without the father's intervention, no one wanted to go to bed. However, with degrees of intervention each eventually found himself in bed.

Alternatively, you could imagine a dad who sounded the bed time bell and all ten children neatly put themselves to bed while dad watched TV.... in your dreams!

Or if that illustration does not compute consider God as the quarterback throwing the football toward righteousness. Then Satan calls the next play, tempting Adam and Eve to intercept the football with the plan to run the ball toward the opposite goal... that is to be god themselves. Of course the whole game is all on God's sovereign football field so that He can send the Holy Spirit to tackle the rebel runners and recruit us to his own team. The point is that until the Holy Spirit tackles our deceived and unchanged hearts, we continue to run full speed away from God toward the goal line to be our own god.

The cross shows us in no uncertain terms that the unregenerate heart of mankind has no love for God. We are unruly children with no desire to rest in bed or pursue our Heavenly Father's goal line. No one who is unchanged will love God because we *cannot* love God without a changed heart. A change, that only God can effect, is needed in our hearts to enable us to begin to love the Lord. Furthermore, God has intended this by design so that he alone is praised as the savior of each individual and all mankind.

Perhaps Acts 4:27-28 (WEB) will help us

27) For truly, in this city against your holy servant, Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together 28) to do whatever your hand and your council foreordained to happen.

So yes, we make decisions. You or I may decide to go left or to go right. However, just because we make decisions does not mean that our will is free to love God! Instead our will is limited to decisions that proceed from our nature. A bear is a bear by nature and so behaves like a bear. Likewise an unregenerate sinner is a self-lover and God-hater by nature and even if filled with worlds of religion we still hate God. So in the case of Acts 4:27-28, all mankind, including ourselves by association, crucified the Lord Jesus

Christ because we hate God by our nature. Our will was not free to Love God, but instead our unregenerate nature was exposed as hating God... to the death.

Furthermore, we also see that behind our will and decision to kill Christ was a more primary and powerful will. God himself ordained the crucifixion of Christ. God himself willed these terrible events! Why would the good God do such a thing? God purposed to expose our heart of sin for what it actually is: enmity toward God. He needed to do this so he could then conquer our hatred of him and heal us with his overwhelming love and grace.

Even if we consider the baseball diamond of salvation it is God's will that has won the game, not our own. On first base we see that God predestined his people to salvation from before the creation of the world. Human will was not involved at all in that decision, but only God's will. On second base we see that God chose to die on the cross, even though Peter and all our self-righteous pride refused the idea. Human will was not involved at all in that decision either, but only God's will. On third base we see that Jesus asked the Father to forgive us, even though no one was asking for forgiveness. Again human will was not involved at all in that decision, but only God's will. Finally, arriving at home-base we see that the Holy Spirit raised us from spiritual death to spiritual life. No one was willing or able to receive grace, but God makes each one willing at the time of his choosing. God hits the home run and freely wills to free our wills!

Rejoice that God has freely willed to begin, continue, and perfect our salvation!

What About the Unforgivable Sin?

ONE ASKED>> What about the unforgivable sin, the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit mentioned in Matthew 12:30-32, Mark 3:28-29, and Luke 12:8-10?

ME>> That is an excellent question. First read these verses in the WEB translation,

30) He who is not with me is against me, and he who doesn't gather with me, scatters. 31) Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. 32) Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, neither in this age, nor in that which is to come.

Matthew 12:30-32 (WEB)

28) Most certainly I tell you, all sins of the descendants of man will be forgiven, including their blasphemies with which they may blaspheme; 29) but whoever may blaspheme against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation.

Mark 3:28-29 (WEB)

8) I tell you, everyone who confesses me before men, the Son of Man will also confess before the angels of God; 9) but he who denies me in the presence of men will be denied in the presence of the angels of God. 10) Everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

Luke 12:8-10 (WEB)

These verses certainly communicate that there is a sin, the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, that is unforgivable. So it would seem that regardless of what someone believes about Hades being temporary or not, if this sin is not forgiven, then certainly you will not be saved from eternal damnation to the Lake of Fire if you commit the unforgivable sin.

So what is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit? One traditional answer can be found here, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/blasphemy-against-the-holy-spirit.html>.

Since blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is not explicitly defined, most theologies work backwards from their conclusions about salvation. They use deductive reasoning to define blasphemy of the Holy Spirit as not satisfying their salvation formula. For example, since Calvinists understand that the elect are guaranteed final salvation, they conclude that whatever blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is, the elect of God can never commit this sin. This is a great hope for Calvinists, but only if you are also able to join them persuading yourself that you are elect while the majority of mankind is not elect.

Alternatively, Arminians conclude that since people are saved through their *free will* choice of "*faith*" in Christ, then the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit must be to resist the Spirit and not choose Christ with your *free will*. This is also a great hope for Arminians, but only if you are able to join them and have "*faith*" that your "*faith*" is truly authentic. So both Calvinist and Arminian thinkers have slightly different understandings of the blasphemy of the Spirit, but with the agreement that it is whatever does not satisfy their salvation formula.

Those holding to the Victorious Gospel view as I do could also use the same deductive reasoning as the Arminian and the Calvinist and conclude that the blasphemy of the Spirit is to be non-elect or to finally resist the Spirit and never place faith in Christ. Satan and his angels fit that description very well. So in fact I agree with both the Arminian and the Calvinist above! However, I also believe that all mankind is elect and that all mankind, thanks to the grace of God, will be transformed either sooner or later. So I could conclude in this way and at least match the reasoning of both the Arminian and the Calvinist above.

However, Young's Literal Translation of these verses offers further important insight. Young's work reveals that the proper translation of the Greek word "aion" is essential to understand the blasphemy of the Spirit and the resulting punishment for committing this sin. Read Young's translation...

He who is not with me is against me, and he who is not gathering with me, doth scatter. Because of this I say to you, all sin and evil speaking shall be forgiven to men, but the evil speaking of the Spirit shall not be forgiven to men. And whoever may speak a word against the Son of Man it shall be forgiven to him, but whoever may speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age, nor in that which is coming.

Matthew 12:30-32 (YLT)

Verily I say to you, that all the sins shall be forgiven to the sons of men, and evil speakings with which they might speak evil, but whoever may speak evil in regard to the Holy Spirit hath not forgiveness -- to the age, but is in danger of age-during judgment;

Mark 3:28-29 (YLT)

And I say to you, Every one -- whoever may confess with me before men, the Son of Man also shall confess with him before the messengers of God, and he who hath denied me before men, shall be denied before the messengers of God, and every one whoever shall say a word to the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven to him, but to him who to the Holy Spirit did speak evil, it shall not be forgiven.

Luke 12:8-10 (YLT)

Consider these important observations:

1. The blasphemy of the Spirit is not explicitly defined which is why most salvation theologies work backwards from their own viewpoint to conclude that blasphemy of the Spirit is to miss their particular salvation recipe. This is not necessarily a wrong method of interpretation, but it is certainly biased.

2. The punishment for the blasphemy of the Spirit is not explained either, but only that this sin will not be forgiven. There is no explicit mention of Hades or the Lake of Fire. Many automatically think of these destinies when “*eternal sin*” is mentioned because it matches their viewpoint. However, could anything else be in view?

3. The WEB translation speaks of “*never*” being forgiven and “*eternal*” sin, while Young’s translation does not! This is a very important difference that should inspire you and me to Greek study. Is blasphemy of the Spirit an eternal sin or not? Sadly we all have biases and preconceived ideas, even Bible translators. Further study of the Greek word “*aion*” may help. Please check out my article, [Forever is Not Forever? You Gotta Be Kidding Me!](#) The <http://www.blueletterbible.org> can also be used to examine each Greek word.

4. Jesus is teaching the same thing in all three passages, but the accounts in Matthew and Mark are the most complete, explaining that the blasphemy of the Spirit will not be forgiven in “*this age*” or the “*age to come*.” When Jesus said those words what was “*this age*” and the “*age to come*?” Are there just two ages: now and eternity? If so, then blasphemy of the Spirit will land you in the Lake of Fire. However, there are not just two ages in the future when Jesus said those words. Jesus spoke during the Jewish law age (“*this age*” during his life), the church / Kingdom age follows, and eternity follows last of all.

Could it be that the popular idea that the blasphemy of the Spirit is an eternal sin is *wrong*? My conclusion based on the grace of Christ and a proper understanding of the Greek word “*aion*” as properly translated in Young’s Literal Translation of the Bible is that, YES, this popular understanding is way wrong!

These verses teach that those who refuse to trust and obey Christ will not be forgiven for their unbelief in this present age, nor the age to come, meaning the Church / Kingdom Age. Their unrepentant unbelief will not be overlooked, but will be punished in the fires of Hades until the commencement of eternity at the Great White Throne Judgment. This also fits well with Revelation 20:5 (WEB), “***The rest of the dead didn’t live until the thousand years were finished.***” However, since there is an age even after the “*age to come*,” namely the New Heavens and the New Earth,

forgiveness still can and will be realized at that time for everyone whose sins are paid for by the work of Christ. The good news is that Jesus has already paid for the sins of ALL mankind.

Hey this is awesome news because it is final salvation for you, me, and our neighbor!

What Harm is There in Believing that God Will Save All Mankind?

Another tentative reader asked...

READER>> What harm is there in believing that God will save all mankind? Why would any object? Why is this good news even questioned? Your Biblical arguments seem clear enough.

ME>> Thank you for this question. You appear to be intellectually persuaded that the Bible teaches the salvation of all mankind. You also appear to be attracted to the prospects of the good news. Yet perhaps your reluctance and uncertainty is due to the traditions that surround you?

Some Christian traditions object, or even strongly object, because they do not think the Bible teaches that God's grace will be victorious in the salvation of all mankind. Furthermore, they may be concerned that this understanding could cause people to miss their understanding of the salvation message and thus be damned forever. These are important and noble concerns and so the hard work remains to properly understand the Bible and the gospel of grace. Repentance also is needed to confess that Jesus alone is the Savior.

I urge you to build your faith on the person of Jesus Christ and the Scriptures themselves rather than the tradition that makes you feel comfortable. Examine the Scriptures and pray, asking God to give you confidence in his truth.

As for my answer to your question, certainly I do not think there is any harm at all in believing that God will save all mankind through the grace of Christ! I believe this is the Biblical message and the good news of God's grace! However, I caution you to consider another question.

What harm is there in NOT believing that God will save all mankind?

If you join the Calvinists and believe that God does not love all mankind, but in fact only loves a sub-set of human beings, can any harm come from that way of thinking? Yes, in fact great harm! This is just the type of blind

hypocrisy that Christ came to defeat through confronting the Pharisees. The Pharisees believed they were God's chosen people while disregarding God's love for the gentiles. Jesus reserved his strongest rebuke for these people! I do not think you want to hear Jesus rebuke you in the same way. That is not a safe place to stand.

If you join the Arminians and believe that God has merely offered his love, conditioned on each individual's choice, can any harm come from that way of thinking? Again yes, in fact great harm! Redefining God's unconditional love to be conditioned upon the '*choice of faith*' undermines the invitation to trust that God has always loved you and your neighbor. Placing conditions on God's love perverts the Christian faith into just another pagan gentile religion of works. Jesus loved the Jews, the Greeks, and the Romans unconditionally, dying on the cross for all mankind. Trust in Jesus is confidence in his unconditional love. Trust is NOT a condition to his love! Please understand the difference. Christ was crucified once for all! Why crucify him again?

If you join those standing on the mystery in the middle of Arminianism and Calvinism, can any harm come from that way of thinking? Once again yes, in fact great harm! Mystery is hardly a safe place to stand for your own salvation or the salvation of your neighbor. Christ did not come to introduce confusion or mystery, but instead to reveal and explain the mystery of how our holy God could justify sinful man. The good and great news is that God the Son became a man, the second Adam, our vicarious substitute, to reconcile all mankind to God. The mystery is revealed in Christ. The Word of God promises confident knowledge of our salvation! Why obscure the good news with mysterious question marks?

Do you prefer the tradition that God does not love all? Do you prefer the tradition that God's love is conditional? Do you prefer mysterious question marks? The great harm of these understandings of "*faith*" is they fall short of Biblical hope in the Biblical Jesus. How can Jesus be pleased with this?

Look to Christ and his Word!

Why Do Some Go to Hell, Even if Temporarily?

Another reader asked...

READER>> Why do some go to Hell, even if temporarily? You say that only the Holy Spirit can lead people to faith and repentance. So then it is God himself who has determined to forgive all mankind from the cross in 33 A.D.. And it is the Holy Spirit who regenerates each individual at the time of his choosing to be born again and receive forgiveness. So then why would

God allow any to go to Hades / Hell? Why wouldn't he end the suffering and bring everyone to faith immediately?

ME>> Thank you again for this excellent question. Confidence in God's unconditional love for all mankind defended from the Bible is a great blessing. Yet, now our questions about brokenness, pain, sin, and judgment become even more significant.

We might have stomached these terrible things in the past, concluding that God simply does not love all, or that sinners are simply getting their just desserts, even eternal damnation. We might find comfort believing that the masses drowned in the flood were unrepentant sinners, outside of God's love, receiving their deserved judgment. Maybe there is comfort, but only if we forget that we are sinners just as they. We might think Ananias and Sapphira lost their lives because they really were not Christians in the first place. Maybe that is comfort, but have we forgotten that God also disciplines Christians? We might try to comfort ourselves saying that Luke 16, the rich man punished in Hades, was not a true story, but a parable. Or we might comfort ourselves saying the rich man missed his last chance to repent and so God's offer of love is rescinded. Maybe there is comfort, if we ignore that fact that salvation is only possible through God's gracious choice. And how do we reconcile God's love for all mankind, considering the pain suffered by Cain and Abel, Noah's family and their generation, Pharaoh and enslaved Israel, King David and Uriah, Lazarus and the rich man, the early church and the destruction of Jerusalem, the murderer and the murdered, the rapist and the raped, the aborter and the aborted, the selfish and the starving?

Joy over God's unconditional love for all mankind seems extinguished by the reality of the world around us and the nether world beyond us.

Scripture may not answer your question directly. However, there is a solid answer concluded from our knowledge of our sinful nature apart from grace, our knowledge of God, and our knowledge of God's purpose in grace. Consider Ephesians 2:1-7 (WEB),

1) You were made alive when you were dead in transgressions and sins, 2) in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the children of disobedience. 3) We also all once lived among them in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. 4) But God, being rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, 5) even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6) and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places

in Christ Jesus, 7) that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus; 8) for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9) not of works, that no one would boast. 10) For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before that we would walk in them.

First we see that our sinful nature apart from grace is horribly described as,

you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the children of disobedience. 3) We also all once lived among them in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

Ephesians 2:2b-3 (WEB)

This horrible description is often worse than we want to admit for ourselves and others. We are tempted to ask “*why do bad things happen to good people?*” However, the answer is that bad things never happen to good people. There are no good people. Though of course not all pain suffered is the direct result of our own sin and there are innocent victims. Nonetheless, the description of our evil nature apart from grace still offends. We might be both offended and fearful to consider that sinful mankind and this broken world really do deserve to be thrown into the refuse heap of eternal damnation. The point is that apart from grace we are children of wrath by our birth nature. The point is that unregenerate man prefers the suffering of Hell in order to worship self rather than worship of Christ with comfort in paradise.

I challenge you to a dangerous mental exercise. Consider the sins that tempt you. Imagine committing them and taking them a step further. Take them another step further and imagine further temptations presented. Now imagine steps even further. Continue until you are able to see that your sinful nature and the sinful nature of all mankind are made of the same stuff as Hitler himself. Continue until you are able to see that your unbridled sinful nature raises its defiant high hand to malign God himself. Continue until you can confess that you would dethrone God to be your own god and the god of those around you if you could. Unless of course you claim that you are not guilty of the crucifixion of Christ along with all mankind. Before we boast that we know and love God we should be reminded that we crucified Christ.

So an accurate knowledge of our sinful nature apart from grace at least explains that sinful mankind deserves and even would prefer eternal damnation to worshipping Christ. So the pain suffered in this life or even

temporary punishment in the next life is at least merited by our evil nature. So if any suffer in Hades after death, they certainly are not Christian brothers calling on God in repentance, but instead remain God haters by their birth nature. The unbelieving regret the pain, but they have no regrets for their continued unbelief and separation from God, even through Hades.

Scary as our sinful natures may be, thankfully this is only a tiny fraction of the whole equation. Yes, apart from grace the justice of God merits our eternal damnation. However, thankfully there is no “*apart from grace*” because the cross of Christ now demands mankind’s salvation. Our Ephesians passage continues,

4) But God, being rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, 5) even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6) and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:4-6 (WEB)

Thankfully God is greater than our sin and he is a savior with no condemnation for sinful man. Our knowledge of God is the great hope of the gospel. The bad news of our sinful nature is only an introduction to the good and great news of the gospel. Ephesians 2:4 is the great contrast of the gospel, “***But God!***” We are terrible sinners by nature, “***But God***” is a greater savior!

Okay, but why did God allow the brokenness, pain, sin, and judgment in the first place? Why does God allow it for another instant? Why does the Holy Spirit leave even one person unrepentant?

7) that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus;

Ephesians 2:7 (WEB)

God’s purpose was and is to “***show the exceeding riches of his grace.***” God is showing off and demonstrating his grace in loving the unlovable and forgiving the unforgivable over time. He is working out our salvation and the demonstration of his patient grace over thousands of years. He could have allowed only an instant of sin, but instead he is showing off his amazing grace working with sinners over thousands of years. The unstained, perfectly pure, glorious holiness of God Almighty has determined to show off his grace muscles in the salvation of a world full and a history full of sinful mankind through the cross of Jesus Christ.

Thus we observe that God has specifically allowed every possible combination of circumstances to show off his grace. God has proved, is proving, and will prove that his grace is undefeated in every arena. Consider, that God has demonstrated grace before the law with Adam and Eve and during the law with Moses. God has demonstrated grace before the advent of Christ with Israel and after the advent of Christ with the Church. God has demonstrated grace with the believing and also with the unbelieving. Furthermore, God demonstrates grace toward both the living and the dead, even to the depth of Hades. God is exercising his grace in every square inch of this broken world so that his grace alone will be praised at the restoration of all things.

Naturally we still have questions about brokenness, pain, sin, and God's judgments in Hades. However, we also know that God's purpose is to demonstrate the victory of grace from the highest to the lowest places throughout his entire creation. For myself, my appetite and imagination are ready now for God's final display of grace and the complete erasure of the fall and the restoration of all things. Yet God still has further displays of his magnificent grace and patience with sinful man. So we glorify him, trust him, and wait patiently.

Why Evangelize?

MANY>> If all mankind is saved from the Lake of Fire why even evangelize?

ME>> That is an excellent question. We evangelize because...

1. We are commanded by Jesus to evangelize and make disciples.

Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.

Matthew 28:19-20 (WEB)

2. Paul commanded Philemon to share his faith so that he would grow in his understanding of grace.

I pray that the faith you share will make you understand every blessing we have in Christ

Philemon 6 (ESV)

3. Love for the lost ought to move us to seek the salvation of the lost sheep, the rebellious elect. Did you pour your heart into evangelism thinking you were adding names to the Lamb's Book of Life? Rather, evangelism and discipleship is purposed to save the unbelieving elect from hardened hearts and punishment in Hades.

14) For the love of Christ constrains us; because we judge thus, that one died for all, therefore all died. 15) He died for all, that those who live should no longer live to themselves, but to him who for their sakes died and rose again. 16) Therefore we know no one after the flesh from now on. Even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more. 17) Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new. 18) But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation; 19) namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not reckoning to them their trespasses, and having committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20) We are therefore ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21) For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:14-21 (WEB)

We appeal to the unbelieving to be reconciled to God because their self-righteous hearts are at enmity toward God and they will be punished in Hades unless they repent. Yet even though their hearts hate God, God loves both the believing and the unbelieving dearly. After all, the work of Christ has already fully atoned for their sin. The wrath of God is fully satisfied and he holds no eternal wrath toward any individual human -- ever! Again He loves both the believing and the unbelieving! Romans 5:10 also makes it very clear that the unbelieving are already reconciled to God... for God's part. The only thing remaining is for their hearts to be changed by receiving God's love.

For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we will be saved by his life.

Romans 5:10 (WEB)

Several people suggested that if all mankind is finally saved from the Lake of Fire then really there is no motivation or reason to be concerned about

evangelism and discipleship. This is a sad testimony to a graceless understanding of God's love. I hope that I have answered your question and that you are motivated to tell your fellowman about the love of God.

Why Evangelize? Spiritual Warfare and Love for the Elect is Why!

Many continue to ask...

MANY>> If all mankind is saved from the Lake of Fire why even evangelize?

ME>> That is an excellent question.

Many do evangelism because they think that their efforts are adding people's names to the Lamb's Book of Life. We have already discussed that if predestination is true in any sense whatsoever, then each individual's final destiny cannot be effected in the least by even one human word or action. So then have I even talked myself out of any valid purpose for evangelism and disciple-making?

No!

Evangelism and discipleship cannot change any one's eternal destiny, *but* through God's sovereign hand, it will change one's life in this life and also during the intermediate states found in the nether world, Hades. Christians have a new heart toward their Heavenly Father and now love God. Non-Christians, however, continue with their sinful birth nature and only love themselves, while hating God and grace. Christians are promised paradise at death through sweet fellowship with God and all the deceased believers that have already left this world. Non-Christians, however, are sentenced to punishment in Hades for rejecting what is good, and in fact they have no desire for fellowship with God.

I mentioned this concept to an individual once and he remarked, "*if that is true we should just party and enjoy sin because we will all be saved eventually anyway.*" That comment is very sad. Frankly, the only cure remaining for him may be to drink even more deeply of the sin he loves until he hits the floor. Friends, God is good, his commands are good, forgiveness is good, and grace is good. Sin, though it may entice with fleeting thrills, is *not* good, and will destroy our lives.

A deadly war is raging across the entire creation with Satan, the arch enemy of God, seeking to destroy God's people, mankind, through whatever means

he can fabricate. Satan began with his lies to Adam and Eve in the garden and he continues to this very day with his lies everywhere.

Remember that Revelation 12:7 (WEB) says

There was war in the sky [heaven]. Michael and his angels made war on the dragon. The dragon and his angels made war.

Surprised? Heaven itself is soiled with Satan's rebellion and Satan has brought the battle to earth to enlist traitors here. Yet God commands his people to follow Christ and enlist in evangelism and discipleship to join the fight against Satan and his demons. Not convinced?

Ephesians 6:10-13 (WEB) EXPLICITLY says,

10) Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might. 11) Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12) For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world's rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13) Therefore put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

The enemy is not flesh and blood. The enemy is not mankind. The enemy is not even unbelieving mankind. Instead our enemies are the powers of this dark world, the Devil and his demon army. So evangelism and discipleship are designed to fight the lies of Satan and teach mankind the truth about the love of God for all people. How do we fight against Satan and his lies? How do we begin? The recipe is simple.

Revelation 12:11 (WEB) says

They overcame him because of the Lamb's blood, and because of the word of their testimony. They didn't love their life, even to death.

Christ invites us to take up his cross and follow him to fight against the lies of Satan by giving our *everything* to testify that the blood of the Lamb has paid for the sins of all mankind! Will you join the fight? Or sit in your religious pew?

Why is 'Free Will' an offense to grace?

Another debater asked...

READER>> I interpret your statement[s] to mean "That [believing in free will] is an offense to God in that it does a disservice of some sort to His grace." Why does it?

ME>> Claiming that *free will* made a distinction between you and another rather than grace is not really a disservice to God's grace, for ultimately nothing interrupts God's service and purpose, even our unbelief. But instead it is a dishonoring of God and a prideful boast toward our fellowman.

Yet you ask a good question.

Why is belief in *free will* an offense to God? First, the Scriptures themselves specifically teach that attributing spiritual progress to anything but grace is contemptible in Romans 2:4 and boastful in 1 Corinthians 4:7. Second, I have also said that if we believe persuasion at the natural level of logic and argument is sufficient, then our evangelism will create victims rather than converts. We will neglect to pray asking God to provide the heart change that only he can provide. One might argue that we chose to pray because of our *free will* choice to obey. However, Paul gives the glory for all his effort to God in 1 Corinthians 15:10 and even our prayers as explained in Romans 8:26. Third, you have already admitted that there are no Scriptures that explicitly teach that man has a *free will*, but there are verses that teach that man is spiritually dead and must be regenerated by the Holy Spirit to be alive to God. Since this is the case, the question begs: why not humbly accept the Scriptures? Why the resistance? Stubborn pride, perhaps? Fourth, if I claim that my *free will* made the difference in my spiritual progress, I have a boast before my fellowman; but if I acknowledge that grace made the difference, I am God's servant to point others to the only hope for their healing, God himself. Furthermore, then God can answer for himself as to why he chooses to do this or that.

READER>> To my mind it is the Calvinist's perspective which does the disservice to God's grace by limiting it to a select few.

On that we totally agree, for God's love is not limited to a subset of mankind as Calvinists ignorantly teach.

READER>> or for the deterministic universalist, by rationing God's grace to a select few now and delaying His gift to a much later time for the others.

Yes, I can understand your concern. However, I have also said I do not like the negative connotation of the word “*deterministic*.” The word ruins the artistry of what God is building and designing. Yet I also ask with you, why did God bring me to faith at age 18, others earlier, and even others later? Or why do many die in unbelief and suffer in Hades when God’s grace could stem the tide? I do not like these facts either. However, it is what the Scriptures teach. So we could try to find an explanation that makes sense to human reason alone and helps us feel more comfortable, or we could give our lives to the Spirit’s purposes and allow God to make his appeal through us as Paul did in 2 Corinthians 5:20 (WEB): “**We are therefore ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.**”

The mistake many make who reject God’s sovereignty is imagining Him sitting in heaven pulling switches and using words like “*deterministic*” to describe his sovereign influence. This is a mistake that improperly characterizes the beautiful work of God’s grace. God’s sovereign grace is intimate and present and at work and when we obey his will then it is certain that he is at work through us for the good.

Wow! How Can You Be Ultra-Conservative and Ultra-Liberal?

Another Pastor asked

ANOTHER PASTOR>> Wow! How can you be both ultra-conservative and ultra-liberal?

ME>> You have just vindicated my entire life for Christ. Thank you!

American Christians, soaked in American culture, have adopted a simplistic two-party worldview. Just like American politics teeters between the labels of Democrat and Republican, so American Christians teeter between the labels of Liberal and Conservative. Labels can be useful. However, in this case the labels are neither sufficiently defined nor granular enough to encompass all the issues. The net result is the polarization of our nation and the polarization of the American church. In fact the current polarization could be compared to the division between the legalistic Jews and licentious gentiles of Jesus’ day. The Jews could be compared with the conservative Republicans and conservative Christians of our day and the gentiles with the liberal Democrats and liberal Christians. This is a curious repetition of history.

The problem with conservatism is that it is not conservative enough, at least according to Jesus’ standards. “*Conservatives*” find self-righteous pride

in pointing out what is wrong and what is right. Meanwhile they do not live up to their own standards and especially not Jesus' standards. They (and we) sin daily! Read Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and you will see that his standard of right and wrong blows all of our hypocrisy out of the water and into plain view. Not one human being on the planet has met his standard of righteousness, **"Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect"** Matthew 5:48 (WEB). Jesus was ultra-conservative, with *perfect* righteousness.

Likewise the problem with liberalism is that it is not liberal enough according to Jesus' standards either. *"Liberals"* pride themselves on standing up for the minority and being the voice of all people. However, put their (and our) philosophy to the test and you will see that their altruism falls short with arbitrary lines in the sand. Read the gospels and you will see that Jesus' standard of inclusivity for the love he gave (not merely offered) is for every human being that ever lived for all time, from Cain to Abel and Hitler to Mother Theresa. Not one human being on the planet has matched his passionate love for even his enemies with the words, **"Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing"** Luke 23:34 (WEB). Jesus was ultra-liberal with grace and forgiveness, given to *ALL* mankind.

So with God's help I hope to praise the righteousness of Christ that exposes the utter sinfulness of all mankind, as well as praise the grace of Christ which brings salvation for all mankind. My words are nothing. Look to Jesus and you will see his righteousness and grace in perfect measure at his cross for you and all mankind!

As an aside, the message that the atonement has effectively paid for the sins of all mankind is not a *"liberal"* view, but in fact the Biblical view of the atonement. Contrary to Calvinism, Christ is glorified for his incarnation as the new federal head of *ALL* mankind, Romans 5:18. Contrary to Arminianism, Christ is glorified for his grace in the salvation of all mankind without any human condition, Romans 5:18. To say otherwise is to offend either the glory of his incarnation or his grace. To say otherwise is to divide the very body of Christ or to redefine faith to be a work rather than simply trust. To say otherwise is to leave the high ground of Christ, falling to the *"left"* or *"right"* with simplistic *"liberal"* or *"conservative"* thinking and debate.

Wow... so what do you really believe?

Others> Wow... so what do you really believe? If you have parted ways with contemporary orthodoxy, then what else have you parted with?

Me> Yes I have parted ways with both Arminianism and Calvinism. However, I hope that I have not unnecessarily parted ways with

the thoughtful conclusions and hard-won discoveries of Christians through the ages. I seek to be a Christian, not a contrarian! Disagreement over one point, whether major or minor, is not reason to disagree *carte blanche*. For example, some claim that there is no punishment in Hell after death for the unbelieving because a God of love would never do such a thing. However, the Scripture plainly says otherwise in Luke 16:19-31. Others abandoned the Biblical doctrine of the Trinity to claim that God is one and only one person and became Unitarian Universalists. Sadly the Unitarian Universalist movement has lost all anchor to Scripture. They have abandoned the good conclusion that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three distinct persons, yet one God, Deuteronomy 6:4, Romans 9:5, Acts 5:3-4.

In short, I believe...

1. In one true God, existing eternally as one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, John 14:9-21, who is in essence spirit, John 4:24, light, 1 John 1:5, and love, 1 John 4:8.
2. That the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments are the unique, inerrant, inspired Word of God in the original autographs, and the final authority in all matters of faith and conduct, 2 Timothy 3:16.
3. In the sovereignty and active rule of God in creation, the fall, history, revelation, miracles, prophecy, redemption, and final judgment, Romans 8:20-21.
4. That man was created by God in His image, but that since Adam's fall, all men are sinful and by nature deserve God's wrath, Ephesians 2:3.
5. That Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, fully human and fully divine, eternally existing as God, yet born in time of a virgin, and that He lived a sinless and perfect life, 2 Timothy 2:5.
6. In the historic death of Jesus as the full and only atonement, guaranteeing loving forgiveness for the sins of all mankind, in His bodily resurrection from the dead, and in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, 1 John 2:1-2.
7. That all mankind is justified by the loving grace of God and redeemed on the basis of the death of Christ, which is received through faith, Ephesians 2:8-9.
8. That the Holy Spirit is the effective agent in regeneration, bringing individuals to faith and transformed lives, 2 Corinthians 3:18.
9. In one universal church, Christ's Body, to which all believers belong, and in particular churches accountable to God, led by elders who rule in doctrine and discipline, while acknowledging individual conscience, 1 Timothy 5:17, 1 John 2:27.

10. That believing mankind is rewarded in paradise after death, while unbelievers suffer punishment in Hades after death merited by their sinful nature and their rejection of the grace of Christ, Luke 16:19-31.
11. In the future, visible, physical return of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory, Titus 2:13.
12. In the final resurrection of redeemed mankind to the enjoyment of God forever, and the damnation of those excluded from the Book of Life to the Lake of Fire prepared for the Devil and his angels for the ages of the ages, Matthew 25:31-46 and Revelation 20:10.

Curiously it is rare to find a Christian that says they are 100% Calvinist or 100% Arminian. Most Christians find some dispute with these theologies and so find an alternative compromise. Yet will most Christians be willing to seriously consider the creed above as I have defended from the Scripture? Will you return with me to the historic faith and Biblical gospel that Christ is the Savior of all mankind?

Yes, but Even Harder Questions!

SELF>> After lengthy discussion with others and reading various books, I have found that there is quite a range of thought even among Christian Universalists. In fact, sadly, the divisions between them in faith and fellowship might even be deeper than between those of traditional Christianity. Most Christian Universalists have observed, as I, that the Greek word "aion" is at times wrongly translated "eternal" in the English Bible. Some are silent about the salvation of fallen angels, while others have concluded that even Satan will be saved, to which I am not persuaded. Most have respected and protected inspiration and strove for reasonable interpretation of the given Word, but some have even violated the Holy Spirit suggesting that difficult verses are better explained as human error. Many have even further differences of various natures, no doubt influenced by the varied traditions and experience from which they came.

Through this study a number of additional questions have come to mind. None of the questions raised have changed my certain position that Jesus is the Savior of all mankind. Yet the questions are very interesting to consider with some of them pertaining to the primary point, while others are secondary.

ME>> Questions and answers follow.

1. When did Satan and his demons fall into sin?

Did Satan and his angels begin their rebellion before Day 1, during Day 1-7, or after Day 7? Having been schooled in the 7 day creation camp I would have quickly said sometime during or after Day 1-7. However, Ernst Stroeter argues in his book *The Gospel of God's Reconciliation of All in Christ* that Genesis 1:1-2 is better interpreted to mean God first created out of nothing and then the Earth became formless. Stroeter speculates that the initial creation and rebellion of Satan took place in the first two verses of the Bible over an unspecified age. In his favor, Job 38:6-7 suggests that the angels, "*sons of God,*" were an audience to creation. So perhaps Days 1 to 7 are the beginning of God creating a home for mankind from the wasteland remaining after Satan's rebellion. Stroeter's view gives us pause to recognize that God has been working his plans out over long periods of time, from age to age. Was there an age of angels and Satan's rebellion in Genesis 1:1-2? Job 38:4 (WEB) ought to keep all of us from dogmatism on this point, "***Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if you have understanding.***" Really the question is a sidebar compared to our larger question of Arminianism and Calvinism versus the Gospel.

2. Where is the place "***Tartaroo,***" mentioned in 2 Peter 2:4?

Tartaroo means to "***throw down to Tartarus,***" a place of punishment deeper and more severe than *Hades* in Greek mythology as explained here <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tartarus>. Does the Holy Spirit then believe in Greek mythology? Hardly. Instead, the Holy Spirit apparently is distinguishing between punishment in *Hades* versus *Tartarus* using terms familiar to his audience, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hades>. Both these locations are in the netherworld after death beyond the vision of the living. Why would the Holy Spirit reference Greek mythology? *Tartaroo* is mentioned only one time in all of Scripture with only fallen angels mentioned as being held there for future judgment. I suggest that the reason the Holy Spirit uses the terms of *Hades* and *Tartarus* is to highlight the radical differences of these two places. They differ in the severity of their punishments as well as the nature and destinies of their inhabitants.

Unbelieving humans, creatures made in God's image and redeemed by the blood of Christ, are punished in *Hades*, Luke 16:23. Yet mercy is extended to them even there, 1 Peter 4:6. And most importantly final salvation is graciously given, Matthew 25:40,46 and Revelation 20:14-15. However, some fallen angels, powerful creatures, that God does not help, Hebrews 2:16, are already held in *Tartarus* for future judgment because of the grave nature of their sin, and they will be sentenced to the Lake of Fire for *The Ages of The Ages* according to Matthew 25:41,46, Jude 6, and Revelation 20:10.

This observation, if correct, may serve to help those who are confident that all mankind is finally saved, but who wrongly conclude that even human

beings are sentenced to the Lake of Fire. The Scripture is clear that the Lake of Fire is explicitly **“prepared for the devil and his angels”** Matthew 25:41 (WEB). The Lake of Fire is not prepared for human beings!

3. When is the Sheep and Goat judgment of Matthew 25:31-46?

The answer to this question is a significant component of my proposed model of understanding. I have proposed that Matthew 25:31-46, Daniel 12:1-4, and Revelation 20:11-15 are all the same event: The Great White Throne Judgment. The book of Revelation explains that The Great White Throne Judgment is just before the commencement of the New Heavens and the New Earth. Matthew 25:31 (WEB) also says, **“But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.”** So Matthew 25:31 certainly seems parallel with Revelation 20:11. Other possible timings for Matthew 25:31 could include God’s judgment on the Jews in 70 A.D. or a judgment that is working itself out through the Christian era.

If the Sheep and Goat judgment is not The Great White Throne Judgment, then it would seem that the Sheep and Goat Judgment comes first. If so that could allow one to conclude that the subjects at the Sheep and Goat Judgment are all human and that the Goats, if they are unbelieving humans, are being sent to an eon of punishment in Hades. Thus, they could still be saved at the Great White Throne Judgment afterward. However, the **“Throne of his glory”** language strongly suggests that the Sheep and Goat judgment is equal to The Great White Throne Judgment. There is a strong sense of finality to this judgment. Also Matthew 25:41 says **“aionian fire.”** This does not sound like Hades, but instead the Lake of Fire at The Great White Throne Judgment. Most Christian Universalists argue that **“aionian”** is temporal even in this case. They are motivated to make **“aion”** mean temporal even in this case because they think the **“ethnos”** is human only, therefore unbelievers must be released from the Lake of Fire sometime beyond the end of Scripture. However, I think the better understanding is that human beings never go to the Lake of Fire in the first place because it is **“prepared for the devil and his angels.”** This understanding also acknowledges many who object to Christian Universalism saying that the parallel construct of Matthew 25:46 cannot be divided into both **“eternal life”** and **“temporal punishment.”** These objectors make an important point. We should all acknowledge that **“aion”** means the duration of the subject in view. When Hades is in view, the **“aion”** is an age. However, when God is in view, **“aion”** is eternal. In this case the subject in view is the Lake of Fire, which has no explicit end as far as the revealed Word of God. But again, this better understanding is aided by the observation that fallen angels are the Goats on the left to be cast into the Lake of Fire. Furthermore, Matthew says that Christ will **“sit”** on his throne. This is the picture of a king who has

conquered and finished his work. Hebrews 1:3 tells us that Christ “*sat down*” after finishing his work of redemption. Hebrews 10:13 tells us his enemies will be made a footstool. In Matthew 25 and Revelation 20 Christ will “*sit*” on his glorious throne to judge and complete the footstool!

Daniel 12:1b (WEB) is also noteworthy when Michael tells Daniel, “...***Your people will be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book.***” Who is “***your people?***” Many think that Daniel’s people are believing mankind and the unbelieving are not his people. However, since the man saying these words is Michael, the Archangel, it is much more likely that Michael is recognizing Daniel as a leader of humanity. Thus “***Your people***” is all mankind in contrast to the people of Michael, the angel kind.

Furthermore, since the Bible is God’s message of hope to his people, it would seem very odd to me if human beings were still undergoing punishment at the end of the Bible, much less in the Lake of Fire which is prepared for the Devil and his angels. Instead Christian reason based on the grace of God and our Biblical evidence leans heavily on the side that punishment for all mankind, whether believing or unbelieving, ends with the emptying of Hades. Revelation 20:15 makes it clear that the fate of those standing before The Great White Throne is determined solely by the Lamb’s Book of Life. Those not named are cast into the Lake of Fire, and inversely those who are named are finally saved. I proved this further in my article, [Revelation 20:11-15](#). So can human action add our names to this book? Hardly. Our names have been written there from before the creation of the world, Ephesians 1:4! Only through faith in the grace of Christ can you be persuaded of this good news. 1 Corinthians 15:55 (WEB) shouts the same hope saying, “***Death, where is your sting? Hades, where is your victory?***”

The timing of Matthew 25:31-46 is also significant because I propose that fallen angels will be judged at this event and that they are in fact the Goats on Jesus’ left. So will fallen angels really be there? Let’s turn to that question next.

4. When will fallen angels be judged?

I have frequently referenced 2 Peter 2:4 (WEB) which says, “***For if God didn’t spare angels when they sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus, and committed them to pits of darkness to be reserved for judgment.***” The key point to note is that these angels are being “***reserved for judgment.***” They are in Tartarus now, but they will be escorted to stand before Christ for judgment. When will this happen? The answer is in Jude 6 (WEB), “***Angels who didn’t keep their first domain, but deserted their own dwelling place, he has kept in everlasting bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day.***” The imprisoned fallen angels of

Tartarus will stand before the Lord for Judgment on the Great Day. When is the Great Day? Friends, everything points to The Great White Throne Judgment! On that Great Day unbelieving mankind will be safely extracted from their eon of punishment in Hades and the imprisoned fallen angels will be extracted from Tartarus to stand before King Jesus. Matthew 25:31-46, Daniel 12:1-4, and Revelation 20:11-15 tell the rest of the story.

5. Will fallen angels be finally saved?

Thus far I have shown that fallen angels, demons that is, are being held for judgment and that they will be judged on that Great Day. I have concluded that this Great Day is the Sheep and Goat Judgment also called The Great White Throne Judgment. Yet, a number of Universalists propose that Christ's reconciliation of all includes the final reconciliation of fallen angels, the demons and even Satan himself. Their conclusion is based on the "all" of Colossians 1:20. Furthermore, since some think that human beings are sentenced to the Lake of Fire and yet finally saved, then perhaps fallen angels will also be finally saved. However, there may be a better answer.

Colossians 1:20 (WEB) does say, ***"and through him to reconcile ALL things to himself by him, whether things on the earth or things in the heavens, having made peace through the blood of his cross."***

However, consider a few more verses concerning the judgment of fallen angels.

Genesis 3:15b (NIV), ***"...he will CRUSH your head..."***

Matthew 25:41 & 46a (WEB), ***"Then he will say also to those on the left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is PREPARED FOR THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS.'" and "These will go away to eternal [aionian] punishment..."***

Hebrews 2:16 (WEB), ***"For most certainly, he DOESN'T GIVE HELP TO ANGELS, but he gives help to the offspring of Abraham."***

2 Peter 2:4 (WEB), ***"For if God didn't spare angels when they sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus, and committed them to pits of darkness to be RESERVED FOR JUDGMENT."***

Jude 6 (WEB), ***"Angels who didn't keep their first domain, but deserted their own dwelling place, he has kept in everlasting bonds under darkness for the JUDGMENT OF THE GREAT DAY."***

Revelation 20:10 (WEB), ***“The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet are also. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever [THE AGES OF THE AGES].”***

Revelation 21:8 (WEB), ***“But for the cowardly, unbelieving, sinners, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, THEIR part is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”***

Revelation 21:8 cannot be speaking of all sinners, but only those whose names are *not* in the Lamb's Book of Life. If it is speaking of all sinners then *no one* could be saved, ever, because we have all committed these sins and still commit them. Instead this verse is speaking of those who have committed these sins and whose sins are *not* redeemed, the Devil and his angels. I have explained this further in my article, [How Can You Say Revelation 21:8 Does Not Apply to Humans?](#)

First, the greatest joy of my wrestling match with grace was to learn that God is the redeemer of all mankind. Hopefully more and more people change their minds to rest fully in God's love for all human beings. There is work enough to be done to persuade our fellowman to let go of their religion and recognize the serious errors in tradition and the mistranslation of “*aion*.” There is work enough to be done to persuade our fellowman that they are truly loved by God, their sins are paid, and it is now impossible for us to be eternally damned.

Paul's great hope for himself, the church, and mankind is climaxed in 1 Corinthians 15:55 (WEB), ***“Death, where is your sting? Hades, where is your victory?”*** This points directly to the end of death for mankind and the safe release of those punished in Hades. Unbelieving mankind then finally receives grace at The Great White Throne Judgment. The Bible rings with the message of God's love for mankind. Rejoice!!!

So are Satan and his angels finally saved? The whole force of the Bible message is the history of the redemption of mankind, those created in the image of God and redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. The pages of Scripture end with the Devil and his angels tormented in the Lake of Fire for “*The Ages of The Ages*.” Satan really is an enemy quite beyond our strength. His fall was designed to serve God's purpose, the demonstration of grace to us, his people. There is a relevant parallel I have proposed between God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit versus Satan, The Beast, and The False Prophet that may further help us understand God's purpose. Read about it in my article, [Revelation 20:10](#). So does the “*all*” of Colossians 1:20 include Satan? Is there an end to “*The Ages of The Ages*?” That is in God's hands.

6. Can fallen angels be “resurrected,” or enter the “second death?”

Some have argued that since angels are spirit beings and cannot die, they cannot be resurrected or enter a second death. If they did not die a first time, how can they die a second time? Good question. I have noted elsewhere that some believe that fallen angels did live embodied on the earth during the time of Noah. It is suggested that their terrible sin in Genesis 6 precipitated the flood. These may be the wicked angels under discussion in 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6. If that is the case then this objection about angel resurrection and second death is easily answered. These wicked angels did live and die in the body and they will be raised for final judgment. We should also note that that Holy Spirit says in Matthew 25:32 that all the “*ethnos*” are “*assembled*” or “*gathered*” before Him. This language certainly accommodates both the retrieval of all his subjects whether from Hades or Tartarus. Revelation 20:11-15, however, uses the language of retrieving the “*dead*” from the sea [Thalassa] and Hades. Perhaps the demons in Tartarus did live embodied on the earth and so it is fair to refer to them as the “*dead*” in Tartarus. Or perhaps the “*dead*” is only explicit mention of the human beings in Hades and the fallen angels in Tartarus are only implied. Either way, Jude 6 makes it clear that these fallen angels will be present to give account and receive their sentence to the Lake of Fire on that Great Day when they enter the “*second death.*” Furthermore, you are right that the Lake of Fire is the “*second death.*” However, you can see that the Bible plainly says that Satan and his angels are sent there. So whether it is fair to say that angels can die or be resurrected I cannot say. However, we can say that Satan and his angels are sent to the “*second death.*” Read even more convincing proofs in my article, *Fallen Angels at the Great White Throne Judgment.* Revelation 20:13 does in fact say that the inhabitants of Tartarus will be raised from the dead!

7. How long will unbelieving mankind suffer in Hades?

Biblical Christianity does teach that even though unbelievers are punished in Hades that in the end all mankind will be finally saved. However, we might also ask how long will unbelievers be punished in Hades? Will they all be in agony the entire time until released at The Great White Throne Judgment? That is a long time! I have suggested elsewhere that Hades is a fit punishment for the unregenerate and that there will be no early exit or any exit at all until the grace of God opens the gate. Hades should not be viewed as the punishment of good people who love God, but instead the punishment of unregenerate people who hate God. Of course it would be very foolish to disregard Christ and make plans to suffer in Hades expecting to be saved eventually. If anyone will suffer the entire duration of Hades it would certainly be the one with a “*Who cares about Christ, send me to Hell*” attitude. However, this is enough of my speculation. Let’s consider the few Scriptures that speak to the subject.

Psalms 139:8 (WEB), “***If I ascend up into heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, you are there!***” Foremost we see that David understood that God’s caring love continues even for those punished in Hades.

Luke 16:24-26 (WEB),

24) 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 in anguish in this flame.” 25) But Abraham said, “Son, remember that you, in your lifetime, received your good things, and Lazarus, in the same way, bad things. But here he is now comforted, and you are in anguish. 26) Besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, that those who want to pass from here to you are not able, and that no one may cross over from there to us.”

The agony of Hades will be great. Plus, the gulf fixed between the punishments of Hades and Paradise cannot be spanned with human effort.

Matthew 16:17-19 (WEB),

17) Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18) I also tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my assembly, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. 19) I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven; and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven.”

Curiously Jesus seems to assign some role of forgiveness to the church in the realms of both Heaven and Earth.

1 Peter 3:18-19, 4:5-6 (WEB),

18) Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit, 19) in whom he also went and preached to the spirits in prison,... 5) They will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 6) For to this end the Good News was preached even to the dead, that they might be judged indeed as men in the flesh, but live as to God in the spirit.

Even more significantly Jesus preached the good news personally to the wicked dead so that they could **“live as to God in the spirit.”** Wow, what does that mean?

1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 (WEB),

14) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15) For this we tell you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will in no way precede those who have fallen asleep. 16) For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with God’s trumpet. The dead in Christ will rise first, 17) then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. So we will be with the Lord forever. 18) Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Clearly the deceased Christians are raised to life first, but what about the deceased unbelievers, the wicked dead?

Revelation 20:5 (WEB), **“The rest of the dead didn’t live until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.”** The deceased unbelievers are not raised to life until the Great White Throne Judgment. So are they in agony for the entire duration in Hades from now until the end? The verses above confirm that God loves and cares for mankind even in Hades and that according to 1 Peter 4:5-6 even conversion might be possible in Hades.

Matthew 25:37-40 (WEB),

37) Then the righteous will answer him, saying, “Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you; or thirsty, and give you a drink? 38) When did we see you as a stranger, and take you in; or naked, and clothe you? 39) When did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?” 40) The King will answer them, “Most certainly I tell you, because you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”

I have suggested elsewhere that the surprise of these righteous, the sheep on Jesus’ right, about their salvation does not sound like those who are already Christians. Christians have already been reigning with Christ. We would not have questions like these people! Instead these are unbelieving mankind just released from Hades, incredulous over God’s grace, and now believing!

Protestants have recoiled from Catholic and other speculation about the afterlife and typically have over-simplified afterlife analysis to death, judgment, and the destiny of Heaven or Hell. Certainly I would agree that Hades is quite unlike Catholic notions of Purgatory. Catholics have speculated beyond the Scriptures. Yet Protestants have likewise overlooked some valuable Biblical data. So what can we conclude from the above verses? I am convinced that God loves all mankind, even the unbelieving punished in Hades. I am also convinced that we should avoid speculation beyond the Scriptures. We should also avoid denial of the information given to us in Scriptures. The point from even one verse of Scripture is truly spoken, no matter how small it may appear.

8. Is salvation through a "limited atonement" of Christ possible?

Alternative to the Victorious Gospel, others add up the Scripture to say that Christ's atonement is limited and purposed for only a small subset of humanity. Those humans that Christ did not die for are then sentenced with the Devil and his angels to the Lake of Fire for eternity. Friends, I have worked as hard as possible to remain faithful to the whole of Scripture to understand the things Jesus has revealed to us about the future of salvation. While error, no doubt, will be found in my reasoning and Scripture reference, to say that Christ did not die for all mankind is a blatant abuse of Scripture, the Incarnation, and the Atonement. The "L" of T.U.L.I.P. as understood by John Calvin is a heresy and corruption of the very gospel of Jesus Christ. We might possibly say, the atonement is limited, it is limited to ALL mankind, and NOT extended to fallen angels. Yet if you reject Christ through adhering to a supposed "*limited atonement*," apparently you are not elected to believe the truth and apparently are not his sheep.

9. Is salvation of a subset by 'free will' faith in Christ possible?

Again, alternative to the Victorious Gospel, others say that Christ did die for all mankind to make the *offer* of forgiveness available for everyone to receive it by their *free will* choice of faith in Christ. Now this false gospel instead strikes at the heart of the definitions of "*grace*" and "*faith*." The Bible defines God's grace as his unmerited favor, his prior love of his enemies, and his reconciliation of mankind prior to our faith. The point is that grace is not an offer, but it is *already given* to his chosen people. To say otherwise is to add human condition to the unconditional love of God. To say otherwise is to trade Christianity for religion. The Christian faith is to simply trust, to believe, that Christ has in fact paid for our sins, and be changed -- period. There is nothing potential about Christ's work on the cross, but instead it is the greatest achievement! He said "*It is finished*." The sin debt of mankind is paid! Man's will is certainly not free to determine whether or not our sins are paid. I say again, man's will is certainly not free to determine whether or not our sins are paid. Our sin debt is paid! Again if you reject Christian faith in

favor of *free will*, apparently you are also not elected to simply believe and apparently are not his sheep.

10. Are there “effective” and “ineffective” parts of the Atonement?

Regular Baptist theology says that Christ died for all mankind in one dimension, but for only a subset of mankind in another dimension. The Arminian and the Calvinist above offer a simple view that either Christ died or all or that he did not die for all. The Scripture, however, makes it plain that Christ died for all mankind, yet not all are saved from punishment after death. So the Regular Baptist explains this apparent conundrum by suggesting that the atonement has both “*effective*” and “*ineffective*” components. They say that Christ died for all in one sense, but this sense is “*ineffective*” to finally save. However, in another sense he died only for believers, and this sense is “*effective*” when combined with the human condition of “*faith*.” They say that God’s love is unconditional for all, but the condition of faith is needed for God’s love to be effective for the saved. They say that the believer’s decision to trust Christ then applies the blood of Christ to their account. Stop! Consider the concept of applying the blood of sacrifice for a moment. Under the Old Covenant, the priests killed the animal of sacrifice and then applied, smeared the blood on the altar for the forgiveness of their sins. So are Christians like priests of the Old Covenant both killing Christ on the altar and then applying his blood to our own sins? God forbid! The very thought is the greatest offense to grace and the New Covenant. Christ is our great high priest who *offered himself* and *applied his own blood* to our sin for our forgiveness. The heart of the New Covenant is that Christ is the better priest who accomplished everything for us -- apart from any condition that we could ever provide.

Hebrews 10:9-14 (WEB),

9) Then he has said, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He takes away the first, that he may establish the second, 10) by which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. 11) Every priest indeed stands day by day serving and often offering the same sacrifices which can never take away sins, 12) but he, when he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God, 13) from that time waiting until his enemies are made the footstool of his feet. 14) For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

Friend, you can try to be your own priest or you can simply trust that Jesus Christ has accomplished the salvation of his people forever with “**one offering.**”

You Are a Heretical Pope Pronouncing Salvation Without Faith!

OBJECTOR>> You Are a Heretical Pope Pronouncing Salvation Without Faith!

ME>> Just to be clear there will be no one in Heaven without faith in Christ or without love for God and mankind. Heaven is the eternal home of the glorified redeemed people of God. There will be no death, sin, mourning, crying, pain, or unbelief! Instead there will be life, perfection, joy, celebration, health, and unwavering trust. There will be unending love from God to us and from us to God and each other. There will be eternal praise and worship by every single inhabitant of Heaven for Jesus, our humble savior, King of Kings, God Almighty!

The confusion is simply this. Many have been led astray to believe that their *choice* of faith in Christ is the condition to God's unconditional love. Friends, faith is not the condition to God's love, but instead faith is trust in his unconditional love! Modern "*evangelical*" heresy has redefined "*faith*" to be the ticket to Heaven that you provide. This twisted gospel has taken the spotlight off of Christ and his gracious decision and focused it on man and our decision. The Scriptures proclaim that Christ will be exalted as the gracious savior of every individual and ALL mankind. Christ will be exalted, not human will!

Christian faith of course is a decision, but it is the decision trust that Christ loved us before we loved him, in fact while we hated God. It is the decision to believe that Christ chose to die on the cross in our place, even though we chose to crucify him. It is the decision to receive the gift of forgiveness already given, instead of begging for forgiveness. It is the decision to know that our eternal destiny is not in jeopardy or conditioned on our choices, but instead it is secure and guaranteed through the choice that Christ already made at the cross. It is the decision to know by faith that we were chosen for grace before the creation of the world. Our faith certainly did not *cause* that, but instead faith enables us to see this good news. Faith, properly defined, is our decision to live a life trusting that Christ already gave us his eternal love at the cross. Our decision does not change God's heart for us, but it certainly does change our hearts for God. Have you made the decision to believe? I pray that you have! Friends, it is a simple decision, though no one will decide without the touch from the Holy Spirit.

And if you do trust Christ, then you must also see that Jesus also loves all mankind, even those who have not yet trusted him. Just as Christ loved you and guaranteed your destiny before you believed, so he also loves all mankind and has guaranteed their happy destiny. Faith never changed

anyone's eternal destiny, but instead it changes our hearts and opens our eyes to see our wonderful destiny from God. Faith is not your personal ticket to Heaven, but instead faith is eyes opened to see our Heavenly Father's love and his eternal happy home given to all his people!

You still might accuse me of saying that Heaven is guaranteed even for the unbelieving. In my defense the Scriptures do say concerning the unbelieving, ***“For what if some were without faith? Will their lack of faith nullify the faithfulness of God? May it never be! Yes, let God be found true, but every man a liar. As it is written, ‘That you might be justified in your words, and might PREVAIL when you come into judgment’ “*** (Romans 3:3-4 WEB) and also ***“For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable”*** (Romans 11:29 WEB). Even so, just to be clear my position properly stated is that ONLY believers will ever gain entrance to Heaven. It just happens I also believe it will be IMPOSSIBLE for even one human being to pass through the final judgment of Jesus Christ without an immediate wholehearted response of faith and worship. The Great White Throne Judgment will be the happiest surprise for the Sheep on Jesus' right. Read the account yourself in Matthew 25:31-46 and Revelation 20:11-15.

Who are the Sheep on Jesus' right? Obviously they are not Christians! Christians would not evidence the surprise of these people over their salvation! Christians already believe and have confidence in our salvation through Jesus Christ. At this point in the story we Christians already had our joyful reunion with Christ raptured in the air! Do you think we will face doubt and judgment at the Great White Throne after that? Instead, Revelation 20:11-15 and Jude 6 make it plain that the wicked dead human beings are finally extracted from Hades and the imprisoned fallen angels held for judgment are extracted from Thalaasa to stand before the Great White Throne Judgment. The Sheep on Jesus' right are the wicked dead human beings, now finally with eyes opened to see their savior and receive grace. The Goats on Jesus' left, however, are the demons now finally sentenced to the Lake of Fire for The Ages of The Ages as explicitly stated in Matthew 25:41 and Revelation 20:10,15.

Furthermore, this is not a second chance salvation! Instead the gracious God of the Universe will one day determine that the time for mankind's unbelief, pain, and punishment is officially and finally over! Praise God! Presently, most of mankind creeps along through this life with eyes lifted no higher than the mud that we crawl through. However, on that Great Day the Lord of Glory will lay the earth bare, roll up the Universe like a tattered cloth, and empty even the depths of Hell itself. While unbelievers stumble like blind men now, there will be no veil between us and Christ on that day. Nor will there be any trace of unbelief among God's people standing in front of the Lord in all his Glory. Because of grace alone, Christ will read the roll call from the Book of Life and find the name of EVERY

human being penned with the ink from his own veins and purchased from before the creation of the world. The God of all grace will be finally and fully revealed in blazing glory to ALL his chosen people, that is ALL mankind, and worshiped by ALL!

I am certainly not a Pope. However, you will have to decide whether it is heretical to believe that Jesus signed, sealed, and delivered salvation for ALL mankind at his cross when he breathed his last and said, "**it is finished.**" Friends, you can believe now or believe then for there is no escape from the love of Jesus Christ and his victory!

You Are Wrong About Matthew 25:31-46!

One unconvinced reader said...

READER>> Your understanding of Matthew 25:31-46 is wrong. The passage is saying that those on the left of Jesus will be punished WITH the Devil and his angels in the Lake of Fire. Whereas you are saying that those on his left ARE the Devil and his angels.

ME>> First you correctly understand my view. Thank you for that. I do believe the passage is best understood in the context of the whole of Scripture that those on Jesus' left, those cast into the Lake of Fire, are the Devil and his angels. Now I will be the first to admit that there are some curious facets to this understanding.

1) We most naturally assume that when Jesus gathers the nations before him that he is talking about only human beings and human nations. The Greek word "*ethnos*" is used in the Bible to mean "*a multitude of individuals of the same nature or genus, for example the human family.*" Thus when he divides the people into their categories of sheep and goats, we naturally conclude that some humans are sheep while the remainder are goats. It appears that only *part* of humanity is saved from the Lake of Fire while the rest are eternally lost. Arminians and Calvinists both agree on this point, though they disagree as to *how* people are saved.

However, do not too quickly conclude that "*ethnos*" mean human "*ethnic*" groups. It should be noted that the meaning of the word "*ethnos*" is also used to mean "*the people, in contrast to their king.*" The first denotation in the Vines dictionary also indicates, "*a multitude (whether of men or of beasts) associated or living together: a company, troop, swarm.*" I would suggest that at the Sheep and Goat Judgment these alternate denotations are closer to the mark. In fact we can be certain of this because 2 Peter 2:4 makes it plain that some angels are imprisoned now being held for future judgment. Jude 6 and Revelation 20:11-15 also make it plain that angels will

be extracted from Tartarus / Thalassa to stand before the Great White Throne at final judgment.

King Jesus will summon *all* his subjects before him for final judgment and this includes both human and angelic people. We humans often neglect to consider Jesus' angelic subjects because they are most often invisible to us. However, angels are also people subject to King Jesus and will likewise stand before his judgment throne. What word other than "*ethnos*" would the Holy Spirit use to identify a mixed body of his subjects that includes both human and fallen angelic people? "*Ethnos*" is the word he chooses! The bad news for fallen angels is that they do not have a vicarious substitute for the condemnation they must receive. The good news for us is that Jesus became a human and so his work of atonement applies to all humans.

2) You say that in Matthew 25:41 Jesus says to human beings about to be damned that they will be sentenced *with* the Devil and his angels to Eternal Fire. I will concede that the sentence structure is odd and lends to your view. Why would Jesus use the demonstrative pronoun first and the proper name second? Typically, for clarity, the proper noun is first and the pronoun second. Consider three possible explanations.

First, the Holy Spirit may have allowed an awkward construct to parallel the structure of verse 34. Second, perhaps the phrase "***which is prepared for the devil and his angels***" is better understood not as a quote to the unredeemed, but as an explanation to the redeemed. Third, with Satan already damned to the Lake of Fire and his demons arraigned on Jesus' left, perhaps Matthew 25:41 is not awkward at all. Read my article [Your Thoughts on Matthews Meaning of 'Aionian Fire?'](#)

If you continue to disagree, then you must provide a reasonable explanation as to why Jesus only lists the Devil and his angels as those for whom Eternal Fire is prepared. Why does the Holy Spirit say explicitly that the Lake of Fire is "***prepared for the Devil and his Angels?***" Why doesn't he say prepared for unbelieving mankind? He says the Devil and his Angels because that is who the Lake of Fire is prepared for and no one else!

3) Finally I also concede that it is odd that the Devil and his angels would say in Matthew 25:44 (WEB), "***Then they will also answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and didn't help you?'***" We might think that at this point the Devil and his angels would recognize their rebellion, concede their doom, and manifest their hatred of Christ with a violent display of malice as they are damned to the Lake of Fire. It is hard to imagine the Devil or the demons with their awesome intelligence speaking such a lame excuse.

Yet in spite of their awesome intelligence, we must remind ourselves that Satan is not only The Great Deceiver, but also The Greatly Deceived. For Satan said, ***“I will ascend into heaven! I will exalt my throne above the stars of God! I will sit on the mountain of assembly, in the far north,”*** (Isaiah 14:13b WEB) and the Lord says, ***“Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty. You have corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor,”*** (Ezekiel 28:17a WEB).

Though Satan was and continues to be an enemy far beyond our strength, his great pride has left him greatly deceived to the very end, along with all his demonic followers. We should note also that the demonic leaders, Satan, The Beast, and The False Prophet are already cast into the Lake of Fire before the Great White Throne Judgment. So the lame excuses are coming from their demonic underlings just arraigned from Tartarus / Thalassa.

If this explanation does not satisfy your objection, then I have a corresponding question for you. I believe the sheep on the right are the redeemed unbelieving just extracted from the end of their punishment in Hades. But, traditional understanding says that these sheep are those who believed before their death. However, the confirmation of the salvation of believers has *already* happened though faith in Christ many years earlier! Yet these people say, ***“37) Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you; or thirsty, and give you a drink? 38) When did we see you as a stranger, and take you in; or naked, and clothe you? 39) When did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?’”*** (Matthew 25:37-39 WEB).

If these people are believers, why are they incredulous about their salvation and ignorant of these basic facts after already spending years of glorious fellowship with Christ? If you are concerned about the lame objections of the goats, you should also be concerned about the objections of these sheep. You could further argue that these sheep cannot be unbelievers because they are praised for doing good. However, these *newly* believing sheep did not yet understand, like we Christians already understand, that we actually serve Christ when serving others. Thus they are amazed that the tiniest good they did is now accepted by the grace of Christ, not that the good outweighed the bad. All these questions are easily answered when we see that these sheep are new born believers just extracted from Hades with their eyes just opened, incredulous over the love of Christ who has also accepted them by his grace.

The redeemed should take warning that our sinful nature is likewise vulnerable to equal deception. We would follow Satan to the very precipice of the Lake of Fire and over the brink if we could! Yet grace will be finally victorious for every single one of Christ’s chosen ones. Not one of Christ’s chosen can ever fall over the brink!

You Categorize Calvinists too Simply!

I say to myself...

SELF>> You categorize Calvinists too simply while comparing them with Arminians. For example some Calvinists prefer the language of limited atonement while others prefer the language of particular atonement.

ME>> Self, that is a very good point that could use clarification.

You are right that not all Calvinists are in agreement about salvation or numerous other Christian doctrines. Many Calvinists advocate infant baptism while others are only for believer's baptism, as an example. In this book I have used the term Calvinist to refer to a Christian who thinks that Christ's atoning sacrifice is only purposed for a subset of mankind and effectively accomplishes salvation for that subset of mankind. These Christians also believe that the remainder of mankind whose sin is not atoned for have no possibility of salvation. Thus the atonement of Christ is limited in both its saving purpose and effect. Let's refer to these guys as *Limited Atonement Calvinists*.

I have already explained in my article, *A House Divided*, that some other Calvinists have attempt to solve the salvation riddle by suggesting that Christ's atonement IS NOT LIMITED in its purpose and is offered "generally" to all. They rightly refuse to swallow the understanding of *Limited Atonement Calvinists* because of verses like I John 2:1-2. However, they still need to explain why they think some human beings go to eternal Hell. So they say that the atonement is general in its purpose, but it IS LIMITED in its effect. Strictly speaking these theologians are not Calvinists. First, their division of the atonement into two dimensions is not supported Biblically. Second, they miss the gospel emphasis that Christ's atonement is definite in its purpose and effect of paying only the sin debt of the people known as "*His People*." The offense of the cross highlighted through the whole New Testament is that Christ came to save his particular people only. So let's refer to these guys as the *Divided Atonement Calvinists*. In fact these guys truly are *divided* for they are further divided into two main understandings. One camp of the *Divided Atonement Calvinists* believes that Christ's atonement is made effective through an individual's *free will* choice of repentance and faith followed by the New Birth. Let's call these guys the *Dishonest Arminians*. The other camp of the *Divided Atonement Calvinists* believes that grace alone effects the New Birth and is followed by faith and repentance. This second group is very difficult to pin down. I know because I was among them! However, if you pin one of them down you will either find a *Waffling Limited Atonement Calvinist* or a *Dishonest Arminian*. Beware the wrestling match.

Okay, what about the *Particular Atonement Calvinists*? Though most Baptists in the United States descend from the Particular Baptist movement, there are very few Particular Baptists that remain theologically orthodox. Most of these groups have migrated back to the General Atonement view with the determining factor of an individual's salvation being the exercise of their *free will* choice of faith. The gospel of grace is lost from their preaching. They are plainly Arminian regardless of the label they give themselves.

So the *Limited Atonement Calvinists* unbiblically restrict the work of Christ. The *Divided Atonement Calvinists* unbiblically divide the work of Christ. And the *General Atonement Arminians* unbiblically add a human supplied condition into the salvation equation. For myself, I have said I am not a Baptist, but a Christian, in keeping with Christ's prayer for unity. Yet IF I were to assign a label to myself I would be a *Particular Atonement Calvinist Baptist*. It seems to me that a person needs to become a Christian before they should be baptized. It also seems to me that the atonement of Christ is neither limited nor divided. However, his atonement is a definite payment for the sins of a particular people. God loves all mankind in a *special* way. Now I cannot speak for all theologians who would give themselves that label, but at least some have come to the same conclusion as I that Christ's particular people is in fact... all mankind. Yet sadly most of mankind is not aware or refuses to believe that their sins are already paid. They prefer the religion of self-righteousness and man's *free will*. So there is much work to do and the Great Commission is to take this good news to the world!

You might say to me that "*particular*" atonement ultimately means "*limited*." However, that is not true. We are using the word "*particular*" to mean "*special*" and not "*limited*" or "*general*." Jesus does not love his beloved in a simple, general way, but in a very special way. Why do you insist that God's special particular love for his chosen ones requires that his love is then limited to a subset of mankind? Do you have children? Do you have a special, particular love for each of them? John called himself "***the disciple whom Jesus loved***" because Jesus loved him. But that does not mean that Jesus does not love you, me, or all mankind! John's nickname for himself confronts each of us with questions. On what basis can you know that Jesus loves you? Are you confident because of your choice to "*trust*" in Christ or because of his choice to love you from the cross? Are you also a disciple that Jesus loved?

Quit complaining about John's confidence in God's special love for him and begin to rejoice in God's special love for you and for all mankind!

You Have Compromised All...

Another responded...

READER>> Here are some of my thoughts in response. On the surface, you have answered all the questions. It seems having harmonized God's grace with man's faith without compromising His justice. But I think you have compromised all of them. You said "the non-believers will be condemned to Hades as punishment for their unbelief, but will ultimately go to the new heaven due to God's grace." First of all, it is undermining the character of God's grace.

Grace, in my understanding, is unmerited. Consider the prodigal son in Luke 15. When he came back to his father, his father received him out of grace. What if his father let him work for ten years due to his prodigality, and then restored his sonship after his hard work? Is it grace? What would be in that son's mind then? He had been working for ten years before the sonship was restored. Is there something he could boast? Say the unbelievers go to the new heaven eventually, will they have something to boast before God? "Oh yeah, I've only spent less than 100 years sinning on earth, but I have been suffering in Hades for (I don't know, maybe) thousands of years, as punishment. I've got what I deserved. Now you pull me up from Hades and expect me to be thankful?" Certainly when grace is contaminated with "works," even just a teeny tiny bit of it, it is not grace anymore. I don't think God would do this to embarrass Himself, to damage His character, or to undermine His grace.

ME>> This is an excellent question and a good point to clarify. Punishment in Hades / Hell may not be remedial. Each individual human being is born into sin according to Romans 5:12. Everyone begins with a depraved human nature that ultimately hates God and grace in favor of self-righteousness. Until the Holy Spirit specifically targets an individual for the new birth their heart remains constantly at enmity toward God. Yet, 2 Peter 2:1, 1 John 2:2, and many other verses make it clear that even these unbelievers have been bought and their sins fully paid. God loves them dearly. However, they have not been touched by the Holy Spirit and so their hearts are unchanged and they continue to be wicked men. Hell is a fit destiny for these unregenerate souls who hate God. Furthermore, even the suffering of Hell may not bring about repentance and love toward God. Hell is the home they chose and God gives it to them. Hell may not draw their hearts one inch closer to God. Given the choice between worship of Christ or going to Hell, they have chosen Hell. So time in Hell is not a "work" that earns grace! Instead, Hell is a home fit for the self-righteous who hate grace. Though God loves all mankind very dearly, including the human beings in Hell, no one in Hell has a heart changed to love God in return... at least not yet. So why does God awaken love in some people early in life before suffering great consequences from sin and others later in life after suffering great trials from sin? The prodigal son may have rebelled for 1 year, 10 years or even 20 years. We do not know the length of time he was separated from his father. Yet our father's love remains constant regardless of the length of time we remain in unrepentance. Furthermore, the time we

spend in unrepentance (whether in this life or in Hell) is certainly not a “work” that earns grace. Grace cannot be earned. Jesus is Lord of salvation. It is his choice as to who he forgives, a choice he *already* made when he paid the entire sin debt of mankind on the cross. It is also his choice as to when he transforms the heart to receive his love and forgiveness. Why would God let many pass this life into Hell only to change their hearts with grace after death? Simply, God is demonstrating the great patience of his grace according to his wisdom in the lives of depraved humanity. King David had confidence that, if he wound up in Sheol, even there God’s love would guide him, Psalm 139. Of course David was a believer so he did not go to Hell. No one transformed by grace will ever say “*I’ve got what I deserved. Now you pull me up from Hades and expect me to be thankful?*” as you suggest. In fact read about the Great White Throne Judgment yourself in Matthew 25:31-46 and see that instead Jesus graciously credits righteousness to the sheep standing before him, just extracted from Hades. The sheep are both incredulous and grateful. That is the heart of a sheep.

READER>> Revelation 20:12-15 (NASB) “And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

From my study and understanding, the ungodly have been kept in a place of torment and punishment in their spirits, but not joined with a final supernatural body fitted for their punishment in the eternal hell--the lake of fire. It’s like a prisoner who hasn’t had his trial yet, he’s still incarcerated in a jail until his trial at which time he is sent to the penitentiary to serve out his life sentence. The unbelievers are incarcerated now in a place of torment away from God. They will be brought before the tribunal of God, they will be given a new, resurrected body fit for their eternal incarceration in the final hell called the lake of fire. I don’t get any indication that God raises them up in order to bring them into the new heaven. This is what Jesus called “the resurrection of damnation,” or “the resurrection of judgment” in John 5:29. Or “the resurrection of the wicked” in Acts 24:15.

ME>> Yes, exactly. John 5:29 and Acts 24:15 are also speaking about the Great White Throne Judgment. But where is your Scriptural support to prove that even one unbelieving human extracted from Hades will then be cast into the Lake of Fire? Matthew 25:41 says that the eternal fire is “**prepared for the Devil and his angels.**” Revelation 20:15 says that the final determination is not conditioned on man’s faith, but on the ledger of the Book

of Life. You seem confident that your name is there, but on what basis? I am also confident that your name is there, but only on the basis of grace. Do you think "faith" is the condition that added your name to the book? Then that would be a human work / condition and not grace. Do you think Christ paid effectively for your sins and not effectively for the sins of all mankind? Holding to either of those views puts you in jeopardy of the destiny of those in 2 Peter 2:1 who deny Jesus as Lord of our salvation. You are right that the unredeemed will be united with a body to suffer eternally in the Lake of Fire. However, Isaiah 66:22-24 makes it clear *twice* that *all* mankind will worship God and *all* mankind will look with loathe upon the bodies of the wicked. Who are the wicked unredeemed? If *all* mankind is looking upon them, then it cannot be mankind! Instead, Satan and his demons are the unredeemed cast into the Lake of Fire united with loathsome bodies. All Mankind has been redeemed through the death of Christ, but not Satan and his angels.

READER>> God is the God of grace, love and mercy. He is also the God of wrath and justice. He has to be consistent with His judgment. God's justice does not mean He will just send those who rejected His Son into Hades for "temporary" (compared with eternal) punishments.

ME>> Yes, exactly. I whole heartedly agree that God's character is balanced perfectly with love, justice, and grace. These excellent attributes cannot and will not be compromised in any way. In fact that is my main point! The wrath of God has been fully satisfied for the sins of both believing and unbelieving mankind. The justice of God has already been met for all mankind and thus all mankind must be saved -- not because of any condition we could meet, but because of the condition Christ already met. Since justice has been served for all mankind, all mankind must be saved! 1 John 2:2 could not be more clear that atonement has been made independently of any condition that man could ever meet for both the believing and the unbelieving. Romans 5:10 also makes it clear that we were reconciled to God while we were yet enemies. The reconciliation of men to God was accomplished by the grace of Christ alone. Many Christians talk about the "finished" work of Christ. I believe his work is truly finished for all mankind and evangelism is simply inviting people to believe it. Yet, 2 Peter 2:1 does make it clear that those who reject their sovereign Lord will suffer for the duration in Hell / Hades even though their sins are paid for.

READER>> I think this might be the key question: You have asked, "What is the extent of God's grace? Or what is the extent of the atonement?" Based on my limited understanding, the extent of God's grace is unlimited. He COULD surely save everyone if He wills. But the effect of the atonement is limited. It only goes to the elect. God offers salvation to whomever he wants to please Himself for His own glory. "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." He is not

doing this to please us. Neither do we have the right to question Him. And it is not done according to anyone's understanding. It is not our job to figure it out, nor do I think we can understand God's infinite mind with our tiny brains. What I have done, and what I will be praying for you also, is to be comfortable with our inability not to get it, to stop fighting it, and to be content not to get it. We are just the clay in His hands after all. He has the right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use.

ME>> You suggest that God's grace is unlimited in potential, but limited in effect. Perhaps you have been talking to some Regular Baptists. I assert that if you believe that Christ's atonement has both potential and effective components then you have also received a salvation that waffles between potential and effective. There is nothing potential about the grace of God in any way whatsoever. God's love and grace is determined and set upon his chosen people and he will not be thwarted. I have to completely refuse your offer to allow question marks and doubt into the salvation equation. Why would I ever do that? Instead I invite you to believe that your sins and the sins of all mankind are fully paid. Why not put both your feet solidly down on the rock of Christ? You point out that God says, "**...he has mercy on whom he desires, and he hardens whom he desires,**" Romans 9:18 (WEB). That statement is true. Most of mankind is not chosen to believe that their sins are already fully paid for. Their existence is to be pitied while they attempt to hide their sin with religion. One could argue with perfect reason from the Scripture that the sins of mankind are fully paid and rather than joyfully rest in the fact they will never let go of their self-righteousness salvation. They will never let go unless the Holy Spirit gives them a heart of flesh. They are dead men clinging to life preservers made of lead. Their hearts remain unrepentant and self-righteous. God has forgiven them from the cross, but not yet given them the mercy of repentance, Romans 2:4.

READER>> *You have said, "If the atonement is limited, then you CANNOT know that the atonement applies to you." I receive it by faith. And you asked, "How can you prove it?" Salvation can be verified by works, as James taught in his epistle. Thus it proves the atonement applies to me. If you are not satisfied with this answer, then I think I CANNOT prove it. I'll just trust the Lord. It'll get me nowhere if I try to prove it. You asked, "Are the sins of a Christian forgiven before or after his/her repentance? If it happens after conversion, then faith itself is work." My answer would be: No! Faith is not work. You stated, "If it happens before repentance, then it applies to everyone." I cannot agree. I don't see any indication that they are related that way. I think "the price has been paid" is not equal to "everyone has received forgiveness." The former is God's grace; the latter is man's responsibility. This goes back to your question "Since the price has been paid, do I receive my forgiveness before or after my repentance?" I don't know. I don't think one can define WHEN it happened. It is God's miracle.*

ME>> Works are evidence of the transformed life and Christian faith, that is true. However, works can never prove that Christ atoned for you and not another. The great transaction at the cross of Christ is independent of all conditions anyone could offer and is proved to vicariously apply to all mankind because Christ became a man and thus is the new Federal head of all mankind, Romans 5:12-21. So yes, works are evidence of having received God's love, but they are not evidence that God loves you in the first place. Think carefully about that. God loved us while we were still his enemies. Biblical faith is the result of being born again, but *"faith"* that claims to be the condition that secures God's love is anti-grace and a work. You are right that *"the price has been paid"* is not equal to *"everyone has received forgiveness."* The price has been paid, but not everyone has received forgiveness. All Christ's chosen are forgiven, but most continue to stubbornly refuse forgiveness in favor of self-righteousness. They hold to Peter's rebellious words, *"you shall never wash me."* And if these rebellious continue in unbelief they will be sentenced to Hades. You say I asked *"Since the price has been paid, do I receive my forgiveness before or after my repentance?"* To clarify, my question to the religious is *"are we forgiven before or after we ask for forgiveness?"* The answer is most certainly before. Jesus prayed for our forgiveness from the cross and there was not one person asking.

You quote me saying *"If it happens before repentance, then it applies to everyone."* I have shown you the verses that say Christ died for all. I have also shown you that the very nature of how Christ paid for sin, that is becoming a man, demands that his death apply to all mankind. He was not a divided man on the cross paying for a division of mankind's sin. He was a whole man divided for all our sin. Are you concerned that I believe if Christ paid for one, then he must have paid for all? Consider Romans 11:16 (WEB), ***"If the first fruit is holy, so is the lump. If the root is holy, so are the branches."*** The Scriptures confirm that if the part is holy, then the whole is holy as well.

READER>> You asked, *"Is your faith a pen or glasses?"* Obviously it is not a pen, I didn't write my name in the book of life with my faith. It's not glasses either. I still cannot read the book, or even see the book. And you asked, *"How and when were those names written into the book of life?"* Based on Paul's teaching, they were written down there by God before the foundation of the world. *"Why some are there and some are not?"* I don't know. Let God decide. The same as the potter and clay relationship. *"How do you know that your name is in the book?"* If you are asking how I can physically see my name in the book. Well, I can't. But I know I have eternal life, so it's gotta be there. 1 John 5:13 *"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may KNOW that you have eternal life."*

ME>> I am glad you have confidence that you have eternal life. My goal in teaching about the gospel of Jesus Christ and his grace is nothing less than to help others have rock solid confidence in God's love for them and all God's people. However, your objections to my primary thesis expose that you do not have both feet squarely on the rock of Christ.

READER>> It seems to me that you are undermining the role of faith in salvation. The Scriptures clearly teach on God's Sovereignty (Election) and Man's Responsibility (Faith). Let me borrow John MacArthur's term and call it the "Twin Truths" here. And the Scriptures go back and forth from divine sovereignty to human responsibility. They always run parallel, and they will never intersect.

The grace of God is sufficient for all men. But only those He chose receive salvation. In other words, the extent of the atonement is universal. It is available to all. But the effect of the atonement only goes to the elect, based on His purpose according to His choice. He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

On one hand, God has His "irresistible grace," on the other hand He holds every one responsible for his/her own belief or unbelief. What is the role of faith then? How do we harmonize it with God's "irresistible grace?" The answer I found is there is no way to harmonize these two things without destroying one or the other, or even both. I just need to believe in both.

The fact that we don't understand how it works only proves that we're less than what we think we should be. It doesn't say anything about God. Our inability to harmonize those things is a reflection of your fallenness, and my fallenness. They can't be harmonized in our puny human mind, compared to the infinite, vast, limitless mind of God.

1 Corinthians 13:9 "For we know in part and we prophesy in part." We are limited to what God has revealed, and we are limited by the fact that a human mind cannot understand a superhuman God in fullness. Systemizing God is very difficult because we don't have all of the information, we are trying to put the pieces together and make conclusions without fullness of revelation. Romans 11:33-34 "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?" His ways are past finding out. We are always dealing with a part of the truth in terms of its total.

ME>> We agree on much. Faith is essential for salvation from a self-righteous heart, for salvation from sin, for salvation from Hell. Faith is essential to be a Christian. Faith is essential to be graced with the title "God's Child." Faith is essential to be reconciled to God... that is for our

hearts to cease being at enmity toward God. The point that we disagree upon may be small, but it is critical. Faith does absolutely nothing to reconcile us to God... for his part. Faith does not get Jesus to die on the cross for us or get Jesus to decide to love sinners. He did that without our asking. He did that in spite of Peter's objections! God loved us first! That is the heart of grace. God's heart never had or will have condemnation toward us. And if he never condemns us then there is no judge with authority to damn us to the Lake of Fire. God loved us while we were yet sinners. That is the good news. We do not have to do anything to get God to love us. And if he loves us at all, he loves us completely.

In the end I think we have different definitions of saving faith. Unfortunately we cannot share the same joy until you let go of "*faith*" as a condition to God's love and instead begin to trust in Christ's unconditional love. You point out that we "*know in part.*" That is true. However, the gospel of Jesus Christ does not reveal "*part*" of God's love for mankind, but the gospel reveals the full extent of God's love. The gospel does not conceal, but reveals. The willing sacrifice of God's only son proves that God loves us to the maximum! The love of God for all mankind is fully manifest in Christ's willingness to die for all mankind, while we were yet sinners. I hope that I can continue to be patient with your resistance to this good news.

READER>> But what I do know is: if one doesn't BELIEVE, he/she is NOT BORN AGAIN, thus he/she is NOT a CHILD OF GOD, and could NOT inherit the kingdom of God. One cannot go to heaven if he/she cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

ME>> I agree. Those who reject grace and remain unbelieving will not be in paradise when they die, but will be punished in Hades. Their hearts remain unchanged by grace and so Hades will be a fit destiny for their souls. They are not sons of God while in unrepentant unbelief. Yet, because the death of Christ has satisfied justice for their sin, the grace of God must and will prove victorious in the end, even for them. These wicked unbelieving humans will be extracted from Hades and transformed by grace to receive grace with gratitude, Matthew 25:31-46. They will be sons of God. I take sides with King David who believed that the love of God continues even for those in Hades, Psalm 139. I also take sides with Jesus who said that even "**...the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.**" (Matthew 16:18b WEB).

READER>> 1 John 2:2 says "and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." I think it can be explained in this way. The extent of the atonement is SUFFICIENT for each individual. But the effect ONLY goes to the elect. Besides, "the whole world" in 1 John 2:2 would fit the rest of the Scriptures better if it is taken as "every nation, every race," instead of "every individual in this world."

2 Peter 2:1 "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves." In what sense are the false teachers bought? The same as in 1 John 2:2. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross was a SUFFICIENT purchase price to redeem all men. The price has been paid for all in terms of availability. In that sense they have been bought. Still, only the elect will be saved.

ME>> When you do evangelism do you tell people that Christ might love them or might have died for them? To say that the atonement is only sufficient implies that it only potentially satisfies the wrath of God against the sinner. If the atonement is only potential then what ingredient is needed to activate the atonement and make it effective? If the sacrifice of Jesus was only sufficient or potentially sufficient to pay for the sins of the false teachers, then on what basis can we say it effectively paid for our sins? The Scriptures say that we were bought and that they were bought. If one is only potential and the other effective, then on what basis can anyone claim with certainty that their sins were effectively paid? On the basis of their "faith?" Then the object of their "faith" is their "faith" and it falls on itself! Their "faith" is no longer on Christ, but "faith in faith." You must agree that a person could be deceived and not have true faith. If that is true then how can you tell if your faith is real and has reached the effective part of Jesus' atonement? This is all silly. Jesus has atoned for the sins of all mankind, period. That is where my faith rests and I invite you and everyone to confess the same.

READER>> 1 John 2:27 "As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him." I think John was rebuking "those who are trying to deceive you" in verse 26, and their human wisdom. He was not talking about pastors, teachers, or shepherds of the flocks. It doesn't make any sense to me that John, as a teacher himself, was writing to the Christians in Asia Minor to tell them they didn't need anyone, including himself, to teach them. I hope Satan did not use this verse to deceive you.

ME>> John is warning the believers about those who are trying to deceive. Deceivers could come from anywhere. How can you say that he is not talking about a pastor or teacher? Certainly not all pastors or teachers are deceivers, but just as certainly some are both deceived and deceiving. You quoted 2 Peter 2:1 above which says exactly that! The point of this verse is that a believer should never turn off the "mind of Christ" he has been given and allow another person to serve as the authoritative interpreter of Scripture. You should not believe what I or anyone says because you trust another person's interpretation. Instead you should read the Bible, listen to the thoughts of others if the Lord leads, but most importantly pray and ask

God to show you the truth. Only the Holy Spirit is the authoritative interpreter of Scripture. You may disagree with me and me with you. Thankfully the grace of God has that covered. However, there is no human being that can ever stand as the referee to judge the match. Who would we choose? Again, the Holy Spirit is our teacher.

READER>> In addition, I think the argument that one need a statement in one verse to prove a point is weak, because there are many truths in the Bible that are indicated to us by the totality of Scripture rather than any one given statement.

ME>> That is a good point. Did I only cite one verse in my book? Here is another one that is an encouragement to believers... 1 Timothy 4:10 (WEB), ***“For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we have set our trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.”*** It is odd that the Holy Spirit would say “especially.” He says it this way because all mankind is loved by God and already reconciled to him and guaranteed a seat in the New Heaven and Earth. Believers are especially saved because they have received God’s love and love him in return *now*. However, unbelievers, though already forgiven at the cross, have not yet received forgiveness and do not yet love God. Also believers have transformed hearts and are saved from punishment in Hades, whereas unbelievers will be punished in Hades.

READER>> Salvation is by grace ALONE, through faith ALONE, in Christ ALONE, and to the glory of God ALONE. God chose to save some for His own glory. Often we think God as what we think He should be instead of “I am who I am.” And we think God works in a way that we could comprehend. Instead, we should trust Him in everything, “and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.”

ME>> You echo the rally cry of the reformation to me. Those are powerful words, yet they are claimed by both Arminian and Calvinistic Christians. As for Luther and his great statements about salvation by faith alone, did he teach us whether faith is receiving God’s love already guaranteed or the condition that activates God’s love? I don’t know what he thought, but you and I have come to different conclusions about what saving faith is, about what Hell is and who goes there, and about the Lake of Fire and who is saved from it. You say that I have compromised all, but in fact it is you who has compromised the meaning of the word “all.” You add condition to the unconditional love of God and so compromise salvation that is ALL of grace. You also limit the extent and effectiveness of Christ’s atonement which paid for ALL. If the Lord changes your mind you will be a most dear brother to me. By the way, you might be tempted to simply choose conventional understandings that surround you instead of my unconventional view. However, history reminds us that truth is not determined by

conventions or even the majority. Perhaps if my idea was totally alone in history or even alone today I would abandon it myself. Yet a Google search of “Victorious Gospel” and “Greater Grace” will show you that many are rejoicing in this understanding.

Your Beliefs Destroy Christian Friendships!

One friend said...

READER>> Your beliefs destroy Christian friendships!

ME>> This is the most important objection of every objection raised to against my happy thesis that **Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.** Certainly of all possible concerns, people and relationship are the most important concern. Yet the objection is raised that my beliefs have strained and even broken relationships with dear friends and churches. So how can that be good? Is my proposed thesis harmful? Shall we just conclude that this is an inevitable part of life under the sun? Shall we even conclude it is an unexplained part of Jesus’ call to discipleship? After all Jesus did say...

34) Don't think that I came to send peace on the earth. I didn't come to send peace, but a sword. 35) For I came to set a man at odds against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. 36) A man's foes will be those of his own household. 37) He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me isn't worthy of me. 38) He who doesn't take his cross and follow after me, isn't worthy of me.

Matthew 10:34-38 (WEB)

Is my thesis and even Jesus himself the promoter of disregard for the importance of people and relationships? Why would Jesus say these things? Is Jesus simply a trouble maker or divisive person? With a very superficial glance some might think so. However, consider that Paul said,

Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

2 Timothy 3:12 (WEB)

So we are reminded that not all is equal in this world. There are right and wrong ideas, and right and wrong ways to live that are in conflict with one another. The decision to believe right ideas and live right ways will offend

those who chose wrong ideas and wrong ways to live. But you may counter that you do not know or nobody can know what is right or wrong in these matters. Certainly there are some things that we cannot know, while there are others things that we can be very confident about through God's word.

So the facts remain that the Bible claims to speak the truth about God, man, and salvation. The fact also remains that ideas are very important because they affect our relationships with people and our understanding of the value of people. And the fact remains that people often disagree, even to the point of breaking fellowship.

So is there a reason that justifies introducing ideas that could cause conflict between people? Is it right to jeopardize fellowship with a disagreement over truth? Wouldn't it be better to navigate the waters of conflict with compromise and negotiation in order to be at peace with all people?

Regarding painful circumstance Jesus records,

1) Therefore let's also, seeing we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let's run with perseverance the race that is set before us, 2) looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3) For consider him who has endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, that you don't grow weary, fainting in your souls.

Hebrews 12:1-3 (WEB)

Jesus did not enjoy pain for the sake of pain or conflict for the sake of conflict. He ***"endured the cross,"*** but he did not like it! Instead he chose to endure the cross because of a greater goal beyond the cross, the joy set before him. And what was the joy set before him? The great victory he would win through paying the price for all mankind's sin, the awesome prize of the salvation of all mankind. Christ gently and resolutely held to the truth, at times offending every spectrum, from pagan to Pharisee, even to the loss of his life, because he chose to love us all. So is there a reason to endure conflict, jeopardize relationships, and even destroy friendships?

Yes, most certainly!

When Satan's lies or our hypocrisy obscures or ruins the much greater goal of God's love expressed for all mankind, then there is a reason to rock the boat. When relationships exclude God and the truth, they cannot endure for

very long, and then there is a reason to tear down and rebuild on a solid foundation. When relationships are not built on the foundation of God's love for all mankind, then you will find you are "friends" with a nest of blind hypocrites... that will be disbanded.

So yes, Jesus said his ministry would bring a sword of division, but he also promises,

39) He who seeks his life will lose it; and he who loses his life for my sake will find it. 40) He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me. 41) He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward. He who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. 42) Whoever gives one of these little ones just a cup of cold water to drink in the name of a disciple, most certainly I tell you he will in no way lose his reward.

Matthew 10:39-42 (WEB)

Broken relationships are not Christ's goal, but exactly the opposite! He is working with self-centered hypocritical unbelieving sinners to build a self-less happy loving family with himself and mankind as the main ingredients. It is too big a challenge for us, but not for him. Meanwhile, he knows that things will get messy. So he invites us to join him in showing love to others even in small ways, like simply giving a cup of cold water to another, in His name. The cup of cold water I have for you and for any that will listen is simply this...

Jesus Christ is your savior, my savior, and the savior of all mankind.

I think you can see for yourself that this is a faithful message, the good news of the Bible. So the only relationships threatened by this truth are with those who disagree saying that God does not love all mankind. If friendships are destroyed over that good news, then of course that is sad. Thankfully, however, because of grace, God's patience, and repentance, it will not be sad forever. Forever friendship and fellowship is coming for ALL God's people, with God our Heavenly Father at the head of the table!

Find courage my friend to hold up the light!

Your Reasoning is Backwards!

AGAIN>> You are not thinking right. Your reasoning is backwards!

ME>> Actually, both the Arminian and the Calvinist are guilty of *reasoning from their end backward* to their conclusions about salvation. They both begin by saying that it is clear that unbelieving humans are sentenced to eternal damnation. They rightly see that many passages do speak about punishment for men after death as I also agree. Yet because of misguidance, ignorance, fear, or worse, they are quick to conclude that the punishment after death is eternal. (It is certainly a challenge because the English New Testament has mistranslated the word "*aion*." Yet not even this mistranslation should stop a believer in his pursuit of the truth!) They then reason backwards into their respective corners.

The Calvinist foolishly claims that Christ did not die for all mankind, reasoning that otherwise people would not be in eternal Hell. The Arminian similarly boasts that his *free will* made the difference in his salvation, reasoning that this must be the condition to God's unconditional love. I fully understand this way of thinking because sadly I thought it myself! Even more curious is that these two guys get along with each other well enough from their different corners and with their different salvation recipes, as long as someone else is going to eternal damnation other than them. This backwards reasoning is foolish and has left us in morally bankrupt corners filled with fear and hypocrisy, devoid of grace. Lord willing, this fight will be brought to the center of the ring so that the truth of God's unconditional love for all will be defended.

If we would be willing to *reason forward from the cross* with the knowledge we have of Jesus, then we would see with open eyes and be willing to break with graceless tradition. Reasoning forward from the cross, we know that our sins were paid *while* we were yet enemies of God. *Free will*, even if there is such a thing, has nothing to do whatsoever with our forgiveness! How could it if we were loved and forgiven while we were yet enemies? Why is *free will* praised when it is dead in the casket and six feet under? The religion of *free will* persists because of fear and self-righteousness.

However, reasoning forward from the cross, if we claim to believe that our sins are forgiven, then we already know that the sins of all mankind are forgiven by the same blood of Jesus! Reasoning forward from the cross, we know that Jesus became a man, and died in the flesh for the sins of all mankind. He did not become part of a man or even half of a man to die for part of mankind. He became a whole and perfect man to atone for the sins of all mankind.

Why is the supposed "*limited atonement*" still ruling men with fear when it plainly contradicts Scripture? The religion of "*limited atonement*" persists because of fear and hypocrisy. However, reasoning forward from the cross we have great reason to question the translation of "*eternal*" and learn from solid study that "*aion*" means "*eon*" or "*age*" or even "*entirety*" or "*whole*"

life.” So it is true that we are warned that those who reject grace are *not* saved from spending a term in Hades, unless they repent. Yet the grace of God *will* be victorious even for those punished in Hades. Want more Biblical proof?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:55 (properly translated by WEB), “**Death, where is your sting? Hades, where is your victory?**” The victorious grace of Jesus Christ has defeated both death *and* Hades! Let’s reason forward from the good news to the glorious future that awaits the redeemed people of God!

**‘Come now, and let’s reason together,’ says Yahweh:
‘Though your sins be as scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow.
Though they be red like crimson,
they shall be as wool.’**

Isaiah 1:18 (WEB)

Your Thoughts on Matthews Meaning of ‘Aionian Fire?’

QUESTION>> [How do you explain] the connection between the eonian fire prepared for the devil and his angels and the eonian fire of Gehenna (the same Aramaic phraseology is used in Matthew’s gospel about them both, “the fire the eonian?” This essentially identifies the two.

ME>> You note that Matthew uses the exact same phrase, “**the fire the aionian**” in Matthew 18:8 and also 25:41 which appears to identify these as the same destiny. Yet Matthew 18:8 is clearly a warning to human unbelievers; and I have proposed that Matthew 25:41 is speaking of a different destiny reserved only for the Devil and his angels. Actually it is traditional theology that attempts to read any expression containing “*fire*” and “*aionian*” as coined only to mean “*eternal Hell*.” However, the word “*fire*” is used 73 times in the New Testament with meanings including judgment, purification, literal fire, and symbolic fire. Download a study guide at DGJC.ORG/OPTIMISM/PYR. Christian Universalists, have also observed that the word “*aionian*” has a rich meaning including “*age*” and also “*complete*” or “*entire*.” This adjective should not be understood to coin a particular eternal destiny. For example, Thomas Talbott translates “*aionian*” in II Thessalonians 1:9 as “**complete destruction**” at the Lord’s return which is the most faithful to the context. Thus we should learn from ourselves that just because the exact same phrase, “**the fire the aionian,**” is found in both Matthew 18:8 and 25:41, this does not mean that this phrase is in fact a capitalized proper noun. Other Scripture teaches us that both Hades and the Lake of Fire include “*fire*” judgments, yet we know these are

different places. So the addition of the qualifier “*aionian*” does not then require that Matthew 18:8 and 25:41 are the same place. In fact in Matthew 25:41, the additional expression, “***prepared for the Devil and his angels,***” is best understood to qualify that “***the fire the aionian***” in Matthew 25:41 is in fact a different location than Matthew 18:8. See my previous article, [II Thessalonians 1:6-10](#).

QUESTION>> You allow that the Gehenna warning isn't a bluff to frighten people whom God does not even remotely intend even temporarily putting into the eonian fire of Gehenna; but you still regard the eonian fire of Gehenna as the fire in hades (for good reasons I agree) and the eonian fire for the devil and his angels as being a different punishment than the lake of fire.

ME>> Yes, that is my conclusion. I understand that Jesus does not merely threaten, but warns that if his unbelieving audience does not repent that they will suffer the complete destruction of their earthly ambitions, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, as well as suffer the fires of Hades, Luke 16:23. Hades is the “*aionian fires*” that are the netherworld judgment of wicked mankind. The word “*Gehenna*” is used twelve times in the New Testament and in each case mankind’s judgment is in view. So the “*Gehenna*” reference is either the destruction from sin’s consequences in this life or the subsequent judgment in Hades. The Lake of Fire, however, is the “*aionian fires*” that are prepared for the Devil and his angels.

QUESTION>> The defense that Christ switches from addressing the devil and his angels to explaining to the redeemed unbelievers (who had unknowingly been faithful) that this fire is “prepared for the devil and his angels,” seems forced to me (though you acknowledge the awkwardness).

ME>> The awkwardness is no greater than the traditional understanding that the Sheep on Jesus’ right are Christians. How could it even be possible that we Christians who already understand our salvation would corporately stand before his throne with these doubts? Consider that if the Sheep and Goat Judgment is synonymous with the final Great White Throne Judgment, then we Christians have already been Raptured to meet Christ in the air, have been re-united with all the deceased saints, and have been given our glorified bodies, all before the Sheep and Goat judgment. Do we think that after these tangible beginnings of eternity that we will then stand before Christ’s throne with revived doubts? Hardly. So if the Sheep on the right are not us, then who are they? Revelation 20:5 makes it clear that unbelievers are raised when the thousand years are ended. Revelation 20:13 makes it clear that Hades is emptied of its inhabitants, unbelieving mankind, after the thousand years to stand before Christ’s throne. Jesus already made it clear that the gates of Hades would not prevail against his work in Matthew 16:18. Paul also made it clear that Hades will not have the victory in 1 Corinthians

15:55. The Sheep on the right are the rebellious unbelieving elect, safely extracted from Hades and finally given grace to receive their salvation.

Then who are the Goats on Jesus' left? Traditional theology and even many forms of Christian Universalism understand these people to be unbelieving humanity. However, again II Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 teach us that certain fallen angels are currently being held for judgment on that Great Day. The Sheep and Goat Judgment and the Great White Throne Judgment are the excellent candidate for the Great Day of judgment for these fallen angels. In fact, even the language of Sheep and Goats fits quite naturally with a group of Christ's subjects containing both man and demon. See this article for even further proof, [Fallen Angels at The Great White Throne Judgment?](#)

You do make a good point that my earlier proposal is awkward, that the phrase **“prepared for the Devil and his angels”** was not addressed to the demons, but was commentary to the Sheep. So instead, perhaps it is not awkward at all to hear Jesus saying the entire phrase to the demons themselves. Satan is already cast into the Lake of Fire at this point and so Jesus points to the Goats on his left, the Devil's angels, the demons, and says, **“Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels,”** (Matthew 25:41b WEB). My original article on this question is titled, [You Are Wrong About Matthew 25:31-46!](#)

QUESTION>> [Also your understanding of the Sheep and Goat Judgment solves one problem, but introduces another. You continue to break the parallelism, but differently. With your understanding] now the parable is contrasting the surprise that those who don't even know they are serving Christ shall be accepted, [contrasted] with what everyone everywhere already believed -- that the devil and his angels will be going into the eonian fire prepared for the Devil and his angels. Even those surprised to have been serving Christ don't need that explained to them; certainly the apostles don't, who had been warned just previously once again as often throughout Christ's ministry, including back in that other saying about “the fire the eonian” that those chosen to be chief servants of Christ might still be dreadfully punished for their rebellious abuses. What Christ thinks they need is, by all prior evidence, emphasized warnings that they had better not regard themselves as inherently safe from punishment!

ME>> We are both agreed that Christ has been warning his audience repeatedly that grave punishment awaits those who do not repent. Some of the challenge in comparing our interpretations is that you hold to a pre-Millennial return of Christ, while I hold that the thousand year epoch is the present church age. Also you hold that mankind is punished or purified in the Lake of Fire with the final salvation of mankind beyond that, while I hold that all mankind's salvation is realized at the Great White Throne Judgment with the Lake of Fire reserved for the Devil and angels alone. I discuss these

differences further in my article, *Is Revelation 21-22 About The Church, The Last Age, or Eternity?* Unfortunately these differences may cause us to mix apples and oranges at times in our conversation. My understanding is that Christ warns unbelieving mankind of punishment in Hades, but the believing also trust that mankind is exempt from the Lake of Fire which is prepared for the Devil and his angels. You are right that the Apostles did not need these things explained to them for I am confident that they recognized the salvation of all mankind. They also recognized that Satan is the archenemy of God and mankind, Ephesians 6:10-20. However, I do not think you are right to assume that the unbelieving acknowledge the existence of Satan. Furthermore, non-Christians certainly do not believe that our election to grace has saved all mankind, even though we have all sinned. Nor do unbelievers know that Satan, the Father of Lies, and his demons are damned to the Lake of Fire. The contrast between the destiny of the Sheep and the destiny of the Goats in Matthew 25:31-46 is an excellent education in grace for all of us.

QUESTION>> Your appeal to the lack of definite articles in Revelation 14 when speaking of human followers of the Beast, compared to later statements about the Devil and his angels being punished into the eons of the eons, is not going to carry much weight with anyone who understands that the omission of direct articles does not necessarily involve such a distinction. There is certainly nothing conceptually obvious about a difference between “into eons of eons” and “into the eons of the eons”.

ME>> I beg to differ. The first obvious conceptual difference is that Hades and the Lake of Fire are different locations employed in different ages for different purposes. Revelation 20:14 (WEB) makes this clear because after Hades is emptied it is then thrown into the Lake of Fire empty of all inhabitants, **“Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.”** Again, Hades and the Lake of Fire are different places with different purposes. We have already shown that Jesus warns unbelieving mankind that they will be punished in **“the fire the aionian”** in Matthew 18:8, which I understand to be Hades. However, Jesus also teaches us that there is also a related but different place, **“the fire the aionian”** that is qualified as being **“prepared for the Devil and his angels”** which I propose is the Lake of Fire. So since there are two distinct places of punishment, it is quite reasonable to expect that there would also be a distinction in the reference to the time spent there. Apparently Hades has served as the place to punish unbelieving mankind since the beginning of Creation and will continue to serve in that capacity until it is no longer needed after the Great White Throne Judgment. So Revelation 14:11 speaks appropriately about the **“ages and ages”** of punishment suffered by mankind for their unbelief in Hades. However, Revelation 20:10, highlights a particular time frame, **“The Ages of The Ages”** of the Lake of Fire. This age is distinct as the last Biblical age and is emphasized by the Holy Spirit with the definite article, “The.” A. E. Knoch also highlights this observation,

though I part ways with a number of his conclusions. Perhaps my A-Millennial church age understanding of the thousand year epoch helps me to fit the puzzle pieces in a way that highlights the observation of the definite article in Revelation 20:10. My proposed model of understanding sees Revelation 14:11 as speaking to the first century audience warning them that those who follow Satan or worship Rome or continue to follow the Old Covenant will be punished in Hades. Of course unbelievers committing similar sins since then are in similar grave danger! Revelation 20:10 then speaks to Christians through the whole church age warning us that Satan's work is not finished, but that one day, praise God, he will be finally damned to the Lake of Fire for the last age, ***"The Ages of The Ages."*** Also at that time unbelieving mankind is released from Hades to finally receive grace and salvation. My original article on this point is, *Forever Is Not Forever? You Still Gotta Be Kidding Me!*

These observations have been building a grander storyline in my understanding. The story began so many thousands of years ago with our parents, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden. Satan invaded our innocent landscape, leading us away from our Heavenly Father. God punished Adam, Eve, and all their children since then, for we have all eaten the forbidden fruit. However, God also promised that deliverance would come from the seed of the woman, her child Jesus, and that one day the serpent's head would be crushed. Jesus crushed Satan's work at the cross and is now finishing the job, making his enemies into a footstool. The final Revelation of Jesus Christ at the end of the New Testament is given to prophecy the fulfillment of the promise given so long ago in the Garden. We look forward to the final deliverance of mankind from sin and punishment with every tear wiped away in the City of God and with the dragon, Satan, and his demons damned to the Lake of Fire. Come Lord Jesus!

Your Thought is that Daniel 12:1-4 is the Final Judgment?

QUESTION>> Your thought is that Daniel 12:1-4 is the final judgment?

*ME>> Yes, I have proposed that Matthew 25:31-46, Daniel 12:1-4, and Revelation 20:11-15 are all the same event, the final Great White Throne judgment. I have already made a case for this in my articles *Daniel 12:1-4* and *Yes, but Even Harder Questions!**

Yet Bill Saxton's book *Daniel's Prophecies of Covenant Change* makes a strong case that the King of North in Daniel 11 is Herod the Great which places elements of Daniel 12 into the first century rather than into the future as I have proposed. Also the prophesied history of the Kings of the North and the South in Daniel 11 do not seem expansive enough to cover the

entire history from Daniel's day to our future. My initial review of Saxton's thoughts can be found in my article, [Daniel 12:1-4, Further Reflection](#).

Bible commentators and even Bible translators are divided on their understanding of many of Daniel's prophecies, especially Daniel 12. Saxton leans far toward a Preterist interpretation of Daniel arguing that most if not all of Daniel's prophecies address the First Advent of Christ and the change from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. However, Saxton does stop short of Full Preterism holding that the Bible does prophecy the final return of Christ yet in our future.

The challenge in understanding Daniel 12 is assigning the timing to these events. As mentioned, Saxton makes a good case that Daniel's earlier prophecies primarily address events leading up to the time of Christ and the change from the Old to the New Covenant. Daniel 12:1 then begins, "**At that time**" making a strong chronological connection between Daniel 11, speaking about Herod the Great, and Daniel 12.

1) "At that time Michael will stand up, the great prince who stands for the children of your people; and there will be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time. At that time your people will be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. 2) Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. 3) Those who are wise will shine as the brightness of the expanse. Those who turn many to righteousness will shine as the stars forever and ever. 4) But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end. Many will run back and forth, and knowledge will be increased." 5) Then I, Daniel, looked, and behold, two others stood, one on the river bank on this side, and the other on the river bank on that side. 6) One said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long will it be to the end of these wonders?" 7) I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by him who lives forever that it will be for a time, times, and a half; and when they have finished breaking in pieces the power of the holy people, all these things will be finished. 8) I heard, but I didn't understand. Then I said, "My lord, what will be the outcome of these things?" 9) He said, "Go your way, Daniel; for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end. 10) Many will purify themselves, and make themselves white, and be refined; but the wicked will do wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand; but those who are wise will understand. 11) "From the time that the continual burnt offering is taken away, and the abomination that

makes desolate set up, there will be one thousand two hundred ninety days. 12) Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred thirty-five days. 13) “But go your way until the end; for you will rest, and will stand in your inheritance at the end of the days.”

Daniel 12:1-13 (WEB)

However, as we read Daniel 12 we see that there are elements that also seem to point beyond Christ's First Advent to the final Great White Throne judgment, still in our history future. Daniel 12:1 mentions a destiny determining **“book”** which parallels the Lamb's Book of Life in Revelation 20:15. Daniel 12:2 is most easily understood to reference the resurrection of the deceased paralleled in Matthew 25:32, 1 Corinthians 15:12-58, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, and Revelation 20:11-15. Daniel 12:4 mentions the **“time of the end,”** but is this the end of the Old Covenant at Christ's First Advent or the end of this present world at Christ's Second Advent? Daniel 12:8 with Daniel's lack of understanding also parallels Matthew 24:15 and the exhortation to understand.

The Amplified Bible also inserts commentary into Daniel 12:1 saying, **“Now at that [end] time”** raising another question. Have we properly understood and translated the chronology of Daniel Chapter 12? Does the initial Hebrew phrase in Daniel 12:1 connect back to the previous subject in Chapter 11 or forward to a new subject? Perhaps the chronological connection between Daniel 11 and 12 is not immediate.

The Full Preterist interpreter tries to connect the fulfillment of all Biblical prophecy to the First Advent of Christ. They see Matthew 25:31-46, Daniel 12:1-4, and Revelation 20:11-15 as events completely fulfilled during the change from the Old to the New Covenant with no unfulfilled prophecy of Christ's future return remaining. They believe Christ's judgment on Jerusalem in 70 A.D. is the fulfillment of his prophesied coming. The Dispensational Pre-Millennial interpreter instead tries to connect the fulfillment of most Biblical prophecy to the Second Advent of Christ.

Saxton, though proposing a first century fulfillment of many prophecies, makes this conclusion about Daniel 12:1, *“The context of this deliverance suggests it may be twofold: After the Romans crushed the Jewish revolt, the Jewish leaders were no longer in a position to actively persecute those Jews who had trusted in Jesus as the Messiah. Beyond this deliverance, however, is envisioned the greater ultimate deliverance to eternal life of both Jewish and Gentile Christians,”* Daniel's Prophecies of Covenant Change, page 67.

The majority of Bible interpreters would agree that there are prophetic Scriptures with twofold applications or where both current and future events are interleaved in the same message. This seems to be the case in Daniel

12, Matthew 24-25, and other passages. For another example, Jesus says in John 14:3 (WEB), ***“If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will receive you to myself; that where I am, you may be there also.”*** So is Jesus speaking about his coming to us individually at our deaths, or corporately at his Second Advent? Perhaps both are true. Hopefully we do not get in an argument about this good news! So our challenge remains maintaining positive fellowship even when we draw the lines in different places on matters that we do not fully understand. Our questions to the Lord are limited to what we can envision, because we never come close to seeing God’s whole picture. However, when Jesus answers, his words help our immediate outlook, but also point us to the consummation of hope, well beyond our vision. God sees the end from the beginning.

So after further reflection I still understand Matthew 25:31-46, Daniel 12:1-4, and Revelation 20:11-15 to point to the same event, the final judgment of God’s creation. However, even if you or I are wrong, we can rest assured because Jesus is in charge.

Your Theory about the Goats... Is it Really Possible? Matthew 25:31-46

READER>> I like what you have written, but question your theory about the goats on Jesus’ left being fallen angels only. Is it really possible?

ME>> Thank you for asking and join me in reconsidering.

Who are the goats? It is a simple question with a simple answer assumed. Unbelievers of course! However, many times a simple observation is missed and we are misled by our assumptions. Consider, ever since 1492 whenever the word Indian is used we need to clarify whether we mean American Indian or Asian Indian. Columbus taught us long ago that accurate understanding requires an accurate knowledge of our frame of reference! Five hundred years later, even in our advanced era, NASA and Lockheed Martin lost a \$125 million satellite to outer space because unknowingly one used Metric and the other English measurements. Oops! They remind us that compatible dialogue needs a compatible use of terms and measures. Michelangelo’s famous Moses statue wears a set of horns because in Exodus 34 the Latin Vulgate translation wrongly says horns instead of glow, two very similar Hebrew words. So truthful conclusions can only come from accurate sources. Even the atheist Friedrich Nietzsche adds a point saying, *“The text has disappeared under the interpretation.”* Thus Bible study is the hardest interpretive work there is, for one must mercilessly imprison a thousand traditions and silence a million voices to see the text of Scripture. May God give us the wisdom to consider every observation of others, but the clear sight to see his Word.

So who are the goats condemned by Jesus in Matthew 25:31-46? I propose that the goats on Jesus' left at the Sheep and Goat Judgment are the fallen angels. Matthew 25:41 (WEB) says, "**Then he will say also to those on the left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels.'**" My defense of the victory of grace for all mankind at DGJC.ORG/OPTIMISM includes this understanding. The Scriptures explicitly say that the *aionian fire* is prepared for the Devil and his angels. Correspondingly, I understand that it is not prepared for mankind, not even unbelieving mankind. My conclusion has been challenged by Christians from various traditions, including Universalists. Yet it should give us all pause to consider that the Scripture explicitly states that these fires are *prepared* for the Devil and his angels. Do you and traditional theologies factor this observation into your conclusions? Perhaps I am wrong. In fact I am already corrected on one point because I may have argued in the past that human beings were never referred to as goats in the Christian Scripture. However, Jeremiah 50:8 and 51:40, Ezekiel 39:18, and Zechariah 10:3 all use goats as a metaphor for Israel and Israel's leaders. So I must reconsider the identity of the goats, and also consider whether being wrong about the identity of the goats at the Sheep and Goat Judgment undermines my larger conclusion about the victory of God's grace for all mankind.

In the following article I invite you to weigh the evidence with me as I reconsider my conclusions about the Sheep and Goat Judgment. In the following paragraphs I list the major views of eschatology, disclose my own view of prophecy, list my previous articles on the subject, note the use and meaning of the Greek word *ethnos*, consider the impact of possible time frames, identify the Sheep on the right, prove the presence of fallen angels at the final future judgment, review the significance of *Tartarus* and *Thalaasa*, compare and contrast the Sheep and Goat Judgment with the Great White Throne Judgment, consider the redemption of fallen angels, examine Revelation 20:8 again, add further thoughts about redemptive ages beyond the Great White Throne Judgment in Revelation 21 and 22, note the promised end of death and Hades, reconsider the identity of the Goats on the left, and conclude whether Biblical proof about the victory of God's grace for all mankind is made uncertain because of uncertainty about Matthew 25:31-46 or any particular view of prophecy.

Various views of eschatology include: 1) Dispensational Pre-Millennialism, future, 2) non-Dispensational Pre-Millennialism, future, 3) A-Millennialism, present, 4) realized Post-Millennialism, past, 5) Post-Millennialism, future, 6) variations of the previous, and 7) full Preterism which understands that all prophecy is fully realized with no future return of Christ forecast. *Preterist* is the word used to describe prophetic statements that were future at the time the prophecy was written, but the events are now are past. Most Christians recognize that some New Testament prophecy is already fulfilled, but full Preterism asserts that all Biblical prophecy is completely fulfilled. I more fully explain each of these views and their relevancy to mankind's salvation in my

articles *Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News* and *Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News Part 2 with Grudem Riddlebarger Chilton Summers Ewing.*

Further, within these views there are both common and uncommon understandings of the timing and purpose of the Sheep and Goat Judgment explained in Matthew 25:31-46. Various understandings include that the Sheep and Goat Judgment happened or happens 1) metaphorically on the cross dividing believer and unbeliever, 2) visibly when Christ judged Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and later Rome, 3) invisibly in the first century by Christ in Heaven, 4) visibly in the future at the rapture of the church before the Millennial epoch, and 5) visibly in the future at the rapture and Christ's second coming after the Millennial church age epoch, thus synonymous with the Great White Throne Judgment. So we have differences, yet I hope we can all agree gladly with the following statement;

Being right or wrong in our understanding about the Sheep and Goat Judgment and prophecy will not change the final destiny of the redeemed people of God in the least, though present understanding and joy may be impacted temporarily.

Many Christian teachers are private about their theological positions beyond the fact that Christ is the divine promised Messiah and that he is coming again for his own along with other essentials. There is wisdom in this discretion. Secondary theology and speculation often divides rather than unites. However, disclosure of my views online has been a helpful for me to think aloud to vet ideas and grow in understanding. Even so, if we meet in person I hope that our conversation remains focused on practical Christian living and loving instead of any puffed-up theories.

Yet prophecy has attracted my attention because the study of grace and mankind's salvation must be consistent with the things the Bible reveals about the future. Developing a consistent model of understanding is no small undertaking as two thousand years of theological conflict show. My own view of prophecy is simply a variation of the traditional A-Millennial view that the 1,000 year epoch revealed in Revelation 20:1-7 is the entire church age between Christ's first and Second Advent. Thus we wait for the final battle with Satan to be followed immediately by Christ's second coming and final judgment at the Great White Throne. At that time the redemption of mankind will be finally and fully manifest with every tear wiped away, sin and brokenness removed forever, and Satan's rebellion crushed as he and his demonic followers are sentenced to the Lake of Fire which is prepared for them. This is just as God promised to Adam and Eve so long ago in the garden, Genesis 3:15 (WEB), ***"I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel."***

My previous articles on prophecy include:

- [Matthew 25:31-46](#)
- [You Are Wrong About Matthew 25:31-46](#)
- [Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News](#)
- [Eschatology is the Study of Future Good News Part 2 with Grudem Riddlebarger Chilton Summers Ewing](#)
- [Fallen Angels at the Great White Throne Judgment](#)
- [Hebrews 2:16 Does Not Say Fallen Angels are Damned](#)
- [How Can You Say Revelation 21:8 Does Not Apply to Humans?](#)
- [Revelation 21:22 The Last Age, the Church, or Eternity?](#)
- [Isaiah 65:25 Says that Even Satan Will Be Restored](#)
- [Hebrews 2:16 Does Not Say Fallen Angels Are Damned](#)
- [Isaiah 66:22-24 Cannot Include Fallen Angels](#)
- [Your Thoughts On Matthew's Meaning of Aionian Fire](#)
- [Daniel 12:1-4](#)
- [Your Thought is that Daniel 12:1-4 is the Final Judgment](#)
- [Revelation 20:10](#)
- [Revelation 20:11-15](#)

Now the passage under discussion, Matthew 25:31-46 (WEB), reads as follows,

31) But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. 32) Before him all the nations will be gathered, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33) He will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. 34) Then the King will tell those on his right hand, "Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35) for I was hungry, and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you took me in. 36) I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you visited me. I was in prison, and you came to me." 37) Then the righteous will answer him, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you; or thirsty, and give you a drink? 38) When did we see you as a stranger, and take you in; or naked, and clothe you? 39) When did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?" 40) The King will answer them, "Most certainly I tell you, because you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you

did it to me.” 41) Then he will say also to those on the left hand, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels; 42) for I was hungry, and you didn’t give me food to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink; 43) I was a stranger, and you didn’t take me in; naked, and you didn’t clothe me; sick, and in prison, and you didn’t visit me.” 44) Then they will also answer, saying, “Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and didn’t help you?” 45) Then he will answer them, saying, “Most certainly I tell you, because you didn’t do it to one of the least of these, you didn’t do it to me.” 46) These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

First we consider the use of the Greek word *ethnos* in verse 32, translated as nations above. Previously I have said that we most naturally assume that when Jesus gathers the *nations* before him that he is talking about only human beings and human nations. The Greek word *ethnos* could be understood to mean “*a multitude of individuals of the same nature or genus, for example the human family.*” Thus when Jesus divides the people into their categories of sheep and goats, we naturally conclude that believing humans are sheep while the remaining unbelieving humans are the goats. So it is commonly understood that only part of humanity is saved from the Lake of Fire while the rest are lost eternally. Arminians and Calvinists Christians both agree on this point, though curiously they disagree as to how people are saved. Further, most Christian Universalists also agree with this understanding, but conclude that all humanity is finally saved in redemptive ages beyond the Great White Throne Judgment and beyond the Lake of Fire. I understand the motivation for these views, but I still feel there is a more consistent model.

We should not conclude too quickly that *ethnos* means human *ethnic* groups. Etymology shows that the English word *ethnic* has a restricted meaning compared to its Greek origins. Perhaps the modern English meaning was wrongly influenced by the traditional understanding of this very passage. Instead note that the Greek word *ethnos* is also used to mean “*the people, in contrast to their king.*” The first denotation in the Vines dictionary also indicates, “*a multitude (whether of men or of beasts) associated or living together: a company, troop, swarm.*” These alternate denotations must also be considered as eligible when interpreting this passage. The main point is that one cannot say that fallen angels are not at this judgment based on the meaning of the word *ethnos*, particularly since *ethnos* can mean “*people in contrast to their king*” and “*a multitude of men or of beasts.*” Do not forget that angels are also God’s subjects and are people with names, minds, wills, and emotion, though they are not human beings created in God’s image. So the Greek *ethnos* would be the perfect word to describe a mixed gathering of humans and fallen angels arraigned before Jesus their king. That much all

must agree. Also as an aside it is noted that the same Greek word *ethnos* is found in Revelation 20:8 in close proximity to the Great White Throne Judgment. Perhaps that is no coincidence.

Defense of the presence of fallen angels at The Sheep and Goat Judgment is important in my view because of my understanding that the Sheep and Goat Judgment and the Great White Throne Judgment are the same final judgment. If I understand that these judgments are the final judgment and the goats are unbelieving mankind, then they are sentenced to the Lake of Fire. However, we are considering and reconsidering the proposition that the goats are not human beings, but in fact are the fallen angels. Now those who think that the Sheep and Goat Judgment is before the Millennial epoch could alternatively still hold that all mankind avoids the Lake of Fire if unbelieving humans were sentenced to *aionian fire* in temporal Hades during the Millennial epoch and then finally saved when extracted from Hades at the Great White Throne Judgment. I initially held this view myself, combined with a non-Dispensational Pre-Millennial view of prophecy. Though, I have since moved to an A-Millennial understanding. In contrast to both of these ideas, the majority of Christian Universalists hold that unbelieving mankind is actually sentenced to the Lake of Fire at the Great White Throne Judgment, but then finally saved in yet later redemptive ages. However, I feel that this view misses the concluding nature of Revelation 21 and 22 and misses the simpler chronology taught in the Bible, Hebrews 9:27 (WEB), ***“Inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once, and after this, judgment.”*** I wonder if those holding to redemptive ages beyond the Great White Throne Judgment would acknowledge that their strained interpretation may be motivated by the desire to save people from the Lake of Fire when it should be reconsidered whether human beings are ever sent there in the first place.

Further debate could be encouraged to consider the plausibility of the various proposed time frames of the Sheep and Goat Judgment. For example to suggest that this judgment is the invisible judgment at the cross neglects the real dialogue portrayed between Christ and his subjects. To suggest that this judgment happened in Heaven invisibly to us might be possible, but then where does it fit on the redemptive timeline shown in the book of Revelation and elsewhere? And the grand picture of Christ gathering all his subjects before him is lost because we were not there along with many others not yet born. Finally, to suggest that this is an intermediate judgment in the future at the rapture before the Millennial Kingdom might also be possible, but requires an acceptance of the Dispensational model. Hebrews 9:27, quoted above, again points to a simpler understanding that we each die once and there will be one final judgment at the end of the church age before eternity begins. In any case, views that propose that the Sheep and Goat Judgment is not the final judgment minimize the importance of the identity of the goats to maintain a consistent Christian Universalist theology because Christ would still have opportunity to save the goats later, if they are human. After all,

Christ did say that the gates of Hades will not prevail, and, as promised, we see that Hades is emptied at the Great White Throne Judgment.

Again, it is commonly assumed that the goats on the left are unbelievers to be damned for all eternity and the sheep on the right are the believers to be blessed for all eternity. However, before we consider the goats on the left, let's consider the sheep on the right. The sheep may offer further clues about the time frame of this judgment. Many times we miss the obvious by not asking the obvious question. Why do the sheep on the right seem ignorant of gospel basics such as, we serve Christ when we serve the least of his brothers? Why do they seem surprised about their salvation? For those that understand the Sheep and Goat Judgment to be synonymous with the Great White Throne Judgment, then the timing of this final judgment would be just after the rapture of the saints to meet the returning Christ in the air. Christ and his church then descend to earth and this judgment begins. That being the case it is strange to think of the believers rejoicing in the air with Christ and with each other moments before fearful judgment. Review 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18 (WEB).

14) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15) For this we tell you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will in no way precede those who have fallen asleep. 16) For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with God's trumpet. The dead in Christ will rise first, 17) then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. So we will be with the Lord forever. 18) Therefore comfort one another with these words.

It is very awkward to suggest that we believers who understand the gospel and will already be rejoicing with Christ in the air at the rapture will then be arraigned with uncertainties before the Sheep and Goat Judgment. You may have guessed by now that I do not think that the sheep on the right are believers. So then who are the sheep on Jesus' right? They are unbelieving mankind just extracted from Hades! This model of understanding is a perfect match with the attitude and questions that would be expected from the unbelieving redeemed that are extracted from Hades at the final judgment. I call them unbelieving redeemed because Christ redeemed them at the cross and their sins are already atoned, though they remain unbelieving. Faith does not cause our redemption and atonement, but instead faith receives our redemption already made certain at the cross. Unbelievers are punished in Hades not because they are not forgiven, but because they refuse the forgiveness already given at the cross and so reject Christ their savior and King. God loves and has already forgiven all mankind, but the hearts of unbelievers are not ready to confess their sin and receive forgiveness. They

do not yet see the great gift in the gospel and the value of Christian service. Instead unbelievers will spend who knows how long in whatever sufferings Hades brings to the wicked dead. And one day they will be released from their prison in Hades to stand before Christ their King. The responses of the sheep on the right fit this scenario perfectly. They are lost sheep, then found. Meanwhile believers, whether standing on the side line or in the midst, are not asking such questions, but have already begun rejoicing that the final victory of grace is at hand.

One objected to this view asking why the Lord commends those extracted from Hades for good things they did. Did they really do good things? Did the selfish rich man do any good? Did Hitler do any good? These are good questions with Jesus answering, ***“whatever you did for the least of these, you did for me.”*** We as believers already know that, but the unbelievers do not know that, and still will not understand until released from punishment in Hades to be judged by Christ. However, even though they do not understand these things now, there still may be many ‘*decent*’ secular humanitarians... from an earthly perspective. True, if they do not repent, they will still be sentenced to Hades for disregarding Christ. Yet even so they may have done some good for humanity. Unbelievers can do good things. Perhaps even Hitler did an act of kindness before he became enslaved to Satan’s scheme. All mankind, even the unbelieving, are created in God’s image, and may at times do good things to help others. Certainly no one does enough good to merit salvation. However, at the Sheep and Goat Judgment Jesus graciously accepts any good done by the unbelieving at this juncture, not because it saves them, but so that eternity begins on a positive note rather than a negative note for these prisoners just released. Another argued that this is not possible because all our righteous deeds are like ***“filthy rags.”*** Well, that is true of both believer and non-believer alike. So Christ’s kind words are undeserved no matter who is the audience! Good parents know to focus on the positive after punishing their children. Even human authorities speak a hopeful future to released prisoners. Would God then begin eternity with a begrudged welcome for those saved out of Hades? No way! God, as the originator of grace, understands better than we about the importance of starting things on a positive note!

Continuing, some have argued that fallen angels will not be present at the final judgment. However, this fact is easily proved. We read in 2 Peter 2:4 (WEB), ***“For if God didn’t spare angels when they sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus, and committed them to pits of darkness to be reserved for judgment.”*** Further, we read Jude 6 (WEB), ***“Angels who didn’t keep their first domain, but deserted their own dwelling place, he has kept in everlasting bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day.”*** So fallen angels will be present for judgment on that Great Day! This fact must be integrated into our understanding of the final judgment passages. The fallen angels will be there.

The Great White Throne Judgment recorded in Revelation 20:11-15 (WEB) offers both similar and additional detail of the final judgment when compared with Matthew 25:31-46. We read,

11) I saw a great white throne, and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. There was found no place for them. 12) I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and they opened books. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. 13) The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works. 14) Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15) If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.

Comparing the judgment in Matthew 25:31-46 and Revelation 20:11-15 is helpful to confirm whether these are the same events. However, first note that Revelation 20:13 explains that the subjects of this judgment are extracted from both the sea, *Thalaasa* in the Greek, and also from *Hades*. This is at least a curious observation and perhaps a significant observation as it relates to the presence of fallen angels at the final judgment. I have already proved the presence of fallen angels at the final judgment from 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6. The Great White Throne Judgment is the last judgment recorded in Scripture and therefore, I believe, the final judgment. Further, we see that the subjects of this judgment are extracted from two locations, *Hades* and *Thalaasa*. We know from Luke 16:19-31 that wicked deceased humans are punished in *Hades*. However, who is located in *Thalaasa*, the sea? I propose that *Thalaasa* is either the retreat or the temporary prison of fallen angels. The sea was commonly understood to be the caustic habitat of demons in the first century. I examine this question at length in my article, [Fallen Angels at the Great White Throne Judgment](#). This article explains possible connections between *Thalaasa* and the prison for fallen angels, *Tartarus*, mentioned in 2 Peter 2:4. Thus the presence of fallen angels at the final judgment, just extracted from the sea, is even further confirmed and must be factored into our view of the final judgment.

I have proposed that the Sheep and Goat Judgment is the same event as the Great White Throne Judgment. If I am wrong about this conclusion then between the two events, the Great White Throne Judgment is the better choice for the final judgment because of its placement at the end of the book of Revelation. That being the case fallen angels would still be present then, even if they are not at the Sheep and Goat Judgment. This is safely concluded because of the reference to “**the Great Day**” in Jude 6 and the emptying of both the prison of *Hades* and of *Thalaasa* in Revelation 20:13. And as already stated, if the Sheep and Goat Judgment is earlier, not the

final judgment, and angels are not present there, then Christ would still have opportunity to save the goats later, if they are human, and if Hades is the aionian fires of the Sheep and Goat judgment. This is true because we see that Hades is emptied at the Great White Throne Judgment.

Consider a detailed comparison of Matthew 25 and Revelation 20.

Comparison	Sheep and Goat	Great White Throne
Both accounts are from gospel writers.	Matthew wrote Matthew	John wrote Revelation
All four gospel writers include Jesus' final prophecies, Matthew, Mark, and Luke within their gospel accounts and John not in his gospel account, but with special attention in Revelation.	Olivet discourse in Matthew 24-25	Missing in John's gospel, but instead explained in his book of Revelation
Both answer questions about the present and future.	24:3) <i>As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? What is the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age"</i>	1:9) <i>I John, your brother and partner with you in the oppression, Kingdom, and perseverance in Christ Jesus, was on the isle that is called Patmos because of God's Word and the testimony of Jesus Christ. ... 1:19) Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will happen hereafter.</i>
Both depict grand thrones.	25:31) <i>But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.</i>	20:11) <i>I saw a great white throne, and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. There was found no place for them.</i>

Comparison	Sheep and Goat	Great White Throne
Both depict Christ summoning his subjects with John providing more detail from where, though without contradiction.	<i>25:32) Before him all the nations will be gathered, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.</i>	<i>20:13) The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works.</i>
Matthew notes the separation of sheep and goats. Revelation notes judgment, though there is no contradiction. Many assume no one is saved at the Great White Throne, but only forwarded to the Lake of Fire. Yet, if these events are the same, then at least some of the people extracted from Hades or Thalaasa are saved at the Sheep and Goat Judgment!	<i>25:32) Before him all the nations will be gathered, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.</i>	<i>20:12) I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and they opened books. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works.</i>
Matthew records dialogue between Christ and his subjects while Revelation does not, though again there is no contradictory detail.	<i>25:39) "When did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?" 40) The King will answer them, "Most certainly I tell you, because you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."</i>	

Comparison	Sheep and Goat	Great White Throne
<p>Matthew records praise for the good deeds of the sheep while Revelation records judgment based on both works and also whether one's name is in the Lamb's Book. Again there is no contradictory detail.</p>	<p>25:34) <i>Then the King will tell those on his right hand, 'Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35) for I was hungry, and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you took me in.'</i></p>	<p>20:12) <i>I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and they opened books. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. ... 20:15) If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.</i></p>
<p>Matthew records both the positive destiny of the sheep and the negative destiny of the goats while Revelation records only the negative destiny of those not listed in the Lamb's Book with the positive destiny of those listed only implied. Again there is no contradictory detail.</p>	<p>25:46) <i>These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.</i></p>	<p>20:15) <i>If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.</i></p>
<p>Matthew and John use different terms for the destiny of the wicked, though again without contradiction.</p>	<p>aionian fire</p>	<p>Lake of Fire</p>

The Sheep and Goat Judgment and the Great White Throne Judgment have much in common and so it is both fair and commonly agreed by many to consider these events as synonymous. Repeating one conclusion from the above chart, if the Sheep and Goat Judgment and the Great White Throne Judgment events are the same final judgment event, then at least some of the people extracted from *Hades* or *Thalaasa* are saved at the Great White Throne Judgment! Since the Great White Throne Judgment only speaks explicitly about those not listed in the Book as being cast in the Lake of Fire, many argue that all the inhabitants of *Hades* and *Thalaasa* are simply

extracted so they can be sentenced to their permanent destiny in the Lake of Fire. Unfortunately this is a hasty conclusion. So, if not clear in Revelation's Great White Throne Judgment, it is clear in Matthew's Sheep and Goat Judgment that some are saved at this juncture. It is also clear that the subjects at the Great White Throne Judgment are from *Hades* and *Thalaasa*. Therefore if the Sheep and Goat Judgment is synonymous with the Great White Throne Judgment, it is proved that at least some are saved from either *Hades* or *Thalaasa*. So if you agree that the Sheep and Goat Judgment and the Great White Throne Judgment are the same event, then you must also agree with me that some from either *Hades* or *Thalaasa* are saved. I would propose that *Hades* houses unbelieving mankind and they will all be saved because all of their names are written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, though they do not yet understand and believe this as Christians do. And I would I propose that *Thalaasa* houses the fallen angels and they are not saved because Scriptures says that the Lake of Fire is explicitly prepared for them!

A more thorough study could compare the Sheep and Goat Judgment with other Bible passages that may also refer to the final judgment. For example, Daniel 12:1-4 is a possible candidate, which I discuss further in my articles [Daniel 12:1-4](#) and [Your Thought is that Daniel 12:1-4 is the Final Judgment!](#) My conclusion is that Daniel 12:1-4 corroborates with my thesis here. Another passage to review is John 5:28-30 which I have considered in my article, [John 5:28-30 Offers No Optimism](#). Likewise 2 Peter chapter 2, one of the scarier chapters in the New Testament, has grave warnings for false teachers. However, this chapter also explicitly reminds us that fallen angels will be present at the judgment. The passage also reminds us that the unbelieving will be punished and then brought to judgment. However, there is no explicit mention of eternal punishment beyond the final judgment for mankind. Note that 2 Peter 2:17 (WEB) is translated, ***"These are wells without water, clouds driven by a storm; for whom the blackness of darkness has been reserved forever."*** However, the Greek word underlying ***"forever"*** is ***"aion"*** which never means infinite chronological time as has been explained numerous times at [DGJC.ORG](#) and in [Optimism Out of Control](#). Instead the meaning is either eonian or entire. Also see the article, [Aion](#), for further proof. So 2 Peter chapter 2 corroborates as well.

As mentioned, particular to my model of understanding is the proposition that fallen angels are the goats on Jesus left that are extracted from *Thalaasa* for their final judgment. These fallen angels are then sentenced to the Lake of Fire which is prepared for them while all mankind is redeemed because Christ has already atoned for the sins of all mankind at the cross, 1 John 2:2 (WEB), ***"And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world."*** Naturally, however, we do not expect everyone to see things the same way. And differences may even be more pronounced among the radical minority that holds to the universal salvation of mankind. One point of debate among Christian Universalists is whether

Satan himself and the fallen angels will be redeemed. I mention this because my model of understanding is different than most Universalists. I agree that the grace of Christ will be victorious in the salvation of all mankind. However, I also understand that no human being will ever enter the Lake of Fire because it is not prepared for mankind, but instead for the Devil and his angels, as explicitly stated. So my understanding may revive debate about the possibility of fallen angel redemption.

Most arguments promoting the salvation of Satan focus on passages like Romans 11:32, Colossians 1:20, and Philippians 2:10 which speak about the salvation and redemption of *all* and worship of every tongue. Weighty arguments can be made from these passages for the redemption of all creation, including Satan. The Holy Spirit's choice of words for the redemption of all creation should especially be noted in Romans 8:21 and 11:32. However, these passages must also be weighed against Scriptures that say God is not the helper of angels, Hebrews 2:16, and Matthew 25:41 which explicitly states the Lake of Fire is prepared for the Devil and his angels. I discuss this question further in my articles *Isaiah 65:25 Says that Even Satan Will Be Restored*, *Hebrews 2:16 Does Not Say Fallen Angels Are Damned*, and *Isaiah 66:22-24 Cannot Include Fallen Angels*. One might also ask if the goat metaphor is ever used of fallen angels in the Bible beyond my proposal concerning Matthew 25:31-46. It is not to my knowledge. Further, the extra Biblical image of the goat-headed Baphomet offers no proof either. Those offended by the damnation of Satan and his angels to the Lake of Fire should be reminded that the bottom line argument for the redemption of all mankind should not hinge on the meaning of *all* and *every*. We all understand that these words can be used in general non-absolute ways at times. Instead the bottom line argument for the redemption of all mankind is the atoning sacrifice of the God-man, Jesus Christ. Christ's role as the second Adam and new federal head of humanity is the heart of our hope and praise. Though I do not want to speculate beyond Scripture as to Satan's eternal destiny, but simply observe that Jesus is not his helper, the Lake of Fire is prepared for him and his fallen angels, and there they remain at the last sentence of the Bible.

Suppose I am right and the judgments in Matthew 25 and Revelation 20 are the same event and fallen angels are the goats on Jesus' left, then does the warning in Revelation 21:8 really only apply to fallen angels? Actually, I would say no. This warning applies to both mankind and angel-kind alike. Revelation 21:8 says, ***“But for the cowardly, unbelieving, sinners, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their part is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”*** The Holy Spirit is consistent through the whole of Scripture giving severe warning to unbelieving mankind. This is evident in God's condemnation of Nineveh, though God did not destroy Nineveh as he promised, as explained in my article, *Jonah 3*. This is also evident when God's calls Israel, ***“not my people”***, then again, ***“my people”*** when they

repented, as explained in my article, [Hosea 2:23](#). So the warning in Revelation 21:8 applies to all, but I believe that condemnation to the Lake of Fire will only be applied to the fallen angels and not mankind, not even unbelieving mankind, who will be finally graced with repentance and open eyes on that Great Day. This is true because God himself already determined the glorious destiny of all mankind when he made atonement for the sins of all mankind. I discuss this in more detail in my article, [How Can You Say Revelation 21:8 Does Not Apply to Humans?](#)

So if we believe the Sheep and Goat Judgment and the Great White Throne Judgment are the same event, the final judgment of men and angels, which I do, and also believe that all mankind will be finally saved, which I do, then we must either defend that the goats on Jesus' left are not human beings, but are in fact the fallen angels, or that the human beings sent to the Lake of Fire will be safely extracted later. We have reviewed the Biblical data above preparing to re-define the proposal that the fallen angels are the goats on Jesus' left. Now if it were true that human beings were never referred to as *goats*, then that would provide even one more argument to support my case. However, Jeremiah 50:8 and 51:40, and Ezekiel 39:18 all use *goats* as a metaphor for Israel and Israel's leaders. So the argument that goat imagery never refers to human beings cannot be used. Yet note that these passages do not distinguish between sheep as good and goats as bad as we find in Matthew 25 and so should not be considered parallel passages. However, Zechariah 10:2-3, a closer parallel to Matthew 25, does condemn Israel's leaders, the goats, for misleading Israel's people, the sheep. So if Matthew 25 is parallel to Zechariah 10, then it draws a line of judgement between condemned leaders and misled followers. But certainly Matthew's Sheep and Goat judgment cuts deeper than a line between leaders and followers, but instead is a division determined before the foundation of creation in the Book of Life, Revelation 20:15. So Matthew 25 appears to be the only place where sheep and goat imagery is used to contrast between those saved from the Lake of Fire and those who are not saved. The final question of this study remains. Is there enough Biblical data to warrant the proposition that the goats on the left are the fallen angels only?

As explained, for most Christian Universalists this is not even an important question because instead most propose that unbelieving mankind, or even all mankind, are scourged of sin in the Lake of Fire and finally saved in redemptive ages beyond the Great White Throne Judgment in Revelation 21 and 22. Revelation 21 and 22 could possibly be understood to portray redemptive ages after the Great White Throne Judgment. For Revelation 20:4 (WEB) says, ***“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; neither will there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more. The first things have passed away.”*** All sin and brokenness appears to be healed. But then beyond that Revelation 22:14-15 (WEB) says, ***“Blessed are those who do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the***

city. Outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.” So has sin reentered the world after the Great White Throne Judgment? No. The mistake in this interpretation is to assume that the verses after the Great White Throne Judgment are a sequential chronology of redemptive ages. Instead a better literary analysis would show that the Great White Throne Judgment is the end of the story for this fallen world followed by the commencement of blessed eternity for God’s people. Revelation 21 and 22 are then the concluding statements that paint a summary picture of this promised future for mankind, as well as a picture of the New Testament church age until we reach the Great White Throne Judgment. A good conclusion will address both the present need and the future hope just as the Holy Spirit does in Revelation 21 and 22. Read more about my understanding of this question at [Revelation 21:22 The Last Age, the Church, or Eternity?](#)

Christian Universalists that propose escape from the Lake of Fire also use the argument that the end of death is promised in the New Testament and so that must mean escape from the second death in the Lake of Fire. This is a hopeful thought, but only born out of the concern that human beings are sent to the Lake of Fire in the first place. However, the thought is not as precise as needed in attention to detail. Jesus does promise that **“the gates of Hades will not prevail against it”** in Matthew 16:18 (WEB) as explained in my article, [Matthew 16:15-21 Optimism Out of Control](#). Paul also reinforces the hope in 1 Corinthians 15:55 (WEB) saying, **“Death, where is your sting? Hades, where is your victory?”** Yet both of these passages point to the good news at the Great White Throne Judgment when Hades is emptied and death is ended for mankind with the beginning of blessed eternity. However, there is no promise in Scripture concerning the end of the second death for the Devil and his angels. In fact the Holy Spirit uses the expression **“second death”** in order to make a distinction between those saved from the first death in Hades, that is unbelieving mankind, and those not saved from the second death in the Lake of Fire, that is the Devil and his angels. These are important observations again supporting the conclusions that unbelieving humans are saved out of *Hades*, the first death, and that fallen angels are sent to the Lake of Fire which is prepared for them, the second death.

So is there enough Biblical data to warrant the proposition that the goats on the left are only the fallen angels? After further review I continue to believe so. Even though human beings are referred to as goats a few times in Scripture I still think there is enough evidence to hold that fallen angels are condemned and all mankind finally saved. The fallen angels are condemned to the Lake of Fire at the final judgment while all Christians rejoice with Christ at the rapture and all non-Christians are safely extracted from *Hades* and surprised to learn that they are finally saved along with all God’s people. The sins of unbelievers are already atoned, the same as the sins of believers, at the cross of Christ! There are many Scriptures and arguments above that

point to this conclusion. I did not even mention the supra-Biblical observation that redemptive history begins with the promise of a deliverer for mankind and the forecast that Satan's head will be crushed in Genesis 3:15. Revelation 20 then finishes the story with the salvation of all mankind and the banishment of Satan and his angels to the Lake of Fire. This is an important point, so let me say it again. History begins with the fall of mankind to the schemes of Satan and with God promising future deliverance for his people and the crushing of Satan's rebellion. And the history of this fallen world will end with the sentencing of Satan to the Lake of Fire and the redemption of all God's people to blessed eternity. These are the two perfectly matching bookends for the history of redemption! The Bible is the story of the most awesome victory of grace for mankind and the final defeat of Satan our adversary!

Even so, for me, the essential facts remain 1) fallen angels will be at the final judgment, 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6, 2) the Lake of Fire is explicitly prepared for the Devil and his angels, Matthew 25:41, 3) Christ is not the helper of fallen angels, Hebrews 2:16, 4) Christ promised to defeat Hades, Matthew 16:18 and 1 Corinthians 15:55, 5) Hades is emptied and proven to be temporal punishment for unbelieving mankind, Revelation 20:13, and 6) Christ as the second Adam is the atoning sacrifice for the sins of all mankind, both believing and unbelieving, Romans 5:18 and 1 John 2:1. These indisputable observations must be integrated into any Biblical view of destiny for mankind and angelkind.

The arguments I propose identifying the goats as the fallen angels seem certain to me. What do you think? However, even so we might ask if Biblical proof of the victory of God's grace for all mankind is made uncertain because of remaining uncertainty about Matthew 25:31-46 or any particular prophecy? Certainly Biblical teaching about future things and final judgments must be compatible with any interpretation about the final destiny of mankind. However, within Christian theology, which is already divided on so many points, the subject of eschatology may be the most divided and confused of all. Biblical passages about judgments and future things can be very difficult to understand and to consistently synthesize with the whole of Scripture. So building a case for the final redemption of all mankind based on a particular view of eschatology may not be the best foundation. (Though curiously, those who oppose the idea of mankind's universal salvation are equally divided over interpretation of prophecy and even their salvation recipes, yet their common foundation is the claim that all mankind will not be saved! What a terrible foundation!). Instead the foundational argument for the salvation of all mankind is Christ himself as the second Adam and the atoning sacrifice for not only our sins, but the sins of all mankind. Confidence in this fact overrules any uncertainties we may have in interpreting Christ's prophecies. Christ's work on the cross for all mankind is the foundation of hope both for us and for our fellowman.

Finally, while I enjoy these studies, confirming and re-confirming the fact of God's love for all mankind from the Bible, I also consider a graver question. Will further proofs of Jesus' promises and prophecy help our understanding and prove God's victorious grace to the unbeliever? Will those already professing Christ be thankful that the grace that saves all mankind is the same grace that also saves them? Will those who reject the salvation of all mankind recognize their offensive blind hypocrisy in claiming their sins are forgiven at the cross, but the sins of others are not forgiven? It would be the greatest honor to be used by God to lead another to Christ and his grace for us all. And God commands us to labor with all our energy testifying to his grace. He adds our feeble efforts into his master plan. However, the praise for opening the ears of the dumb, giving sight to the blind, and raising the dead goes to Christ alone. He alone has the power to conceive born again believers. Fine arguments alone never persuaded one person to come to Christ. The Holy Spirit alone breathes life into the dead.

So if further expert defense is rejected after all our efforts, remember Paul's exhortation in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 (WEB), ***“For though we walk in the flesh, we don’t wage war according to the flesh; for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the throwing down of strongholds, throwing down imaginations and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”*** We wage war preaching God's word and praying to Christ while waiting patiently for the Holy Spirit to make the difference!

Thank you for joining my further research. Understanding prophecy has always been difficult for me. Lack of confidence in my position has, at times past, resulted in embarrassment and defensiveness. Helpful teachability was lost in me because confident understanding eluded me even after all my study. Further, I was lost in the dizzying array of interpretive models available. I despaired whether understanding was even possible. The winning recipe for my dilemma was instead to rest confidently in the Lord's love knowing that our promised destiny does not depend upon our understanding, but upon his grace. That is good news! Hopefully this good news lowers our defenses enough to honest that our best explanations are merely models of understanding. History future will give us the certain understanding when that Great Day reveals all. My proposed model of understanding has answered enough questions to satisfy my desire to make consistent sense of the whole. However, I pray that I, or any who agree with my conclusions above, would keep knowledge in its proper place for questions still remain. One day even the value of knowledge will be eclipsed and pass away with the commencement of glorious eternity. Though knowledge about God's love for you, me, and all mankind will certainly never pass away!

Your Thought is that Christians Have Lost the Gospel?

QUESTION>> Your thought is that Christians have lost the gospel? Really?

ME>> Certainly not all Christians have lost the gospel! However, just as certainly there are many who claim to follow Jesus and profess faith in Jesus, yet are misguided as to who Jesus is and the beauty of his unconditional love. Consider that the first century church of Galatia lost the gospel. Apostle Paul wrote the letter of Galatians to rebuke their unbelief. This church was nurtured by Paul himself. This church was only decades away from Christ himself. Yet even they were not immune from falling from grace. They were not immune and neither are we, as church history shows. Sadly our natural way of thinking prefers conditional love instead of unconditional love. Our sinful self prefers hypocrisy instead of happiness that Jesus loves all mankind. So are you thinking naturally or supernaturally? Are you hypocritical or happy? Read Galatians 3:1-5 (WEB).

1) Foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you not to obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly portrayed among you as crucified? 2) I just want to learn this from you. Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by hearing of faith? 3) Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now completed in the flesh? 4) Did you suffer so many things in vain, if it is indeed in vain? 5) He therefore who supplies the Spirit to you, and does miracles among you, does he do it by the works of the law, or by hearing of faith?

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*Friend, trust the good news, take the yoke that is easy.
Learn from my mistakes, avoid the dead end that is hard.
Jesus was the perfect sacrifice, he loves mankind deeply!
Why believe Satan's lies, why run from grace scared?*

God's richest blessing to you!

Jeff Martin