

# And These Shall Go Away ...

A rebuttal to the Orthodox doctrine of eternal punishment

By

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&

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## Matthew 25:46

kai apeleusontai outoi eij kolasin aiwnion, oi de dikairoi eij zwhn aiwnion.

**And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.**

On the face of it this Scripture would seem to settle conclusively the question of unending punishment of the lost—that is, if “the lost” can be properly tied to the “goats” listed in the teaching preceding this verse. To say that this verse is scary gives a whole new meaning to the term ‘understatement’.

Illustrating that the orthodox teaching is not good exegesis, nor in keeping with “rightly dividing the word of truth”<sup>1</sup> requires laying a rather lengthy foundation. I won’t be able to go into anywhere near the depth I would like to in this paper to lay this foundation, but I will do my best to sketch the outline of a proof and give the reader links to other resources to continue their investigation into this all-too-important topic.

In this paper, we will argue the following:

1. The Orthodox position is not consistent with God’s character or His heart.
2. The Orthodox position violates the common sense rules of grammar.
3. The Orthodox position has eradicated the very important concept of “age” from Scripture.
4. The Orthodox position makes for poor theology.
5. The Orthodox position ignores the historical context provided by the OT writers.
6. The Orthodox position is not consistent in translation and is biased in favor of applying such terms as “eternal” and “everlasting” instead of “temporary” or “age-lasting” when translating the Greek adjective aiwnioj.

I’ll begin in reverse order.

**Point no. 6.** “The Orthodox position is not consistent in translation and is biased when applying such terms as ‘eternal’ and ‘everlasting’.” As my friend James Strahan has so

cogently noticed, “The translation of the Greek word ‘aiwnioj’ into ‘eternal’ in both cases does not represent the only possible rendition.” This section of the article will attempt to show that our translators’ decision to use “eternal” is optional at best, and at worst, we will show later, is based on questionable assumptions.

With a little elbow grease<sup>2</sup> one can find out quickly the actual Greek words that underlie our English translations. Doing so, you will find that word 167 (aiwnioj) underlies the word *eternal* in both instances in this verse. However, we also know that word usage dictates word meaning. With tools such as *The Englishman’s Greek Concordance of the New Testament*, we can review the sixty-plus Scriptures where this word is used and see if the English meaning assigned “makes sense.” Most of the time, our translators were consistent in their rendering of this Greek adjective.<sup>3</sup> Overall, they rendered the term as *eternal* or *everlasting*. They ran into a problem, however, when they started to translate Paul’s use of the word. In Titus 1:2 and 2 Timothy 1:9, our translators would have us believe that Paul used this “infinite” adjective to modify a finite noun, namely, “times”—producing a non-sensical or absurd construction—i.e., a contradiction in the English mind. It would seem reasonable that if the noun is finite, then the adjective that modifies the noun must also be finite. (I’ll have more to say on this observation in points 2 and 3.)

I’ve already noted that this word—word 167—is an adjective. It is based on the noun that precedes it, word 166. That noun “aioon” or aiwn is transliterated as “eon” in English and has as its fundamental meaning, “a finite, but indefinite period of TIME”. In *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*<sup>4</sup> this word is said to have the following meanings:

1. a very long time,
2. eternity!

Please, understand the key difference here. The word can mean—according to this authority—either a finite but indefinite length of time, *or* it can mean ‘eternity’ where the measurement of time ceases to have any meaning. (Speaking of “ceases to have any meaning,” there is no mathematical term, equation, or expression that can have both an infinite or finite possibility, but let’s set that logic aside and play in the imaginary world of these linguists). You can’t tell by looking at the word itself whether it should be translated as its temporal form or by its alleged eternal form. Some will say, “The context determines which meaning.” We can say it means “eternal” in this instance, but not in that one because we all have an inspired sense of determining context! No, actually, we don’t have an inspired sense of determining context. The truth is that we and the people who write lexicons, in fact, make decisions about which form to use—although I don’t believe the Holy Spirit ever intended this word to have dual meanings—on this and other words based on our own prejudices and biases. Scripture may be inspired, but our tools—lexicons and our sense of context for example—are not. So when you tell me that “eternal” must be applied to both uses in Matthew 25:46, I’m going to ask you to explain your biases in the matter. Then I’m going to take your verse—and using my biases—translate the verse as follows:

“And they will go away into **an indefinite but not eternal length** of punishment, but the righteous into **eternal** life.”

And I’m going to be well within my rights to do so. Why? Because the very same lexicons say I can. Both meanings are clearly listed there. The adjective—being based on the noun—cannot

supersede the scope of the meaning of the noun it is based on. Since the noun is said to have finite and infinite coverage, then so also must the adjective. If enough people on textual committees decided that the context was sufficiently clear to decide that the temporal meaning of the word should be used in the manner I just illustrated, would we be any more convinced that meaning of the word was NOT established in a biased manner? I think not. So it is in this case. The translators of the AV of 1611 were Latin-speaking primary, Greek-speaking secondary type of people. Because of their proclivity to believe that God has the moral capacity and the will to punish eternally, it became easy to translate the adjective in its infinite rather than its temporal form. Still, one might wonder whether or not God really did have that meaning in mind when He inspired the authors of His text to write as they did.

**Point no. 5.** The Orthodox position ignores the historical context provided by the Old Testament writers.

We already know there is another verse in Mathew (18:8) where Jesus speaks of “eternal” (aiwnion) fire and one in 2 Thessalonians (1:9) where Paul speaks of “eternal” (aiwnion) destruction in connection with “fire” and “punishment.” It seems logical therefore, when attempting to understand Jesus or Paul’s view of “eternal” punishment, fire, or destruction to turn to the context provided by the Old Testament since the Old Testament was the Bible in the days of Jesus and Paul.

My friend, James Strahan comments at length here:

“Thirteen times Jeremiah uses the words translated “eternal” or “eternity” in the context of divine punishment. Jeremiah also mentions a fire that cannot be quenched, the same phrase used by Jesus. So let’s look at a few of these pronouncements **for Israel** when speaking about this “eternal” punishment, fire and destruction.

Jeremiah 17:4 – “For in my anger a fire is kindled that shall burn forever” (eternally). 17:27 “Then I will kindle a fire in its gates; it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem and shall not be quenched.” 25:9 “I will utterly destroy them, and make them an object of horror and a hissing, and an everlasting (eternal) disgrace.”

But the everlasting burning of God’s wrath, the unquenchable fire, and the eternal destruction, and disgrace for Jerusalem is not the end of the story. These words are followed by 31:38-40, “the days are coming, says the Lord, when the city shall be rebuilt for the Lord...The whole valley of the dead bodies and ashes... shall be sacred to the Lord (these dead bones are going to rise again!). It shall never again be uprooted or overthrown.” So it seems to me that proponents of the Orthodox view have some explaining to do with this idea of “eternal.”

Jeremiah 23:20 and 30:24 say the same thing: “The anger of the Lord will not turn back **until** he has executed and accomplished the intent of His heart.” But I thought we just read that His anger is kindled forever? The word little word “until” destroys the idea of unending punishment, eternal destruction, and unquenchable fire. Incidentally, I love how both of these verses end: “in the

latter days ye shall consider it perfectly, “ indicating to me that He anticipated our current ignorance of His intentions until near the end. 31:3-4 speaks of a new covenant and ends with “for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sins no more.” As it is written, “All Israel will be saved.”

Here in Jeremiah we see that punishment is not the end. And we have story after story in the Old Testament that teaches restoration for the likes of Sodom<sup>5</sup>, Edom, Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Samaria, and even Jerusalem **who God said was worse than her sisters Samaria and Sodom** (Ezek. 16:46-48).

So back to our original text, we need to look at the context once more to see if there is an end to this “eternal punishment” as in the references of the Bible of Jesus’ day. As in the case of Jeremiah’s discourse about Jerusalem, we see that Mathew 25 does not end in punishment, but in the hope of Calvary where the sins of the whole world were paid. For the very next verse says, “when Jesus had finished these sayings, he said unto His disciples... the Son of man will be handed over to be crucified.”

In his book, *The One Purpose of God*, Jan Bonda points out that verse 46 was not the end of the discussion. Jesus speaks of this terrible punishment, and then tells His disciples what He must do about it. Bonda:

*“ His life will be given as a ransom for many (Mathew 20:28). His blood will be poured out for many (26:28). Twice we read: “for many”. Who are these “many?” They are the many who have entered wide the gate and walk the easy road that leads to destruction (Mathew 7:13; 22:14). These are the same people of whom He just said that they will end in “eternal punishment.” But did he not give His life for “the few” who found the narrow road that leads to life (Mathew 7:14)? Certainly, also for them. But when He speaks of these “many,” He does not refer to these “few”! ... “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2)... Jesus goes the way of the cross in order to open for these many the way of escape from eternal punishment; to make sure that their “going away to eternal punishment” will be followed by their return. For that very reason He became obedient unto death on the cross.”*

The picture of Jesus coming to the rescue of those bound for destruction fits well with the carefully chosen Greek word for punishment whose root word meant the pruning of trees to make them grow better (more on this word later). Here we have another picture indicating a design and purpose in the pruning with an outcome of abundant life, not destruction or ceaseless punishment. It also fits well with 1 Corinthians 5:5 where it was the “flesh” that was to be destroyed so that the spiritual man may be saved! In Thessalonians 1:9, it is not destruction “away from the Lord,” but a redemptive process that comes “from the presence of the Lord.”<sup>6</sup>

More fascinating imagery is found in the two groups of people represented in the story as sheep and goats. I think most see the sheep as representatives of current believers and the goats as non-believers. Whatever the intended symbolism, Jesus ends the story by informing the disciples that He must fulfill the law by

becoming the sacrificial lamb of Passover. The Law of Passover stated that lambs were to be killed in the evening, and Josephus tells us the priests did so from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. Jesus died on the day of Passover at about 3:00 p.m. We are all familiar with the Passover where the Angel of Death passed over the homes with their doors covered with the blood of a lamb chosen from the sheep or the goats. The **additional** days of life given to these Israelites, His sheep, were intended to be purposeful in that their privileged role was to come out of Egypt, symbolic of the world, and participate in the establishment of His kingdom on earth. I believe this is the “life” of the “age” referred to in our text erroneously as “eternal” life.

Speaking of eternal life, those who hold the traditional view may not have realized it, but the goats are also given “eternal” life! They live forever too—just with punishment. Think about it for a moment. At the very minimum “eternal” life consists of endless existence and an ability to experience that existence i.e., senses. By this definition, we can see both sheep and goats—if you accept the Orthodox view of things—live eternally because the goats, like the sheep, must be alive eternally to receive eternal punishment. So if both groups receive the same duration as regards their future existence, why bother bringing the topic up at all? Could it be that Jesus was focusing on another aspect rather than the duration of existence? Jesus did not describe the eternal life of the sheep. But we reason that if these are two contrasting groups, then *rewards* must be in store for the sheep since it is in contrast to the *punishment*. The point being made is that the time period is the same for both. Therefore we believe Jesus was emphasizing the *quality of this life*, not its length.

Although not expressed, most folks decide the reward for the sheep is Heaven. But remember the discussion is centered on those who hear and *do* the Word—not just on those who believe as opposed to those who don’t. The text strongly implies that the goats are totally surprised for their rebuke. As a matter of fact, the sheep were surprised as well. Although both groups seemed to know of Him, neither group had recognized Him as the stranger nor the one who was naked, hungry or sick. This sounds all too familiar.

The choosing of the nation of Israel was for the purpose of becoming a light in the world. They were the ones who God chose to establish His kingdom on earth. They were given the privilege of His presence and His Word. They were called to rule and reign with Him (this calling found in the meaning of the name “Israel”) but in humility as a servant rather than in the power-driven arrogance of right. Jesus showed displeasure with the religious leaders of His day who had missed the spirit of His Word and loved the privilege more than the service. These leaders should have known better. As in other generations before us, there are many Christians today who have heard the Word and accepted the privilege of His grace, but are acting out their lives like the goats rather than taking the position of the servant like the sheep.

Salvation is gift received passively by the opening of our eyes to believe. But taking the position of a servant is a choice with rewards and consequences. I believe the sheep in this text are those who pressed into the high calling in Christ that Paul referred to in Phil. 3:14. I believe these are the people who will receive

the privilege of ruling and reigning in His kingdom because they were not only covered by the blood of the lamb, but were the ones who did the Father's will in this life as they fed the hungry, took in the stranger, clothed the naked, and visited those sick or in prison. Notice the words of the King to these sheep in verse 34: "Come you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom..."

And there is one last point about the reward of the sheep. Again, since the length of the life of the sheep and goats are the same, I believe Jesus was emphasizing quality not quantity. And you have to love how He leaves the reward part open for further investigation. It is a familiar method in the way He teaches. He does not give us all the answers directly, but He calls us to closer inspection. And by looking closer at the rewards of those who take the position of servants, we find out something about the length this reward.

As a child I often wondered what we would be ruling and reigning over in Heaven if everyone were already in perfect harmony. Who would there be left to rule over? It would seem reasonable that there would be no need to divvy out justice because it has already been established. So were we just going to a get bigger crown and proudly carry around a bunch more weight on our head; was that the goal? Later I learned more about His plan and found the ruling and reigning to be for a specified time because the Scripture says that He (Jesus) must reign (and us with Him) **until** He has put all enemies under His feet. He reigns until God becomes all in all - 1 Corinthians 15:27. So, this ruling and reigning accomplishes a purpose, then ends. If the reward is for a specified time and purpose, then would it not follow that the punishment would be for a time and purpose? Could it be that we rule and reign until the punishment has accomplished its purpose? Even if one had an option to choose between eternal or temporal when describing rewards and punishment, I believe the evidence is overwhelmingly in support of using temporal, or age lasting.

But Jesus was not only the lamb of Passover, He also became the sacrificial goat and the scapegoat in fulfillment of the law on the Day of Atonement. In the sixteenth chapter of Leviticus we find the high priest presenting two goats as a sin offering for the people. Aaron cast lots to determine which goat was to be killed as the sin offering, with the other to be led by a fit (meaning ready or timely) man and released alive into the wilderness symbolizing the removing of the sins of the people out of the camp. I believe Jesus was baptized on the Day of Atonement. His baptism was symbolic of His death thus fulfilling the role of the first goat. Immediately after the baptism, Jesus was led away by the Holy Spirit (arriving at the appointed time) into the wilderness fulfilling the role of the scapegoat by taking away the sins of the entire world. I believe Jesus used both the sheep and the goats to demonstrate His grace for both categories of people.

And this is not all. How anyone can ignore the clear teaching of Paul in 1 Timothy 4:9-11 escapes us. Paul asserts, "God is the savior of *all mankind*—especially those who believe. Preach and teach these things." We have no trouble believing that those who believe are to be saved. But why does Paul make the distinction we see here? Is it not obvious that God is the Savior of ALL who believe? But that is NOT what Paul said. Paul clearly implies that God is *also* the Savior of all who DON'T believe. When you add up the members of both

groups—those who believe and those who don't—you not at all surprisingly end with an equivalence of the phrase "all mankind." For is it not true that from a biblical view all of mankind can be viewed as either believing or not believing?<sup>7</sup>

**Point no. 4.** I wish to argue that the Orthodox position makes for poor theology. How so? Consider the following Scriptures:

<sup>21</sup>"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup>Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup>Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

Matthew 7:21-23

<sup>7</sup>"Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? <sup>8</sup>Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? <sup>9</sup>Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? <sup>10</sup>So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.' "

Luke 17:7-10

<sup>41</sup> There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. <sup>42</sup> And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? <sup>43</sup> Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. <sup>44</sup> And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. <sup>45</sup> Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. <sup>46</sup> My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. <sup>47</sup> Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.

Luke 7:41-47

<sup>8</sup>For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- <sup>9</sup>not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup>For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Ephesians 2:8-10

These combined Scriptures illustrate a powerful truth—salvation is by grace alone (and I mean solely) and is God's only plan for our salvation. Grace—unmerited favor and peace—cessation of againstness. These two things are the Gospel of Jesus Christ! God's sense of justice has been satisfied! The sin issue has been dealt with! Oh how wondrous the thought. Paul opens all 13 of his letters with this combination of grace and peace being expressed. Many have mistaken these words of Paul as a mere greeting! Paul opens all his letters with the Gospel of Jesus Christ! That is what Jesus bought for us on Calvary.

Unfortunately, too many of God's children are going to make a huge mistake by reading back to Christ the resume of their successes in serving him. That we would dare bring the dirty laundry<sup>8</sup> of our works into his presence instead of relying on His favor, His grace is grossly offensive to our Maker.

The second Scripture only strengthens this view. The best we can say to Him is that we have only done our duty—no matter how well we may have thought we served Him.

The third Scripture illustrates the true basis of our relationship with Him. We all owe Him. Some more, some less, but in the end, it doesn't matter—we all owe and NONE of us can pay. We have no currency, we have no bargaining power, no leverage. We are helpless to fix our condition. "He frankly forgave them both." *That* is our basis for salvation, His good will and kindness.

Paul tacks on a solid double-witness by emphasizing again that our salvation is an extension of His kindness. We would do well to remember that. And just to make sure you get the point, he stresses that it is not about yours or anyone else's works. "It is not of yourselves", Paul argues. We would do well to listen.

Anytime some teacher or preacher starts in on you by making you feel guilty that you're not "working" hard enough for the Kingdom, or worse—argues that your salvation is on the line because of your lack of works—I hope you will realize that you're not being taught the good news of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

So what do we find when we examine the Scripture of Matthew 25? First, we find the acquisition of "eternal" life based on works alone! How can this be? Note the damned are not lost due to lack of a confession of sin, repentance, baptism in the name of Jesus or anything else we normally associate with obtaining "eternal" life. These tenets of Christianity so crucial to our way of thinking about obtaining "eternal" life are simply not mentioned here by our Lord. Just works. (I should note in passing that what separated the sheep from the goats was conduct eerily similar to that of the Rich Man in Luke 16.)

How can this be in light of such clear teaching to the contrary? What else do we see here? We find Jesus sitting on a throne on *Earth*. (I mention this because I was taught growing up that Jesus would never set foot on the Earth again.) We find the *nations* being separated into goat and sheep nations in His presence—collectively so to speak. This would seem to be a collective judgment based on each nations behavior toward "the least of these my brethren." Commentators disagree on the meaning of these cryptic words of Jesus. Clearly the nations are composed of live people.

This is not the only judgment scene found in the Bible.

The judgment scene in Revelation 20, in contrast, has an entirely different character. In the first place, it is the dead—not the living—who stand before Him, both great and small. This appears to be an *individual* judgment—not a collective one. There appears to be no particular organization of the dead. What status they held in life is of no importance here. (As I was growing up I was taught that these judgments—the one in Revelation and the one in Matthew—were actually the same event all mashed together into one. Looking back, I don't quite know how they could have believed nor taught such a concept. )

If we accept the premise that these two judgment scenes are NOT the same event, then we must also conclude that one or the other of these descriptions—maybe, neither—must not be the true *final* judgment of all mankind.

Thus, I think the thought should at least be entertained that the judgment scene described in Matthew 25 is not the final judgment we have all been taught about since we were kids.

Until the Orthodoxy comes up with a better explanation for how the judgment scene of Matthew 25 fits into the overall stream of God's truth, we need not assign Jesus words to the final state of mankind.

**Point no. 3.** The Orthodox position has eradicated the very important concept of 'age' from Scripture. This may seem an odd departure for me to take, but I hope you will be patient as I explain the importance of this.

I have alluded to the Greek word *aiwn* or age. This word is used, I think, 102 times in the Greek New Testament. Would you care to guess how many times this word is actually translated as its most fundamental meaning? Twice!<sup>9</sup> You read right—two out of 102 times! Because of this fact, the concept of "age" has been obliterated from the English Bible, and hence, the English mind. And it's a shame too because there is so much in the Bible regarding the concept of age and the ages. I hope this will strengthen your understanding of our statements above concerning the adjective form—*aiwnioj* —of this noun. I will cite several Scriptures from the AV and then put them back in the literal Greek translation for comparison, and you, the reader, can evaluate the importance of these differences.

Hopefully the theological implications will become clear for the reader.

To start off, in Matthew 12 when Jesus pronounces the sentence for the "unforgivable" sin, the AV renders this passage as:

<sup>32</sup> And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in the world to come.

The NIV has the correct rendering:

<sup>32</sup>Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Note a few things of importance here. Ages end. There is at least one more age to come since our Lord refers to it. But if ages have endings then ages must also have beginnings, since another age is going to follow the one we are currently in. Thus ages are finite but indefinite lengths of time. See Galatians 1:4 below.

The writer of Hebrews writes in the first chapter,

1 God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, 2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;

The Greek word is the plural of age, or ages. ( touj aiwnaj ). So it is the ages God made, not worlds or the universe. (I am referring here to what *this* verse teaches. Clearly Genesis records God as the creator of the universe and all that that entails. See Colossians 1). The same book<sup>10</sup> in that great chapter on the heroes of faith makes this point even clearer.

3 Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear

As you might have guessed by now, the word here is the plural of age. The correct rendering of this verse should have been.

3 Through faith we understand that the ages (touj aiwnaj) were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear

As a side comment, the verb rendered framed in this verse implies very intricate detail. For example it is used in Matthew 4:21 of fishermen “mending their nets.” It is also used by Paul in Romans 9:22 where he describes,

22 What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction?

Note Paul implies that these vessels of “destruction” were prepared carefully “with great patience” by God. This verse will, no doubt, trouble those who believe the orthodox position, because it argues that a sovereign God has planned in His creation a role for destruction for *His* purposes and this destruction is not based upon the exercise of their “free will,” their rejection of Him, nor anything else they may have done. (In fact, God looks rather monstrous if this verse is considered only by itself.) If this destruction serves God’s purposes and God is not arbitrary in His judgments, then is it not possible, even likely, their destruction is only temporary while serving an eternal purpose? In any case the ages are the canvas on which God paints His plan of redemption for mankind. His invisible brush strokes are revealed all around us as He works out “all things after the council of His determinate will”<sup>11</sup> and brings about the results He desires. His indescribably and staggeringly complex plans, so deftly executed, are for the training of mankind and for mankind’s ultimate and eternal benefit.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians,

3 Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ,  
4 Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father:

What Paul actually said was,

3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,  
4 who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be glory *for ever and ever*.<sup>12</sup> Amen.

Thus the age we are currently in is definitely characterized by evil. Of course, I didn't have to tell you that.

Further, in discussing the church in Ephesians 3, Paul tells us that there was a purpose to the ages although you can't tell it from the AV. It states:

11 According to the eternal<sup>13</sup> purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The literal translation is "the purpose of the ages" (touj aiwnwn). With this change the above Scripture becomes:

11 According to the purpose of the ages which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There was and is a purpose to God's unfolding plan and it was and is being played out against the backdrop of the ages—those finite but indefinite lengths of time.

Paul speaks of a state before the ages came into existence—twice. 2 Timothy 1:9, and Titus 1:2.

Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; <sup>2</sup> In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;

What Paul actually said was, that God promised "pro kronwn aiwniwn," or, literally, "before times of [the] ages" i.e., before time was sub-divided into those finite, but indefinite periods of time I mentioned earlier. I admit that that AV translation correctly renders Paul's point, but in doing so, our translators have missed a golden opportunity to show how to render 'aiwnioj' the adjective, correctly with respect to New Testament writings. Thus the literal of the verse above becomes:

Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after

godliness; <sup>2</sup> In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the times of [the] ages.

This illustrates that instead of ‘aiwnioj’ being rendered ‘eternal’; it should have been translated to the same scope of the noun it modifies, or time. For if ‘aiwnioj’ is synonymous with ‘eternal’, why bother mentioning time at all?

Yet the writers of our lexicons would seriously have us believe that the adjective built on this word has ‘eternal’ scope—far beyond the scope of the noun as used by Jesus Himself and His key apostle, Paul! I’ll discuss this more fully in the next section.

**Point no. 2.** The Orthodox position violates the common sense rules of grammar.

For better or worse, we have inherited a translation of the Greek New Testament in our KJV of the Bible. The AV of 1611, dearly loved by millions, unfortunately has destroyed the concept of age as taught in the Greek New Testament. The legacy of that destruction can be seen, as I have alluded to, in the unwarranted assigning of the English word ‘eternal’ to the Greek adjective ‘aiwnioj’. This is not all though. It has also led to the inclusion in our Bibles of the ridiculous phrase “forever and *ever*” found in numerous places throughout the New Testament including the one above quoted by Paul.<sup>14</sup>

We need to be clear on this. “Forever” is a superlative. The same applies to “eternal.” There is nothing beyond them. It is nonsense to speak of forever *and ever*. It’s like arguing for something better than “best.” That’s why words such as these are called superlatives—they speak of the ultimate of what they describe. If words are to maintain their meaning—both relative and actual—we cannot sanction such gross renderings as we have here. Frankly, I think our translators simply did not know what the Greek phrases that underlay their translation meant. So they “guessed.”<sup>15</sup> They wrote down what their biases dictated they should mean. They would have been wiser to translate the phrase<sup>16</sup> literally—to let the Bible speak for itself as I so often heard growing up—and then let time, study and archeology sort out its correct meaning.

Can we really believe that the Holy Spirit was so sloppy with such dire concepts as this one to violate the common sense of ordinary language? I don’t think so. The Bible was not written for the elite, but for the everyday man or woman. Yet because of our translators’ decisions, we are left to muddle through passages that clearly reflect nonsense—to make sense of the non-sensible because of our respect for God’s word. I can assure you that if this were *any* other book, we would not tolerate such foolishness. Over 40 of the 102 times when the word age (aiwn) was used, our translators turned them into nonsensical English. Again, that should have been a clue to them that the meaning they assigned to the Greek words was incorrect. Again, alas, it was not.

**Point no. 1.** “The Orthodox position is not consistent with God’s character or His heart.”

The bulk of this paper has made technical arguments to establish to the reader the possibility that God has a better plan than to destroy most of mankind in Hell forever in spite of the meaning assigned to Matthew 25 by Orthodoxy.

We already have some idea how the proponents of the Orthodox position feel about this subject. They will likely quote early church fathers such as Augustine to argue that “eternal punishment” was always the position of the early church. Those who believe in Universal Salvation are likely to quote early church fathers such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, or Gregory of Nyssa to argue the opposite case.

Typical of those who argue the context of Matthew 25:46 demands eternal punishment, Augustine used the following rationale. First, he *assumed* that “life” in this verse refers to immortality. And since immortality is eternal, he then *assumed* “punishment” must be eternal as well since the same adjective, *aionios*, undergirds both. Even if he was correct in connecting this “life” to immortality, it does **not necessarily** follow that punishment *must* be eternal as well. Augustine plowed ahead with his assumptions about this verse, and look where it led him.

Like Calvin and others afterward, he reasoned that since God is omnipotent and has not willed anything that has not been done or will be done, and given that eternal punishment exists, then **God must not want all men to be saved!** This horrific conclusion about our heavenly Father’s nature is reached despite many plain Scriptures like 1 Timothy 2:4 which describes God as one “who will have all men to be saved.”

Next, despite the many Scriptures that say one day Christ will be “all in all,” Augustine, as well as many scholars today, find that they must explain away the obvious meaning by stating that “all” doesn’t really mean “all”. So, they add to the Scripture by saying “all” really means “all *types of people*.” But we need to question whether anyone has the authority of the Holy Spirit to add in words, such as, “types of people?”<sup>17</sup> Further, when the Scriptures say that one day every knee will bow, confess, praise, and swear an oath that their righteousness is in Christ, Augustine and all those that believe in eternal punishment or annihilation must again add more words by demanding that such praise, confession and oaths are “forced”, or by adding, “it’s too late!” Calvinists add words in an effort to limit God’s love while Arminians do the same to limit His ability. Were they inspired by the Holy Spirit to add these words and jump to these conclusions? Do these men have a lock on the intentions and mind of God? We think not.

It is very easy to get lost in the details of the historical aspect of this argument (or any aspect we have already mentioned e.g. grammar) and lose sight of the bigger picture. So let’s stop for a moment and ask a question or two, and reflect on God’s character and heart vis-à-vis our topic.

Just what has been in God’s heart in all this? Did He not really have a better plan than what we have been traditionally taught? Would He really have engaged in this grand experiment in its orthodox form—to lose most of mankind forever?<sup>18</sup> Would He destroy the many for the benefit of a few?

To answer these questions, let us consider the following observations based on Scripture.

In Mark chapter 2 Jesus confronted the religious leaders of His day concerning a matter of law. They accused His disciples of violating the Sabbath, an infraction of the Law punishable by death.<sup>19</sup> Most Christians know very well that requirement of the Law of Moses which reads, “Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy” is a part of the Ten Commandments.<sup>20</sup> In His response to His accusers, Our Lord makes an amazing statement. The Sabbath—and therefore, by extension, the whole Law—was made *for* mankind; not the other way around. This insight provides our first clue to ascertaining the heart of God as regards His love for the lost of this world.

There have always been people who will enforce the Law of God for the sake of the Law itself. Such people are a burden. Jesus confronted those with this attitude constantly during His ministry. Jesus even said that some would kill all the while thinking they are doing God’s will.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately that same mindset remains today.

The life of Christ has been considered from almost every conceivable angle. Many, many books and articles have been written about our Lord’s glorious mission of salvation of mankind. While accomplishing His mission, Jesus spent His days teaching the crowds and, in private, His disciples. His teachers were and still are revolutionary. Yet, our Lord was so talented that He could even teach lessons based on the mundane events and aspects of life.

Did you know, for example, that Jesus was into fragments—food fragments? After feeding 5,000-plus men, women and children, Jesus ordered His disciples to pick up the fragments, “that nothing be lost.”<sup>22</sup> Was Jesus into conservation, or was He making a higher statement about Himself? An interesting observation can be seen here. If one accepts the traditional view of God’s character, then apparently, Jesus cares more about perishable leftovers of His day than He does the souls of mankind—for that is one of the implications one may draw from His actions here since the food fragments were, in fact, saved.

Jesus tells Peter to be willing to forgive others “unto 70 times 7”<sup>23</sup> who wrong him. Does anybody really believe that humans are capable of daily suffering 490 wrongs against themselves and being able to forgive? Is Jesus not rather painting a picture of God’s capacity to forgive? The number seven has the implication of completeness or perfection in Jewish tradition. Is it not possible here that Jesus is arguing symbolically for complete forgiveness? And if He really expects that of us, can we really expect less of Him?

Jesus taught “turning the other cheek” as a way to overcome evil. Paul expanded this theme in Romans 12:17-21 by showing that we should overcome evil with good. Yet can we not see that this is God’s ultimate plan for doing away with evil—by overcoming it with His goodness. Further, what would be the ultimate good in damning that which He could otherwise have saved? He has, after all, already paid their debts!<sup>24</sup> Can we not see that embedded in this commandment is the reflection of a God who will one day woo back to Himself all that is lost—both the willing and the obstinate? We postulate that the obstinate will perish in their old form, yet be returned whole to Him in their new form as, for example, Saul of Tarsus, the old man, became Paul, the new man.<sup>25</sup> So God will ultimately overcome all the evil that has been done and, by His success, actually justify the need for evil as a tool of His grace. He will truly rob the grave of its victory! How do you heal the wounds the murderer has caused? Well, for one thing, you might bring to life anew the person murdered! And then you might return the victim to the loving arms of God, his friends and family. Death will truly lose its sting!<sup>26</sup>

Thus the evil done by the murderer is undone!<sup>27</sup> His victim is returned to God and loved ones alive again. The pain of the loss is erased by the triumph of God's grace—the return of life. As the woman forgets the pain she endured to bring her child into the world once the child arrives, so will God undo all our losses and turn them into joy.<sup>28</sup> We maintain that God isn't finished even at this point. For "restitution of all things"<sup>29</sup> to be true then it must logically follow that one day murderer and victim will be reconciled *to each other!* Think of the billions of such people who need to be reconciled to each other. With man this task is clearly impossible. Is such a task, however, impossible for God? Just how big is your God? We believe our God is willing and able to do all these things. In the meantime, we will all—both saint and sinner alike—have learned many necessary and valuable lessons; for example, the truth that God really does know what's best for us and it is in our interest to no longer rebel against His ways.<sup>30</sup>

In the parable of treasure found in the field, we see that God, in parable form, sold all that He owned—His death on Calvary—and bought not just the treasure—but *the field in which the treasure was concealed!* And what is the field in parable form but the world itself?<sup>31</sup> The treasure—most people believe—are those who believe in God. Yet, clearly, God isn't just interested in the treasure—He bought the entire field! We can certainly understand God wanting to redeem His treasure—but why would He purchase the field if He didn't want to redeem it too?

In the parables of the talents (Matthew 25) or the pounds (Luke 19) we find Jesus reading the riot act to an "evil servant." The servant had squandered his opportunity and responsibility to serve His master by burying His Master's goods. Jesus' comment about the bankers illustrates that, in effect, the servant had made no effort to engage his master's resources at all. Most writers at this point will devolve into a lesson about Christian duty or responsibility. What I find fascinating is Jesus' attitude about His ROI—return on investment—as displayed in these parables. Instead of criticizing his master's harshness, the servant might have said, "What are you belly-aching about? You got your principal back! You didn't lose a dime!" But notice the implication here. The master isn't satisfied with just getting His principal back. He wants more than a 100% return! (You investors in the stock market should appreciate the unrealistic expectation of our Lord here.) Applied to the Orthodox view, this is impossible. Jesus will be lucky to get back 1% of all the humans He created. His desire, expressed in light of the glorious restitution of all things, makes perfect sense. Jesus wants the 100% of all He ever created back with Him. He doesn't want them to remain forever in bondage to the decay of the current creation.<sup>32</sup> He wants more than a 100% return. What might that mean? Might it mean He wants humanity fully endowed with His image—an image no longer weighed down by the flesh—the bane of all humanity? That's the "interest" in the parable and the gain realized by using the Master's goods. In Matthew 10:24-25, Jesus notes that one of God's hidden goals is for the Student to become *like* his Teacher and the Servant *like* his Master. The logical conclusion here is that God is not merely satisfied with creating fleshly beings—He wants nothing short of fully redeemed mankind, a mankind animated by His Spirit. And that, my dear reader, is an ROI—a return on investment—worthy of God Himself.

Yet another item of interest to consider is that the word translated as 'punishment' in Matthew 25:46 may well have a corrective aspect to it, not just a retributivist one. According to one relatively conservative Greek scholar—William Barclay—this word specifically designates

remedial correction. Thomas Talbott, author of *The Inescapable Love of God*, quotes Barclay as saying:

*“kolasis is never used of anything but remedial punishment.”* The etymology of the word is especially intriguing, because it “was not originally an ethical word at all. It originally meant the pruning of trees to make them grow better.” [This kind of punishment is ] ... literally that kind of remedial punishment which it befits God to give and which only God can give...It is eternal both in the sense that its causal source lies in the eternal God himself and in the sense that its corrective effects last forever. But as a means to an end, it need not last any longer than is necessary to produce the end for whose sake it exists in the first place.<sup>33</sup>

If Barclay is correct, then Jesus’ words about the Father pruning the branches in John 15:2 is especially insightful and consistent with the punishment listed in Matthew 25.

It’s not that we are downplaying the severity of God or His judgments<sup>34</sup>. It is just that we want the reader to understand His severity in light of His overall plan—to see the mercy beyond the judgment. We maintain in accordance with Psalms 103, that God’s anger—His severity, if you will, is temporary—but His love lasts forever!

To see this more clearly the Old Testament records a horrific event that involved the people of Beth-Shemesh, which means “house of the Sun.” The Philistines—an ongoing enemy of Israel had captured the Ark of the Covenant and then returned it under pressure from God.<sup>35</sup> The people of Beth-Shemesh received the Ark but then made the mistake of opening the Ark to look inside. They learned and endured an extremely high-priced lesson; when there is nothing between the Law—as exemplified by the tablets of stone—and mankind, mankind dies! This was illustrated by the fact that the Lord promptly slaughtered 50,000<sup>36</sup> people of Beth-Shemesh. This lesson was not meant for the people of Beth-Shemesh alone! It was meant to teach all of mankind that the “letter [of the Law] killeth.”<sup>37</sup> The logical conclusion is that if mankind is not to suffer the same fate, we need to have protection from the curse of the Law. This protection, analogous to the role a heavy coat plays on a cold winter’s day, was provided by the covering on the Ark which was called the “kappereth” or mercy-seat. Paul, probably with this history clearly in mind, celebrates the fact that God raised up His Son to become the mercy-seat Himself! Paul writes,

(22) This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference for all have sinned and fall short<sup>38</sup> of the glory of God, (24) and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came *by Christ Jesus*. (25) God presented Him as a *sacrifice of atonement*.

The latter italicized phrase is translated from the Greek word `ilasthriion (hilasteerion) which translates literally as ‘the mercy seat’!!!! (This is one of those occasions where I wish the translators would simply have translated the term as is instead of seeking an English equivalent.) The long history of the Ark of the Covenant and its purpose in God’s plan of redemption is now made clear. The covering was to be prototypical and representative of Jesus Himself and it protected mankind from the effects of failing to keep the Law in its entirety.<sup>39</sup> The former italicized phrase harkens back to Isaiah 59:15-17 mentioned in endnote 49 where

Isaiah saw that there “was no one ... to intercede so His [God’s] own arm worked salvation for Him ...” and that only God could produce this salvation. Salvation is of, by and only through Him.

So let’s complete the entire analogy and the teaching it represents. The world is full of works-driven religions and works-driven religious behavior. All such attempts to please God is to, in effect, remove the mercy-seat and “look inside” for ourselves. Any attempt to “stand on your own two feet”—on your own merits—before God is to re-invite the same disaster the people of Beth-Shemesh experienced. In the Galatian letter, Paul will argue that returning to the obedience of the Law and “keeping it” by human effort is to be analogized to putting oneself under a yoke of slavery again. Think of this for a moment. We all know that sin has a vice grip on mankind—that mankind is everywhere enslaved to the power of sin.<sup>40</sup> But Paul likewise maintains that trying to keep the Law is equally a yoke of bondage! In this world so darkened by Satan’s deception, we are truly not surprised how few Christians actually understand these vital principles. This same deception may have likewise darkened the church’s view of punishment.

The idea that punishment might actually be beneficial to the lost—and not merely retributive—might come as a shock to the reader, especially if he/she has been raised in an Orthodox church. For those who believe that eternal life must be balanced by eternal destruction, I would be curious as to why you think that way. Human parents don’t punish their kids for the remainder of life, why should God? Why can’t it be that punishment is temporary and remedial and life is eternal—assuming that it was God’s desire to provide eternal life in the first place? And there is little argument about God’s intention to provide eternal life is there? The church has tended to view God’s judgment only in terms of the doom of the lost. We maintain that God’s goodness, kindness and wisdom have allowed Him to craft a plan that is universal in scope and universally effectual unto salvation. What a blessed and glorious hope. It is a hope deftly sewn into the pages of Scripture, easily overlooked by a church all too ready to believe the most horrible things about God, or a reader blinded by traditions of man.

All throughout Scripture, God drops hints about who He is and what He wants for and from mankind. If we really understood God’s heart and love for us, then it would be much more obvious to us why the energy expended feeling guilty about our inability to attain His standard of perfection<sup>41</sup> and fearing His sense of justice could be better spent praising Him for His tender mercy for us. If we could really accept the fact that the sin issue has been solved and dealt with then we really would know the peace that passes understanding<sup>42</sup> and His love completed in us would drive out all fear of judgment.<sup>43</sup> No less a fiery apostle such as James asserted that when judgment based on justice goes up against mercy, mercy triumphs.<sup>44</sup>

One of the unstated purposes for which God gave mankind His law is to convince mankind that any attempt to keep His law in our flesh or through sheer will power is a course of action guaranteed to fail. Thus, according to Paul, the law’s intent was to be a tutor or schoolmaster who would lead us to Christ.<sup>45</sup> The law accomplishes this by holding up a mirror to our actions and motives. But while the mirror of the law can help us see clearly what we look like to God, it is powerless to help us in our weaknesses.<sup>46</sup> Once we figured out that our condition is helpless, desperate, and permanent and we learn of the solution God provided for in Christ, we can escape the fate guaranteed by the Law. God, of course, knew this all along. He wanted us—mankind in every age—to come to the same conclusion. So instead of expecting us to rely

on our *own* righteousness, He determined to impute to us *His* righteousness. For the exercise of trusting in His Grace—His genuine goodwill towards us—God will impute to us His righteousness.<sup>47</sup> Paul states that such a solution is really a manifold part of God’s wisdom.<sup>48</sup> So we should boast in *His* salvation. He knew we couldn’t save ourselves so He did it for us!<sup>49</sup> The history of Israel’s repeated failures provide more than enough proof for every honest skeptic in every subsequent age of the folly of entertaining the thought that mankind can rise to God’s standard through sheer will power. ~~So we can see that even by the giving of the Law, God ultimately cancels the sentence the Law imposes by His ability to save. (Delete previous sentence.)~~

That God would impute His righteousness onto us might not have been delivered as great a shock if we had recognized one of those subtle hints given to us in the Old Testament. It is no surprise that many of Paul’s powerful teachings are but echoes of hints laid down in the first covenant. If you blink you might not have noticed word 3072 in your Hebrew concordance. This compound word contains a glorious hint about God’s character and plan. One of the many names God chose to reveal Himself by is Jehovah-Tsidqenuw, which translates to “the Lord is our Righteousness.”<sup>50</sup> Even by the revealing of one of God’s names, He reveals His ultimate plan for handling our unrighteousness—by giving us His righteousness!

I’d like to close this section of the discussion now with a troubling implication that believers in the doctrine of eternal damnation must deal with. Embracing the tenet of eternal damnation for many people causes these people to, in effect, ingest poison into their spirits. Even if they have never fully articulated each step of the logical progression I’ve listed below, I think their minds will jump to the unavoidable conclusion. Acceptance of this conclusion by most people poisons and hardens their hearts against God, tending to drive a wedge between God and their affections for Him.

The following questions are rhetorical in nature. I think most Orthodox Christians have been taught or know instinctively the answers to the following questions—and will have no trouble drawing the logical conclusion shown below. First, the questions.

1. Did God create everything?
2. Does God really love the world and all those therein?
3. Can God see the future, that is, did God know from the beginning who would reject Him and who would accept Him?<sup>51</sup>
4. Did God realize before time began that every person He brought into the world would have either an eternal home with Him or an eternal death with Satan and his angels?
5. So combining the above questions, did God not know before time began those who would accept Him and those who would not—that to accept Him is salvation and to reject Him is eternal death, and did not God know in advance that to bring those into the world who would reject Him would result in a guaranteed, one-way ticket to an eternal hell for the lost?

In summarizing the results of the above questions, the inescapable conclusion one *must* draw is that this God—who supposedly loves mankind so, very, very much—who saw the outcome of His grand experiment from the beginning, who knew in advance the result of every person’s ultimate decision, who knew, therefore, in advance that to let the lost be born was a guaranteed ticket to hell for them, this same God loved these lost people so very much that He LET THEM BE BORN ANYWAY!!!!!!!!!!

Do you see the dilemma here? A person might accept a view of God that is all-powerful with no morals creating such a situation like this—a “might-makes-right” kind of God. But to hold the position that the God of the Bible in anyway shows love for the lost by damning them forever, when simply not to create them would have been the kindest thing to do is just morally non-sensical.

A skeptic might ask, “So that's the God you serve? So that's *your* Gospel? (euaggelion) So that's your good news?” Well, dear reader, is that *your* gospel?

“You have to love Jesus. Love Him and He'll save you. Reject Him and it is a one-way ticket to hell—eternally.” You accept Him one second before you die, you can be saved. A nanosecond too late, and it's too bad. His love for you while you were alive turns to hate the moment you die. Come to think of it, if the orthodox position is true, then His love for mankind must not really be of the unchanging variety after all.

Those who believe in the doctrine of eternal damnation can keep trying to convince themselves that the Orthodox Gospel teaches a God of love, but many people will see through such a claim. They may well vote with their feet in droves. Not surprisingly, they may never enter a church again as long as they live after being told about the “loving” God taught in most churches across this planet. Or they may join a church but only out of fear of the loss of their souls, but one cannot help but wonder, “will they give their service to our Lord out of gratitude or only out of a sense of duty, the door to their affections being closed by this wretched doctrine”? On judgment day, will those who so vehemently support the doctrine of eternal damnation, like Saul of Tarsus, find out they didn't have a clue about the heart of the God they were serving?

Saul, like most of the religious leaders of our day, was a highly intelligent and a well-versed Bible scholar who could not have understood a man like Paul. He could not, because he did not understand what was in God's heart. Paul knew from his own miraculous testimony the extent of the thoroughness of God's longsuffering. It was thorough enough to make a believer out of the worst kind of a sadistic (in Paul's own words) enemy of Christ as a pattern for others to follow (1 Tim. 4:16). Paul learned that Saul was not pursuing Jesus; Jesus was pursuing Saul. And given that He is just and fair, and no respecter of persons, Paul knew that God will pursue every lost sheep with that same “all longsuffering” until in His timing, God will be all in all. Put another way, dear reader, if God used such an extreme method to convert Saul into Paul—and God is not arbitrary in His affections—can we expect that He will do less to save each and every member of mankind? We have no better testimony in all of the Scripture that demonstrates His ability and willingness to save the lost. The only other more meaningful testimony of His ability to turn an object deserving of His wrath into a vessel of His mercy, is your own story.

In conclusion, we have argued that Matthew 25:46 is not actually a picture of man's ultimate destiny. Various levels and types of proof have been offered—both positive and negative—to persuade the reader to rethink the doctrine of eternal damnation. Doing so may be the kindest act a human can do for God—to defend His name, character and to celebrate His eternal love for us. After such reflection, one may come to share in the glorious realization that in the end, there will be no lost people, only redeemed ones. It is our hope that this document will be a starting point for further investigation on your part and that you may be filled with the

glorious hope of the consummation—a point in the future—where and when God will be truly “all in all.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Timothy 2:15.

<sup>2</sup> Use a *Strong's Concordance* for example.

<sup>3</sup> This is most certainly NOT true of all Greek words e.g. see the discussion of αἰών , or age below.

<sup>4</sup> William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Second Edition, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1979 (ISBN 0-226-03932-3).

<sup>5</sup> Similar pronouncements can be found about other nations not chosen by God as exemplified here by Sodom and Samaria. God also promised destruction to other nations such as Edom, Babylon and Assyria. Yet there is redemption even for these. One also cannot help but noticing Jesus' words about Sodom in Matthew 11:20-24. When contrasting the privilege of those who had been given the actual and full light of His presence e.g. Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum with the ancient Phoenician cities of Tyre, Sidon and the cities of the plain such as Sodom who were given next to no light, we find Jesus asserting that “it will be *more* tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.” If the people of Sodom are to be destroyed in Hell forever what sense does it make to talk about a punishment that is “more tolerable.” Even the slightest bit of discomfiture endured over the timeless trek of eternity would sooner rather than later render all who are experiencing it into unqualified madness.

<sup>6</sup> The reason that some translators inject into the text the idea of being excluded or shut out from the presence of the Lord is that Greek ‘apo’ like the English ‘from’, can sometimes mean ‘away from’ – as when, for example, the kings of the earth and others cry out on the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from (apo) the face of the one seated on the throne and from (apo) the wrath of the Lamb .....’ (See L. Morris, 1959, p.206, and Bruce, 1982, p. 152). When we try to hide or to conceal ourselves from the presence of the Lord (an impossible task) we are indeed trying to get away from that presence. But in 2 Thessalonians 1:9 there is no verb, such as ‘to hide’ or ‘to conceal’, and no other grammatical device that would give grammatical sense to such a rendering. In the absence of such a device, it is no less grammatically awkward to translate ‘olethron aionion apo prosopou tou kuriou’ ( olethron aionion apo prosopou tou kuriou ) as ‘eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord’ than it would be to translate ‘kairoi anapsuxeow apo prosopou tou kuriou’ (Acts 3:19) ( kairoi anapsuxeow apo prosopou tou kuriou )as ‘refreshing times away from the presence of the Lord’. Indeed, just as the presence of the Lord brings refreshment to the obedient, it brings destruction upon the disobedient. From *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate*, p.49.

<sup>7</sup> John 3:36.

<sup>8</sup> I'm being kind here. The prophet Isaiah compares our righteousness to *used* menstrual napkins!

<sup>9</sup> You can count them for yourself in the *Englishman's Greek Concordance of the New Testament* by George V. Wigram.

<sup>10</sup> Hebrews 11:3.

<sup>11</sup> Ephesians 1:11.

<sup>12</sup> I will comment more fully on this absurd use of the English language in the fifth part of this paper, “The Orthodox position violates the common sense rules of grammar.”

<sup>13</sup> In my opinion, this translation is particularly egregious. It's bad enough that our translators converted almost every instance of αἰωνοίη into ‘eternal’ or ‘everlasting.’ In this case where the adjective isn't even used, they shoe-horned a *plural noun* into the role of adjective!

<sup>14</sup> See also Phil. 4:20, 1 Timothy 1:17, 2 Timothy 4:18, Hebrews 1:8, Hebrews 13:21, 1 Peter 4:11, 1 Peter 5:11, Rev. 1:6, 4:9, 4:10, 5:13, 5:14, 7:12, 10:6, 11:15, 14:11, 15:7, 19:3, 20:10, and 22:5.

<sup>15</sup> Even Thayer admits there is no precedent for the plural form of these statements etc.

<sup>16</sup> I say phrase, but in reality there are several flavors of this phrase. Andrew Jukes—a 19<sup>th</sup> century researcher—has noted in his treatise *The Restitution of all Things*, on page 61,

Every scholar knows that the expressions *eij ton aiwna*, *eij touj aiwnaj*, and *eij touj aiwnaj twn aiwniwn* are unlike anything which occurs in the Heathern Greek writers. The reason is, that the inspired writers, and they alone, understood the mystery and purpose of the ages. They, or at least the Spirit which spake by them, saw that there would be a succession of ages, a certain number which constituted a greater age. It seems to me that when they intended a duration of many ages, they wrote *eij touj aiwnouj*, or "to the ages". When they had in view a greater or more comprehensive age, including in it many more subordinate ages, they wrote *eij touj aiwnaj twn aiwniwn* that is "to the ages of the ages". When they intended the longer age alone, without regard to its parts, they wrote *eij ton aiwna* that is "to an aeonial age"; this form of expression being a Hebraism exactly equivalent to *eis aiwva aiwviov*: like "liberty of glory", for "glorious liberty" (Rom 8:21) and "body of our vileness" for "our vile body". (Phil. 3:21). When they intended several comprehensive ages collectively, they wrote *eis tous aiwvas twv aiwvuv*, that is "to the age of the ages". Each varying form is used with a distinct purpose and meaning.

<sup>17</sup> Deuteronomy 12:31-33 and Revelation 22:18-19 both reveal that God doesn't want His Word added to nor shortened inappropriately.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 7:13-14.

<sup>19</sup> See Numbers 15:32-36. Note the man was stoned for violating the Sabbath.

<sup>20</sup> Exodus 20:8.

<sup>21</sup> John 16:2.

<sup>22</sup> John 6:12.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew 18:22.

<sup>24</sup> 1 John 2:2

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God*, Universal Publishers September 2002. p. 97.

<sup>26</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:55.

<sup>27</sup> This is just but one example of how God will "destroy the works of the Devil." (1 John 3:8) I often have wondered how people who believe in eternal damnation reconcile their beliefs with this verse. Whatever else eternal damnation may be, the fact remains that as long as the "second death" remains, it will, likewise, forever remain as a testament to not only God's colossal failure but also as a monument to the success of Satan's work—in perpetuity. The Devil's work—far from being destroyed—will be an acute and permanent reminder to God of His inability to destroy the very works this verse He claims to be true.

<sup>28</sup> John 16:20-22.

<sup>29</sup> Acts 3:21.

<sup>30</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:20.

<sup>31</sup> Matthew 13:38.

<sup>32</sup> Romans 8:21.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God*, Universal Publishers September 2002. p. 91.

<sup>34</sup> Although we don't have room in this paper to illustrate it, the fact is that the Bible teaches emphatically that there is a good side or aspect to God's judgments. Multiple scriptures could be cited here. To name just one, God told Jonah that the benighted Assyrians did not "know their left hand from their right" clearly implying the need for instruction in His ways. These brutal people, so fierce in combat and conquering, were lost in darkness so far as God was concerned. One of the roles of judgment is to provide light which dispels this kind of darkness.

<sup>35</sup> 1 Samuel 6:1-21, esp. 19.

<sup>36</sup> Specifically, 50,070.

<sup>37</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:4-11:

(4) Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. (5) Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. (6) He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but

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*of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.* (7) Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, (8) will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? (9) If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! (10) For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. (11) And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!

<sup>38</sup> The force of the Greek here is that we are all deficient in the Glory of God. Thus the later half of the sentence explains the former—the explanation of why all mankind is enslaved to sin (Romans 5:21) is that all mankind is deficient, or lacking, in the Glory of God—that is, His presence within us.

<sup>39</sup> James 2:10.

Recall that the apostle states that the violation of even one aspect of the Law renders one guilty of the entire Law! Of course the horror to realize one has become obligate to the entire law is mirrored in glory by Romans 11:32 where we see that it was in God's plan to consign **all** mankind to obstinate disobedience so the He could *have mercy on us All!!!*

<sup>40</sup> Romans 5:21:

<sup>41</sup> Matthew 5:21-30:

<sup>21</sup>"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' <sup>22</sup>But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother, will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. <sup>23</sup>"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup>leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. <sup>25</sup>"Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. <sup>26</sup>I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny. <sup>27</sup>"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' <sup>28</sup>But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. <sup>29</sup>If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. <sup>30</sup>And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell."

These two teachings about murder and adultery illustrate as a double witness that anyone who genuinely thought they were "keeping" God's standard really were not. Yes they might truly have committed either overt act of either murder or adultery. But everyone has sinned in the area of lust or anger—these and other internal uncleannesses we experience while in the flesh. And if you don't believe you've sinned in either of these areas, Paul has another list you can compare yourself against in Romans 1 and 2. In any case, Paul summarizes that "all have sinned." (Romans 3:23) What I want to stress here is that Jesus "raised the bar" by about a million percent in the difficulty of keeping or even reaching God's standard for mankind as expressed through the Law. He did this by focusing not the action but on the motive which caused the action—human thoughts and passions. Those who think they can keep God's law in their own efforts are really just fooling themselves.

<sup>42</sup> Phillipians 4:7.

<sup>43</sup> I John 4:15-19:

<sup>15</sup>If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.

<sup>16</sup>And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. <sup>17</sup>In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him.

<sup>18</sup>There is no fear in love. But perfected love drives out fear, because fear has to do with

punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. <sup>19</sup>We love because he first loved us.

<sup>44</sup> James 2:12-13:

(12) Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, (13) because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

<sup>45</sup> Galatians 3:23-25:

(23) But before faith came, we were kept under the **law**, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. (24) Wherefore the **law** was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. (25) But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

<sup>46</sup> Romans 8:3.

<sup>47</sup> Romans 4—the entire glorious chapter argues that for our trust in Him, God will “reckon” us to be righteous. The crowning example Paul uses is that of Abraham and the promise God gave him long before God gave the Law!

<sup>48</sup> See 1 Corinthians 1:30:

(30) It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. (31) Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

<sup>49</sup> Isaiah 59:15-17. (The whole chapter is awesome!).

<sup>50</sup> See Jeremiah 33:16 for example.

<sup>51</sup> See Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids Michigan 2000. This author argues that God only has partial foreknowledge of the future and thus God doesn't know totally who will and won't accept His offer of salvation. A fatal flaw in his argument is that he doesn't explain how God would be able to see and direct the future so that the prophecies concerning Jesus would work out as He planned and yet would *not* be able to do the same for every other of His creatures. I also believe his efforts are misdirected since his book, in summary, is nothing but an effort to clear God's name and reputation of the repugnant stench it naturally acquires once one accepts the belief in eternal damnation. Such a book would be altogether unnecessary if he did not believe in the orthodox view of eternal damnation.

<sup>52</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:28.