

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT?

Biblical Considerations to the Contrary

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NOTE: The following information was delivered as “over-the-pulpit” sermons to the congregates of C.A.M.P.U.S. on four consecutive Sundays, beginning Sunday, June 9th, 2013 and ending Sunday, June 29th, 2013.

Special thanks and acknowledgment must be given to Pastor Darrell Scott who courageously took the time to compile a study on this topic and then self-published his findings at his own expense. Some twenty years later, in May of 2013, Pastor Scott’s sister in law handed the study off to me wondering if it would ever “be of value” in my verse by verse Sunday teachings. Two weeks after receiving the document, while preparing to teach on Hebrews 1:13, the contents of Pastor Scott's thoughts and insights became invaluable – and were presented (in part) over four consecutive Sunday Sermons.

Please know the content herein is presented for your biblical consideration. It is not my intent to dogmatically take stances on what I consider non-essentials in the Christian faith but to fully explore every nuance as a means to try and understand the will and mysteries of our Great God and King.

If the following information is offensive to you please receive my apologies in advance. If, however, you find it of value, all praise, and glory to God Almighty whom we serve.

Shawn
July 4th, 2013

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FIRST SERMON (A GENERAL SUMMARY)

Now, to wrap this up and wind you up, let's go back to verse 13.

Here the writer produces yet ANOTHER proof that Jesus is superior to angels, asking the question,

"when has God ever said to an angel to sit on His right hand until he makes their enemies his footstool?"

Never.

This passage is taken from Psalm 90:1 which is a Psalm that is repeatedly quoted here in Hebrews and referring to the Messiah.

Interestingly enough, when Jesus was on earth He applied this passage to Himself (in Matthew 22:43,44).

Peter applied it to Him too (in Acts 2:34,35).

Notice something here though. The passage says that Christ will sit at the right hand of the Father UNTIL . . . He makes all His enemies his footstool.

"Until I reduce them entirely to a state of total subjection."

A footstool is what we put under our feet when we sit on a chair and so the phrase here pictures that His enemies are *entirely* subdued.

Entirely . . . subdued.

Every knee bowed. Every tongue confessed.

I am going to lead you into some amazing imagery now - one I challenge all of you to prayerfully consider and studiously pursue. I'm not set on this at all, but there are things in my life leading me to wonder.

In first Corinthians 15, Paul touches on the topic of all things being subjected a bit more and this is what he says beginning at verse 23

23 "But *every man* in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

24 **Then** cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; *when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.*

25 For he must reign, till he hath put all **enemies** under his feet.

26 *The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.*

27 For he hath put *all things* under his feet. But when he saith **all things** are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. (LISTEN)

28 And when *all things* shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that **God** may *be all in all.*"

I do not want to terrify you at this point and completely unearth any shred of confidence you might have in my ability to teach, but these passages introduce something that we must consider.

Again, I am telling you that I am considering this because of these passages and much, much more.

We know hell is a reality. We know people go there and we know it is described paradoxically as a place of flame (even eternal flame) and torment but also a place of darkness.

We also know from scripture 1st Timothy 2:4 that says, speaking of God

"Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."

We know from scripture that Jesus atoned for the sins of the whole world, and we know from scripture that God does some amazing things to bring about as many as possible to saving truths.

Finally, we know that God elected the nation of Israel, as a people, to do certain things - bring forth the Law, the scripture, and the Messiah.

And when they were in the game they thought they were all that, that everything began and end with them, right?

They were reticent and surprised that the "great unwashed" Gentiles would be accepted by God, right? They still resist the notion.

But contrary to their ideas, the Lord did open the gates to all, didn't He?

And Christ has gathered unto Himself a bride (or a church) - and we were elected to do certain things to help bring about God's will, right?

Is it possible, that just as the Jews thought that they were all that and no others were allowed, that we, as the body of Christ, could be making the same mistake?

Is it possible that those who go to the lake of fire, once bowing and confessing, will too, come forth and bring to fruition God's will that all men be saved?

More on this next week. In the meanwhile get into the word. Maybe we can talk more about this next week when we open.

SERMON NUMBER TWO

Having finished up Hebrews 1 we've seen where the writer has taken the time to liken Jesus to

- Prophets
- God (in verse 3)
- And then to heavenly angels in the rest of the chapter.

As I said we entered into a discussion toward the end of our time together about the meaning of verse 13 (which says):

*Hebrews 1:13 But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, **until** I make thine enemies thy footstool?*

I was taken aback by the wording which says Jesus will sit on the right hand of God "UNTIL he makes His enemies His footstool."

We see in this passage a presentation of an "age" or "period of time" that will run out here. We see Jesus walk from the side of the glory of God. We see enemies submitting.

This opened us up to a number of ideas which I am going to try and articulate here and now before preceding forward into chapter two.

All of this examination is in reference to verse thirteen.

Why does Jesus remain at the right hand of the God only until all His enemies have been placed under His feet?

Who are His enemies? And where are they located? Are they in hell? The Lake of Fire? And exactly how does God make them His footstool? Are they in a big pile of souls serving as a pillow under his feet?

What does this look like? What does God look like in this picture? What is the imagery suggesting?

And then I wondered "to what purpose" or "what is the end result" of His enemies being placed under His feet?

So, as we would do when faced with any sort of philosophical problem, I went back - way back. And I started at the beginning and appealed to scripture to clarify what the actual picture was of all of this.

Now, the Calvinists have a point of view that is centered on what they call God's Sovereignty.

To them, He does His will irrespective of the will and ways of Man. This premise is sort of summarized by the "I" in the well-known acronym T.U.L.I.P. (which stands for irresistible grace).

Irresistible Grace essentially says that God is totally and completely sovereign and if He will's you to believe, you will believe - there's no choice on your part - His grace is irresistible.

I FULLY embrace the idea that God is sovereign and that His will is done.

Scripture supports this completely. Let me give you some examples which may surprise some of you.

Consider:

Psalms 115:3

"But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased."

Proverbs 19:21 which says

"There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand."

Jesus said in Matthew 19:26

"with God all things are possible."

Ephesians 1:11 (puts a sharp end on this point saying - speaking of Jesus it says),

"In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

That passage in and of itself seems to support the idea of irresistible grace.

Revelation 4:11 says

"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure, they are and were created."

Daniel 4:35 adds

“And all the inhabitants of the earth [are] reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?”

Psalms 24:1

“The earth [is] the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.”

Proverbs 16:4 says something interesting, something that troubles many:

“The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.”

And listen to Isaiah 45:5-9

“I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me:

6 That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else.

7 I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.

8 Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the LORD have created it.

9 Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherd of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands?

Echoing these sentiments Romans 9:21 says

“Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?”

From these passages (and many, many more) we KNOW God does “whatever He pleases” . . . “that His counsels will stand” . . . that “with Him all things are possible” . . . “that we are predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of His own will” . . . and “that He even created all things for His own pleasure ???”

When we read in Proverbs that “He made all things for Himself, even the wicked,” and in Isaiah it says “He created evil” and in Romans 9 it says “He has the power to create one vessel for honor and another for dishonor” (one for heaven and one for hell) what are we to think!!!!???

It certainly sounds like God is a sovereign – even a despotic – God . . . at least that is the way Calvinism presents Him.

But then we read passages like James 1:3 which says:

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man."

Does this speak to the free will of man? In the face of a sovereign God does man have free will?

Consider 1st John 1:5 which says:

"This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, "that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."

(beat)

There are so many passages that speak of God as loving, more merciful than a cold glass of water in a hot desert, more longsuffering than a thousand Jobs and more forgiving than any human parent.

How to understand?

Would a loving, good, kind, merciful God even create human beings, whom He loves, for an eternal hell?

Go back with me, then – way back to before the world or the heavens were. To the "before all things."

To the place where all we can say is "God." The first and the last.

Did God know all things about all things *prior* to creating them? Absolutely.

We have to agree that He is . . .

- Omniscient (all knowing).

- Omnipotent (all-powerful).

- Omnipresent (everywhere present).

Being all of these, being all things, being the first and the last, knowing the beginning to the end, did this God WHOM JOHN DESCRIBES AS LOVE know all things about each and every one of us . . . PRIOR to creating us?

(softly) He had to.

Not only because scripture says He did but because if He didn't He could be surprised by our acts and if surprised then not in control of them – which is counter to scripture.

This leaves us facing a **tremendous biblical** conundrum. Enormous and one where the answers provided have plagued me since I could think.

We are told He is light. We are told He is love. But we are also told He is in control and He does what He will.

In response to this men have come along and made propositions.

Today we have men who are claiming something called Open Theism which suggests that God does not know everything, He is only fully prepared to respond to what comes up.

Intellectually it is a reasonable response but the problem with it is it counters biblical representations of Him. I reject Open Theism as a non-biblical creation of Man.

Then there is Calvin.

He took these concepts and explained them in the form of what has come to be summarized by others in the acronym T.U.L.I.P.

First, God, knowing all things, unconditionally created and elected some of us, before the foundation of the world, for eternal life and others for eternal hell.

Born of flesh and due to the Fall all of us are totally depraved (having no ability to choose God). Then God unconditionally elects (saves, regenerates) those whom He will “to life,” then Jesus came and suffered only for the sins of those whom God elected to save (limited atonement). And because God always gets His way those whom He has elected cannot refuse His call (irresistible grace) and then finally, once He calls or elects a person they will persevere – endure to the end / Once Saved Always Saved because God does not give them a choice . . . His will be done!

The system is workable through much of scripture but it does not, in my mind, answer a number of other significant descriptions of God and His heart.

For instance

Isaiah 55:8-11 comes to mind where He says

“For my thoughts [are] not your thoughts, neither [are] your ways my ways, saith the LORD.”

And then, knowing God is love and good, how are we to understand **Isaiah 46:9-11 where God says:**

9 Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me,

10 Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:

11 Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it.

As a God of love from eternity to eternity, what is His pleasure, His will, His purpose?

What does Jeremiah 29:11 mean when God says

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.”

What does it mean in the face of all this information when we read in 2nd Peter 3:9 that

*“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that **all** should come to repentance.”*

Or what does 1st Timothy 2:3-4 mean which says

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

Somehow we have to come to terms with ALL of this information – not just some of it and NOT embracing what generations of Men and Women have taught and believed if it is NOT right nor biblically sound.

(beat)

So go with me (again) back to the beginning – prior to where God created the heavens and the earth and all that in them is.

IF God knew He was going to create beings that would become kindling for hell, burning forever and ever and ever in real flames and created them anyway, calling it, His Good Pleasure, we have a serious problem with the other passages that call Him love, and good, and merciful, and Holy.

Calvinism has provided the word with a myopic and therefore limited view of God – emphasizing His sovereignty while either ignoring or redefining what love is.

On the other hand, Arminianism, a response to Calvinism, refutes God's Sovereignty and places salvation in the hands of the man who is responsible for freely choosing all things and then being responsible for keeping his salvation thereafter.

Is there a reasonable, biblical response that offers us a solution to these seemingly contradictory issues and if there is, what does it ultimately reveal to us?

I would strongly suggest there is an alternative view - neither Calvinistic nor Arminianist - that is wholly biblical.

Let me say this from the start - I want nothing to do with the philosophies of Man. I do not want to tickle ears or please men instead of honoring God.

I want to teach what is biblical and refuse that which is not. The Bible must be taken as a whole and I am convinced at this point that the solution to these paradoxical issues exists.

Nevertheless, let me also warn you . . . what the explanation will ultimately reveal or suggest is going to be considered heretical by most . . . and its teacher a heretic.

May God and His Word enable you to decide for yourselves.

So here we go.

First of all, we must admit that God is certainly sovereign and in total and complete control.

Can or will real agape love control the way we define control, the way the Calvinist defines control - I would suggest no way.

Control, as we see and define it, is diabolical in most applications. Love is liberating and free, NOT controlling.

How then, is God (who IS love - pure love, all love, the very definition of love) completely Sovereign?

By His foreknowledge.

He controls by foreknowledge, not force. We get a picture of this in the story of Joseph when he was sold into Egypt by his brothers.

After going through all sorts of hell, he became a mighty prince overseeing the distribution of food.

When the brothers who sold him into Egypt years early came to him in search of food, he revealed himself.

Of course, they felt horrible and frightened for having sold him but Joseph said in Genesis 50:20:

“But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as this day, to save many people alive.”

How did a good and loving God, in light of the free will choices He knew humans would take before creating them, still create them, knowing some would burn forever in hell? Additionally, how is He able to have His will done in the face of such free-will choices?

Foreknowledge friends, foreknowledge.

His omniscient foreknowledge existing in the glory of pure love allows for human beings and angels and saints and demons to freely choose while at the same time giving Him total and ultimate control over all things and for His pleasure.

We'll get more into what His good will and loving pleasure is next week.

Speaking of His foreknowledge God said through Isaiah (42:9)

“Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them.”

Psalm 33:11 *The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.*

Speaking to King Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel said:

Daniel 2:28 *But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days.*

Speaking of the day when heaven and earth will pass away, Jesus said:

Matthew 24:36 *But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.*

That's foreknowledge.

In describing himself, Peter said that he was

1st Peter 1:2 *“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.”*

Even when it came to the suffering and death of His own Son, we know it did NOT occur by the indiscriminate actions of the Jews or the Romans, or even of Satan Himself, but by and through the foreknowledge of God.

Did God force Satan or the Jews or Romans to do what they did? Not in the least. They chose. But God, knowing all things, allowed them to do what they chose to do to bring about His sovereign will.

In Acts 2:23 Peter is speaking to a group of Jews on the day of Pentecost and says to them:

“Him (meaning Jesus) being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.”

When Jesus was taken by the Jews was it any surprise to God? Not at all.

Again, listen to what Peter said:

“Jesus was . . . delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God to them, where they took Him and with wicked hands crucified and slayed Him.”

So, again, let's go back. And ask yourselves,

In the beginning, did God know Adam and Eve would sin? Absolutely. No surprise.

Did Satan get them to? Sure. Did God create Satan? Yes. Did Adam and Eve have the free will to choose evil?

You bet.

As a result, scripture says that Jesus was slain from BEFORE the foundations of the world.

Stay with me now.

We KNOW from scripture that God is good, light, love. He desires a good and expected end, not an evil one.

We know that out of His good pleasure (and out of His loving good pleasure because God is LOVE) that He created all things, knowing beforehand how all things would freely live, and walk, and be.

Not forcing us to be, but freely allowed us to be.

Prior to creating all things with a complete foreknowledge of them would a loving God desire or will that only some would be saved or all?

(beat)

Again, we KNOW He is love, and mercy, and forgiving, and longsuffering, so PRIOR to creating all things, having a complete foreknowledge of all things from the beginning to the end, would it be His desire that only some of His creations are redeemed or that all of them are?

We know from scripture that He is sovereign and He will have His way.

But we also know He is all about freedom so He doesn't have His desire met by and through force, He has it by and through working in and around the free will choices of Man - which He foresaw from the beginning.

Got all that?

Now to help round out the idea and the applicability of the idea to the various things God has done to have His will and pleasure completed let's talk about the very biblical concept of first-fruits.

The word used for firstfruits in the Greek is (aparchn) and it generally applies to the first-fruits of a harvest - or the that which is first collected and consecrated to God as an offering of gratitude.

The idea is when the blessing of God is poured out we respond by taking the first part of it, in recognition of His love and mercy, and give it to Him.

Built within the concept is an order or rank.

Additionally, first-fruits ALSO applies to the best of the whole harvest.

So let's say you have a grove of apple trees and you want to give the first fruits to God.

This does NOT mean the very first apples to come to the grove are God's. In fact, we learn from Leviticus 19:23-25 that when it came to tree firstfruits the Children of Israel were to wait for four cycles of harvests before either offering first fruits or harvesting them for themselves.

So the order and rank part applies to the first acceptable harvest as a whole and the best of the harvest.

Numbers 18:12 says it well:

"All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the firstfruits of them which they shall offer unto the LORD, them have I given thee."

When it comes to humans, the firstfruits of the womb, however, are always the firstborn sons, which is naturally a picture of our Lord.

The purpose and symbolism are manifest even in our day and age. The person to be served first is typically someone of highest honor.

Proverbs 3:9 says, *"Honor the LORD with thy substance and with the firstfruits of all thine increase."*

Additionally, the firstfruits, as we've defined them, were very important to God.

Ezekiel 48:14 says:

"And they shall not sell of it, neither exchange, nor alienate the firstfruits of the land: for it is holy unto the LORD."

So, and in accordance with God and His sovereign ways and perfect foreknowledge, the idea of firstfruits - picturing His Only Begotten Son - was initiated from the beginning.

Remember, firstfruits include the concept of the best, the first, and a rank among others what ARE TO COME.

Did you hear me? Firstfruits include the notions of the best of a crop, the first out of a crop, and a rank (meaning there are other ranks coming in behind the first and best.)

When God created everything in the Garden of Eden it was good.

Adam and Eve were the firstfruits of all humanity. They were first, they were the best (God created them, right) and they were first in rank.

God gave them a choice - to love Him and therefore obey Him or to choose their own will and way.

Did God know what they would do? Certainly. Which is why scripture says His Son was slain from the foundations of the world.

Did others follow in after the first and best called Adam and Eve?

Certainly. Even all the way down to each of us today.

With the first fruits of the Human race failing to love and choose God, God elected a nation above all other nations.

Romans 11:16, speaking of the Nation of Israel and likening them to a tree God created and elected for specific purposes, Paul wrote to Gentile believers in Rome:

"For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches."

See, the firstfruit nation, like the firstfruit couple, failed to live the law and choose God.

Now listen - this is key -

Just as more individuals came after the firstfruit couple Adam and Eve, filling the earth, so did other nations follow in after the firstfruit nation failed to choose God and ultimately rejected the Messiah.

Listen - ALL OTHER NATIONS, right?

God has elected (based on His foreknowledge of what Adam and Eve and the Nation of Israel would choose to do) to use them so He would achieve His good pleasure and will, not because He respected them anymore but because of His foreknowledge of what they would do.

We know that God sent His Only Begotten Son, right?

The firstfruits of God (now the Father) and of Mary and the ONLY one up to this point in history to do His will.

In many ways, Jesus was the first and only of the church.

First and only born of a virgin.

First and only without sin.

First and only to come down from above.

First and only to obey the Law.

And having been the best, the first, and the first of an order of humanity, he became the firstfruits in overcoming the grave by overcoming sin and death.

Listen.

1st Corinthians 15:20 says it:

“But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.”

Because of Him, all of mankind (every rank) will be resurrected, or as it says in 1st Corinthians 15:23

But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

From His ascension on, the Church – His church, comprised of individual believers, has become the firstfruits of believers.

Romans 8:23 calls us, the firstfruits of the Spirit.

Of the first, of a rank, of, therefore, the best of all.

Firstfruits plays such a role in God and His achieving His own pleasure and will, that when a person became a believer in a certain geographical area, they were known as the firstfruits of that area.

In Romans 16:5, Paul is giving greetings and says

“Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Salute my well-beloved Epaenetus, who is the “firstfruits of Achaia” unto Christ.”

Here's the point, which we will build upon next week . . .

Firstfruits does NOT mean there is no fruit coming after. It merely signifies the first of the best, the first in rank, and the first AMONG many.

Adam and Eve were followed by more people.

The Nation of Israel was followed by more nations.

Jesus, the first resurrected, was and will be followed by more.

The first believers of an area will be followed by more, and the church of the redeemed will be followed by more.

James 1:18 says it well:

*“Of his own will (of His own good pleasure) begat he us with the word of truth (according to His election based on His foreknowledge), that we should be **a kind of firstfruits** of his creatures.”*

Just as the Nation of Israel thought the sun rose and set on them, and could not accept subsequent nations being His, we, in the church, have made an error in believing that the sun rises and sets on us.

More are coming. I would say, even all, perfectly supporting the fact that God is all knowing, is in control, is Love, supports complete free will, but has His way.

SERMON NUMBER THREE

Ooooookay. . . 🙏

Three weeks ago we covered the last few verses of Hebrews chapter one.

At verse thirteen the writer of Hebrews wrote:

*“But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, **until** I make thine enemies thy footstool?”*

I had been doing a casual study of the eternality of hell from scripture due to a book I was given and this passage sort of launched us into a discussion about time periods in the hereafter.

Last week I intimated some bold things.

I first suggested that hell, or more properly put, the time humans will spend in the Lake of Fire is . . . limited. We will note the differences between hell and the lake of fire in a minute.

I also suggested that SINCE we know God is love, and SINCE we know He is all knowing FROM before He created us, and SINCE He always has His will and desires accomplished (by and through His foreknowledge NOT by force) the ONLY way to merge all of these facts (and these are biblical facts, folks) was to suggest that He will use the "Lake of Fire" (which was not created for the consumption of human beings but for angels) to purge the dross from the many who will go there . . . and once purged, a loving God, a long-suffering God, a God who forgives" would bring all out since Jesus paid for all their sin (except the sin of unbelief).

In this way, I suggested, God would, through a number of different means, and peoples (firstfruits, we said) would accomplish His good will and desires.

I also noted that the biblical concept of firstfruits was the first is used to bring forth more fruit later.

Remember? I said the Nation of Israel was a firstfruit Nation “of many to come,” that His Only Begotten Son was the firstfruit of many that would rise from the grave,” and that the Bride of Christ – us – are the firstfruits of the redeemed of many to come).

But all of this is preface material used to build an argument IF the Bible says otherwise, right?

I get that. And again, I want nothing to do with anything that is not true and validated by the Word of God.

I am NOT here to present you with conjecture, but instead what I see relative to my STUDY of the Word of God.

This being said, I am wrong and could be wrong on this subject. I do not stand concretely on the premise but all things considered find myself leaning far more on the idea of limited punishment and the salvation of all.

Now, there was, shall we say, a natural resistance to this teaching last week (which I fully anticipated).

Christians have always believed punishment (after this life) is eternal and that salvation is NOT universal.

Perhaps more importantly, the passages we have all read in the Word (especially if we use the King James Bible) appear to support the idea of there being a punishment that is eternal and only a few shall escape it.

So (among other things) I am going to do my best to explain why the terms of eternity applied to “afterlife suffering” are at best, misleading, at worst, completely wrong.

We’ll get into the original languages in a minute.

When we conclude, I will open the discussion up for comments and questions – so you may want to jot them down.

Admittedly, there are so many implications tied to a “change of perspective, opinion, or belief in this area it can be a *terrifying thing* for some to even consider.

But God wants us to worship Him in Spirit AND in truth – and His word is constantly revealing both as we pursue Him.

When a lawyer came to Jesus in Matthew 22 and asked, “*What is the greatest commandment?*” Jesus said in verse 37:

*“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with **all** thy heart, and with **all** thy soul, and with **all** thy mind.”*

We are always personally so much better off pursuing the living God with all three areas of our human make-up than to just cling to all we have ever heard and in light of these words of the Lord I believe such pursuits please our God.

Finally, you have my fellowship and love no matter how divergent your thinking or walk may go from mine. I hope and expect the same from you.

But before getting to the word study there are a number of points I would like for you to consider which might add to our general comprehension of afterlife punishment and this brief study on it.

POINT NUMBER ONE:

There are issues to die on in Christianity – virgin birth, resurrection, the divinity of Jesus, salvation by grace through faith period, the infallibility of the Word of God. In my opinion, these are worthy of splitting company – I hope you agree.

But there are a whole bunch of hills that have long divided the body and churches that ought to have never had such an effect.

Eschatology or end times? Fa-getta bout it. If you think you *KNOW* what is what – (on *either* side of the fence) I have a few people to introduce to you who will argue you into the dust with opposing views.

Calvinism, Arminianism, Preterism, mode of baptism, creation being six twenty-four hour periods. Don't worry about it. Walk in faith. Smile. Trust the Lord. Because almost everything contains some sort of give and take, right?

I would suggest – *strongly suggest* –

that the *term of hell* and the natural result (if the term is anything short of eternity) universalism, also not be an issue of division.

There is **NOTHING** about the belief that ought to alter our walk, our pursuit of others missionally, or our hope and joy in being His.

So that's the first point.

Secondly, if we are to consider ourselves biblical Christians, we have to admit that hell and the Lake of Fire is a reality.

In light of last weeks discussion, a few people have suggested that I have taken the road of a man named Rob Bell, who teaches that there is no hell.

I would not be any kind of pastor-teacher if I suggested such a thing. And nothing could be further from the truth.

If I was teaching that there would be no reason for our being the first fruit, for reaching out missionally, or anything else we are commanded to do in scripture.

From what I have been told Mr. Bell's little statement is "love overcomes all," meaning, I think, that Jesus overcame death and hell by love, destroying it all together.

Any honest Bible reader would have to disagree.

Third, I hope it is completely understood by any and all within the sound of my voice that IF every human being is ultimately redeemed, it is only by and through the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and faith in such.

There is no other way. He made the way possible.

Finally, I would add before venturing into our specifics of the study that hell is no place to trifle with.

Last week a brother here accused me of teaching "another Gospel" by suggesting hell / the lake of fire gives up her occupants and a universal salvation ensuing.

I would remind you all that the "gospel" or "good news," as defined by Paul in 1st Corinthians 15 contains ONLY the following components:

how Christ died for our sins

that he was buried

that he rose again the third day

That, my friends, is the biblical definition of the Good News. And I preach nothing in addition to it and nothing to take from it.

No, the notion that all will ultimately be redeemed has no bearing on another gospel as such salvation could only come about by His grace through the individual's faith in the Gospel message.

Additionally, and in yet another point, I also ardently suggest that when someone embraces the only Good News given to Man **while here on earth** eye has not seen nor ear heard the glories that await them - glories and lack of suffering that those who do not escape punishment will never possess.

Additionally, and speaking of hell, ANYONE who would consciously reject Jesus here so as to live a life of sin because they believe they will ultimately be saved could ONLY make such a decision in total ignorance.

Hell (and/or again, the Lake of Fire) is a place of utter misery. We know this based on a number of biblical facts.

First, Jesus became flesh to save us from it. Being love, I would suggest He knows nobody would ever want to spend any amount of time in her jaws.

Second, the Bible is emphatic on how it describes hell and the Lake of Fire (which I will distinguish momentarily.)

It is separation from God. At least here, we have God's creation and influence calling to us in seven different listed ways . . .

- Through nature
- In conscience
- On the tables of stone
- All of the scripture

- On and In Christ
- On our hearts
- In the outward lives of Christians

I would imagine none of these appeals are present or available to those living in the dark absence of the influences of the God.

What it will take, and or the amount of time and suffering it will take, to bring them to their knees and to open their mouths is unknown and terrifying to me.

Additionally, since God is outside of time, and since the punishment or wrath is from Him, we have absolutely no idea of how passages of "time" work in utter burning darkness.

Could it be that a moment in hell feels eternal for those there?

Could it be that a hundred billion years will not be enough to bring some to faith?

To stand on teaching that is not consistent with the Bible as a whole and the descriptions of God therein seems to avoid possibilities like these . . . and resorts to dogma unfounded by a contextual reading of His word.

Finally, we must go to scripture to learn and hear their things today:

First, let's resort to scripture to hear how it defines and describes both hell and the lake of Fire.

Then let's see if we can determine how they differ.

We'll finalize all this by examining how the words used to describe hell and the Lake of Fire have been translated.

Whether hell or lake of fire, the Bible describes the reactions people have to it as painful.

"Weeping, gnashing of teeth, torments, and tormented in flames."

The physical descriptions include:

"Darkness, outer darkness, chains of darkness, and blackness of darkness" and then ever paradoxically, "Hellfire, a furnace of fire, everlasting fire, fire that shall not be quenched, damnation, (a place where) "the wrath of God abides on them," "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, from the glory of His power, "the perdition of ungodly men,"

"torments ascending up forever and ever, no rest day and night," "everlasting contempt, and "a lake of fire."

Those who are said to go there are described as:

“them that work iniquity,” (listen) “the children of the Kingdom (Matthew 8:12), people who say, “thou fool” are in danger of it, “all things that offend,” “those on the left hand,” “the goats,” those “whose feet or hands offend,” Jesus described one inhabitant only saying he was a “rich man who lived sumptuously every day,” “those who have done evil,” “raging waves,” “wandering stars,” “those who worship the beast and his image and whosoever receives the mark of the beast,” and regarding the Lake of Fire, Revelation 21:8 says these are they who will have their part in it . . . ready?

“The fearful, the unbelieving, the abominable, murderers, whoremongers, sorcerers, idolaters and all liars.”

NOT a place anyone anytime would want to step foot in.

Taking all of this into account, we have those who believe hell and the lake of fire consist of literal flames being applied to the actual flesh of a resident forever and ever.

Any deviation from this interpretation is considered heretical. And while I do NOT downplay the torments of hell, I am personally unconvinced that this interpretation holds water.

One reason is when Jesus had a chance to tell a story about hell, in the story of the Rich man and Lazarus, He has the Rich Man (while described as awfully thirsty) carrying on a rather intelligent conversation with those on the Paradise side of hell. I would think if his flesh was literally on fire (with literal flames) no such conversation would be possible, right?

I mean how come Jesus didn't say, and Lazarus looked down from Abrahams bosom and saw the Rich man on fire, and screaming in unconscionable pain?

We have to be careful not to maniacally apply literalism to places where God is speaking in concepts. And admittedly, sometimes its hard to tell which is which.

Okay.

Now, one thing almost all of us do – myself included because it is convenient – is to refer to hell as the catchphrase for where everyone has gone or will go that is not heaven.

In light of scripture, this practice not only adds to the confusion of the topic but is wrong.

Going back to the Old Testament we have the Hebrew word sheol.

And really this place ought to be referred to as the realm of the unknown.

The Hebrews translated sheol as the grave, as a pit, and a place (listen) for both the evil AND the good.

In essence, sheol is the covered holding tank for souls prior to Christ ascending.

It was comprised of prison and paradise.

The Old Testament translators frequently called it hell but remember, it was the holding for all disembodied spirits.

In the New Testament, the word finds its equivalent in the Greek word Hades. Again, and unfortunately, it is in the English often called hell.

We read in Revelation 20:14 that the keys to Hades and Hades itself will be cast into the Lake of Fire so we can see that it is different from the Lake of Fire . . . that hell is NOT the lake of fire. Got that?

Another term used for hell is the Greek word Tartarus, and it is only used once (in II Peter 2:4) It is best-translated, "pit of gloom" or "pit of darkness" and is considered by some to be lower parts of Hades.

Now, prior to Christ's victory, those in Paradise and those in Prison of sheol or hades waited.

Christ took paradise with Him to heaven but the prison part remains as the holding tank (so to speak) for the faithless.

Gehenna is another word used to describe hell. It was actually a real place - a trash heap in the southeast of Jerusalem - where fires burned bodies of criminals and refuse and animals. It was formerly a place where human sacrifices took place, offered to the pagan god Molech so it had a VERY bad association and Jesus used it to describe prison of sheol, hades, Tartarus.

Here MANY people make the association that this describes the ultimate end of people who reject Christ but it is used symbolically. Even James uses the term to describe the human tongue - so this is NOT an allusion to the Lake of Fire spoken of in Revelation.

In other words, hell and the Lake of Fire (with all of its inherent descriptions) are two different places.

In fact, if we turn to Revelation chapter 20:13 we read that at the time of the Great White Throne judgment, it says:

"And the sea gave up the dead which was in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works."

The best definition of eternal punishment is found in the next few verses of Revelation 20 where it reads:

"And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

So if we really want to argue where unbelievers go afterward, we would say first, to hell, which is a dark and very unwelcoming place and then to the lake of Fire.

They are NOT one in the same.

Now the Lake of Fire was prepared for Satan and His angels.

Jesus tells us so in Matthew 25:41, saying:

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

Take note, it was NOT prepared for Man.

(long beat)

Additionally, many think that this is where Satan and his angels live right now but scripture suggests otherwise, describing him in Ephesians 2:2 as the prince of the power of the ??? AIR and a "roaring lion walking about" 1st Peter 5:8.

Again, Revelation 20:7 and 10 tell us that after Christ's 1000 year reign Satan WILL be Throne into the Lake of Fire but I think we are mistaken to believe he is there now.

So, let me briefly summarize. I think we could all agree that when it is speaking of Hades, Gehenna, Tartarus, sheol or what many think of as hell (where unbelievers go after this immediate life) that it is a dark painful place of torment BUT it does give up its dead to be judged.

What we are really talking about when we are speaking on the eternity of suffering is the Lake of Fire.

Accordingly . . .

Hell is not the Lake of Fire.

The Lake of Fire was prepared for the Devil and his angels.

The Lake of Fire is a future experience for some.

And the Lake of Fire is only described in Revelation chapter 19-21.

What is this Lake of Fire? Revelation describes it in one sentence:

"And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death."

Every one of us will experience the first death. 1st Corinthians 15:22 says it –

"For as in Adam all die," but not everyone will experience the second death.

Who experiences this second death? What is it? And is it eternal?

Revelation tells us plainly who will experience the second death.

Revelation 20:15 *"And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."*

Now, let me pause here and gather up our thoughts in summary. Since hell will give up its dead, we cannot say (and be correct) that hell is eternal.

No matter how tormenting and dark the holding tank may be, it will end, and all those in it will be brought forth the great white throne and will be judged.

If their names are NOT found written in the Lambs Book of Life, they will be cast into the Lake of Fire created for . . . "them?" Created for Satan and his angels.

Got all of that?

Now, the question remains, *Is the Lake of Fire experience eternal, forever, ever-lasting?*

Reading King James (and probably your NIV's and ESV's) we are presented with English words that tend to say in absolute terms, yes, the Lake of Fire suffering is eternal, everlasting, endless, etc., etc.

For example, in the King James of Matthew 25:41 Jesus describes "the smoke of their torment going up forever and ever," and Revelation 20:10 says, "they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Such passages lead us to believe that the punishment is unending.

And if how the King James Translators were correct in this the idea would be sound.

Here's the deal.

Where we have the word Eternal or everlasting in passages like this in the King James and other translations BUT in other Bible Translations, like

"Young's LITERAL translation" or "Weymouth New Testament" or "Rotherham's Emphasized Bible" or the "Concordant New Testament" we have the translation all saying:

"Age-abiding."

Where the King James says in Matthew 25:46 –

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

These other translations read:

"And these last will go away 'into aeonian punishment,' but the righteous 'into aeonian life.'"

OR

"And these shall go away into the Punishment of the Ages, but the righteous into the Life of the Ages."

"And these shall go away to punishment age-during, but the righteous to life age-during."

Why the difference?

Did I just go out and find Bible translations what would support my views?

And what it the deal with this focus on "age-abiding" or "punishment of the ages" VERSES eternal punishment, like it says in the King James?

It all comes down to the Greek noun "Aion" and the adjective, "Aionious."

In the King James, which takes this Greek word and translates it, "forever and ever,"

Other MORE literal translations of the Greek to the English would translate it, "unto the ages of ages."

What is an age? A period of time.

The noun aheehohn (aion) means age. Its where we get the English word, Eon. A specific period of time. It begins and it ends.

But when we use the adjective, it honestly does translate to the opposite meaning, "without end, without beginning, without beginning or ending."

I would first and foremost suggest that this is at best a dubious development of the adjective from the noun.

I can say this because the adjective simply does not work in many passages of the New Testament.

For example (and you can take note of these passages) Romans 16: 25; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 1:2; and Philemon 15 all define aheehohnois as the world, which had a beginning and will have an end, instead of as eternal.

But let me explain this to you in another way.

When we take the Greek Word Aionon and its adjective, we know they have a given meaning - from the root word, age or eon.

Every time the Greek terms are used they ought to translate into age-related phraseology.

Instead of remaining true to the definitional root of the Greek Word, the King James translators took aionon and aionous and subjectively translated the terms depending on the context of what the passage was talking about.

Why would they do this? Because they were intent on maintaining doctrinal purity as they translated.

In most cases, this proved beneficial and congruent but in the case of eternal punishment, it failed.

So along comes these other scholars (like Rotherham and Young or Weymouth) and instead of translating Greek words into English words they think fit best, they produced LITERAL translations of each Greek word every time it showed up in the text.

Therefore Rotherham and friends translations read consistently regarding the Greek.

Every time we come across the Greek word Aionos or Aionious we find an age-related definition.

But with the King James and others that took up its cause, we are presented with prejudicial confusion.

Why do I say this?

Because of the King James translators, instead of ever translating aionos and aionious in terms of the English word age (a period of time with a beginning and an end) they translate the terms 197 times using all of the following English words.

For the noun Aion they used the English words

Ever (72 times)

World (40)

NEVER (7)

Evermore (2)

Course (1)

And for the adjective, they translated the Greek word Aionious

Eternal (42)

Everlasting (25)

World (3)

And Ever (1)

Only twice out of 197 times were the Greek words translate correctly. I mean the exact same Greek word in one place is translated eternal and in another place, it is translated "never," and in another, it is translated, "world."

There are forty places in the King James where the Greek Word Aion is translated world. The Greek word for world is Kosmos, not Aion.

Aion means age.

So if you read these literal translations we discover that the Bible, from the Greek, literally does not teach eternality of the lake of fire but an age-abiding lake of fire.

"The smoke ascends up unto the ages of ages, not forever and ever."

Reading the Greek properly, we would read the following passages like this:

God has a "purpose of the ages" Ephesians 3:11

He is the King of the ages 1st Timothy 1:17

He prepared the ages by His word Hebrews 11:3.

A final thought and then we'll pick this back up next week before moving into chapter 2. There are two very simple Greek words that would have cleared all of this up had they been used.

Akatalous and aperantos. They both clearly mean endless.

1st Timothy 1:4 speaks of **endless** genealogies" (akatalous) and Hebrews 7:16 speaks of the power of an endless life (aperantos).

The word immortal (athanatos) and immortality (aptharsia) also indicate never-endingness but NONE of these clearly defined terms which denote eternal and endless are EVER assigned to hell, damnation, or punishment for sin.

Additionally, there are two simple prevalent adverbs in the New Testament which would have made the argument decisive regarding punishment being eternal - aei (which means always) and pantote (which means evermore) but neither of them is ever used to describe damnation, hell, or punishment for sin.

It is of interest that the super strong phrase “to the uttermost” is used only once and describes hell? The punishment in the lake of fire? Nope – Neither. It describes God’s ability at saving us.

In Jude 25 says the glory of Christ shall last “to ALL the ages . . .” had this been applied only once to punishment the argument would be over.

But it’s not.

The Greek phrase “for perpetuity” could have also been used to describe the Lake of Fire punishment – but it is only used to describe God and ultimate sanctification.

No Greek word that truly is used to describe forever, forevermore, evermore, always, endless, to the uttermost, etc. is EVER connected to punishment . . . but the terms that are related to age (to a beginning and an end) are.

Let me conclude with a statement from the book THE VOCABULARY OF THE GREEK TESTAMENT (edited by James Hope Moulton and George Milligan).

It might be helpful as it says, talking about the Greek word *aionios*:

"In general, the word depicts that of which the horizon is not in view . . ." (p.16). If the horizon of the extermination spoken of by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 1:9 is simply not in view, then we can see that what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:22 can truly occur. The same all who are dying in Adam, which includes some who incur eonian extermination, can indeed eventually be vivified in Christ. The Bible, in fact, does not speak of judgment and condemnation, death and destruction, Hades and Gehenna, or any of these serious consequences of sin, as unending. It may refer to them as not having the end in view, but none of these fearful works of God can keep Him from achieving His will (1Tim.2:4); reconciling all through the blood of Christ's cross (Col. 1:20, and becoming All in all (1 Cor.15:28).

SERMON NUMBER FOUR

Well, folks, we are going to get back to some new passages in our verse by verse study of Hebrews beginning in chapter 2 . . . (beat) . . .

But first I want to present a conclusion to our little side sojourn on the topic of hell,

“Lake of Fire suffering” and “universal salvation – if there is such a thing.

Let me remind you all we are exploring and seeking and I am presenting things emphatically to see what . . . sticks, what remains, and what is biblically sound.

I have had a number of you supply me (ever so graciously) with refutation information.

Two of you presented me with the same internet articles that counter my presentation of the Greek words for age.

I’ve read them, even examined them closely and they have merit. The points presented added gray to my otherwise black and white arguments that “age” can only be defined as a limited period of time.

However . . . 😊 differences and difficulties regarding word translation are only ONE reason for my leaning toward ultimate universalism (which has to be the end result if the second death in the Lake of Fire is not eternal).

So allow me to touch on a few final factors that push me over (like the leaning tower of Pizza) toward the idea that the second death is somehow of a limited duration.

First, we have to ask ourselves “if God will always have His will done.”

You can answer that question yourselves – as I supplied plenty of passages two weeks ago that tell us what the Bible has to say.

Secondly, we have to ask ourselves, "What is His will relative to humankind?"

This is an interesting question because it comes out in different ways depending on an individual's perspective.

To ardent five-point Calvinists, His will translates to an almost wholesale indifference to certain individuals He has literally created for hell and for those more tender-hearted (so it seems) His will is that none should ever be lost.

I would suggest we answer this query with a number of passages employed by both sides of the coin.

You decide what

2nd Peter 3:9 means when it says:

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Isaiah 45:23-24 "I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed."

1st John 2:2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

1st Timothy 2:3-4 "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior;

4 Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."

1st Timothy 4:10 For therefore we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, especially of those that believe.

And Check out Isaiah 46:8-11 where God says:

8 Remember this, and shew yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors.

9 Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me,

10 Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:

11 Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it.

Third, we have to ask, *“Is God just?”*

As Christian’s we have to admit that if He is to be considered a God that can be trusted, He must be completely just.

And then, If or since He is just, we ask the fourth question, *“Is there a hell and/or place of punishment?”* for those who reject His will?

To this any Christian must manifestly state that yes, there is both a hell and what is called the second death – the first being a dark and dreaded holding tank (of sorts) for the unbelieving and the second being a place that was created for Satan and his angels and where all humans whose names are NOT written in the Book of Life are cast.

The fifth query we have to put forth is to ask: *“Is hell eternal?”* Biblically speaking, the answer is *“No, it is not. Hell gives up her dead at the Great White Throne judgment.”* We know this from Revelation 20:13.

The next question then relates to the lake of fire – *“Is it eternal? After all, those whose names are NOT written in the Lamb’s book of Life are cast into this place created for Satan and his angels.*

And after all, this does occur AFTER the Great White Throne judgment so it seems like we could logically concur, *“Yes, those in the Lake of Fire will never get out.”*

If we say they will get out, we face some degree or another picturing universalism. But if we say they will never, ever get out, we are then left with subsequent questions:

“Are those in the Lake of Fire (who from what Jesus says encompassed most of humanity) “literally burned” with “literal flames of fire” “forever and ever and ever” in the worst pain and anguish imaginable and without end?”

OR

“Are they annihilated? Burning so deep and badly that they are ultimately and totally consumed?”

OR

“After a time of purposeful suffering aimed at purging and not punishment, are they let out, only to come to faith and enter His all in all at some level or another?”

The idea of no hell completely refutes scripture so this is not an option, leaving us with essentially these three choices in light of how scripture describes the future state of the wicked.

Wrapping all of these ideas up I suggest, humbly (mind you) and always open to correction, that scripture depicts God in the following ways:

- He is all knowing and in possession of all knowledge from beginning (prior to any creative endeavors) and then all the way out to the end, where 1st Corinthians 15:28 says the last enemy death is destroyed, Jesus hands over the kingdom to the Father and God becomes, “all in all.”
- I would suggest that scripture pictures Him as perfectly fair and just through executions of love. There exists in Him no shadow, evil, or darkness.
- That contrary to Calvinism He is a God of freedom and free will. He created the universe not under a despotic hand of unfeeling pre-destination but under one of ultimate love. In this manner, He governs ALL things by and through His foreknowledge - electing and choosing (predestining) some people and nations (based on this foreknowledge) who will freely accomplish His ultimate will (which is complete and total redemption).
- In this plan some will come to Him by faith through law, some will come to Him by grace through faith, and some will come to Him by faith through sorrow.
- And in the end, He will have His way - which from the onset is the redemption of Man.

As a means to supplement these notions allow just a little more detail information.

Let's start with a look at the term fire itself. And I'm talking about fire as it is related to The Lake of Fire, which as we pointed out, scripture defines as, “the second death.”

There are four passages in the Book of Revelation (which is the only book that mentions the Lake of Fire) which tie a unique word to that place - brimstone.

Revelation 14:10, 19:20, 20:10 and 21:8.

The word brimstone was translated from the Greek word “theion” - T-H-E-I-O-N.

You probably recognize the Greek word Theos - it means God - and it's where we get the word “theology,” which means the study of God.

Additionally, the Greek word THEIOS means divine. So it is really easy to see that the word brimstone, which comes from the Greek word THEION is in the family with other Greek words used to describe God.

In Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament, the word brimstone is defined as fire from heaven used to purify.

If you check Strong's Concordance or Thayers you will discover that brimstone is connected to God's divine power to purify NOT punish.

So we have to also ask, is the fire for punishment or purging, for torture or trying, for cruelty or for correction?

As an interesting aside, where is the Lake of Fire actually located?

There are passages in Revelation 14 that might surprise you where the fire and brimstone exists, or at least who is present amidst it.

Revelation 14:9 *"And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand,*

*10 The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and **brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:***

11 And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name."

From these passages, we can see that those tormented in fire and brimstone are *"in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb!"*

We know from scripture that God does not take pleasure in this type of death – in any death of the sinner and wicked.

Ezekiel 33:11 Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

2nd Samuel 14:14 says something interesting, in my opinion alluding to God and His ways of redemption, saying:

“For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person: yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him.”

From all these passages and the information they provide, it seems we see the lake as having a few different elements present that what we might have thought were there before.

I had been taught by almost every faction of modern Christianity that the Lake of Fire is God tormenting evil men for the sake of cruel punishment.

Listen – this assessment is absolutely correct . . . IF the fire is literal and unending.

It couldn't be LOVE that exposes most of the world to the flame IF they never get out.

Get it?

But we can say it is love if they do and will.

In other words, if those who do not receive Christ shed blood in this life – those who die unsaved – are banished to torments and fires forever, the torments MUST . . . MUST be based in cruelty and torture . . . because they have no redemptive value.

So let's take a look at that word “tormented” in Revelation 14:10 – the passage that says they will be tormented by fire and brimstone in the Holy Angels and Lambs presence.

Ready for this?

The word translated tormented in Strong's, Vines, and Thayers is “basinizo.” And it comes from the Greek word that literally means “to put to the test by rubbing on the touchstone.”

Touchstones are pieces of rock or flint that are used to grind off elements or particles in the processing of alloys or other metals.

From this definition we can see that the process in the Lake is not one of a mindless, endless torture for the sake of cruelty but one of refining, purging, rubbing off the rough edges, so to speak.

I find this interesting because in it we discover real meaning – loving meaning – in something Jesus says in Matthew 21:44.

Jesus had just given the parable of the wicked husbandman to the scribes and Pharisees.

He ends the parable by telling these religious leaders

(Matthew 21:43) *"Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."*

They had the True Messiah come and they rejected Him and therefore, Jesus tells them, the Kingdom is going to be taken from them and given to another nation (the Gentiles) which would bring forth fruit.

Then he says something interesting and relative to this touchstone concept in the very next verse:

"whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever, it shall fall, it will grind him to powder."

The nation refused to fall upon Him the Rock or stone and humbly receive Him. Therefore, He says, the other option is He will fall on them and grind them to powder.

I would suggest, in light of the meaning Torments found in Revelation 14, and the fact that those in the Lake of Fire will be subject to brimstone and fire in the presence of the Holy Angels and the Lamb that again, we are talking about painful mandatory refinement - grinding down upon the willful - a grinding that, producing friction simultaneously produces heat or fire.

Some things to think about.

Additionally, the wrath of God is to come. And it will be poured out on those who reject His Son.

Revelation speaks of His wrath, and fierce anger being contained in a cup - a container of limited dimensions.

A loving, forgiving, longsuffering God would not have wrath that runs like a river forever.

It is limited, justly appropriate to the crime, and delivered in appropriate amounts - like stripes that come to some as a few, and to others as many.

I'd like to stop here . . . but I can't!

There are three more concepts that must be addressed in this matter to help round it all out.

There are two basic Greek words for the will of God - THELEMA, and BOULEMA.

Thelema is essentially defined as "God's gracious design and it is indicative of His desires. His desired will. In this word, we see connections to the Greek word Theos or God.

The second word, Boulema, is His deliberate design or His purposed will.

Thelema his desired will.

Boulema his purposed will – what will not be altered.

If we look at 1st Timothy 2:3-4 we will read:

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

The English word “will” here is taken from the Greek Thelo – He desires that all men be saved.

Now, if eternal punishment is a reality, God will not have His desires accomplished, for all men will not be saved – in fact, only a few.

This is the standard rationale of most Christians – God is love and He desires all to be saved, but His desires (due to the free will of man) will not be met.

Does this response differ from your earlier view that God will have all His desires accomplished?

But let’s get a little more emphatic here.

Go back to II Peter 3:9. It says:

“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

Where it says that God is NOT WILLING that ANY should perish, are we talking Thelema again, “that He does not desire that any should perish?”

No. The Greek word is Boulamai - His purposes and expressed will shall be done.

He has not purposed that ANY should perish.

From these two passages, we see that it is both God's desire and His purpose that none should perish, but all should come to repentance and be saved.

From these passages and passages like these, we are confronted with a serious breach if intellectual, biblical, and spiritual integrity is not maintained.

What is the breach?

That a sovereign God, who knew and knows all things from the beginning to the end, and by and through foreknowledge of all things WILL NOT see His loving and good desires and purposes fulfilled!

This is an impossible contradiction.

Calvinists meet it by saying this Sovereign God's desires and purposes are accomplished in that He has predestined some to burn in hell forever, ignoring the fact that He is love and mercy.

But the Bible suggests otherwise through what we have discussed on the matter. In and through this beautiful approach, God maintains LOVE, SOVEREIGNTY, A RESPECT for FREE WILL, and JUSTICE while having his pleasure and desires completely and fully met.

Another point to consider.

In light of all we have talked about I find new meaning in the term *lost*.

Since Jesus paid for all the sin of the world, paying the debt and redeeming all, we are dealing with people who are blinded by the prince of this world who seeks to have them suffer.

Seeing the redemptive work of our King in this manner enables us to see those who have yet to believe as lost and sinful due to unbelief or a lack of faith, not sinful in the sense of numbered and categorized sin.

This is important because when we as believers start looking out at the world as "the sinful" and ourselves as "the worthy" it is easy to forget that our righteousness has come by faith, and abides in the flesh we call home.

If we are able to see the rest of the world as failing in faith and therefore lost due to their blindness, it enables us to retain a modicum of humility and gratitude for Him who redeemed us RATHER than looking down our noses at those who have YET . . . to be found.

In other words, if a person is a lost sinner it merely means they are temporarily separated from the Good Shepherd who owns Him. And if Jesus redeemed the world, there are those who are "always with Him and who have been His from the beginning (The Bride of Christ)," but there also remain those needing to be found.

And here's the key - a Good Shepherd would never abandon the search and return of those who are His.

In Luke 15:4 Jesus said:

*"What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost **until** he finds it?"*

5 And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

6 And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.

7 I say unto you, that likewise, joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance."

That last passage used to frustrate me to no end. Who needs no repentance? Jesus here paradoxically says the ninety and nine. I would strongly suggest that this parable speak NOT only to

The house of Israel and them being the lost sheep.

The church and those who backslide, but also to the whole of humankind.

See, there are words used in the King James especially that have been assigned to the wicked of this world.

Lost, Perish, and Destroy.

In Luke 13:3 Jesus says (KJV) ". . . except ye repent, ye shall all likewise "**perish**."

2nd Corinthians 4:3 *But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are **lost**."*

And James 4:12 says:

*James 4:12 "There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to **destroy**."*

These words sound definite and complete, don't they?

But all of these words come from the Greek word, *apollumi*. (apoolomee)

Unfortunately, some have assigned meaning to this Greek term that is not consistently applied.

For example, in my Powerbible software, it suggests that apoolamee means to obliterate.

In a sense, it does because the better definitions mean "ruin," and "loss," but not total extinction.

I can prove this through other passages of scripture. For example in the story of the Lost Sheep Jesus tells, the Greek word for lost is apoolomai.

In the story of the prodigal son the word is "apollomai," and in Luke 19:10, where Jesus says:

"For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost," the word is the same.

It obviously does NOT mean totally destroyed or completely perished, but suffering loss.

Two more things and I guess we'll open it up to questions and comments.

The first is the Psalms.

When I read them I am able to hear the heart of God shining through.

Admittedly, I have come across a number of them that give me pause. In light of all we have talked about over these past few weeks, let me share a few with you - see if they hit you in a similar way?

Psalm 2:7-8 "I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession."

Psalm 22:27-28 "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the kingdom is the LORD'S: and he is the governor among the nations."

Psalm 24:1 *"The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein."*

Psalm 65:2 *"O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come."*

Psalm 68:18 *"Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them."*

Psalm 89:11 *"The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine: as for the world and the fulness thereof, thou hast founded them."*

Psalm 86:8-10 *"Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord; neither are there any works like unto thy works."*

9 *All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name.*

10 *For thou art great, and doest wondrous things: thou art God alone."*

And of course,

Isaiah 45:22 *Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.*

23 *I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.*

24 *Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed.*

Didn't Paul say love *never* fails? If God is love, can He, will He, ever fail to bring about His Goodwill and pleasure?

Doesn't the Word say that Death will be swallowed up in victory? Does some death escape victory of Christ on the cross?

As I've talked on this topic over the last few weeks with others I've had people say, in their efforts to establish eternal punishment as a fact:

"God is Just, God is Just!"

He certainly is. And because He is just He sent His Son, a Son who not only saved all men, He is a Son before whom "every knee will bow and every tongue will confess."

Do you know what James, Jesus brother said about Mercy and Justice?

James 2:13 says, "*Mercy Triumphs over Judgment.*"

Before going to questions, prayer, and song, I want to bring in a few quotes from people that loved the Lord and His word from long ago relative to this subject.

They are just humans – like you and me – but I am bringing their thoughts to the table to show you just how long these ideas have been around.

We call these men the Early Church Fathers.

Now, admittedly, they made some mistakes – this may (MAY) be one of them. But they were willing to voice their opinions on the topic and were not castigated as heretical when they did.

I would suggest, prior to reading them, that the doctrine of endless eternal punishment was a rarity among believers in the earliest centuries of the church and it was the Roman and Greek traditions that helped bring the ideas to the church in time.

Augustine (in 354 -430 AD) was one of the first to truly popularize the teaching of eternal punishment. Proving the teaching was still around in the church when Augustine was alive let's first hear a quote from him, which says:

"And now I see I must have a gentle disputation with certain tender hearts of our own religion, who are unwilling to believe that everlasting punishment will be inflicted, either on all those whom the just Judge shall condemn to the pains of hell or even on some of them."

Augustine aside, the earliest church fathers tended to believe that the torments were purposeful and aimed at purging and cleansing rather than cruelty and suffering for suffering's sake.

These thoughts all fell under what was known as "the restitution of all things" (which, interestingly enough, Paul refers to frequently but never mentions hell).

It wasn't until 533 AD that an official attempt was made to rid the world of the "restitution of all things idea."

By this time, most of the men (who dominated Christianity) couldn't even read Greek.

Irenaeus (130-200AD), who wrote intimately of Polycarp who was a close friend of the Apostle John, reveals through his writings a belief in "an ultimate reconciliation of all things back to God."

Clement of Alexandria (185AD - 254) wrote:

"The Lord is a propitiation not for our sins only, that is, of the faithful, but also for the whole world. Therefore He indeed saves all universally; but some as converted by punishments, others by voluntary submission, thus obtaining honor and dignity, that "to Him every knee will bow, of things in heaven, of things in earth, and things under the earth, that is to say, angels, and men, and souls who departed this life before His coming into the world."

ORIGEN (185-254AD) wrote:

"He that despises the purification of the Word of God, the doctrine of the Gospel only keeps himself for dreadful and penal purifications afterwards; that so the fire of hell may purge him of torments whom neither apostolical doctrine nor gospel preaching has cleansed, according to that which is written of being "purified by fire." But how long this purification which is wrought out by penal fire shall endure, or for how many periods or ages it shall torment sinners, He only knows to whom all judgment is committed by the Father."

I could write on and on, adding a dozen or more to the list, but let me conclude this whole thing with the words of Luther, that if uttered today, would certainly cause many to scream HERESY.

This is what the Father of the Reformation said in a letter written in 1522:

"God forbid that I should limit the time of acquiring faith to the present life. In the depth of the Divine mercy, there may be an opportunity to win it in the future."

-END SERMONS-

Final note: The best resource for hearing the entire content of these teachings is through the video archives located at www.campuschurch.tv. The reason for this is while these notes provide much of what I presented, I am prone, at times, to veer from my outline (as lead by the Holy Spirit and/or my flesh or insanity) and to include things that come to me extemporaneously.

AN UGLY ADDENDUM

Before I embarked on this subject I warned all present that the teaching on these views would be considered by some to be heresy and that some would consider me a heretic as the result. Unfortunately, I called it right. In the midst of this teaching we had some otherwise faithful congregates stand up – mid-teaching, by the way – and let anyone who was paying attention know that they were done with CAMPUS by walking right out of the building.

Others stormed passed me upon exiting after the sermon (without saying a word) but later chose to make a series of public pronouncements (through various social media outlets) about how I have fallen and cannot be trusted.

A few have at least had the decency to contact me directly. Below is a chronology of an email conversation I had with a man who was present at two of the four teachings:

HE WROTE:

Dear Pastor Shawn,

I was at the service last Lord's Day and was very concerned that you were questioning the doctrine of an Eternal Hell. After carefully looking over the Doctrinal Statement of Calvary Chapel Bible College there is no reason to doubt where they stand and this issue and what you were taught there. This is a very serious issue and embracing Universalism in any form is embracing heresy.

Many of us attending C.A.M.P.U.S. are seasoned Christians and have had to battle false doctrines being taught in other churches. We had high hopes that would not be the case with C.A.M.P.U.S.

Please prayerfully reconsider what the implications are of embracing false doctrines that are ear tickling and why we rejected the false doctrines of Joseph Smith for that same reason.

Yours In Christ.

I WROTE BACK

Did you hear all four teachings?

HE REPLIED

No, I was there for two of the four. The first and the last ones. I'm hoping that I am in error in what direction you seem to be going on this issue. Do you lean towards or embrace any form of Universalism (that all men will be saved)?

Looking forward have my concerns clarified to avoid any further misunderstandings on my part and others!

PS.

I have been really enjoying and have benefited from your teachings thus far.

I WROTE BACK

Maybe you ought to hear all 4 parts before we talk. All Things Considered, I'm not so sure the Bible is perfectly clear on the matter. It's not a hill to die upon in my opinion but if it is for you I understand. But before you make up your mind (because you've already made up your mind) hear the total presentation. I think most of those who were present for all four teachings walked away at least better informed. We are done with this diversion and are now headed into Hebrews 2.

HE REPLIED

I am more than willing to listen to all four parts of your teaching on what your view is on the topic of Universal Salvation. I do think that the Bible is perfectly clear on where the lost and the saved go for all Eternity and the Bible has been for THE PAST

2,000 YEARS. If you think your view is the correct one why don't you just say so plainly so we can examine it in the light of scripture? My mind is captive to the Word of God and to His Word alone. Please tell me what your true view is and then we can be like the Bereans and search the scriptures together to see if these things are so [see Acts 17:11].

We are not done with "this diversion" in my book [the Word of God] until you come clean and reject the false doctrine that you seemingly do not want to own up to.

Please reply to my request before I take any further action against you and your False doctrine.

I WROTE BACK

Whoaa, slow down there. There is a lot of information I shared that ought to be considered and I think that it is only fair you hear it prior to you taking whatever further action you want to take. That's all I'm asking. I love the Lord and his word too, (blank). I care about searching the word like a Berean too - which is why I wanted to know if you heard all parts. You are making accusations without having heard all that I've said on the matter - that seems presumptuous to me. What am I hearing you

say is that your mind is made up and there is no need for you to hear all I said on the matter? If this is the case then I am sorry for you. My sole ambition is to know Him by and through His Word and to share Him in Spirit and Truth. I am open to being wrong about my conjectures. But you have assigned guilt to me without hearing all I've said on the matter.

HE WROTE BACK

My apologies, I am more than willing to hear you out. I have been a Christian for almost 30 years after being saved out of Mormonism. I have during that time encountered almost every heresy that is out there. I do not agree with you that the Bible is not clear on whether or not Hell is Eternal and/or Salvation is Universal. Rejecting the first and accepting the latter are very serious doctrinal errors. You should please clarify why you seem to be embracing them or even questioning them. Please set the record straight for me and also the rest of the congregation at the C.A.M.P.U.S.

Fellowship, so there will not be any further misunderstandings on where you do stand

on those important issues.

My apologies again and I am looking forward to hearing from you soon!

END EMAIL COMMUNICATION

Words cannot describe how frustrating these responses are to my person. It appears that what some believers want is for a pastor to stand before them and for that man to make sure in the delivery of his message two things are present:

1. All that has ever been taught as proper biblical interpretation must be maintained (without any variation or reservation), and
2. He must reassure all who are listening that what he is saying is absolute truth and there is no room for ideas or opinions that might differ in the least.

If the above is not administered with a dogmatic delivery by the pastor then the pastor is legitimized as being “wishy-washy,” “possibly dangerous,” or even “heretical.” He is punished. He is maligned in the court of Christian public opinion. And there are attempts by the so-called doctrinal purists to put an end to his work for the Lord.

The problem with these demands is they place the pastor in a position of supreme authority – which ought never be the case. Pastors are not all-knowing. For them to embrace a position of certainty (when certainty is not present) is not only hypocritical, it is false. Pastors are to teach the word with all the love and honesty they can muster. If this means there are points of doctrine where uncertainty exist it is their duty to explain (as best as possible) why. It also means if there are historical beliefs that have long been perpetuated by Man which are proven false or questionable, he has the duty to point them out and make clarifications . . . come what may.