

Grace Evangel Fellowship Pulpit

GOD'S WILL FOR ALL TO BE SAVED

A Message

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God, Who wills that all mankind be saved and come into a realization of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:4)

[God] is operating all in accord with the counsel of His will. (Ephesians 1:11)

To begin – let's consider the logical conclusion from these passages. It is *God's will* that all mankind be saved, and He is operating all things in accord with the counsel of His will. What, therefore, can prevent God's will from taking place?

Examine for yourself these passages in their full context. I think you'll see that they mean exactly what they say. They express God's will and His plan for all of mankind to ultimately be saved.

So why is it not this simple? Why are we prevented from understanding this very simple, very gracious, very powerful plan of God? How can all believers not understand what God is saying here?

Aion

First – let's look at a key word in the original languages that is largely misunderstood; *aion*. If we examine all of the passages in the Scriptures where this word is found, we must come to the conclusion that the word means *age* or *eon* – an extended period of time. This is difficult to see in most Bible translations, since *aion* has been handled so inconsistently by the translators. If “eternal” seems to fit in the opinion of the translator, then “eternal” is what we will see in our translation. If “eternal” will *not* fit the context, then another word is used – like “age.” But how can a single word employed by God mean two opposite ideas – never-ending and a time period with an end?

Our English word *eon* comes directly from the Greek *aion*, and as we learned in our school days it means “age” – a long period of time; but not without end.

Consider all of the various forms in which we see *aion* in the Scriptures. (I will use the English transliteration *eon* from this point forward.)

Eon (singular)
Eons (plural)
Before the eon
Before the eons
End of the eon
End of the eons
Eon of the eon
Eon of the eons

Can these variations be chalked up to sloppiness on the part of those inspired to record the things that God revealed to them? If there *is* such sloppiness, how can we truly know that which God is wanting to reveal? No – I suggest there is meaning to be gleaned from each of these variations. God chose the different forms of *eon* with precision and purpose.

Certainly the variations demonstrate that the Greek *aion* does not mean eternal or endless. What would be the meaning of “before eternity” or “end of eternity?” And if the singular *eon* means endless, why would we see the plural *eons*? An *eon* is a period of time with a beginning and an end – hence “before the eons” and “end of the eons.”

A careful study of the Scriptures reveals an unfolding of time, and what appears to be five distinct eons – and an *end* to these eons. We live in what is referred to as *the present wicked eon* (Galatians 1:4). There is a *coming eon* (Mark 10:30), and *oncoming eons* (Ephesians 2:7). There was a time *before the eons* (1 Corinthians 2:6-8), also stated as *before times eonian* (Titus 1:1-3; 2 Timothy 1:9-10). Jesus said that the blasphemy of the spirit will not be pardoned *in this eon nor in that which is impending* (Matthew 12:32); though He does not say that pardon would not come at the end of the eons.

So, there is ample evidence that *eon* is not eternal or everlasting. G. Campbell Morgan, one of the most well-known and respected Bible teachers and preachers in history, wrote,

“Let me say to Bible students that we must be very careful how we use the word ‘eternity.’ We have fallen into great error in our constant use of that word. There is no word in the whole Book of God corresponding with our ‘eternal’ which as commonly used among us means absolutely without end.” (God’s Methods with Men, pages 185-6)

The words *aion* and *aionian* occur 199 times in the New Testament. In the King James Version, the word is translated “ages” 2 times, “course” one time, “world” 43 times, and “eternal” or some variation the remaining 153 times. So, in 46 of the 199 occurrences (or 23% of the time) the King James Version recognizes that the word cannot be properly translated “eternal,” since it is clearly a limited duration being expressed.

Admittedly, when we translate from the Greek it is sometimes necessary to use English *idiom* or expression to relay the meaning – resulting in different English words to express the same Greek word. But could a single Greek word carry such opposite meanings as “eternal” and “temporal?”

The idea of “forever” originated from tradition and the theology of mankind. But throughout God’s Word He speaks of long periods of time called *eons*. The Bible seeks to tell us about this time period known collectively as *the eons* (or ages) when God works toward the fulfillment of His purposes.

Once the eons have ended this does not mean the things that are *eonian* must end. The phrase *eonian God*, for example, speaks of God as He works in the eons. When the eons conclude, this does not mean that God ceases to exist, as we see in 1 Corinthians 15 when God becomes *All in all* after the eons have ended.

In other cases, though, things that exist in the eons *will* end when the eons have concluded. The *eonian kingdom*, for example, ends at the consummation of the eons (1 Corinthians 15) when Christ delivers up the kingdom to God, and when there is no longer a need for *sovereignty, authority, or power*. God concludes the ages by becoming All in all.

At the consummation when the final enemy (death) is abolished and when God becomes All in all, fulfilling His ultimate purpose, there will no longer be a need for the lake of fire (the second death) that had existed during the eons, for it will have fulfilled its purpose.

Romans 11:36 tells us that all is *out of God*. 1 Corinthians 15:28 tells us that God will ultimately be *All in all*. The eons are the period of time between, which God uses to accomplish His will and His purpose to get to the end goal.

Hell

Another word in the Scriptures that is greatly misunderstood is *hell*. I had always been taught that those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Saviour in this lifetime will spend eternity in heaven, and those who do not will spend eternity in hell, tormented forever by flames as the just punishment for their disbelief.

In our English translations, three different Greek words are mixed together and translated with the single word "hell." *Hades* is used 11 times in the New Testament, *gehenna* is used 12 times, and *tartarus* is used once. The KJV renders all of these instances as "hell" except for once, where "hell" will not fit and "grave" is used.

Hades is a word constructed from the Greek roots *a* (meaning "un") and *idios* (to perceive). So, the word construction would infer a meaning of "unseen" for the Greek *hades*. The "h" at the beginning of *hades* comes from a breathing mark which affects the pronunciation of the otherwise *ades*.

In the Old Testament we find the Hebrew *sheol* used 65 times. The KJV renders *sheol* as "hell" 31 times, "grave" 31 times, and "pit" 3 times.

If you use a concordance to look at every passage where *sheol* is used, you will see why the translators used "grave" in many instances. It is because "hell" as we understand it would not be appropriate. For example, in Psalm 16:10 David would not be in "hell;" would he? The NIV uses "grave" in this case.

Acts 2:27,31 makes a direct reference to this Psalm 16 passage. Here we learn that *hades* is the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew *sheol*.

So the translators reasoned that the wicked are going to hell. But they could not treat the word *sheol* in a consistent manner, as a study of all Scriptures will reveal that *sheol* is the place where *all* will go; wicked and righteous alike.

Sheol in all cases is concerned with the state of death, where all human activities cease. Like *hades*, *sheol* would be properly translated *unseen*. This *unseen place* is where *all* go when they die, saved or unsaved, to await the resurrection.

So, as was the case with *aion* we see the same inconsistent treatment of the Hebrew word *sheol*. There is a big difference between "hell" and "grave," although both are used as translations for this same Hebrew word. The Concordant Literal Version translates *hades* and *sheol* consistently as *unseen*.

The penalty for sin

Let's pause for a moment and consider the penalty for sin. In Genesis 2:17 we read in the Concordant Version:

From every tree of the garden, you are to eat, yea, eat. Yet from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you are not to be eating from it, for in the day you eat from it, to die shall you be dying. (CV)

To die shall you be dying! In Chapter 3 of Genesis we see the sin of Adam and Eve, and the penalty for their sin is invoked. They were expelled from the garden, expelled from the presence of God, and prohibited from eating from the tree of life. The process of dying has begun, in accordance with the penalty for sin, *Dying, thou dost die*.

Paul spoke about this in Romans 5:12 ...

Even as through one man sin entered into the world, and through sin death, and thus death passed through into all mankind, on which all sinned ...

So it all started with Adam's sin, which led to the penalty – his “dying condition.” Mortality! This dying condition was passed to Adam's descendents; and this dying condition gives us a weakness and a propensity to sin. It is this dying condition, resulting ultimately in death, that is the penalty for sin. Sin embodies us in this fleshly state, and the resulting weakness leads to our sinning – our “missing the mark.”

So, where did the idea of *hell* as a place of eternal torment come from? It came not from the Word of God, but from pagan philosophy and myth. The Greeks saw Hades as the spirit world; an intermediate state after death. Their myths developed images of Hades that have been preserved to the present day.

The well-known “Dante's Inferno” comes from “Divine Comedy,” the story of a fictitious trip through heaven, hell and purgatory. Dante was a great poet, and he exerted a strong influence on society in his day.

We have allowed these pagan ideas of “hell” to taint our understanding of the Word of God. Dante, and those creating the myths of old, misused the Greek *hades*. Whereas *hades* simply refers to “the unseen place,” the myths painted a fictitious picture of this place. They described in detail this place that no person has ever seen, and much of our thinking about death, what happens to us after death, and the “after-life” has come from these writers, not from the Word of God.

As used in the Bible, *sheol-hades* is not the place that Dante or the myth writers of old described, as we can clearly see when examining every occurrence of these words in the Scriptures. Let us look to God's Word to understand the destiny of mankind, and not to images created by pagan writers which taint God's character.

Death

Now considering “death” a bit more closely – a study of the Scriptures will reveal that individuals do not go immediately to heaven upon death. Some will use a few isolated passages of Scripture – misinterpreted, taken out of context, or mistranslated – to justify the position that the saved go immediately to heaven. This is a study unto itself, and well worth your serious exploration into God's Word. For now, though, let us look at how “death” is described in the Scriptures.

*And the soil [referring to the physical body] returns to the earth just as it was,
And the spirit, it returns to the One, Elohim (God), Who gave it. (Ecclesiastes 12:7 CV)*

Consider the example of Jesus. At the point of death, He committed His spirit to the Father (Luke 23:46), His soul was in *hades* (Acts 2:27,31), and His body was buried in the grave (soil).

In short, death is a return to the original state of existence before God brought the elements (soil and spirit) together to form a living soul. The body, created from the elements of the earth (soil), returns to the earth (soil). The spirit which was “breathed into” the body to form life returns to God. The soul, which did not exist before God created life, returns to the “unseen.”

The soul, in *hades* or the *unseen* place, has no consciousness.

The living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything. (Ecclesiastes 9:5)

No one remembers you when he is dead. (Psalm 6:5)

The dead are not in a conscious state. In some cases, death is even equated to sleep – a state of unconsciousness (Psalm 13:3; Daniel 12:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:13).

Death is simply a dissolution or dis-assembly of the body and spirit, and the soul that was created at their union sleeps in the *unseen* place, awaiting the resurrection. Those of our friends who have died are now in this *unseen* place. One day they lived in our midst, and the next we no longer see them, or hear them, or touch them.

Some may protest, “Are you saying my loved ones are not in heaven at this moment?” I, too, had been taught for years that upon death one goes immediately to heaven or to hell for eternity, but this is not supported by Scripture.

Knowing my loved ones are asleep at this moment instead of in heaven causes me no concern. Either way I mourn their loss in this lifetime. But I do not mourn as those who have no hope! I praise God and marvel at His grace and His love, knowing that they are asleep, awaiting the miraculous day of resurrection which is foretold and assured in the Word of God!

Gehenna

Let us now look at another word in the Greek that is commonly translated *hell*.

Gehenna is a word not used by any Greek authors. It is the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew “Gai Hinnom,” or “Valley of Hinnom.” The Valley of Hinnom, or *Gehenna*, is not a spiritual place like the common notion of “hell.” It is an actual, physical place.

In 2 Chronicles 28:3 and 33:6 it is a place where the Jews would sacrifice and burn their children in idolatry. King Josiah, when making his reforms, *defiled* the place *so as to lure no one to make his son or his daughter pass through fire to Molech.* (2 Kings 23:10)

Later the place was used as a garbage dump. In Jesus’ day, fires burned in Gehenna to destroy the refuse of Jerusalem.

Much of our problem is that when we hear Jesus talk about the kingdom in the gospels, we think He is talking about heaven. The kingdom and heaven have been *confused* by faulty Bible interpretations.

The Old Testament prophets talked about a restoration of the physical kingdom – like the one in David’s day, except with the Messiah upon the throne. This future kingdom will be a physical, restored kingdom upon the earth. The “Sermon on the Mount” is the code of laws that will be enforced when the kingdom is set up.

In Matthew, when Jesus mentions *Gehenna* as He speaks of the Kingdom to be restored to Israel upon the earth, his hearers knew He was referring to the Valley of Hinnom, and that casting one into this refuse dump for Kingdom violations was the topic. Had Jesus been introducing, for the first time ever, the concept of an eternal torment, there would have been questions and a further explanation given as this would have been an entirely new concept. Up until now the penalty for sin has been death; not eternal torment. This has been the case since death was first introduced early in Genesis, and it has been the case throughout the entire Old Testament.

So *Gehenna*, or the Valley of Hinnom, is a physical location outside of Jerusalem, and from Jesus’ words we see that it will again play a role in the future restored kingdom where immediate judgment will be meted out for transgressions, and where those committing crimes worthy of death will be cast. Those hearing Jesus’ words as He spoke

would have been quite disturbed about the possibility of being cast into Gehenna. For a Jew to be denied a proper burial would be shameful. To have one's body cast into Gehenna, this refuse dump outside Jerusalem, would be a disgrace.

Tartarus

The Greek word *tartarus* is used only once in Scripture (2 Peter 2:4):

For if God spares not sinning messengers, but thrusting them into the gloomy caverns of Tartarus, gives them up to be kept for chastening judging ...

Tartarus, then, is a place where sinning messengers (angels) are kept as they await the judgment. It does not refer to a place where men are sent at all, nor does it speak of a final destination where there is everlasting torment. It is a temporary place reserved for sinning messengers ... period!

Part of the problem, then, is that one Hebrew word and three different Greek words – with three very distinct meanings – have been carelessly combined into a single word *hell*, to support the present-day image of *hell*.

It is interesting to consider our English word *hell* for a moment. This word *helan*, of Anglo Saxon origin, had an original meaning of “to cover up” or “to hide,” much like what we have seen *sheol* and *hades* really mean. In some parts of England, the word is still used to mean something that is covered over. Some common English words, like *helmet* (to cover one's head), have come from the root *helle*.

The lake of fire

Now besides the several Hebrew and Greek words translated *hell*, the *lake of fire* is mentioned five times in Scripture. Only two of these refer to conscious torment, and in both cases no humans are included in the description – only the wild beast, the false prophet, and the Adversary (Revelation 19:20; 20:10). We are told they will be tormented not forever and ever, but for the eons (at least two) of the eons.

Later in Revelation we see the other three references to the lake of fire, this time involving humans.

And the sea gives up the dead in it, and death and the unseen (hades) give up the dead in them. And they were condemned, each in accord with their acts. And death and the unseen were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death—the lake of fire. And if anyone was not found written in the scroll of life, he was cast into the lake of fire. (20:13-15)

To him who is thirsting I shall be giving of the spring of the water of life gratuitously. He who is conquering shall be enjoying this allotment, and I shall be a God to him and he shall be a son to Me. Yet the timid, and unbelievers, and the abominable, and murderers, and paramours, and enchanters, and idolaters, and all the false—their part is in the lake of burning with fire and sulphur, which is the second death. (21:7-8)

We observe two important details in these instances. First; we are not told how long the individuals will remain in the lake of fire. Second; we learn that this lake of fire is “the second death.”

Interestingly – our word “fire” comes from the Greek *pur*. Our words “purify” and “purge” come from this root. We see instances in the Old Testament where fire is indeed used to purify.

So, could it be that the lake of fire is the presence of God – as when God appeared to Moses in the burning bush – purifying and refining instead of tormenting? One thing we do know; the lake of fire will fulfill God's purposes in some way; and we do not read of *any* of its participants remaining there forever and ever.

I could never understand how God, who is a God of love, could torment in fire forever those who did not accept Jesus Christ as Saviour in this short lifetime. I can *fully* understand the lake of fire if its purpose is refinement and purification; consistent with the love of God, and with His ultimate goal of saving all creation at the end of the ages.

I do not question that there is a judgment; surely there is! I do not question that there is a lake of fire! But the Bible tells us that the lake of fire is the second death, and death is not eternal but will one day be abolished (1 Corinthians 15).

The nature of God's judgment and punishment

Let's consider for a moment the *nature* of God's judgment and punishment. The Greek *krino* and *krisis* are properly translated "judge" or "judgment." This is a *neutral* term, simply signifying that one's case has been reviewed and determined by the Righteous Judge. It does not in and of itself designate the *nature* of the punishment.

But the KJV renders these words in a variety of ways, clearly not all relaying the same meaning: judgment, damnation, condemnation, accusation, and avenge.

A passage often used to "prove" an eternal hell is the separation of sheep and goats event described in Matthew 25:46,

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.
(KJV)

"Everlasting punishment" in this passage is *kolasin aionion* in the Greek. William Barclay, well known Greek scholar, professor and author of the popular "The Daily Study Bible Series" commentary says:

The Greek word for punishment is kolasis, which was not originally an ethical word at all. It originally meant the pruning of trees to make them grow better. I think it is true to say that in all Greek secular literature kolasis is never used of anything but remedial punishment. (page 66, "William Barclay, A Spiritual Autobiography")

John Wesley Hanson writes in "The Greek Word Aion-Aionios,"

All God's punishments are those of a Father and must therefore be adopted to the improvement of his children. (pg. 50)

The argument was introduced by Augustine that if *aionios kolasis* did not mean "endless punishment" then there is no assurance for the believer that *aionios zoe* means "endless life." It is interesting to note that it was not until the 5th century A.D. that theologians began for the first time to introduce the sense of endlessness, rather than eonian (or age-abiding) which had been the interpretation prior to that time.

It seems, then, that the new meanings for the words *aionian* and *kolasis* crept in out of a fear that eternal life could not be supported unless there was also eternal punishment. And if punishment was eternal it could not be corrective in nature, so it must be vengeful. As a result, we have come to associate the passages referring to judgment as punishment to repay for past wrongs. Instead God's Word refers to judgment as a correction, chastisement or discipline.

God has always stressed the importance of forgiveness. Of the lost ones, Jesus said,

What man of you, having a hundred sheep, and losing one of them, is not leaving the ninety-nine in the wilderness and is going after the lost one, till he may be finding it?
(Luke 15:3)

How can God, who places such emphasis on forgiveness, come to the point where He refuses to forgive? How can God, who places importance on the one lost sheep, be satisfied if all the sheep are not securely in the fold when all is said and done?

Does it not make better sense that the purpose of judgment is for correction, in preparation for a future day when every knee shall bow before Him? Is this not more consistent with God's character of love and forgiveness?

Could God really be filled with love and power and wisdom, and yet be *unable* or *unwilling* to find a way to bring the necessary correction to every one of His creation, in order that every knee bows before Him?

If an earthly ruler condemned even the vilest criminal to be kept alive just to be tortured forever, we would shudder at his cruelty. But we have inherited the current orthodox teachings about God that calmly attribute such activities to Him, while also teaching that He is a God of love.

But the Bible does not teach this at all. Man has intervened and has placed his philosophies and pagan ideas within the Word of God. The modern English translations now perpetuate these man-made ideas, primarily because of a few words mis-translated and misinterpreted. We are taught of a God of love, but a God who is also very harsh. Some say this is necessary because of God's holiness and justice, but is God not able to use His love and power to bring about justice without losing a single sheep from the fold?

Concordant Version

Since I have mentioned "The Concordant Version" a few times, let me say a few words about it. In creating this version in the early 1900's, Mr. Knoch and his associates went about their work very systematically. They wanted to study, and to allow others to study, the pure Word of God, untainted by the bias of men as far as can be achieved.

The translation assumes that if God chose to use two distinct Greek words, He had a reason for doing so and it would behoove the earnest student to seek the distinction God was wanting to make.

Additionally, most English translations will take a single word that God has chosen in the originals and translate it in different ways to suit the idea the translator is wishing to relay, allowing his biases and preconceived notions to shape the translation. We have seen this with the Greek word *aion* as previously noted.

Even in secular writings if a distinct idea is being presented, great care is taken in word selection so as not to lose the meaning of the thought being relayed. In the business world I have written many letters to customers or prospective customers. Where a crucial matter is at stake, I choose my words very carefully, considering the precise impact upon the reader.

If the Bible is the revelation of God, and if He is desiring to reveal certain ideas to mankind, would He not take precise care in choosing His every word?

In developing the Concordant Translation, each individual Greek word was closely examined. Each word was studied in every occurrence within the New Testament to determine the best English equivalent to be used. As much as was possible the meaning

for each word was determined from the way the word was used within the New Testament, and not how other human authors may have used the word.

To preserve distinctions made by God, each individual Greek word was matched with a unique English equivalent. The same English word was not used for different Greek words, and differing English words were not used when a single Greek word was used.

The translation was named "Concordant Literal" because of this methodology. Individual words were translated not because a human translator chose an English rendering which could vary from phrase to phrase based on their opinion. Instead, a "concordance" was employed to examine every instance where a single Greek word was used and based on all of these readings a single English equivalent was determined. God had a reason for using the same Greek word in multiple cases, and He had a reason for using different Greek words as He intended to relay distinct meanings.

This word-for-word literal approach seems quite scientific and straightforward, but the fact of the matter is that the final product would be very difficult to read and study. And so the Concordant translation takes one final step in putting the translation into English idiom. In doing so there may be times when a single Greek word could result in several different English words, but this is kept to a minimum, and the English words employed will retain the original Greek *idea*. When God chooses a particular Greek (or Hebrew) word, He is intending to express a particular *thought*, but because of language differences it may be necessary to use a variety of English *words* to express this single thought. But always the same Greek or Hebrew *thought* or *idea* must be relayed.

In order to remain accountable to the reader, the Concordant Version provides a "Keyword Concordance" with everything that is needed to trace back to the original Greek, so the English idiom is not totally relied-upon. Unlike other English translations, the reader can examine for himself the English word used to translate any given word in the original Greek. While not perfect, the method used by the Concordant translation is scientific, systematic, uniform, and consistent.

The ALL passages

Back to the subject at hand! Now that we have reconsidered the meaning of *eon*, *hades*, *Gehenna*, *tartarus*, *sheol*, and the *lake of fire*, let's turn to the many references to the salvation of ALL in the Scriptures.

Because I had been taught that *some* would not be saved but would spend eternity in hell, I always found it necessary to *restrict* these ALL verses, even though the context does not make any restriction. If we do not restrict the *all*, there are contradictions within God's Word (as commonly translated), and this cannot be. We determine that because of eternal punishment the ALL passages cannot really mean *all*, but only "all who accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour in this lifetime." We eliminate the contradictions within God's Word by placing restrictions on some passages.

But now we have seen that *aion* should not be translated "eternal," but *eon* or *age*. And we have seen that "hell" as found in the Bible is not the place of eternal punishment we had been led to believe. And we have seen that God's "punishment" is really a *remedial discipline*, not to torment but to *correct*.

And so when the Bible uses the word ALL maybe that is exactly what is meant ... ALL without any restriction. Let's look at some of these passages.

We rely on the living God, Who is the Saviour of all mankind, especially of believers. (1 Timothy 4:9-11)

So God is the Saviour of ALL mankind, not just believers! Some say that the word *especially* restricts the *all* to believers. But this is clearly not what the writer is expressing, or he would have simply said that God is the Saviour of all who believe.

The word *especially* in this passage is *malista* in the Greek, and we also find this word in Galatians 6:10,

Consequently, then, as we have occasion, we are working for the good of all, yet specially for the family of faith.

Do we interpret this to mean that we are not to work for the good of all, but *only* for those within the family of faith? Certainly not! We are instructed to work for the good of ALL, and in a special way for those within the family of faith.

Likewise, when we read that God is the Saviour of ALL, and *especially* those who believe, we see that while God is truly the Saviour of ALL, there is something special or unique about those who believe in this present age. Certainly there is; for believers are enjoying a realization of their salvation in this present era. And they will experience *eonian life* and not the second death in the era to come. But there will come a time, at the end of the ages (as seen in 1 Corinthians 15) when death will be abolished and when God becomes All in all, and ALL will be saved.

Now on to another passage ...

God, who wills that all mankind be saved and come into a realization of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:4)

Some will say that while it is God's *will* that all mankind be saved, since he has given us free will, it may be possible that some will reject Him, and will not be saved. In other words, God's will *cannot* be realized because the will of mankind to reject Him, or the will of Satan to deceive, will overcome God's will to save all mankind.

Assuming we have free will (and that we do not simply *think* we have the ability to freely choose at every turn), consider this. When God created man in that perfect Garden of Eden, evil was already present. Man did not even have the ability to exercise his free will on neutral ground, but was tempted and enticed by the serpent who was also in the Garden.

Man disobeyed and was expelled from the Garden. The consequence was the process of *dying*, leading ultimately to *death*. But Scripture tells us that God knew the cross would be necessary even *before the disruption of the world* (1 Peter 1:19-21). In other words, God *knew* that man would sin and death would enter the scene.

But what if God could, through the course of time (the *eons*), in His infinite wisdom and power and love, find a way to save ALL of mankind?

Consider the life of Joseph. He was mistreated by his brothers, sold into slavery, framed by Potiphar's wife, jailed ... yet ultimately God used all of this to accomplish *His* purpose. Despite the free will of Joseph's brothers who sought to harm him, or Potiphar's wife who sought to frame him, or anyone else who may have entered Joseph's life; still God was able to accomplish His purpose.

And you, you devised against me evil, yet the Elohim (God) devises it for me for good, that it may work out as at this day, to preserve alive many people. (Genesis 50:20, CV)

God's purpose was to save His people when the famine struck; and in the process to save the Egyptians as well. He selected Joseph as His instrument to accomplish this. Despite

the free will exercised by those who sought to harm Joseph or thwart God's will, His will prevailed.

Consider Ephesians 1:11 which speaks of God as:

The One Who is operating all in accord with the counsel of His will.

If it is God's will that ALL mankind is saved, and if God is truly operating ALL in accord with the counsel of His will, who can thwart His plan?

I think of the power of advertising, which has become a detailed science. Billions of dollars are spent on advertising, with the objective of influencing our decisions. Advertising gives us the desire to buy things we didn't know we really needed or wanted. Our free will has not been removed, yet we often make decisions because of the influence of advertising.

If advertising executives can influence our free will in this way, why do we question God's ability to allow free will, but to ultimately bring all mankind to the point where He is recognized, and that every knee bows before Him?

Moving on – there are a few instances in Scripture where Adam is directly contrasted with Christ.

For since, in fact, through a man came death, through a Man, also, comes the resurrection of the dead. For even as, in Adam, all are dying, thus also, in Christ, shall all be vivified. Yet each in his own class ... (1 Corinthians 15:21-23)

Does this tell us that ALL die in Adam, but only those accepting Jesus Christ as Saviour in this lifetime will live in Christ? Unless we restrict the ALL who die in Adam, how can we restrict the ALL who will live in Christ?

Now consider the following passages that speak of Christ's purpose ...

Lo, the Lamb of God, which is taking away the sin of the world. (John 1:29)

One Mediator of God and mankind, a Man, Christ Jesus, Who is giving Himself a correspondent Ransom for all. (1 Timothy 2:6)

Every knee should be bowing ... every tongue should be acclaiming ... (Philippians 2:10 and Isaiah 45:23)

For even as you once were stubborn toward God, yet now were shown mercy at their stubbornness, thus these also are now stubborn to this mercy of yours, that now they also may be shown mercy. For God locks up all together in stubbornness, that He should be merciful to all. (Romans 11:30-32)

Where is the restriction on the ALL in these passages? Again, we have placed the restriction there in our thinking to reconcile these passages with those that talk about eternal condemnation. But once we recognize that the Bible does not teach eternal condemnation but only age-abiding correction, we can appreciate these wonderful passages for what they really are.

I, if I should be exalted out of the earth, shall be drawing all to Myself. (John 12:32)

William Barclay, respected teacher and commentator, says of this passage:

The word all means all. It is not possible for the word all to mean anything else, but all. Part of the trouble in the interpretation of Scripture is the refusal of people to take it at its face value which is nearly always right. (From "Universal Reconciliation, a Brief Selection of Pertinent Quotations" compiled by Michael Phillips, page 26.)

I am in no way mitigating Christ's work upon the cross. Christ's death and subsequent resurrection were very necessary in order for us to be granted salvation. The only question is the scope of Christ's work upon the cross. Does it have effect only for those who believe upon Him in this lifetime, or will there come a day when ALL are saved by His work upon the cross?

Now consider very carefully Colossians 1:16-20 ...

for in Him is all created, that in the heavens and that on the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones, or lordships, or sovereignties, or authorities, all is created through Him and for Him, and He is before all, and all has its cohesion in Him. And He is the Head of the body, the ecclesia, Who is Sovereign, Firstborn from among the dead, that in all He may be becoming first, for in Him the entire complement delights to dwell, and through Him to reconcile all to Him (making peace through the blood of His cross), through Him, whether those on the earth or those in the heavens.

ALL is created through Him, and ALL is reconciled. Consider the global nature of this passage. ALL CREATION is included ... visible and invisible. He is the firstborn from among the dead. In Him the entire complement now delights to dwell (the Body of Christ comprised of those believing in this present age). And through Him ALL is reconciled.

When will the salvation of all take place? We turn our attention to 1 Corinthians 15:21-28,

For even as, in Adam, all are dying, thus also, in Christ, shall all be vivified. Yet each in his own class:

*the Firstfruit, Christ;
thereupon those who are Christ's in His presence;
thereafter the consummation,
whenever He may be giving up the kingdom to His God and Father,
whenever He should be nullifying all sovereignty and all authority and power.*

For He must be reigning until He should be placing all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy is being abolished: death. For He subjects all under His feet ...

Now, whenever all may be subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also shall be subjected to Him Who subjects all to Him, that God may be All in all.

This is the grand conclusion of the ages. God has taken what mankind (and Satan) have intended for evil, and He has used it to achieve good. He has operated all in accord with the counsel of His will to achieve His will ... that ALL mankind be saved. Some have recognized the greatness of God, and the work of the Saviour, in this lifetime, by faith. Others have taken longer, but now find salvation also. Every knee is now bowing in subjection before Him. Every person has found salvation. Every lost sheep has been found. The purpose of the eons has been achieved, and God is now All in all.

Is all of this too difficult for God? Thomas Allin states in his "Christ Triumphant" (pg. 1),

All forms of partial salvation are but so many different ways of saying that evil is in the long run too strong for God.

The Consummation

Some point to the lake of fire at the end of Revelation, insisting that it continues to burn and torment its inhabitants for eternity. But let's look a bit more closely at this.

As Revelation comes to an end, we see the end of the ages. But as the last "Amen" of Revelation 22 is uttered, there is more to come. The crowning event of the ages is found in

1 Corinthians 15, the *consummation* of the ages. Here God reveals what happens when the ages have ended.

There are a number of reasons to conclude that 1 Corinthians 15 happens *after* the end of Revelation 22.

In Revelation we see the slaves of God reigning (22:5) and kings of the earth (21:24). But in 1 Corinthians 15 we see a time when all sovereignty, authority and power are nullified; having served God's purpose.

In Revelation we see Christ seated on the throne (21:5). But in 1 Corinthians we see that Christ must reign *until* He places all enemies under His feet; and when all is subject to Christ, He then subjects Himself to God (15:25-28).

In Revelation we see the lake of fire; the second death (21:8). But in 1 Corinthians 15:27 we see the last enemy, death, abolished.

In Revelation 22:2 we see leaves on the tree for the cure of the nations, implying corruptible bodies needing the leaves to sustain life. But in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 we see an incorruptible, spiritual body.

We note the Jewish character throughout Revelation. We see the twelve tribes (21:12), the twelve apostles (21:14), and the nations outside the city (21:24). But in 1 Corinthians 15 there are no Jewish references, and in Paul's later writings there is no barrier between Jew and Greek.

Revelation describes a physical place upon the earth, with mortal bodies, and much like our present world except with Christ reigning and keeping evil in check (22:14-15). But in 1 Corinthians we see a spiritual realm, with no corruption, no reign, no power. All are subjected. There are no enemies, no death, no sin, no rebellion. The purpose of the ages has been accomplished, and God is now All in all. How could God be All in all with death, the enemy, still present?

Revelation is a description of the final age or eon. 1 Corinthians 15 is a description of the consummation which occurs *after* the ages have been completed. The climax of God's Word, then, is found in 1 Corinthians 15 when God becomes All in all. The book of Revelation does not take us quite this far.

With God All in all, all things have been reconciled to God, despite the plans of the enemy and the rebellion of the flesh which have seemed to triumph at times. Corruption is eliminated, and even our bodies are now incorruptible, not even needing the leaves from the tree of life to sustain life. The worst enemy of all, death, has been abolished.

In 1 Corinthians 15 we finally see every knee bowing before the Lord. The salvation of all has not meant the ignoring of sin. The lake of fire, the second death, has accomplished its work. All men now recognize the wondrous ways of God, and His grace as expressed through the work of Christ.

The salvation of all does not negate or minimize the work of the cross. The work of Christ upon the cross, and the power of God as displayed through the resurrection, were both necessary. But now, at the end of the ages, we see the true *scope* of God's work. Despite the sin and rebellion of humanity, God has found a way to bring every soul to the point of acceptance, and every knee now bows before Him.

The ages have ended. The purpose of the eons has been accomplished. God's will that all mankind be saved has been accomplished. Wickedness and evil are gone. Death is no more. God is love, and He is All in all. Eternity in perfection has begun!

Church history

Up to this point we have looked strictly at the Word of God to shape our opinions. This is as it should be! Specific information about God and His will can only be found in His revelation to mankind, and not through speculation. But let us consider for a few moments the history of the early church.

We first observe that a belief in the ultimate salvation of all is not a new thing. Universalism has had its witnesses throughout the history of the church.

Most average people in the first few centuries A.D., and many (if not most) of the “Church Fathers” (the leaders within the church) believed in the ultimate salvation of all. And their beliefs came directly from God’s Word.

For the sake of time I will not mention names or provide quotations here. There are many books available concerning church history, though details concerning the doctrine of universalism are not included in the popular works found in Christian bookstores of our day. But these written works can be found.

I included in my own book, “At the End of the Ages,” a very limited history of those within the church that believed and taught from the Scriptures universal reconciliation. For those wishing to dig deeper I offer a few recommendations.

- “The Ancient History of Universalism” by Hosea Ballou.
- “The Greek Word Aion-Aionios” by Hanson
- “Restitution of All Things” by Jukes
- “Universal Reconciliation” by Phillips
- “Christ Triumphant” by Allin
- “The Modern History of Universalism” by Whittemore
- “Is Hell Eternal?” by Pridgeon

One final note relating to church history. The term “universalism” as used in these early church writings has nothing to do with *modern* universalism which has generated its views apart from the Word of God. To the early Christians, the Word of God led them to the doctrine that salvation was given to all of mankind through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Objections

If universal reconciliation is as clearly stated in God’s Word as I have portrayed, why do so many within the church today not see it?

First – some just don’t want to hear anything that will upset their doctrinal “apple cart.” They are happy and content where they are.

Some don’t want to work very hard or invest much time in studying the Scriptures. They are content to hear what their preacher has to say and go no further in their studies. A passage comes to mind ...

For the era will be when they will not tolerate sound teaching, but their hearing being tickled, they will heap up for themselves teachers in accord with their own desires, and, indeed, they will be turning their hearing away from the truth, yet will be turned aside to myths. (2 Timothy 4:3)

Some are too busy. Others believe they are not smart enough to understand on their own and need the “experts” to interpret the Scriptures for them. Some actually *like* the idea of hell; it is a cherished belief.

There is only one objection that, to me, has any merit. It is the fear of being led astray. But I would respond to this by saying that perhaps those within the traditional church have already been led astray, and unless they study and think for themselves there is no hope in finding the truth.

Why don't most preachers and Bible teachers see universal reconciliation in the Scriptures? They have been indoctrinated with the orthodox interpretation of the Bible that has been passed down to them. Once within the confines of orthodoxy, they are busy keeping their church or ministry afloat. Even if they had time for an independent study of the Scriptures, their livelihood depends on continuing support from their parishioners and students; so there is a built-in incentive not to rock the boat.

Those understanding truth have *always* been in the minority. The prophets of old, John the Baptist, Jesus Himself, the apostles.

Consider that by the end of their lives; John, Peter, and Paul all found themselves in the minority. Look at their closing letters and you will see that the majority had turned from them and from the truth. This being the case, the best place to be is in the minority if you truly want to understand that which God has chosen to reveal to us!

What if we fail to proclaim God's plan to ultimately save all?

There is a monumental problem I want to mention if we fail to proclaim God's plan to save all. With such an incorrect and inconsistent message that is being proclaimed by those within "orthodoxy" today, it is no wonder that many have stayed away from the faith. We must, to some extent, hold ourselves responsible for those who have rejected God.

Imagine being an unbeliever and hearing the message of the church for the first time.

"God loves you and wants to save you from your sins, so that you can live forever in heaven with Him. It's too bad this message was not embraced by your family members who failed to make a decision for Christ in their lifetime. That's the rules God has put into place. He does love us, but if we don't place our faith in Him in this lifetime He is forced to cast us into a fiery hell where we will be tormented, with no hope of relief, forever and ever. But not to worry, if you choose Christ this day you won't have to worry about that."

"Let me get this straight," says the world. "I live twenty years on this earth and I fail to understand who Christ is, even though I've been told about Him. I admit that I was in error. I can now see that. The problem is that I have died, and am now in hell, where I am being tormented, and where I will be kept alive forever and ever so that I can continue to be tormented. And now that I can see the error of my ways in that brief twenty year period I was given to live, it's too late to be forgiven and I will be spending all of eternity here in this awful place."

Sounds reasonable, doesn't it?

Is it any wonder that those of the world have a hard time understanding God as we have described Him? Where is the consistency in a God of superabounding love, Who commands us to love and forgive others for their offences, but Who is willing to cast many into a never ending hell with no chance of forgiveness?

We are keeping people away from God when we proclaim a "gospel" like this. We're supposed to be ambassadors, but we don't know what we're talking about. We're representing God falsely, we're defaming His character, and we're driving people away from Him because of our inaccuracies.

Questions I have had

Let me speak briefly about certain questions I have struggled with through the years.

I learned from my Sunday School lessons that Jesus came to this earth to die for my sins; that I might have eternal life. I learned that love was the most important thing, and that God loved the world so much that He sent Jesus. I learned that love was the summary of all of God's laws and commands.

And I learned that those who accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour in this lifetime will go to heaven when this life has ended. But those that do not, regardless of how good they lived their life, would go to hell where they would burn in torment and agony for eternity.

A short life, with eternal consequences, based on a single decision made while we have the chance.

"Yes, God is love, but He is also holy and requires justice," I was told. And while it did not seem to make total sense to me, if the Bible says this is how it is, then so be it.

I guess I never had much of a problem with Adolph Hitler in hell, or those who commit heinous crimes. But the Jews? They were certainly faithful in seeking God in a way they thought was right. Having been raised in a Jewish family, in a Jewish school, with Jewish friends; with all of the evidence being presented to them telling them that the Messiah was still to come ... it didn't seem fair that they would be in the same place as Hitler and the others.

But that's what the Bible says. It is quite simple, isn't it? It's black and white; heaven or hell; no second chance once this life is over.

I never doubted that the Bible was the Word of God. I searched the Scriptures and kept coming up with a validation of what I had come to believe. Anyone who did not receive Jesus Christ as their Saviour in this lifetime, regardless of how good or bad they lived, would spend eternity in hell.

I thought about people growing up in other nations, in cultures and upbringings much different from mine. I was raised in a Christian home. I was taught that Jesus Christ was the Saviour since day one. I was in Sunday School every Sunday.

I thought about young men just like me that were growing up in India. They were raised in a Hindu home. They were never taught about Jesus Christ. Maybe a missionary had reached them, but then I thought about all of the cultural pressure that told them that Jesus Christ was not the only path to salvation.

It didn't seem fair. But rules are rules. God is holy, and He cannot stand to have sin in His presence. So to get to heaven and to live in God's presence for all eternity, a person either had to live a perfect life (which no one can possibly do), or God would need to cleanse him and forgive him. God chose Jesus Christ as the means to accomplish that. So those that accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour are forgiven and will one day be given a glorified body and will live forever in heaven.

But what about my friend in India, who perhaps lived a better life than me? Maybe he was less selfish than me. Maybe he helped other people more than me. But if he died without accepting Jesus Christ as his Saviour in this lifetime, he would stand before God on his own merits. He would be found guilty and condemned to hell.

"God," I would plead, "isn't there a way my Indian friend can still be forgiven? Can't you still give him a glorified body fit to live in heaven? If you gave him a glorified body just like mine, wouldn't he be just as fit for heaven, to live in your presence, as me?"

I remember the Bible saying that salvation was a gift from God so that we who receive that gift have no right to boast. But I guess I do have *some* right to boast. After all, I'm smarter than my Indian friend. I made the right decision, and he did not. My wisdom in making this decision certainly shows some intelligence on my part, doesn't it?

I remember a friend of mine who died from cancer while I was on my senior trip in high school. He was only 18. I don't know if he accepted Jesus Christ as his Saviour or not, but I think about God's justice, and I wonder why he would give me so many years to make the right decision, and Bill only 18.

I had another friend whose brother was hit by a car and killed as he rode his bike alongside a country road. He was only 17. I guess that's old enough to make your own decisions, but when I was 17 I don't think I considered eternity all that seriously, since I thought I would have many years left. Jeff didn't have that chance.

One man lives to be 80 years old, and in his final 6 months, after living a sinful life, he accepts Jesus Christ as his Saviour. Heaven!

Another man lives to be 17 and is killed in an instant. He was told about Jesus Christ, but he did not make the right decision. Hell ... forever!

"Not fair," I thought, "but this is what the Bible says." God is love, but He is also holy. To me there seemed to be a big conflict between love and justice; a big chasm. But I never doubted that the Bible was God's Word, and it is indisputable truth. Who am I to question God? I would give my friend in India a second chance after death. I would give Bill and Jeff a second chance. But the Bible made no provisions for second chances. This is the way God set things up. These were His rules, and this is His world.

I remember talking to some friends when I attended seminary, and we discussed what it would be like in heaven, when we find that our loved ones aren't there. One friend believed that God would kindly wipe away every memory of that loved one. I can enjoy heaven because I will have forgotten that my loved ones ever existed. This thought did not bring me great comfort. Especially since I have five children of my own I wonder what it would be like to die, and to forget that I even had children if they didn't make the right decision.

I could better understand why some people who are not Christians have purposefully rejected Christianity, because they knew their sons and daughters and brothers and sisters made the wrong decision, and they were not intrigued by a heaven where these loved ones would not be present.

I thought again about friends my age that were dying without having accepted Jesus Christ. And I thought about Saul (Paul) who went on a rampage pulling Christians out of their homes and having them tortured and sometimes killed. But did God punish Paul? Paul had a "hardness" about him, like Osama Bin Laden. Paul condoned killing Christians and he believed he was right in doing so; even that he was serving God in doing so, like Osama Bin Laden. Paul was killing innocent people, like Osama Bin Laden. But did God give up on Paul? No! He met Him on the Road to Damascus, and struck him down, and spoke to him from the heavens, and set him straight.

Why couldn't God do that with my lost family and friends. It didn't seem fair.

It worked out quite well for Paul. God struck him down, but he didn't kill him. It seems that it would have been awfully hard for Paul *not* to make the right decision. He was blinded and helpless. Jesus Christ actually appeared to Paul and spoke to Paul. I guess that was the only way to reach a hardened guy like Paul.

But why couldn't God do the same with everyone who needed that kind of treatment, so as to save them from spending an eternity in hell?

Sometimes my mind would wander like this, but I would always come back to the Bible. There are things that I just can't understand, but I'm not God. He created this world, and everyone in it. He can provide salvation or punishment through whatever means He chooses.

More recently I began thinking about the Garden of Eden. After all, wasn't it Adam and Eve that brought death and punishment upon us in the first place? They lived in Paradise; the perfect place. God was right there in their presence. They ate from the tree of life. There would be no death. It was perfect ... or was it?

If Paradise was truly perfect, what was the serpent (Satan) doing there? He was evil, with the intent of luring Adam and Eve into sin. It doesn't seem fair. If Paradise was really Paradise it would seem that the serpent wouldn't be allowed in, and Adam and Eve wouldn't have been tempted, and perhaps they wouldn't have sinned, and maybe we wouldn't be in this mess today.

I thought this through. God placed Adam and Eve in Paradise, knowing they would be tempted, and knowing they would fall, since He had foreknown since before the disruption of the world that Christ would be a flawless and unspotted lamb (1 Peter 1:20). But still He created them! And He continues to create men and women to this day who live in a world filled with temptation, where some will accept Jesus Christ and others will not, so that He knows as He creates that some of His creation is bound for the eternal torments of hell.

I thought about all of these things, and the gulf between God's love and His justice kept getting larger (according to my reasoning), but I never doubted that the Bible was God's Word, and it was clear on the matter of heaven and hell.

But there were some issues that did seem to conflict. What about the "all" passages found throughout the Bible? These passages seemed to be in direct conflict with passages that talked about *some* not being saved. According to my Christian friends, it's quite simple. Since the Bible says that those who do not accept Jesus Christ in this lifetime will spend eternity in hell, these *all* passages must refer only to all who accept Christ. Now I don't see this restriction in the context of these passages, but it's the only explanation that makes God's Word consistent, instead of contradictory.

But don't we read that it's God's will that *all* are saved? (1 Timothy 2:4) And doesn't He cause all things ultimately to operate in accordance with His will? (Ephesians 1:11)

No. My Christian friends tell me that even though God *wishes* that all would accept Jesus Christ and be saved, He gives us free will.

So we have free will, but we're basically very fallible and weak, and to make things even more difficult we find that Satan is alive and well in this world, tempting us and leading us astray at every turn.

So even though it is God's desire that all are saved, it will not happen because He will not *force* anyone to make a decision against their will.

The good news is we have been given free will (although some will disagree, with strong Biblical support). The bad news is that many will make a wrong decision in this lifetime, since they were not as smart as others so as to make the correct decision in this lifetime,

and perhaps they had less time (17 years instead of 80) to make the decision, with Satan nipping at their heels at every turn.

So God will be All in all, when all is said and done (1 Corinthians 15:28), and Christ will have accomplished the purposes of God through His death and resurrection, but the bottom line is there will probably be more souls burning forever in torment than those in heaven.

I am thankful to have found the Concordant Version of the Bible, and the "Unsearchable Riches" magazine, published now for over 90 years. Here for the first time I learned about the many contradictions in our modern English translations which have *distorted* the word of God. The Word of God is perfect, as I had always thought. But I never studied deeply enough to understand that there are many conflicts even between the various English translations, and the translation from the Hebrew or Greek to English is inconsistent and biased.

I began reading the back issues of "Unsearchable Riches" that showed how the Concordant Version was developed, striving for consistency and accuracy. I always liked the NIV, since it was easy to understand. I learned that it may be easy to read, but it was not too faithful to the originals.

I found in "Unsearchable Riches" how each word in the Scriptures was meticulously studied. Sometimes there would be a ten-page article focused on the translation of a single word. The best part about what I was reading was the great *open-ness* of this translation. Without even knowing the Hebrew or Greek, I could trace each word back to the Hebrew or Greek, and then look up every other occurrence of that Hebrew or Greek word, to see from the contexts the meaning God intended.

I now see that truly the Word of God is perfect, and it is totally consistent. There are no contradictions, and no need to impose restrictions on the *all* passages. It is only because of the errant English translations that these restrictions have arisen. It is only because of the errant English translations that there has been a great gulf between God's love and His justice.

God will one day execute full justice, His holiness will prevail, death will be abolished, every knee will bow before Him, and He will be All in all. (1 Corinthians 15) He is not willing that any should perish. (2 Peter 3:9) His will is that all will be saved, and even now He is in the process of causing all things to work in accordance with His will.

Conclusion

So after much reading and study through the years, I have come to see that the Bible does not teach eternal torment at all. Instead, God is working His plan to ultimately save all mankind and reconcile His entire creation to Himself.

I sometimes think of the many people occupying the pews of churches today that do not know of God's plan for universal reconciliation. They are forced to accept the unpalatable doctrine of eternal torment as I once was; if they are to believe their Bibles and their pastors and teachers. And so my ministry today is to proclaim as clearly as I can God's wonderful plan – His true gospel as found within the Bible – when translated and understood correctly.

But don't take my word for these conclusions. Don't take the word of *any* scholar, teacher, or pastor. They do not even agree amongst themselves.

The most common teachings within the orthodox church today are based largely on traditions and teachings passed along through the church since the 5th century. These

teachings are not based upon the word of God, but upon the fallible traditions of men and the fallible translations of Scripture which are confused, and which are strongly influenced by the biases of the orthodox church.

In the realm of science, theories are proposed and then tested to detect error and ensure an accurate understanding. Corrections are made as necessary to perfect the theory. It is the same with theology, which is simply mankind's *theory* about God. Do not simply accept the theory or theology that has been handed to you. Study and think for yourself!

Your current beliefs about God, and about the destiny of mankind after death, have been shaped by things you have been taught since childhood. I'm not asking you to throw out your beliefs and accept mine. I *am* asking you to consider what I am presenting as a theory to be tested.

Consider the evidence. Study God's Word. Think and pray and come to your own conclusions.

This overview contains the thoughts and opinions of the author and is a work in progress as his study of the Scriptures continues. Some things that God has revealed are very clear. That Christ died for our sins; that He was entombed; and that He was roused (1 Corinthians 15:3) is clear. That all are to be ultimately reconciled to God thru the work of Christ is also very clear (1 Corinthians 15:20-28). But on many specifics in the Scriptures there are a variety of interpretations and opinions, and none should conclude they have the complete and final understanding on these matters that are less clear. The reader is encouraged to consider various opinions, but to study and to think for himself. Within the Body of Christ we should study and discuss our understandings so as to mutually reach a more complete understanding of that which God has revealed.

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