

A BRIEF STUDY ON THE ISSUES OF DEATH AND ETERNAL JUDGEMENT.

I apologise to God and to the readers of my earlier studies on Revelation, for not previously examining the subject of eternal judgement in sufficient depth, and with the necessary clarity. I hope and pray that this study will rectify this in some measure. Those who desire to study eternal judgement at greater depth, can read my more detailed study under this same heading.

1. WHAT IS A SOUL? WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A PERSON DIES?

What is a person's soul?

The Scriptures often refer to a person as a "soul," however, they are not just a soul, for in 1Thes.5v23., they are said to be a tripartite being composed of body, soul and spirit. A person's soul is certainly differentiated from their body and spirit in many places in the Scriptures. Is.57v15,16. Eccles.12v7. Numb.16v30-33. Lk.12v5. Mt.10v28. 1Kings.17v21. 1Cor.2v10,11. The Hebrew word for "soul," "nephesh," means "a breathing creature, a living organism," it is used over 770 times in the Old Testament, but it is never said to be put into a "qeber," a grave. Its Greek equivalent, "psyche," occurs 105 times in the New Testament. Both words are used to speak of a person's essential personality, self and being, and also of the life of the lower animals. In Heb.4v12., we read that there is a division between soul and spirit. People are called "souls," because it describes their essential being and personality. When a farmer says that he has 200 head of sheep, we do not think that his sheep consist only of heads. When a captain says that he has 50 hands on board, we do not think that 50 hands float about his ship doing the work. In the same way, when we describe people as "souls," we do not mean that they have no body or spirit, we are just speaking of their essential being and personality. Our body enables us to contact earth; our spirit enables us to contact and communicate with God, Heaven, and spiritual realities; it is the organ of spiritual perception and spiritual activity. 1Cor.2v10,11. 14v1,2,14-16. Paul declares in Rom.1v9., that he served God with his spirit.

What happens when a person dies?

When a person dies their body goes to the grave, whether they are a Christian or an unbeliever. At death the soul of the unbeliever goes to Hades, and his spirit goes back to God who gave it. Eccles.12v7. Whereas, when a Christian dies they do not lose their spirit, their soul and spirit are not separated, and they go to God together. The Old Testament teaches that before Jesus died for us, the souls of all mankind went down to "Sheol," the Hebrew name for the New Testament "Hades." However, at the coming of Jesus things were greatly altered, Christ brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel, He said that those who believed in Him would never die, and the gates of Hades would not prevail against His Church. 2Tim.1v10. Mt.16v18. At death, believers in Jesus go right into the bliss of Heaven. Lk.23v43. Jn.6v39,40,44,54. with 8v50-52. 11v21-26. Acts.7v55-60. Heb.12v22-24. Rev.6v9-11. 14v13. 16v7. Paul writes in Phil.1v21-23., that he was joyfully anticipating being present with the Lord, which he said is far, far, far better {Lightfoot says it is a triple far in the Greek}. See 2Cor.5v6-8. So we can see the death and atonement of Christ, and His descent into Hades, completely transformed the function of Hades, from a place where both unbelievers and believers went to at death, to a place only for unbelievers.

The Old Testament speaks of people "giving up the spirit," at death. Gen.25v8,17. 35v29. 49v33. Job.14v10.

At death the spirit goes back to God who gave it. Eccl.12v7. Jesus gave His spirit back to the Father, His body went into the tomb, and His soul was made an offering for our sin, and endured the pains of Hades for us. Mt.27v50. Lk.23v46,50-53. Acts.2v23-31. Is.53v10. Jesus took the judgement of our sins upon Himself. Ananias and Sapphira, and Herod, in sharp contrast, gave up their spirits through an act of divine judgement. Acts.5v5,10.12v23. Eccles.3v21. 8v8. The Scriptures state that the spirit of the wicked is dead to God while they are still alive. Lk.15v32. 1Tim.5v6. Heb.6v1. 9v14. Rev.3v1.

The Old Testament also uses the phrase "he slept with his fathers," to speak of the death of the body.

See Deut.31v16. 2Sam.7v12. 1King.1v21. 2v10. 11v43. 14v20,31. 15v8,24. 16v6,28. 22v40,50. 2Kings.8v24. 10v35. 13v9,13. etc. The New Testament also speaks of people "falling asleep," though the expression is only used of believers, this sleeping is clearly seen to be referring to bodies and not souls. Jn.11v11-14. Acts.7v60. 13v36. 1Cor.11v30. 15v6,18,20,51. 1Thes.4v13-17. 2Pet.3v4. We read in Mt.27v50-52., that many bodies of the saints which slept arose and after Christ's resurrection and went into Jerusalem and appeared to many. In 1Thes.4v13-17., Paul informs us that the souls of Christians who die are with Christ when their bodies are asleep in the grave. The word "slept" clearly only applies to the body, this is why we still call burial grounds, "cemeteries," which means "sleeping places."

The Old Testament uses the phrase "gathered to his people" of the death of the righteous.

It is used of Abraham, Gen.25v8.; of Ishmael, Gen.25v17.; of Isaac, Gen.35v29.; of Jacob, Gen.49v29,33.; of Aaron, Numb.20v24,26.; of Moses, Numb.27v13. 31v2. Deut.32v50.. This shows that even under the old covenant the righteous dead were gathered to their godly relatives; a lovely and thoughtful divine decree from a loving God. His thoughts have always been kind to His children, even before our redemption was accomplished in Christ Jesus.

IS "SHEOL-HADES" THE GRAVE?

In the Old Testament all who died went to the place, which is called in the Hebrew, "Sheol," and in the Greek "Hades." However, now only unbelievers go to "Hades," its gates have no power over Christians, they are with their Lord in Heaven. Mt.16v18. Rev.1v18. 2Cor.5v1,6-8. Phil.1v21-23. That the dead consciously exist is seen in many of the Scriptures we have already quoted, and by the following Scriptures. Is.14v9-11. Ez.32vv21. Ps.16v10. Lk.16v22-25.

"Hades" occurs more than 100 times in the Septuagint Greek Old Testament, nearly always to translate the Hebrew "Sheol." "Hades" occurs 11 times in the New Testament, Mt.11v23. 16v18. Lk.10v15. 16v23. Acts.2v27,31. Rev.1v18. 6v8. 20v13,14. In 1Cor.15v55., the Critical Texts read "thanatos," "death," instead of the Majority Text "Hades," which the Authorised Version wrongly translates as "grave." The English word "Hell," comes from the Saxon "helan," to cover; it originally meant, "a covered or invisible place." However, in many people's eyes, the word "Hell," has come to mean, "the place of the future eternal punishment of the wicked." It no longer conveys the idea of "Sheol" or "Hades." It is, therefore, unfortunate that "Sheol," "Hades," "Gehenna," and "Tartarus" are all translated by the word "Hell" in the Authorised Version of the Bible. {Tartarus," is the place in the Abyss where evil angels are confined. 2Pet.2v4.}.

That the Jews were confused and unscriptural in some of their theology about "Sheol," can be seen from the following comment on "Hades" in Edward Robinson's, "Greek and English Lexicon." "According to the notions of the Hebrews, 'Hades' was a vast subterranean receptacle, where the souls of the dead existed in a separate state until the resurrection of their bodies. The region of the blessed during this interval, or the inferior Paradise, they supposed to be in the upper part of this receptacle; while beneath was the Abyss or Gehenna, Tartarus, in which the souls of the wicked were subjected to punishment." End of quote.

If Robinson's synopsis of the beliefs of the Jews about Hades is correct, the Jews were certainly unscriptural in their ideas about life after death. It is certainly true to say that Hades is a vast subterranean receptacle, which was divided into two separate parts for the wicked and righteous. However, to say that Gehenna is part of Hades is definitely wrong; Gehenna is the lake of fire, the place of eternal punishment, into which Hades is cast after the millennium. Rev.20v14. No one is cast into the lake of fire until the return of Christ. Mt.25v41.

It is unscriptural to call Sheol-Hades, "the inferior Paradise," for "paradeisos," speaks of a park or garden, and of the ultimate in blessedness. The Septuagint translators use "paradeisos," when speaking of the Garden of Eden in Gen.2v8. and Ezek.31v8,9.. "Paradeisos," is used in 2Cor.12v1-4. and Rev.2v7., to speak of God's incredibly beautiful garden in Heaven. In Lk.16v23-25., Jesus tells us that the Old Testament saints did receive comfort from God, but they were anticipating anything but Paradise. Gesenius says "Sheol" is, "a subterranean place full of thick darkness. Job.10v21,22." Godly Job said that when he died, he was going to "a place where the light is as darkness." Job.10v20-22. Hades is certainly no paradise, it is a dark and awful place, and even godly saints were in bondage all their lives, at the thought of going to Hades at death. Heb.2v15.

The correct translation of Lk.23v43. should read, "I say unto thee today, thou shalt be with me in Paradise." Jesus told the thief that his faith had saved him THAT DAY, and that he need not wait until His kingdom was established to be assured of a place in it. Jesus did not go to Paradise that day, He went to "Hades," and to the bad side where the wicked were incarcerated, for He died in the sinners place. 2Cor.5v21. When Jesus told the parable of Lk.16v19-31., He knew that to redeem us He would have to go and be imprisoned in the bad part of Hades like the selfish, greedy and evil rich man in the parable.

"Hades" and "Sheol" are both speaking of the same place, and Ps.16v10. and Acts.2v27., confirm this.

They refer to the unseen subterranean place of departed souls and are quite distinct from the Hebrew "qeber," and the Greek "mnaymion," which are translated as grave, sepulchre, or tomb. The Authorised Version never translates "qeber" and "mnaymion" as "Hell," however, it incorrectly translates "Sheol" as "grave" 31 times out of the 65 which it occurs in the Old Testament, probably because the translators have avoided the use of "Hell" when the reference was to godly people, obviously feeling that there was some slight in using "Hell" in connection with them. Gen.37v35. 42v38. 44v29-31. 1Kings.2v6-9. 1Sam.2v6. Job.7v9. 14v13. 17v13. 21v13. 24v19. Ps.6v5. 30v3. 31v17. 49v14,15. 88v3. 141v7. Prov.1v12.30v16. Eccles.9v10. Song.8v6. Is.14v11. 38v10,18. Ezek.31v15. Hosea.13v14.

In the Authorised Version "Sheol" is translated as "pit" 3 times, in Num.16v30,33. Job.17v16.; and as "Hell" 32 times, in Deut.32v22. 2Sam.22v6. Job.11v8. 26v6. Ps.9v17. 16v10. 18v5. 55v15. 86v13. 116v3. 139v8. Prov.5v5. 7v27. 9v18. 15v11. 23v14. 27v20. Is.5v14. 14v9. 15v28. 15v18. 57v9. Ezek.31v16,17. 32v21,17. Amos.9v2. Jonah.2v2. Hab.2v5. "Abyss," "abussos," meaning unfathomable depth, is translated as "bottomless pit" and "deep" in the Authorised Version, it is the lowest part of "Hades" to which Christ went to pay the penalty of our sin. Rev.9v1,2,11. 11v7. 17v8. Lk.8v31. Rom.10v7-9.

"Sheol" and "Hades" are quite distinct from "qeber" and "mnaymion," a burying place, grave, tomb, or sepulchre.

This is clearly seen from the following facts. "Sheol" is never used in the plural, whereas both singular and plural are used with "qeber" and "mnaymion." The Hebrew "nephesh," soul, occurs over 770 times in the Old Testament, but is never said to be put into a "qeber," a grave. No corpse is ever taken to "Sheol," whereas

many bodies are taken to "qebers."

In Numb.16v30,33., the casting of people directly into "Sheol" was looked upon as "a new thing," and quite abnormal. Nobody is said to have seen or touched a "sheol" on earth, whereas many "qebers" have been seen and touched. No animal is ever said to go to "Sheol" at death, the comparison of Ps.49v14., is between men who are dying and going to "Sheol" as fast as sheep are slaughtered for eating, even though in their pride men think that it will never come; compare v15, the Psalmists hope. The Scriptures constantly affirm that men go down into "Sheol," and that "Sheol" is in the lower parts of the earth, and is so deep that it is below the mountains and seas, and it cannot be dug into. Num.16v30,33. Deut.32v22. Ps.63v9. 68v18. with Eph.4v8-10. Ez.31v14-18. 32v18-31. Jonah.2v2-6. Job.11v8. Amos.9v2. {The task of digging into "Sheol" is looked upon as being as impossible as climbing into Heaven.} Mt.12v40. Phil.2v10. On 5 occasions in the Scriptures, "Sheol" is used for comparison with the height of Heaven, being put as the extreme opposite in depth. Job.11v7,8. Ps.139v8. Jonah.2v2,6. Mt.11v23. All this in sharp contrast to a grave, sepulchre and tomb, which men dig, make, hew and are laid in. The Septuagint of "Sheol" is never called grave.

"Sheol" is certainly not a place where people are unconscious.

The wicked are in Hades "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgement of the great day."Jude.v6,13. 2Pet.2v17. See Is.14v9-15. Ez.32v27-31. Ps.18v5. 116v3. Lk.16v19-31. Lk.20v38. Mk.12v26,27. As Jesus said, the rich man died, but in "Hades" he was tormented in soul, only wilful blindness can ignore such plain statements. Jesus was imprisoned in the Abyss to atone for our sins, while His body was in the grave, "qeber." Is.53v9. Ps.16v10. Acts.2v24,27. He preached to the dead who were imprisoned there. 1Pet3v18-22. 4v6. 2Pet.2v4. The Old Testament saints were among "the multitude of captives," that Jesus led out of Hades. Eph.4v8. Rev.1v18.

Hades has two parts between which a great gulf is fixed, which is impassable. Lk.16v26.

Before Jesus came all souls went to one side or the other, but the good side was not in God's presence, and though the Old Testament saints had the comfort of their faith in the resurrection, they lost their spirit at death, and none of them liked to die, they lived their lives in fear of death. Eccles.12v7. Is.38v1-3. Heb.2v15. Job.10v20-22. 19v25-27. Heb.2v15. All this is changed for the believer in Jesus, we do not lose our spirits at death, and go to Hades like the Old Testament believer, we go into the presence of God in Paradise in Heaven. Mt.16v18. Jn.8v35. 11v24-26. 2Cor.5v1,6-8. 12v2-4. with Rev.2v7. 21v10. 22v2. Phil.1v21-23. Heb.12v22-24.

GEHENNA AND THE LAKE OF FIRE.

The name "Gehenna" is derived from a place in the valley of Hinnom where refuse and the dead bodies of animals and criminals were burned. Jesus uses it to describe the place to which evil souls and spirits will be sent, who are too dangerous be allowed to live and roam free, because they are given over to unrestrained selfishness and evil. They see and hate God and righteousness, and are sadists who only find pleasure by causing suffering and pain. Jn.15v22-25. 1Pet.5v8. No one has, as yet, been cast into the lake of fire, Antichrist and his followers are the first people to be cast into Hell, and this occurs at Christ's second coming. In the New Testament "Gehenna" is used 12 times. Mt.5v22,29,30. 10v9. 23v15,33. Mk.9v43,45,47. Lk.12v5. James.3v6. It is the lake of fire. Rev.19v20. 20v10-15. 21v8. Fire is associated with judgement on the wicked in many places. Lk.16v24. Mt.7v19. 13v40,42,50. 18v8. 25v41. Mk.9v44,46,48. Is.30v33. Jn.15v6. 2Thes.1v8. Heb.10v27. Jude.v7. Rev.14v10. Deut.32v21,22. These Scriptures should be treated with the utmost gravity, it is no wonder that Paul said "work out your salvation with fear and trembling." Phil.2v12. Hell was prepared for Satan and his angels, it destroys angelic as well as human bodies. Mt.25v41. It is called "the second death," because it destroys the bodies of wicked people for the second time. Rev.2v11. 20v14.

In Lk.16v14,19-31., Jesus warned the covetous Pharisees with two very striking metaphors, unquenchable flame and unquenchable thirst, that the consequences of their greed, would be confinement in Hades, and a fearful anticipation of judgement to come. Heb.10v27. There are flames in "Gehenna," "the Lake of fire," but no flames in Hades, the Bible states it is a dark prison, where the wicked are "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgement of the great day."Jude.v6,13. 2Pet.2v17. 1Sam.2v9. Christ's parable reveals how fearful and mentally painful confinement in Hades can be if you have lived a selfish evil life. All who are in "Hades" will come out for the Great White Throne judgement, but no one is said to come out of "Gehenna." Rev.20v11-15. "Hades" is the temporary abode of the dead, "Gehenna" is the God's prison for unrepentant evil people and unclean angels. We read in Rev.20v14., that "Hades" is cast into "Gehenna," the lake of fire, after the Great White Throne judgement.

The feet of Asaph nearly slipped when he was overwhelmed with numerous difficulties and trials, and he compared his situation with the prosperity of the wicked, they arrogantly rejected God, and mockingly cried, "How doth God know? Ps.73v11. And is there knowledge in the Most High?" Then Asaph saw their end. Psalm.73. The righteous have often cried out in great distress, "Yahweh, how long shall the wicked triumph?" Ps.94v3. Our Lord gives the answer, He said, "The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds." Mt.16v27. When Jesus returns He "will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts." 1Cor.4v5. Eccles.12v13,14. In Rom.2v5,6., we again read of the day of wrath and the revelation of the righteous judgement of God, "who will render to everyone according to their works." See Rom.1v18-22.

God longs to save people, He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Ezek.18v,23,32. 33v11. Lk.15v20-32.

Jesus extolled the long-suffering kindness and mercy of God. He said in Luke. 6v35,36. "But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and evil. v36. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." Jesus repeats this thought in Mt.5v44,45., "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, v45. that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." In Acts.14v15-17., Paul states how good God had been to Heathen idol worshippers.

Divine anger is mixed with grief. Mk.3v1-7. Mt.9v9-15.

Papias informs us that Mark's Gospel is Peter's recollections of Christ's ministry. In Mk.3v5., Peter vividly retells how Jesus "looked round about" on the hypocritical Pharisees, "with anger," "orge". See Lk.6v10. Mk.3v5,34. 5v38. 10v23. 11v11. Jesus was not angry because of the murder that was in their hearts towards Him, and it was truly there, for after this miracle they went out and plotted together with their hated enemies, the Herodians, how they might destroy, "apolesosin," that is, kill Jesus. Mt.12v14. Mk.3v6. Lk.6v11. Jesus was angry at their ruthless hardness of heart that denied mercy and healing for the sick and needy. However, our Lord's anger was mixed with grief at the Pharisees hardness of heart. "Grieved is "sullupoumenos," the present middle participle of "sullupeo," 4818, from "sun," with, and "lupeo," to make sorrowful, to cause grief, in the passive voice, "to be grieved together with," or "to sorrow on account of someone." That the anger of Jesus was momentary is shown by the use of the aorist participle "orges," His continuous state of grief and heart-pain over the hardness of heart of the Pharisees is revealed by the use of the present participle "sullupoumenos." They seared their consciences and hardened their hearts and always resisted God and His truth. Acts.7v51-60. Their impurity, false traditions, pride, prejudice, and bigotry had imprisoned them in a fortress of lies, from which even God's mighty works and truth could not release them.

Just as in His broken-hearted weeping over Jerusalem in Lk.19v41-44., Jesus was grieved over the hardness of heart, self-injury and spiritual suicide of the Pharisees, who criticised His healing of the man with the withered arm on the Sabbath day. "Hardness," is the noun "porosis;" 4457, from "poros," a kind of marble, or a callus on hardened hands or feet, or the callus that forms to heal broken bones. "Porosis," speaks of a dulled spiritual perception, and hardening of the heart, it occurs in Mk.3v5. Rom.11v25. and Eph.4v18. The verb "poroo," 4455, to petrify, to make hard, to thicken the skin, to become dull of understanding, is used of the apostles in Mk.6v52. and 8v17., and the Israelites in Jn.12v40. Rom.11v7. and 2Cor.3v14.

The noun "sklerotes" 4643, speaks of the hardness of heart of the wicked in Rom.2v5. N.B. v1-16. The verb "skleruno" 4645, means "to make dry or hard;" it is used of Pharaoh's heart being hardened by God in Rom.9v17,18., after Pharaoh had implacably hardened his heart and rejected God's signs and wonders. God hardened Pharaoh's heart by allowing Satan to do the miraculous, and by God in His mercy repeatedly lifting the plagues. Ex.7v13,22. 8v19,32. 9v7,12. We read in Acts.19v8,9., that Gospel truth can harden people's hearts. In Heb.3v8,13,15. 4v7., Paul warns us not to harden our hearts.

There is coming a time in world history when God's amazing long-suffering and mercy are going to be replaced by "thumos" anger. However, we read in Is.28v21., that God's angry judgements at Christ's return, are God's strange {"zuwr," to be strange} work, and His strange {"nokriy," foreign, alien} act. Such judgements are difficult and foreign acts to a God of love. God longs to embrace sinners, not judge and condemn them, as Jesus made clear in Lk.15v20., "When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." In 1Tim.2v3,4., Paul proclaims that, "God our Saviour, -- desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." And again, in 2Pet.3v9., Peter declares, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

2. THE MAJOR SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT ABOUT ETERNAL JUDGEMENT.

Eternal judgement and Divine retribution is an undeniable fact of Scripture.

Almost all schools of thought on eternal punishment believe that there will be some retribution on the wicked, it is the extent of that retribution that is the main area of controversy. We are now in the age of grace so the principal theme of the Gospel is one of mercy and forgiveness, nevertheless, the Scriptures also give the revelation of the wrath and righteous judgement of God, "who will render to each one according to his deeds." Rom.2v6. The solemn warning of Peter in 1Pet.4.17-19., cannot be watered down, "For the time has come for judgement to begin at the house of God: and if it first begins with us, what shall the end be of those who do not obey the gospel of God? v18. And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? v19. Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator." Our God is a faithful Creator, He loves His creation with all His being, we can completely trust His love and judgements.

When Israel came under judgement from God, David chose to fall into the hands of God rather than the hands of men, we read in 2Sam.24v14., "And David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Please let us fall into the hand of the LORD, for His mercies are great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man." Abraham knew that

the Judge of the whole earth always executes merciful, true, and righteous judgement. Gen.18v25. Rev.6v10. 15v3. 19v2. Repentant souls will always find that God's mercies are great, even when judgement is deserved, and Calvary supremely confirms this fact. When 1Pet.4v18., states that, "it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved;" it is because the human will frustrates God's efforts to save, not from any failure in the Divine desire and will to save. Lk.19v41-44. 2Pet.3v9.

Jesus warns us of the reality of eternal judgement and Hell, and we need to treat His words on this subject very seriously, and not dismiss it as a theme just advocated by fanatics. Eleven of the twelve references to "Gehenna" in the New Testament are spoken directly by our Lord, Mt.5v22,29,30. 10v28 18v9. 23v15,33. Mk.9v43,45,47. Lk.12v5., the other is in James.3v6.. Eternal punishment is listed in Heb.6v1-3., among the foundation truths of the Church. Our feelings about God's character and justice are greatly affected by what we believe about eternal judgement, so it is vitally important to interpret this doctrine correctly.

All the viewpoints here stated on eternal punishment have been believed by godly and sincere Christians, even the extreme and dark views of Augustine and Calvin, however, there are other kinder and more thoughtful views about eternal punishment, {even amongst those who would consider themselves as followers of Augustine and Calvin}, which have received acceptance by godly reformers and Christian leaders in Church history. Peter wrote in 1Pet.1v18,19., that we need to be delivered from the false and empty traditions handed down from our fathers or ancestors, "patroparadotos." However, Church history has shown that many church leaders have been unwilling to let the clear bright light of Scripture shine on their cherished traditions and doctrines, and have even used the most horrific persecution and murder to enforce them. This contentious murderous spirit is from the Devil, it is certainly not following Paul's instruction in 2Tim.2v25., to instruct and correct in meekness, gentleness and humility those who oppose our views. Let us remember the words of our Lord, "they that are for us, are not against us;" Mk.9v38-41. Lk.9v49,50.; for we too can imitate the apostles, and mistakenly think that a contentious unloving party spirit, is zeal for truth, when we are in reality resisting and fighting God. Ex.16v8. Acts.5v39. 7v51-60. 23v9. However, God has directed us to oppose dangerous heresy, and He has even executed those who were a danger to His Church. Acts.5v1-12. 12v18-25. 1Tim.1v18-20. 2Tim.2v16-19. 2Pet.2v1-3. Nevertheless, God also commands us never to bite and devour good Christians. Gal.5v13-15. In his earlier years Spurgeon strongly opposed the view of Conditional Immortality, but in his later years, he took a more charitable view, for Spurgeon is quoted as saying, "I have no quarrel with the Conditional Immortality doctrine." Let us imitate his magnanimous spirit.

Christians would agree that no being can exist for ever without the help of God, and that the God who created us can, if He so desires, withhold His sustaining power and so bring about our extinction. All agree that God can also cause the wicked to exist forever, if He chooses to do so. The question is, do the Scriptures teach that God will, or will not, sustain the wicked in everlasting punishment and painful existence, and if so, why? The following viewpoints have been held by Christians from many diverse theological backgrounds and denominations.

1. The Traditional Western viewpoints.

There no such thing as a uniform Traditional orthodoxy, there is a wide divergence of view within the Traditional Western viewpoint of eternal punishment. Some followers of Augustine and Calvin have said that the atonement of Jesus extends to infants, others have taught the doctrines of their leaders, and have stated that all the heathen who have not even heard the Gospel, and all unbaptised babies will go to Hell for ever. Farrar and others state that such theology attacks the character of God, and has put a dark cloud over the Church, and has caused Christians to question in their minds, if not openly, the love and justice of God. Unbelievers also have attacked the double-minded inconsistency, that a God of love could descend to such levels of cruelty and injustice. It is certainly very difficult to understand, worship, and love a God who condemns all the heathen, and all unbaptised babies, to Hell forever without any opportunity of salvation. Thank God, this awful doctrine is not true, children are especially precious to our God of Love, Jesus stated that "of such is the kingdom of Heaven," and any doctrine that denies this is to be rejected as unscriptural and untrue. Mt.18v1-10. 19v13-15. Mk.10v13,14. Lk.18v15-17.

Some who believe in many of the doctrines preached by Augustine and Calvin have rejected their extreme views on eternal punishment, that all unbaptised babies, and the heathen will go to Hell for ever, and "that doom passes irreversibly at the moment of death on all who die in a state of sin." Like E. B. Pusey, in his work, "What is of Faith as to Everlasting Punishment?" (1880), they believe in "endless conscious existence for a relatively small number of the lost," and state that the atonement of Jesus extends to infants. They also say that the pain of Hell is not physical, but "a bare minimum of pain, caused perhaps only from being deprived of all good rather than by being inflicted from an external source." Other Traditionalists also support the viewpoint that eternal punishment does not necessarily consist of physical sufferings, or is not necessarily due to inflictions from God, but that their suffering may be due to a person's sense of loss, or accusing conscience. This is a far more compassionate and thoughtful view on eternal punishment than the dark theology of Augustine; however, those who believe in Conditional Immortality believe that this does not go far enough.

Some Traditionalists have stated that because we are made in the image of God our souls must be immortal, but this cannot be correct for our bodies die, and these are made in God's image too. Historians have stated, and it appears correctly, that the doctrine of immortality of the soul is a product of the Greek thought of Plato

and Aristotle, who taught that the soul did not have a beginning because it was part of a pantheistic god. Some early Church fathers thought that some ideas of Plato on immortality of the soul would help to clarify Scripture truth, however, they rejected the idea that the soul was pre-existent, and said that it only came into existence at birth. Most of the expositors from the Reformation onwards, including Calvin, have said that immortality is a continual gift of God, and that God chooses to sustain for ever the existence of all beings, not only the righteous, but also the lost. T. F. Torrance writes on page 26f, of his book "Calvin's Doctrine of man," that Calvin taught that the "soul survives the death of the body only at the mercy of God, and has no durability in itself."

2. The Annihilationist viewpoint of Conditional Immortality states the wicked will be destroyed.

The Annihilationist school of thought is also known as the name of Conditional Immortality. These believe that God will not eternally punish the wicked, but will instead destroy them. The distinguished evangelical biblical scholar John Stott wrote in 1988, on pages 320f, in the book "Essentials," {which he co-authored with D. Edwards}, that the ultimate annihilation of the wicked should at least be accepted as a legitimate, biblically founded alternative to their eternal conscious torment." Other notable evangelical scholars have also supported this viewpoint. John W. Wenham in, "The Goodness of God," published in 1974, and in "Universalism and the doctrine of Hell," published in 1993, also states that he believes that Conditional Immortality is a biblical doctrine. Isaac Watts the famous hymn writer, wrote a book, which strongly supported the viewpoint that the wicked would endure conscious eternal torment, then later wrote another book, which stated why he had become an Annihilationist. Harold Ernest Guillebaud, who went as a missionary to Africa in 1925, took for granted that the Traditional viewpoint of eternal punishment was correct. When the Inter Varsity Fellowship asked Guillebaud to write a book on "Moral Difficulties of the Bible," a chapter on everlasting punishment was omitted from the book when it was published in 1941, because he felt he had not answered the problems to his own satisfaction. However after intensive study he changed his viewpoint and wrote a book called "The Righteous Judge," which was published in 1964 after his death, in this he set out the arguments for Conditional Immortality. He wrote that every soul survives the death of the body, but that both the bodies and souls of the wicked will finally perish at the second death.

In 2Thes.1v9., Paul writes that the wicked, "shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. In Luke.12v4,5., Jesus said, "And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. v5. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which **after** {"meta"} he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him." **In Matt.10v28., Jesus gives a similar very strong warning, "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Here Jesus speaks of the soul being destroyed in Hell by God. What does He mean?** Traditionalists say it means ruin of prospects rather than the annihilation and destruction of the soul, Conditionalists say it means destruction and annihilation of soul. If this destruction of soul does occur, and we know that it does not immediately take place when the wicked are cast into Hell, for we read in Rev.20v10., that Antichrist and the False Prophet are still in the lake of fire 1,000 years after being cast in there. This definitely proves that they exist, and are conscious, after they are put in the lake of fire. That some do suffer conscious confinement in Hell for a period of time is also confirmed by Rev.14v9,10., here we read that Jesus and the holy angels examine the souls of the followers of Antichrist after they have been cast into the lake of fire. Conditionalists would say that the soul would cease to exist after a period of time.

All the facts about Hell have not been revealed, as Paul, even with his unique apostolic revelation of New Testament truth, acknowledges in 1Cor.13v12., "Now we see but a dim and blurred reflection in a mirror, as in a riddle or enigma ("en ainigmata"), but then face to face ("prosopon pros prosopon"). Now my knowledge is partial and incomplete, but then I shall fully know, even as I am fully known." We will not have full knowledge about eternal punishment until God's kingdom comes, so we need humility of mind, not dogmatism.

N. B. The soul sleep viewpoint.

These teach that those who die are not conscious and do not exist until the resurrection, and if this were true, depriving a person of their body would be in fact annihilation. However, the dead are certainly not unconscious, they all live to God, as Jesus pointed out to the Sadducees, who believed in soul-sleep, and also in His parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Mk.12v26,27. Lk.16v19-31. 20v38. The doctrine of soul sleep is believed by Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses, however, great Christian reformers and leaders like William Tyndale and Martin Luther, have believed this doctrine, as well as other good orthodox Christians. When Luther's teaching of soul sleep was attacked by Sir Thomas More, William Tyndale defended Luther's theology, he wrote, "The true faith putteth the resurrection, which we be warned to look for every hour. The heathen philosophers, denying that, did put that the souls did ever live. And the Pope joineth the spiritual doctrine of the Christ and the fleshly doctrine of philosophers together, things so contrary that they cannot agree, no more than the Spirit and the flesh do in a Christian man. And because the fleshly minded Pope consenteth unto heathen doctrine, therefore he corrupteth the Scripture to establish it."

Some Conditionalists have stated that Conditional Immortality was believed and preached by Clement of Rome, died 100 A.D.; Ignatius, died 110-115 A.D.; Polycarp, died 156 A.D. {or 166 A.D. Eusebius}; and Irenaeus, died 202 A.D. However, others dispute this and say that Conditionalists have overstated their case by claiming that these early Christian writers support them. Dean Plumptre feels that Irenaeus agrees with the Conditional

Immortality viewpoint, on page 133 and 134 of his book, "The Spirits In Prison, he quotes Irenaeus, "And he who shall reject life and prove himself ungrateful to his Maker deprives himself of continuance for ever." 2. 34. 3. And again in 5. 27. 2. " Good things are eternal, and without end in God, and therefore the loss of them is eternal and never ending." End of quote. Whichever view we take, all would agree that the loss here revealed is totally tragic, disastrous, catastrophic, and dreadful.

The Liberal or Modernistic, "No after life," Viewpoint.

Many of these, like the Sadducees, do not believe in an after life or resurrection, they believe death is annihilation. Like the unbeliever, which they really are, they believe the eternal realities of Heaven and Hell do not exist, and that death is the end.

3. The universal ultimate reconciliation viewpoint.

These, like Origen, Gregory Thaumaturgus, Eusebius, and other Eastern early Church leaders, and some in more modern times, state that God would finally reconcile all the lost and allow them into the kingdom. Some, like Maurice, in his "Theological Essays," and Farrar, in his books, "Eternal Hope," and "Mercy and Judgement," look upon ultimate reconciliation, not as a theological certainty, but only as a "hope," and admit that human beings may continue to resist God's efforts for ever. Some use the phrase, "the restoration of all things," to justify the doctrine of ultimate reconciliation. However, it must be noted that in Mt.19v28., Jesus states that "the restoration of all things," "palingenesia," will occur at His second coming, in the context of this verse He also points out that it is extremely difficult for rich men to enter the kingdom of God. At this "restoration," our Lord is forced to send the goats of Mt.25v31-46., into everlasting punishment in order to preserve the happiness of the new earth, so "restoration" here, certainly does not mean ultimate reconciliation. When Peter speaks in Acts.3v21., of "the restitution of all things," he uses "apokatastasis," which means "reconstitution," this "reconstitution" is the remaking of a new Heaven and earth that takes place at the second coming of Christ. Is.65v17-25. The last judgement , which decides the eternal destinies of all created beings, does not occur until a thousand years after our Lord's second coming. We read in Revelation 21 and 22, that another "reconstitution" of Heaven and earth occurs after the last judgement.

4. The second probation viewpoint.

These believe in a second probation after death, at which God gives the full light of the truth to all mankind, and that only those who are irreconcilable will go to Hell. They state that the Scriptures teach that Jesus has already preached to all the dead. The refusal of the wicked to repent of their evil ways makes eternal judgement inevitable. This second probation viewpoint is certainly not ultimate reconciliation, it recognises that the God of love is forced to send some of His creatures into eternal punishment, because their determination to commit eternal sin would forever ruin the happiness of His creation, if they were at liberty to put their desires into action. We read in Is.32v1,17., that righteousness is the means of producing and preserving eternal happiness. God takes away the bodies of angels and men so that they cannot injure anyone any more. Mankind's first death occurs primarily because of the loss of the tree of life, the second death occurs because of Divine judgement. Gen.3v22. Rev.22v2. 21v8. We will consider this at greater length later on.

5. There are those who say we cannot definitely know the final outcome of eternal judgement.

Some outstanding theologians have not committed themselves to any definite conclusion on the subject of eternal punishment. **Professor F.F. Bruce**, in his introduction to E. W. Fudge's book, "The Fire That Consumes," has written concerning the choice between the viewpoints of eternal conscious torment, or annihilation after a period of suffering, that he would not be regarded as a Traditionalist nor a Conditionalist, and that his thoughts on these issues, would be very much in line with that of C. S. Lewis; for just as Lewis did not systematise his thoughts on the subject, he had not done so either. F. F. Bruce probably has some definite opinions on eternal judgement, but has possibly refused to disclose them because he does not want to give ammunition to unloving, critical and judgmental theologians, who use truth to shoot people down and divide up the body of Christ, rather than build it up in love and faith. **Billy Graham**, is quoted as saying in Time 74, November 15th. 1993, "The only thing I could say for sure is that hell means separation from God....When it comes to a literal fire, I don't preach it because I'm not sure about it." End of quote. I believe the fire is real, but the nature of that fire is not fully revealed to us, for it is a fire that consumes the bodies of angels as well as the bodies of men, and acts as a prison.

It is certainly true that we do not know all the details about eternal punishment. Paul states in 1Cor.13v12., "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall fully know even as I am fully known." Our knowledge of eternal realities is only partial, and we should acknowledge it; there are facts about eternal punishment, "which are secret and belong to the Lord." Deut.29v29. We should avoid aggressive dogmatism for we do not know all the facts. 2Tim.2v25.

God often speaks in ambiguous puzzles, and even the finest prophets were at times extremely troubled, because they had great difficulty in understanding and interpreting WHAT God had told to them, and WHEN the events they prophesied about would take place, and they had to spend a considerable time in intense prolonged prayer and earnest waiting upon God to obtain the correct interpretation of their revelations, it was not a purely intellectual exercise. See Numb.12v6-8. Dan.7v15,28. 8v15-27. 9v21-0-27. 10v21. 1Pet.1v10-12. Even the peerless prophet Daniel had to be instructed by angels to understand God's purposes and revelation to him, and at times even he did not understand what was told to him. Some prophecies have been sealed until

an appointed time. Dan12v4. Rev.10v4. God's prophetic words have puzzled and tested the greatest of the prophets, and God's revelations about eternal punishment certainly sift, test, and expose our characters, love, and theology. We can be quite sure that eternal punishment should never be confused with eternal punishing, for God certainly does not eternally inflict pain on the wicked, our God of love is definitely not a sadist. We read in Hos.11v8., "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zeboim? My heart churns and is turned over within Me; all My repentings and compassions are kindled together."

World history has abundantly demonstrated the misery and carnage that is produced in the world by power hungry worldly and religious leaders who have acted out Satan's cruel, evil and selfish plans, and soon the world will experience the greatest blood-bath it has ever known through following Satan's evil plans. The choice is either war and misery without end, or a Divine judgement on evil, and the rule of love and righteousness that produces peace. Is.32v12,17. After the judgement of the Great White Throne, God will make sure that there will be no more sorrow through sin, or any kind of sorrow at all, God will sadly and reluctantly commit to eternal judgement those whose desire to sin forever makes them a positive menace to the peace and happiness of His kingdom. Then He will place before His children those treasures which will forever satisfy and rejoice our hearts; endless variation, expansion, "creations beyond imagination", and above all the revelation and all-pervading presence of God our Father and our Saviour. Our eternal joy and delight will be in our God and Saviour. Will you be in that kingdom of light and love? Repent of your sins and accept Jesus as your Saviour, and enjoy life forever more.

CONCLUSION.

As we have stated before, all the facts and evidence about God's truth have not been revealed, as Paul, even with his unique apostolic revelation of New Testament truth, acknowledges. He states in 1Cor.13v12., "Now we see but a dim and blurred reflection in a mirror, as in a riddle or enigma, but then face to face. Now my knowledge is partial and incomplete, but then I shall fully know, even as I am fully known." Our present knowledge of eternal realities is only partial, and we should acknowledge it; there are facts about eternal punishment, "which are secret and belong to the Lord." Deut.29v29. So we should be gentle and avoid aggressive dogmatism. 2Tim.2v25. ("prautes.") We shall only "fully know" all the facts when God's kingdom comes, and we too are "fully known." The Conditional Immortality view that in the end God will refuse to sustain the souls of the wicked, and so they will cease to exist, could be true; for it is certainly a better reflection of the character of God than the traditional viewpoint of Augustine and Calvin. However, both Traditionalists and Conditionalists may have failed to realise that by embracing evil, the wicked may have committed a spiritual "hara-kiri," and that the evil they have embraced, will in the end devour and destroy their own beings. Mk.9v44,46,48. It could be that Rev.14v9-11., is telling us that Jesus and the holy angels examine the wicked in Hell until the evil within the wicked destroys their being and personality. When we get to the Heaven, our heavenly Father will reveal the whole truth to us. Until that wonderful day there is one thing that both Traditionalists and Conditionalists can full agree upon, and proclaim with total confidence, that God's love is perfect, and His judgements are always true and righteous. **In the light of the Cross of Jesus, we are even more convinced than Abraham, that the Judge of the whole earth will do right. Gen.18v25.**

God's prophetic words have puzzled and tested the greatest of the prophets. God often speaks in ambiguous puzzles, and even the finest prophets were at times greatly troubled, because they found it difficult to understand and interpret WHAT God had told them, and WHEN the events they prophesied would take place, and they had to earnestly seek God for the interpretation of their revelations, it was not a purely intellectual exercise. Numb.12v6-8. 1Pet.1v10-12. Even the great prophet Daniel had to be instructed by angels to understand the revelations that God gave to him, and even he could not understand some of his prophecies, for they were sealed until an appointed time. Dan.7v15,28. 8v15-27. 9v21-0-27. 10v21. 12v4. Rev.10v4. God's revelations about eternal punishment also sift, test, and expose our prayerfulness, love, and theology. Eternal punishment should never be confused with eternal punishing, for God will certainly not eternally inflict pain on the wicked, both Traditionalists and Conditionalists would heartily agree that our God of love is definitely not a sadist. We read in Hos.11v8., "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zeboim? My heart churns and is turned over within Me; all My repentings and compassions are kindled together." Doctrines on eternal punishment that deny this longsuffering mercy, amazing love, and righteous justice of God, must be rejected.

The righteous know that the wicked must go to Hell because of their determined impenitence, because if they were free happiness would be impossible. In Rev.19v1-6., God's children rejoice that the pain caused by evil is finished. If the wicked were put in a kingdom of their own, it would be a repeat of the great tribulation, and the suffering that the wicked would inflict on each other would be even be worse than the isolation of Hell. So we see that life of any kind, never mind a happy life, in the end becomes impossible to the wicked.

The Great White Throne Judgement will disclose the wonderful grace of God, His innumerable strivings and pleadings with the souls of men and angels, for God does not want any souls to perish. 2Pet.3v9. There is nothing strange about eternal judgement, it is common sense, Hell safeguards and preserves the happiness of Heaven from the malice of the wicked. The Law of God is given to preserve the happiness of society, and just as human societies have prisons to preserve society from criminals, God is forced to have His prison for those who will not repent and are determined to be eternally wicked.

Most people do not realise that habitual sin can harden and eternally set the will in evil, and many think that the doctrine of confinement in Hell is strange, evil and cruel, and cannot be true of a God of love. However, if you asked these same people if it was strange, evil and cruel to imprison unrepentant hardened criminals and murderers, they would say, "Certainly not, it is the only way to preserve society." Hell is the only possible end for those who have determined to sin eternally. Hell is not an act of cruelty by God, it is a place where cruel, hate-filled, evil people are confined to preserve the happiness of others. For a time God has allowed the wicked to make the world a misery, and this has made it obvious to all that the wicked must be put in Hell before there can be any hope of security and happiness.

Jesus said that those who reject Him, and see and hate both Him and His Father, have decided to sin forever, and would be eternally selfish and wicked if they had the opportunity. Mk.3v28-30. Jn.15v22-27. If an earthly judge were to let off unrepentant hardened criminals and murderers, because he said that he loved them, society would be enraged and they would say that the judge was unjust and wicked; yet how many think that a God of love must let off those who have rejected His salvation and are determined to sin for ever, regardless of how it would effect society. People forget that love is a desire for the well being and happiness of others, therefore, a just God of love must preserve the happiness of His subjects by removing from society those who would forever destroy any hope of happiness.

The Cross of Jesus emphasises both the justice and love of God, and the nature and end of sin.

Jesus not only died to obtain forgiveness for us, and reveal to us His wonderful love, He also died to show that God is absolutely just and will uphold the law, and that only by Jesus paying the penalty of our sin could there be any hope of forgiveness. The Cross of Christ establishes the Law, and enables God to be just and yet forgive the repentant sinner. Rom.3v26,31., However, it warns us that God cannot forgive the unrepentant sinner. God sends people to Hell because they are determined to sin forever. God is perfect in His love, meekness, and gentleness, He is a perfect gentleman, but He is also the perfect judge and custodian of the happiness of His creation.

Mankind has already seen the effects of Satan's cruel and evil plans, and soon the world will experience the worst blood-bath it has ever known, as a result of following Satan, and rejecting God's way of love. The choice is either war without end, or a Divine judgement on evil, which is then followed by God's rule of love and righteousness, which produces peace. Is.32v1,2,17. v1. Behold, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule with justice. v2. A man will be as a hiding place from the wind, and a cover from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. v17. "The work of righteousness will be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever." After the judgement of the Great White Throne, God will make sure that there will be no more sorrow through sin, or any kind of sorrow at all, God will reluctantly commit to Hell, those whose desire to sin forever makes them a positive menace to the peace and happiness of His kingdom. Then He will place before His children those treasures which will forever satisfy and rejoice our hearts, endless variation, expansion, "creations beyond imagination", and above all the glorious revelation and presence of God our Father and our Saviour, who will be our eternal joy and delight.

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