

The Outcome of Infinite Grace

Death Swallowed Up in Victory

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THE PROBLEM

I was just going into my study when the idea struck me; and the effect was to stop me in my tracks. There in the half-opened door I faced anew one of the old, well-known verses of the Bible, and from that day I have had a completely new Bible, and, an increasingly wonderful God.

Like Saul of old, I had thought that I ought to do many things against this heretical teaching--everything but to study it! But on that summer day in 1940, just one verse from the Bible changed my attitude completely; and then, I was ready to study. That verse was one that I had known by heart from boyhood, and one that I had thought I had understood perfectly.

But on that day it struck me afresh--almost like a blow in the face. With my hand on the knob, I stood, almost spellbound, and faced the most daring thoughts I had ever entertained. It was some time before I could loosen myself enough to continue on through the door and sit down at my desk. Yet ever since that day, I have had a new vision in my heart and mind, one that is ever becoming more beautiful and satisfying.

Then the problem arose as to how to go about the study of this subject, in order that through careful investigation, I might truly convince myself "whether these things were so." A regular attendant at our church had tried to interest me in the subject a few years earlier, but I had ignored it as heresy. I might have asked his help in study, but decided against it. I would study alone. Also, I had a copy of a New Testament translation which emphasized the idea, but I decided against using that, except for occasional reference. I would use a Scofield Reference Bible in which the notes were bitterly opposed to the idea.

What is contained in the following pages is the result of that study. If it should prove as satisfying to the reader as it has to the writer, we shall have a delightful time together, "rejoicing in hope of the glory of God."

"The last enemy to be destroyed is death!" This was the well-known verse that stopped me in the half-opened door that day and directed all my thinking into fresh channels. "What death?" I queried. "The first death, or the second death?" Is God able to destroy the first death, and not the second death? The Bible says, "The wages of sin is death!" Is it the "wages of sin" that is to be destroyed?" Thus I began to grope for light and truth.

Of course, like all students of the Bible, I knew there were three destinies of the wicked taught in the Bible--that is, this is so if the various, respective verses are taken as they read in our ordinary versions. No wonder some people believe in eternal torment! It is clearly taught in the Bible! And, I knew, also, that the doctrine of extermination is also "in the Bible," for I had read it there, over and over! Then, I was aware that, while apparently not quite so clearly, the Bible also taught the ultimate salvation of all men. Through all the centuries, some men had believed that teaching as well! They had called their belief "Christian universalism," or "the restitution of all things," or "final restoration." For the last century and a quarter, those calling themselves "Universalists" have been quite generally combined with Unitarians, a liberal, non-Trinitarian

church organization which now no longer affirms the inspiration and authority of Scripture, or even the blood of Christ for the sinner's salvation. Yet more recently, some of those who believe that all men will ultimately be saved, have adopted the practice of calling their doctrine by term "reconciliation." They believe in an authoritative Bible, the divinity of Christ, and a sacrificial atonement; yet they also believe that all men, eventually, will be reconciled to God. Thus I recalled the general positions of various groups with which I was somewhat acquainted. But which one was right?

It will be well at the outset of our study to get the Biblical basis of this subject clearly in mind, and to recognize that all three destinies of the wicked are taught in the usual translations of the Bible. One set of verses tells us that the wicked are to be tormented "for ever and ever;" another set just as clearly affirms that they are to be exterminated; yet still a third set assures us they will all ultimately be saved. Of course, the various conclusions which men draw from these respective texts cannot all be right. Either there is some way to understand them all, and to interpret them all correctly so they do not conflict with one another, or else hopeless confusion will be inevitable.

ETERNAL TORMENT

The first set of verses we shall consider, teaches the doctrine of eternal torment. I suppose this has been the generally accepted belief of most Christians through the years. The Bible (that is, the English versions of the Scriptures, in common use) teaching is so obvious and definite: "And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:43,44); "Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt.25:41). "And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone" (Rev.19:20).

"If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb, and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name" (Rev.14:9-11); "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Rev.20:10).

These and other references, if taken as they read in the above quotations, clearly teach the eternal torment of the wicked.

This is the teaching based upon which I grew up. In fact, I used to teach it in no uncertain terms when I first began to preach. One family withdrew from my old home church during my first pastorate because I taught eternal torment, as the majority of the church also believed. But the time came when I began to think a bit more deeply about the nature of God, and to study more carefully certain other statements of the Holy Bible, at which time a second set of verses were drawn to my attention.

EXTERMINATION

The following texts seem to teach extermination just as clearly as the preceding verses eternal torment: "Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt.3:12). "As therefore the tares are gathered and burned

in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matt.13:40-42).

Note that the chaff and tares are burned up--not burned forever.

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt.10:28).

Again, the wicked are to be gotten rid of, just as bad fish are to be thrown away to decay and disappear, as Jesus taught in Matthew 13:47-50. Similarly: "But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption" (2 Pet.2:12); "...who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power" (2 Thess.1:9); "...even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" (Jude 7).

Please note that Sodom and Gomorrah are not burning today, though their destruction is spoken of as an example of "eternal fire." If the verses above, too, are taken as they read, then the wicked will be exterminated. And, it must be remembered, these verses are just as Biblical as any others.

RECONCILIATION

Still another set of verses, however, seems to clearly teach that all men will ultimately be saved: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:16,17). "Love never faileth" (1 Cor.13:8). Wilt God's love for the whole world fail?

"And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa.53:6). "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead" (2 Cor.5:14).

"And, having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven" (Col. 1:20). "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Myself" (John 12 :32).

"Well, then, just as the result of a single transgression is condemnation for all mankind, so also the result of a single deed of righteousness is a life-giving acquittal for all mankind; and if, through the disobedience of one individual, the mass of mankind were made sinners, so also through the obedience of One the mass of mankind will be made righteous" (Rom.5:18,19; Weymouth).

"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor.15:20-22). "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Thee" (Psa.22:27). "All nations whom Thou hast made shall come and worship before Thee, O Lord; and shalt glorify Thy name" (Psa.86:9).

"Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. I have by Myself, the word is gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear" (Isa.45:22,23). "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isa.53:11).

Would God's love, infinite in its reach, be satisfied with just a fraction of those for whom Christ travailed in soul? If you paid the purchase price for one hundred acres, would you be satisfied with a deed for only one acre?

"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name that is above every name: that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil.2:9-11).

Would a confession wrung out of the lost by compulsion--"writhing in the torments of hell"--be to the glory of God, and could such tormented souls confess Jesus as Lord? "No man can say that Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor.12:3).

"Then cometh the end, when He shalt have delivered up the kingdom to God even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign, until He hath put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For He hath put all things under His feet. But when He saith, all things are put under Him, it is manifest that He is excepted, Who did put all things under Him. And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be All in all" (1 Cor.15:24-28).

For every verse in the Bible that seems to teach eternal torment or extermination, one can find many verses that teach universal reconciliation. Remember, one text is just as Biblical as another. Unless there is a way to explain them all correctly, we will be left with hopeless confusion. Which one of the three sets of verses would you like to be true?

BIBLICAL USAGE

HOW LONG IS "FOR EVER?"

It is an interesting fact that every intelligent believer in extermination (or "annihilation") can answer the doctrine of eternal torment to his own complete satisfaction, and, without subterfuge, or doing violence to the Scripture. He just takes Biblical usage for his answer.

In all languages, it is usage that determines meaning. The King James version records Paul as writing to the Roman church (1:13) that he had often "purposed to come to you, but was let hitherto." Today, we would say "hindered," instead of "let." In three centuries, usage has completely changed the meaning of the word "let." It may be spelled the same, and pronounced the same, but the meaning has been changed to the exact opposite.

Since usage always determines meaning, Biblical usage, certainly, always determines Biblical meaning. Let us illustrate.

The term "for ever" (even as the related terms, "eternal" and "everlasting") often occurs in verses in which it

cannot possibly mean unending. Later, we shall study this matter at greater length; but for the present, a few illustrations will suffice. In the story of Jonah, one is surprised to hear Jonah declare, while in the belly of the fish, "I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever" (Jonah 2:6). Jonah, however, was in the fish only three days and three nights. Similarly, in the case of a Hebrew slave who loved his master and who did not wish to go free at the end of the seventh year, we read: "His master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him for ever" (Ex.21:6). Of course that couldn't be longer than the slave's life span. Again, when Solomon built the temple unto the Lord, he began his prayer of dedication with the statement: "I have surely built Thee an house to dwell in, a settled place for Thee to abide in for ever" (1 Kings. 8:13). And the Lord answered Solomon: "I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou has made before Me: I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put My Name there for ever" (1 Kings 9:3). Yet Solomon's temple lasted for only about 400 years.

Here is something that ought to be clear to any intelligent, honest man. A word that is used to mean, in one case, three days and nights, in another case, a man's life-time, and in still another, a period of about four centuries, surely does not mean unending or eternal--no matter what English word is used to translate it. Usage determines meaning. That is why a believer in extermination laughs at the doctrine of eternal torment. He knows that Biblical usage is against any such meaning.

DOES "DESTROY" MEAN TO EXTERMINATE?

But the believer in extermination may not see so clearly that his own doctrine can be overthrown by the same appeal to Biblical usage. The evidence for this does not appear so clearly in the English translation as the use of the term "for ever" does. One must study the Hebrew and Greek words themselves of the Scriptures. While it is true that doing so may open the way for some to accuse us of "trying to tear the Bible to pieces," not all will make such claims. Some are anxious for the truth at any cost, and will not accuse honest, believing souls of "handling the Word of God deceitfully," where this is not the case. It is for such that we are writing.

Young's Analytical Concordance lists 45 Hebrew words and 10 Greek words that are translated "destroy," while 31 Hebrew words and 4 Greek words are translated "destruction." These words have a variety of meanings, as is evident to all who will study these questions. These meanings include "to kill," "to mar," "to bruise," "to break," "to cut down," "to put an end to," "to abolish," "to lay waste," etc. In the story of the flood it is written that God said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth." Does that mean that the antediluvians were permanently exterminated, and will never come to judgment for their sins?

Jeremiah pronounced woe against Jerusalem thus: "For who shall have pity upon thee, O Jerusalem? or who shall bemoan thee? or who shall go aside to ask how thou doest? Thou hast forsaken me, saith the Lord, thou art gone backward: therefore will I stretch out My hand against thee, and destroy thee." Does it follow from this that Jerusalem was annihilated and so no longer exists? The fact is that Jerusalem has probably been "destroyed" more frequently than any other city in the world, yet it still exists. Its people have been killed, its walls and buildings have been broken down, its government has been changed again and again, but Jerusalem still exists. It has not been exterminated.

Similarly, Sodom was more completely "destroyed" than any other city of which we know. Jude 7 says it was "set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." But Sodom is to be restored again (see Ezekiel 16:44-63).

Someone will probably say, Yes, that is clear enough, but how about the statement of Jesus, "fear Him Who

is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" ("Gehenna;" Matt.-10:28). Well, that does sound formidable, doesn't it? That is, this is so until we learn that the same word is used in the statement, "He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth [destroyeth] his life for My sake shall find it" (Matt.-10:39). If his life was exterminated, it couldn't be found again. Perhaps someone else may ask about the statement, "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" (2 Thess.1:9). That sounds unanswerable, doesn't it? Well, maybe; but only until we learn that the Greek word *olethros* translated "destruction" here, is used in other places where it cannot possibly mean "extermination" (see 1 Cor.5:5; note the verb "destroy" in Hebrews 11:28, which is from the same root).

Do you think that all the "first-born" of Egypt, including the innocent babes, were exterminated, and will never have a chance to be justly judged, nor receive any recognition from God that they ever existed? Surely God does not deal with anyone in such a way as that! Please note, too, that the word "destruction" in 2 Thessalonians 1:9, is limited by the word "everlasting," and that the word "everlasting" is a misleading translation. We shall study that Greek word more carefully later; but suffice it to say for the present that the idea of the Greek word here is "eonian," or "pertaining to the age(s)." It does not mean unending. (See the sections, "How Long Is For Ever?" and Concluding Section).

It is usage that determines meaning--the Scripture's own usage, not man's. What counts is the meanings that the Biblical writers themselves gave to their own words, not the meanings that our English translations may sometimes provide.

According to Biblical usage, there is not a single clear statement of the "endless extermination of sinners" in the whole Bible--not even one. The doctrine of extermination is based wholly on inferences--according to human traditions and pre-suppositions. Thus the doctrines of both eternal torment and extermination are based wholly on false translations. There is not a single clear statement, correctly translated, in the entire Bible which supports either doctrine.

THE PENALTY FOR SIN

Jesus is the Savior because He bore the just penalty for sin. "Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18). "Him Who knew no sin He made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor.5:21). "Who His own self bare our sins in His body upon the tree, that we, having died unto sins, might live unto righteousness; by Whose stripes ye were healed" (1 Peter 2:24). "And He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world" (1 John 2:2).

Paul insists that Christ's death on the cross as a propitiation for sin, manifests the righteous judgment of God upon sin. "Whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in His blood, to show His righteousness because of the passing over of the sins done aforesaid, in the forbearance of God" (Rom.3:25). That is, for thousands of years God did not deal adequately and completely with sin--He "passed it over." He did not deal with mankind on the "cash basis," where full payment is required immediately on each transaction; but He dealt with the race on the "credit basis," under which method payment in full is expected at a later date.

Now when God made Him "to be sin on our behalf" (2 Cor.5:21), and "laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa.-53:6), Paul insists that God dealt fully and righteously with human sin in all its aspects. Accordingly, whatever debt, or price, or judgment, or penalty should have been met (call it by any word you choose), He exacted in full from His own Beloved Son. "In the crucified, God is dealing with the whole sin of the whole universe in holy love, in righteous judgment, and in redeeming grace." Recognizing this great fact, our Lord, hanging upon the cross, and ready to give up His spirit, spoke the word that, in His day, was regularly written across

every receipted bill, "Tetelestai," "Paid in full" (John 19:30; lit., "It is accomplished"). Christ on the cross demonstrates the love of God as nothing else ever did or can; yet He did more. The holy Son of mankind was making complete reparation to the holy and righteous throne of God.

But notice carefully what price He paid. If the just and ultimate penalty for sin is eternal torment, then Jesus can never be the Savior of anyone! He is not being eternally tormented. Again, if the just and ultimate penalty for sin is extermination, then Jesus can never be the Savior of anyone! He was not exterminated. Instead, He died for all; and, He is now in the glory as our advocate!

FALSE IDEAS OF GOD

"Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (i.e., false gods, or false ideas of the true God; 1 John 5:21). The most important aspect of the three proposed doctrines regarding the fate of the wicked is not what their consequences might be in relation to the wicked, but what their consequences would be in relation to God. The most important thinking in the world is the thinking men do about God. True ideas of God lead to nobility of life; false ideas of God lead to the opposite.

Theology and philosophy mold the life of the world. For example, a leading factor in the attitudes and beliefs that led to World War I, was the adoption by some of the philosophy of Nietzsche. Similarly, as in so many lands, it is belief in idols that makes an idolatrous people. This is so, even as it is also true that a Catholic theology makes a Catholic land, and a Protestant theology makes a Protestant land.

Do we have false ideas about God? I fear we do. We say that God is all-wise and all-powerful, and then turn around and deny it. We say that God is all-loving, and then turn around and deny it. We read John 1:1-14, and say that the Creative Word of God and the Redemptive Word of God are the same--but then turn around and deny it.

"God as Creator, and God as Redeemer, the God Who acts through the order of nature, and the God Who acts through the order of grace, God in the law, and God in the gospel--all are one and the same God!" (Edwin Lewis, in "Philosophy of Christian Revelation"). If only we held true to such beautiful teaching!

Let us look a bit more carefully at our teaching. Though we may formally affirm that God is all-wise and all-powerful, we do indeed turn around and deny this when we fail to unreservedly accept such glorious declarations as, "Is My hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver? behold, at My rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness" (Isa.50:2). "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud, thy sins: return unto Me; for I have redeemed thee" (Isa.44:22).

Ferre, in "The Christian Fellowship" says: "Although faith is supposed to hold that [God] is both all-wise and all-powerful, the point remains that either God is the Creator of this world, Who knew what He is doing, and Who will, in His own way, accomplish a completely good end, or else He is in some way limited. No matter what the nature of that limitation might be, if God is to be thought of as a sufficiently wise and powerful, completely good Will, the choice between a limited God and, ultimately, somehow, a universal salvation stands. On this point every theologian must make up his mind."

Folks who claim that they are true to the Bible, may indeed affirm that the Word Who creates, and the Word Who redeems are the same Word of God, but they effectually deny this very affirmation by their attitude toward the question of ultimate salvation for all men. They have an infinite Creator, but a very little Redeemer. Their Christ is a comparatively helpless and puny Saviour Who is going to lose most of those for Whom He died. He can pay the price for the sins of the whole world, but the stubborn will of man makes it ineffective.

Man's will is mightier than God's will. God is infinite to create; powerless to redeem.

Again, we say that God is love, and then turn around and deny it. We confidently affirm that God is going to do to His rebellious children what we would imprison or hang an earthly father for doing to his children. We really make God less than human. Let me quote again from Ferre in "The Christian Fellowship":

"We of the liberal tradition are still too empirical in attitude, however, to define love in terms of a historical revelation which can make love punish eternally the children of its own creation. God's love to us must at least be as good as the best love we know, and, we believe, much better. Punishment, hell, must be the decree of God's love. It must be purposive, not [merely] punitive, in nature. If the Christian love be sufficiently wise and strong, heaven can be heaven only when it has emptied hell."

Even so, beautiful as that idea may seem, some of us could not accept it merely on the basis of human philosophy. Unless we can find the truth revealed in God's Holy Word we would still have to reject it.

Another factor in our problem is God's relationship to the introduction of evil and sin into the universe. Some of the theological contortions men go through in order to relieve God of all responsibility in that field are pitiful. They are not explanations, but evasions. We have not room here for an extended discussion of such a subject, but a few observations may be in order.

Over and over, in different ways, the truth declared in Acts 15:18, "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world" is affirmed. God knew sin would enter His creation. He made preparation for it ahead of time. The first Christian sermon declares of Jesus, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23). If God knew about it ahead of time, then He could have prevented its entry if He had not wanted sin to get into His universe. But He did know, and, He did plan beforehand for just that. "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18).

Without relieving man of one whit of guilt for sin, it can be stated on the basis of the Bible that: (1) God provided a Saviour, "slain from the foundation of the world"; (2) God created Satan, the tempter, and had him on the doorstep of the world when man first appeared (if God had not wanted Satan there, surely He could have located him elsewhere, or else restrained him; "I have created the waster to destroy," Isa.54:16; (3) God planted the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and put it right at the cross-walk of Eden (hence, it is folly to assume that Adam is to blame for such factors; (4) God, in His infinite wisdom, wanted sin and salvation to operate in His universe: "For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of Him Who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God" (Rom.8:20,21). When we attempt to introduce sin into God's world as an oversight, or a slip-up, or otherwise somehow as a weakness on God's part, we are thereby destroying any concept of a Sovereign God, especially One Who is worthy of worship.

What we teach about the fate of the wicked, is a reflection of our understanding of God's solution to the Sin Problem. The eternal torment doctrine gives us a fiendish solution, to say the least. Such a God might well be feared, but could never be loved. No wonder the little girl who heard her father preach about such a God wished that God were as kind and good as her father!

And the extermination doctrine is a childish solution, at best. If you planned a house and by some chance--no matter whose fault--a door was put in the wrong place, or a partition left out, would you burn down the house? Only children would solve the problem that way!

Yet we confidently affirm that God is going to do such unGodlike things, in spite of the many places in the Bible which plainly show, "that in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him" (Eph. 1:10). See also Colossians 1:20, Philippians 2:9-11, and other clear statements in the Scriptures which plainly show that all realms of intelligence will ultimately be brought under the sway of Christ.

One other factor should be noted. In the eternal torment doctrine, God is supposed to let the lost suffer in the brimstone for all eternity without His feeling any concern over their suffering. What a perverse paternal care for His creatures such a doctrine would entail! And, according to the extermination doctrine, He would burn up the greater part of His own creation, and then go on for ever in perfect peace and heavenly bliss, with no sense of pain or emptiness of heart over the loss of countless millions of the souls for whom He sent Christ to die! "Little children, keep yourselves from false ideas of God!"

Either God is all-powerful, or He is not. Either God is all-wise, or He is not. Either God is all-loving, or He is not. Either God's will is sovereign, or it is not. Either God's grace is infinite, or it is not. Isn't it time for the church of Christ to decide one way or the other, and then make her theology fit her expressed faith? "Little children, keep yourselves from false ideas of God!"

THE PROBLEM OF THE AGES

The Hebrew word *olam* and the Greek word *aion* both mean "age" or "eon." For evidence of this refer to Young's Analytical Concordance, or any similar concordance. Incidentally, Robert Young in his "Literal Translation of the Bible" always translates these words by "age" and never once as "ever," "everlasting," or "eternal." The Hebrew "olam" comes from a root meaning "hidden." The word therefore means a period of time, but a period of unknown or hidden length. The word was often used to mean a man's lifetime because it was an unknown period. The adjective *aionios* is often translated "age-lasting" or "age-during," but would be more properly translated "pertaining to the ages," that is, something that occurs within the ages, but not necessarily lasting even throughout one entire age.

We have already spoken of "for ever" in connection with Jonah in the belly of the fish; of a Hebrew slave serving his master "for ever"; and of the Lord accepting Solomon's temple, "to put My name there for ever." Another illustration is the Aaronic priesthood. According to the King James version, Aaron and his sons were anointed as priests "forever," It says, "Their anointing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations" (Ex.40:15). Yet we read in Hebrews 7:11,12 that the Aaronic priesthood is changed to that of Melchisedec. There would be no contradiction if the statement in Exodus were translated, as it should be, "to the age, throughout their generations." That is, throughout their generations as long as that age lasted. In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures which Jesus and His disciples used, the Greek word *aion* was the word used for the Hebrew word *olam*. According to Hebrew and Greek usage, therefore, these words mean a period of time, a period of unspecified length, the duration of which is determined by the fact or condition or person to which the term is applied.

To show how confusing the whole matter is in the King James Version New Testament, let us look at the word *aion* a bit more in detail. In the Greek text from which this version was prepared, the noun form is used 128 times, while the adjective form *aionios* is used 71 times. In the King James Version *aion* is translated "age" only twice. Thirty-eight times it is translated "world." In the Scofield Bible we find 35 marginal corrections for the noun and three for the adjective, leaving about 160 passages where the translation is misleading and no corrections are made.

But there is still more confusion, as a little study of the Ephesian letter will show. The word *aion* is used six

times in the first three chapters as follows: In 1:21 we read "not only in this world" where it should read "age"; in 2:2 we read, "according to the course of this world"; it should be "according to the eon of this world"--not the eon before the flood nor the eon of the millennium, but the eon of *this* world (*kosmos*); in 2:7 it is translated as it should be, "in the ages to come." In 3:9 we read "which from the beginning of the world," where it should read, "from the ages." In 3:11, we find, "according to the eternal purpose," where it should read, "the purpose of the ages," while in 3:21 we discover "world without end" for the phrase, "to the age of the ages." To add to the confusion, the word *genea*, which means "generation(s)," is translated "age" twice in the third chapter: in 3:5 "which in other ages," and in 3:21 "throughout all ages." Is there any wonder that people do not know what the Bible teaches about the "ages"?

In various places, the American Standard comes nearer to giving us the accurate understanding of the noun, but never once correctly translates the adjective, either in the text or in the margin. Both the English and the American Revised Versions correctly have, "to the consummation of the age" in the margin, yet leave the wrong translation, "end of the world," in the text. Neither version translates Ephesians 3:21 accurately, "to the age of the ages."

We have no difficulty in understanding "King of kings" or "Lord of lords." Everybody knows that they mean the greatest King of all kings, and the highest Lord of all lords. It ought to be equally clear that "the age of the ages," means the greatest age of all ages, the great consummation of the ages when God brings to completion what He has been busily engaged in during all other ages. Of course, if you grew up in the age of Darwinism and evolution, as this writer did, it may be as hard for you as it was for him to accept the Biblical teaching of God's ages; nevertheless, many things in your Bible will continue to be confusing, and apparently contradictory, until you see this truth of the Scriptures.

God was before the ages. "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory" (1 Cor.2:7). The accurate translation is "foreordained before the ages." "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ before the world began" (2 Tim.1:9). But again, the accurate translation is, "before eonian times." "In the hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began" (Titus 1:2), should read: "before eonian times." God was before the ages.

But God made the eons or ages through Christ. "God, Who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us in His Son, Whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by Whom also He made the worlds [ages]" (Heb.1:1,2). "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God" (Heb. 11:3). But it should read, "the ages were planned [or, "attuned"] by the Word of God." God made the eons through Christ.

Christ reigns for the eons. "And He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:33). This should read, "He shall reign over the house of Jacob for the eons"; indeed, the time will come when Christ will no longer reign over this kingdom. "Then cometh the end when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father" (1 Cor.15:24). But the kingdom will continue under the Father's rule, and it will have no end.

The ages will end. A literal translation of Hebrews 9:26 is, "But now, once, in order to [lit., "on"] a conclusion of the eons, hath He been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."

There are so many Biblical statements that become clear when one grasps the truth of the ages. "Many are called, but few are chosen," applies to the kingdom age and calling. There seems to be a conflict between the statement in Joel 3:10, "Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears," and the

statements in Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3 where the swords are to be beaten into plowshares, and the spears into pruninghooks. But when one sees that the first statement applies to one age, and the other statements apply to another age, there is no conflict. When Jesus was talking about the so-called "unpardonable sin," He said, "But whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come." The Scofield Bible translates "age" in the margin instead of "world," just as the American Standard does, and that makes sense. He will not be forgiven in this age, nor in the millennium; he will carry his sin still unforgiven into the coming age.

Throughout the eons there is sin and evil, condemnation and death. (Rom.2:1-16; Rom. 5:12; Heb.6:2; Rev.-20:11-15, and others). At the end of the eons, death is to be destroyed, and all will be justified (Rom.5:18,19, Weymouth). All will be reconciled through Christ's blood (Col.-1:20), all will be subject to God, and God will be All in all (1 Cor.15:25-28). Only as one sees the plan of the Ages does he see the beauty of God's Program for the redemption of the race.

But the question naturally arises, "How many ages are there?" Different Bible students might vary widely in their opinion here, and the present writer would be the last to claim infallibility. The Scriptures speak often of this present age. Again they speak of ages past, and ages to come.

There must have been an age, or ages, before the creation of man when the order of angels was created (Job 38:3-7). According to the Bible, Satan was a created being waiting on the doorstep of the world to lead men astray when man was first placed on this earth. We read in Genesis 2:15 that Adam was placed in the garden to dress it and keep it (i.e., to till it and guard it). Thus there was already a threatened danger which must have been in existence before Adam's creation. When Adam failed to keep (guard) the garden the cherubim were set with flaming sword "to keep [i.e., "guard," the same Hebrew word as in Gen.2:15] the way of the tree of life." When Adam was thrust out of the garden, the entire human family sank lower and lower into sin until God destroyed all but Noah and his family in the Flood, and then ushered in a new age. So there must have been two or more ages before this present evil one (Gal.1:4). Similarly, in Ephesians 2:7 we read, "That in the ages to come..."; here, through the usage of the Greek *aion* in the plural, we learn that there shall be, at least, two ages after this one. Similarly, Revelation 20:10 speaks of "the ages of the ages."

WHAT HAPPENS IN JUDGMENT?

Those who object to the doctrine of the ultimate salvation of all usually insist that those who hold that doctrine do not believe that sin will be punished. That is a false criticism. Believers in Reconciliation are sure that "every transgression and disobedience receives a just recompense of reward" (Hebrews 2:2). They are certain that judgment for sin is inescapable. But they also believe that there are more judgments than folks ordinarily have recognized. Some judgments are past, some are continuously present, and some are future. It is misleading to speak of "The Judgment," as though it were only one event coming sometime in the future.

It may help us to list a few of the judgments of God upon sin. First of all, there was the judgment pronounced upon Adam in the Garden of Eden. That judgment has been operating ever since, and will continue to operate until the consummation. Then there was the special judgment of the Flood, and the special judgment on Sodom. There have been judgments upon Israel, such as the Captivity, and the Dispersion. One terrible judgment known as Jacob's Trouble is still to fall upon Israel (Jer.30:7).

The average church member has the idea that there is only one judgment at the great white throne; and that there everyone, good and bad, Christian and non-Christian, will meet and be separated like sheep and goats. That is not Biblical teaching.

The Bible teaches three judgments to be faced by every Christian. One is past; one is continuously present; and one is future. In one we are judged as sinners; in one we are judged as sons; and in one we are judged as servants.

JUDGED AS SINNERS

This judgment is past for every Christian. "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Pet.2:24). But He did that 1900 years ago--and I do not know that you and I can do anything to add to its effectiveness. Do you? "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin" (2 Cor.5:21). "There is therefore now no condemnation (sin-judgment) to them who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom.8:1). Why is there no condemnation *now*? Because He bore it *then*, over 1900 years ago. So we do not have to bear it now. We ought to thank Him that He has already borne it for us.

JUDGED AS SONS

Through Christ God accepts us as His children. "For we are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal.-3:26). "Beloved, now are we the sons of God" (1 John 3:2). He gives us the standing of sons. But He desires also that we become sons in state, or condition, as well. He wants His sons to be son-like. And in order to make us so, He brings us into judgment, son-judgment. The prodigal son was not son-like, but he was still a son.

"For if we would judge ourselves we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" (1 Cor.11:-31,32). That is, when we do wrong, if we recognize it, and condemn it in ourselves, and confess it to God, that is the end of it. For all God wants is for us to recognize and forsake all evil. But if we do not recognize it, or fail to confess it, then God has to take us in hand and judge us Himself. That is, He "chastises" us--which word comes from a root word meaning chaste or pure. God wants us to be chaste.

Here is a clear statement of that truth from the Bible. "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son [this is son-judgment], despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him: For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure: but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them who are exercised thereby" (Heb.12:5-11). This quotation shows both the nature and purpose of our son-judgment.

JUDGED AS SERVANTS

This is the judgment that is still future. It is a reward for works, not a judgment on sin. Salvation is from sin; reward is for service. May God grant us a greater awareness of the fact that our reward depends upon the faithfulness of our service.

"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels and then He shall reward every man according to his works" (Matt.16:27). "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work [not his sin] of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (1 Cor.3:11-15). The future judgment is on service.

Then there is the Judgment of the Nations (Matt.25:-31-46), which will be a judgment of the living at the Second Coming of Christ. At the close of the Millennium will occur the Great White Throne Judgment, a judgment upon those who were not raised at the second Coming of Christ but were resurrected after the thousand years are past (Rev.20:12). The most important Judgment of all, however, was the judgment of sin at the cross of Christ.

Every sin ever committed receives a just recompense of reward. There is no escape. But it is a mistake to believe that every sin will be judged at one and the same time in the future. For instance, Jeremiah pronounced the curse of God upon Israel thus: "For Mine eyes are upon all their ways: they are not hid from My face, neither is their iniquity hid from Mine eyes. And first I will recompense their iniquity and their sin double" (Jer.16:17,18). The part of Isaiah's prophecy that looks beyond the Captivity begins as follows: "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (Isa.40:1,2). Now if her iniquity is pardoned, and she has received double for her sin, do you think God will demand punishment again for that sin? No, God is not like that.

Nevertheless, every sin that has not already been punished, as those of Israel mentioned above were punished, or sins that have not been forgiven through Christ, will be punished. Some will receive their just recompense in the crises connected with the millennial age, and some in the great day of judging that follows the Millennium. These will be "eonian punishment," which is mistakenly translated in our ordinary versions as "everlasting punishment." It is not "everlasting punishment," but more accurately, "eonian chastening."

One hesitates to use the word "hell" in speaking of the judgments. In the King James Version, the Hebrew *sheol*, and the Greek *hades*, *gehenna*, and *tartarus*, were all translated "hell," while popular usage makes the lake of fire mean "hell" as well. Any careful student of the Bible is aware of these things. So that, no matter how carefully one tries to explain, he is sure to be misunderstood if he uses the word "hell." This is because, to the ordinary person, "hell" means a lake of fire and brimstone in which the damned (condemned) will suffer forever.

While feeding hogs in the "Far Country," the prodigal came to himself. It was the lack of food that changed him. His body was made for food, even as his heart was made for friendship and love, but he was destitute. "No man gave unto him." Then he remembered: "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!" (Luke 15:17). He was suffering the results of his own selfishness, and lust, and profligacy. His body was in agony without the sustenance it was created for. Rags, and filth, and the stench of his surroundings were only incidental to these greater facts: (1) his body was without the food for which it was created, and (2) his heart was without the friendship and love for which it was created. So it ought to be clear to thinking people that the reality of judgment will be separation from God's fellowship and the consequent recognition of God's wrath and condemnation, and not the incidentals of place or circumstances.

Of course, no one knows just what judgment will be like, nor will one know until one enters into it. Still, we ought to have a few trustworthy ideas, based on the teachings of the Bible about the subject, and about the nature of God:

(1) Judgment will bring punishment, deserved punishment; but it will not be meaningless torture. The *Riverside Daily Press* for November 23, 1940, had an Associated Press report from San Francisco as follows: "A Father's Curse,' was the legacy left by Dennis Donohue III, fifty-four, member of a well known family here, to his two daughters by a former wife, in a will filed for probate in Superior Court:

"And to my two daughters, Frances Marie and Denise Victoria Donohue,' he wrote in his own hand, 'by virtue of their unfilial attitude toward a doting father, and because they have repeatedly thwarted my efforts to see them, I leave the sum of one dollar each and a father's curse. May their respective lives be fraught with misery, unhappiness and poignant sorrow. May their deaths be soon and of a lingering, malign, and torturous nature. May their souls rest in hell and suffer the torments of the damned for eternity.'" Of course, such an attitude is not that of a true father; it is only that of a fiend. But what may not be clear to all is that, in this respect, this unfortunate man is a perfect example of the God of popular theology. Because his children were unfilial he consigns them to the torment of "hell fire," for ever.

We have all been unfilial children of the Heavenly Father; only a handful of us have repented. Therefore, this "God of orthodoxy" consigns all the rest of us to unending torment! No more terrible insult was ever given to the God of all grace.

(2) Judgment will be just. "The Lord will count, when He writeth up the people, that this man was born there" (Psa.87:6). That is, God will remember the heredity and environment of each individual. We read in Hebrews 2:2 that "every transgression and disobedience receives a just recompense of reward." Judgment will be just.

(3) In order to be just, judgment will be graded to suit the offense. In Luke 12:42-48, Jesus taught us that the servant "which knew His Lord's will and prepared not himself, neither did according to His will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes." This one fact about judgment rules out both Eternal Torment and Extermination, for neither of them, by their very nature, can be graded.

(4) All of God's judgments will be purposive; they will accomplish something. "For when Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isa.26:9). "Lord, in trouble have they visited Thee, they poured out a prayer when Thy chastening was upon them" (Isa.26:16). "Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness" (Heb.12:9,10).

(5) Judgment will destroy enmity and rebellion. "For He must reign till He hath put all His enemies under His feet" (1 Cor.15:25). And when enmity and rebellion are destroyed what is to hinder faith and trust?

The pity about this whole matter is that many folks who claim to be missionary and evangelistic in attitude, and who insist that they want to see the wicked saved, nevertheless tend to anger if they are told that God is going to do just that for all the wicked. They are not willing for God to save the lost ultimately, unless He does it according to their theological scheme. They are like Jonah, who was angry because God spared the wicked city of Nineveh. Search your own heart and see if you really want the wicked saved. Such a self-searching may do you good.

THE PLACE OF THE CHURCH IN THE PLAN OF THE AGES

To see the place of the church in the plan of the ages one needs to remember a bit of history which will be readily admitted as historic by any Bible believer.

First, sin entered the universe among the angels. Since angels are an order of beings, not a race, each one obviously a separate creation, sin affected only a part of the angelic order. When, through Adam's disobedience, sin came into the human race, according to the Bible, it brought mortality and death--"dying thou shalt die" (Gen. 2:17). Paul shows that the weakness and depletion accompanying mortality and death are the source of our proneness to sin. A literal translation of Romans 5:12 is--"On this account, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and thus death passed through to all men, upon which all sinned." Death passed through to all men by the process of heredity. And then because we are all mortal and dying--all weakened and sapped and depleted--we sin. We are all born with a tragic bent or tendency to sin. No child has to be taught to give vent to his temper; he has to be taught to control it. No child has to be taught to lie; he has to be taught to tell the truth. The pull of our natures is down and not up. No unaided mortal has ever yet been able to resist every evil tendency in his hereditary weakness.

Here, then, we have the setting or background against which God puts forth His plan of the ages. Part of the angelic host affected, and all of the human race affected by this virus of sin, the wages of which for man is death. What does God do about it?

Of course, the fallen angels were cast out of heaven (see 2 Pet.2:4; Jude 6). Then later man is cast out of Eden, and the whole earth is also affected by man's sin. "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" (Rom.8.22).

Until the time of the flood, there was just one kind of man; all were simply one common lot of sinners. Yet in the age after the flood, beginning with Abraham, men were divided into two groups--men in general, plus a Chosen Family. Later we recognize these two groups as Jews and Gentiles. The Chosen Family, or Israelites, were selected to bear witness to a wicked and idolatrous world of the truth of the one true God. They remembered that they were chosen, but quickly forgot what they were chosen for. Instead of bearing witness to the Gentiles, they only hated them.

In the New Testament, however, another group has appeared, a group called the Church. It is a "called-out" group, composed of both Jews and Gentiles, chosen especially to proclaim, not only the power and wisdom and righteousness of God, but, particularly, His grace. They are to proclaim to the world God's solution of the problem of sin and evil, the solution God wrought out in Christ.

So far, what has been said in this chapter is proclaimed widely in Christian churches. But what is not generally taught is what God is planning to do with the church "in the ages to come." This is made clear especially in Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. Let us look at it briefly.

First of all, the members of the church were chosen in Christ before the foundation [lit., "disruption"] of the world, predestinated unto the adoption of sons by Jesus Christ to God, and accepted in the Beloved (Eph.1:4-6). To the selection of that chosen group, the activities of God in the world are now devoted. It may sound like a startling statement, but it is Biblically true to say that God is not now trying to convert the whole world! Instead, He is calling out the church! As recorded in Acts 15:13,14, James said, "Men and brethren, hearken unto me; Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name." The whole speech of James, however, is one which is generally overlooked in forming a Christian viewpoint. It is as follows:

"After this I will return [the Second Coming of Christ], and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down: and I will build again the ruins thereof, and will set it up: that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the nations, upon whom My name is called, saith the Lord, Who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:16-18). That Christians can read these stirring words and have no idea of what God plans to do in the coming ages seems to be past belief. Yet the writer read them for years before their meaning dawned in his own mind, so why should he be critical of others who see no further than he used to see? Still, he does ask that you not only read about all the nations seeking after the Lord (following the Second Coming), but that you put with it the clear statement in Romans 11:26, "And so all Israel shall be saved." God is not done with humanity in this age! He has much still to do "in the ages to come." And, in the doing of it, He will make use of His church, the called-out assembly.

God not only chose the church, He not only predestined it to the adoption of sons, He not only accepted it in the Beloved, but He also does for its members exactly what He did with Christ. He has "quicken'd us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved), and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus" (Eph.2:5,6). God has given to the church the highest standing that it is possible for Him to give it. The church is not only "beside" Christ in its standing; it is to live and reign with Him as well; best of all, it is to be like Him (1 John 3 :2). But that is not just to honor the church. It is part of God's program for the church, "in the ages to come."

What is that program? Here it is: "That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph.2:7, RV). Show it to whom? Not to those who already know it--that would be useless nonsense. But to those who do not know it! That is, in this age to living men, and in the ages to come to resurrected men. More than that! To the angels, also! That is Paul's daring faith. "Unto me who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the nations the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the ages hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and authorities in the heavenlies might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the purpose of the ages which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph.3:8-11). To all on the earth the grace of God must be made known; and to all in the heavenlies, also. This is the calling of the church.

The plan of God for the ages has the church in its center. He has revealed in the Bible a progressive unfolding of those plans, principally covering human history, but giving also glimpses of His purpose in the "ages to come." In the center of that purpose stands the church. Christ, the Head of the church, has been given the place of highest authority in the entire universe. "Far above all principality, and authority, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come" (Eph.1:21). But to rule with Him, to reign with Him, to demonstrate His grace "in the ages to come"--this is the task of "the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph.1:22,23).

But the objection will be made that "in the ages to come" men will not deserve an opportunity to accept Christ. Of course there will be countless millions there who have never had an opportunity for salvation, who never heard the name of Christ in Whom alone men find life. How much will the apathy of the church today be responsible for that fact? But here will be other countless millions who have heard the message and have rejected it. So men say, "Let them go to hell! They will be getting just what is coming to them. They do not deserve the grace of God."

May the writer say that he does not deserve the grace of God. And without any thought of being insulting, but just to state the fact according to Bible estimate, you do not deserve the grace of God, either! All men are

undeserving sinners. That is why it takes grace (unmerited favor) to save.

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph.2:8,9). Why do these verses follow immediately the statement, "that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus"? And why do these verses begin with the word "for"? The word "for" shows a relationship between what precedes and what follows. In the ages to come, He will demonstrate His grace, for He has already shown it to us, His church, whom He will use as the demonstration.

No member of the church deserves to be saved by grace. Not one thing can we claim that has any merit in it. Some will say that at least our faith is our own. "For by grace are ye saved through faith"--and surely the faith is ours. But Paul will not have it so, for he adds, "and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." Yes, God gives to us our faith, "according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Rom.12:3). And He gives it to us through "Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb.12:2). Not only does He give us grace: He gives us the faith to receive it. Otherwise we would still be in stubbornness or unbelief. "For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all" (Rom.11:32).

So God chooses a few undeserving sinners in this age through whom He will demonstrate His grace to other undeserving sinners, "in the ages to come." And the demonstration will be convincing, too. It will accomplish what God intends that it shall accomplish: "That in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him" (Eph.1:10).

Oscar Lowry, in "Scripture Memorizing for Successful Soul-Winning," tells us about George Mueller, perhaps the greatest man of prayer since the apostle Paul, and how this great man of God with all his spiritual power was not able to bring his own father to faith in Christ. One wonders if God will use George Mueller "in the ages to come" to accomplish what the same George Mueller was unable to do in this age! For George Mueller is a part of the church which God will use to demonstrate His grace. All of us have dear ones who are unsaved. Will God give us the privilege "in the ages to come" of showing the exceeding riches of His grace to them personally? There is no promise like that in the Scriptures, so far as I know. But there is the definite promise that the church will be used "in the ages to come" to demonstrate both the grace and the manifold wisdom of God. And every member of the church will share in that universal revelation of God's infinite love. In the end, God will be "All in all," "for out of Him, and through Him, and unto Him are all things" (Rom.11:36).

SOME OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED

There are many objections raised against the teachings of Reconciliation, but the principal ones can be covered under five heads. One is that if all are to be saved ultimately, there is no need for preaching and teaching the gospel; another is that we shall have salvation by compulsion; a third is that Reconciliation teaches a "second chance" gospel; the fourth is that Reconciliation would give to many men a "hell redemption"; and the fifth is the problem of Dives (i.e., the Rich Man) and Lazarus. Let us consider these briefly in the above order.

(1) Why preach and teach the gospel if all are to be saved ultimately? This is one of the first objections made. The writer used to make it most vehemently himself. But it just shows a lack of clear thinking; that's all.

First, the Christian life is so rich and worthwhile that it would be the only life to live, even if there were no hereafter. Ask those who have really tried Christ over a long period of years. Was it not Dr. A.J. Gordon who

met an old crippled man on the street, and asked him why, with all his handicap, his face was nevertheless so bright and shining? And the old man answered, "The Devil has no happy old men!"

*Let me grow lovely, growing old,
So many fine things do;*

Laces, and ivory, and gold,

And silks, need not be new;

And there is healing in old trees;

Old streets, a glamour hold;

Why may not I, as well as these,

Grow lovely, growing old?

.....K.W. Baker

Ah, but it is those who keep closest to Christ who grow loveliest, growing old. Wouldn't you be glad to tell someone of that possibility?

Then we have the additional reason of keeping people from going into judgment. To be separated from God for a whole age, not merely three score years and ten, is a terrible fate. If you could prevent folks from having typhoid fever, or infantile paralysis, wouldn't you do it, even if the question of dying from such diseases was not considered? Do you care?

Again, the ministry of reconciliation has been committed unto men--not unto angels. If men are taught the gospel at all, other men must do it. And those other men must be those who know our Christ. The angels of God would be happy to proclaim the message we have to give, but they can't do it. We must do it (see 2 Cor.5:18-20).

Moreover, we are commanded to evangelize the world. That was the last word the Master left with his disciples. If we do not herald the gospel, we are disobeying our Lord.

Then, to, we should witness for Christ because of the great honor of being "workers together with God." Some day we shall realize, as we may not now, just how great that honor really is, and how much we have missed if we fail to share in this task to which the Almighty has set His hand.

Not least of the reasons, possibly, from the standpoint of personal experience, is the joy of seeing people accept Christ as their own Saviour. Just ask anyone who has led some person to the Lord, what is the greatest joy he knows. He will not be slow in telling you. Or try it yourself.

Lastly, there is the urge of reward. Salvation is a free gift to be received by faith, and by faith alone. No one can buy it, or earn it. There is no way to get salvation except to take it as one takes any other gift, and then say, "Thank you!" But in addition to our salvation, the Lord offers us rewards for the service we render after we have accepted His salvation. We may have salvation here and now, and know it, too; but the greatest rewards for our service are to be given to us in the future. Only God knows how glorious they will be. Don't miss out. Share the gospel you know!

(2) "Reconciliation would mean salvation by force," men say, and they are thinking about the freedom of man's will.

They claim that when God made man in the first place, He endowed him with freedom of will, the ability to accept God's love or to reject it, and that the decision he makes here and now is a final choice. But our Lord Jesus says, "No one is able to come unto Me unless the Father Who sent Me draw him" (John 6:44). Some men interpret 1 Timothy 2:4, "who will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth," as meaning that God desires or wishes all men to be saved, but that it does not mean that they will or must be saved. A little careful thinking will show that such an interpretation makes the will of man more mighty than the will of God. God wills (or wishes) all men to be saved, but He is not able to get His will (or wish) fulfilled. Man wills not to be saved, and he is perfectly able to have his will fulfilled. That deifies man, and dethrones God. Man is able to get his will done, but God is not.

Let us think a moment of just how free man is, how far his freedom can go. A little observation and study will show that man's freedom has very narrow limits. One is able to wish or desire or purpose as he pleases, but when he comes to carry out his wish or desire or purpose, he finds that he faces a problem. One is not free in the physical realm. Just let him try to jump off the earth and land on Mars, for example. One is not free in the social realm. Not every man can marry the woman he wishes. One is not free in the moral and spiritual realm. He may desire with all his being to free the world of drunkenness and vice, of greed and hate and war, but who has yet accomplished that?

If you will turn to the Bible, you will find some clear teaching about the limits of man's freedom. "Oh, Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer.10:23). "Man's goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way?" (Prov.20:24). These seem to teach that man is not free at all. How much freedom does he really have? "A man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps" (Prov.16:9). That is, it is clearly within a man's province to believe what he wants to believe, to desire and plan a certain way of action, but, unless God permits him to carry it out, his plan will never be accomplished. "The Lord directeth his steps."

It is a strange theory that obsesses men that the human being is greater in power than God, and that, no matter what the plan of God for the world may be, man is able finally to wreck it. But it is not given to man finally to overthrow the will of God. Since God is God, His will must ultimately triumph. In Ephesians 1:11 we read that God is One "Who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." God is still God. "I know that Thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of Thine can be restrained" (Job 42:2).

We often forget that God not only allows sin and evil, but that He also uses them. Again and again, when trouble stalks his path, a man turns back to the God Whom he has despised. When his wife dies, or his children go wrong; when loss and disaster fall upon him, again and again he will seek the God he has neglected. Many men in military service find that danger and privation turn their minds back to God. Foxholes cure atheism, they say. Probably this occurs not so generally as such statements lead us to believe, but often. Weeks on a rubber raft in the ocean do something to a man; and he is a very different person when he lands on shore again. That is not because God coerces the man, but because God brings upon him such experiences as change his attitude. And God brings such experiences upon men, not in anger, but in love. He is too wise to err, too loving to be unkind.

God knows that some men will need judgments to bring them to their senses. He will see to it that ultimately all men will want God's will to be done, because they will see that His will is wisest and best. That will not be salvation by compulsion, for *love is the only ultimate power that is not coercive*.

(3) Again, people say that Reconciliation makes a "second chance" gospel. No, no,

no! We do not have a "first chance" gospel, nor a "second chance" gospel. Salvation is not by "chance," it is by grace! Infinite grace!

There have been some people who accepted Christ as their Saviour at the "first chance" they ever had. Three thousand did that on the day of Pentecost. But I have asked many men if they accepted the Saviour the "first chance" they had, and have yet to find that man! I had hundreds of "chances" before I let Christ into my heart, and so have most of you.

One denomination, in an official publication concerning its belief, makes the following statement:

"Some people inconsiderately accuse us of rejecting the atonement of Christ entirely because we dissent from the view that the atonement was made upon the cross as is generally held. But we do nothing of the kind. We object to the view that the atonement was made upon the cross, because it inevitably leads to one of two great errors, thus, Christ on the cross bore the sins of all the world. John said, 'Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away (margin, 'beareth') the sin of the world' (John 1:29). Peter tells us how Christ thus bore the sins of the world. 'Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree' (1 Peter 2:24). Paul says that 'He died for all' (2 Cor.5:14,15). That which Christ did on the cross, therefore, was done indiscriminately and unconditionally for all the world, and if this was the atonement, then all the sins of the world have been atoned for and all will be saved--but all men will not be saved; hence the sins of all were not atoned for upon the cross."

Little comment needs to be made about this quotation except to point out that the writer sees clearly that, if the usual understanding of the cross of Christ is accepted, all men will be saved. Hence, in order to maintain that not all will be saved, as he thinks, he claims that the atonement was not made upon the cross. But the Bible teaches clearly that the atonement was made upon the cross. "All we like sheep have gone astray: we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa.53:6). "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). And in the Hebrew letter we read of the Christ Who "by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Heb.2:9). But He did that on the cross.

Through the centuries the Christian understanding has been that when Jesus hung on the cross and cried, "It is finished," the problem of atonement was settled for all time. We do not have, therefore, a gospel of chance, either first chance or many chances. We have a gospel of grace.

Jesus gave a wonderful teaching in Matthew 11, one aspect of which is often overlooked. He said that if Tyre and Sidon had only witnessed the mighty works which were done in Chorazin and Bethsaida they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. That is, more knowledge and information would have brought them to repentance. Do you think, therefore, that God will torment the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon forever because of their lack of knowledge? Again, He said that if Sodom could have witnessed the mighty works that were done in Capernaum "it would have remained until this day." Do you think that the inhabitants of Sodom will be tormented forever just because they lacked the opportunities of Capernaum? Nay, indeed! God will not inflict ultimate punishment on men who have not had ultimate knowledge. "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim.2:3,4). It is not just a matter of one "chance."

Just as God dealt with the writer until he wanted to accept His grace, so will God do with all men, though it may take ages to accomplish His purpose. Infinite love is not exhausted in three score years and ten! Of course our creeds insist that mercy is ended when men die, but the Bible doesn't say so. It says "the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting," or correctly, "from eon to eon" (Psa.103:17). Why do we not

believe it?

(4) The fourth objection is that the doctrine of Reconciliation teaches a "hell redemption." Chas. G. Finney opposed the teaching of the ultimate salvation of all by ridicule. He said that those who were saved after this "age of grace" would unceasingly sing, "Thanks be to the hell that saved us by our own suffering!" Just how much weight is there to that criticism? Those who accept the usual interpretation of Calvary believe that on the cross Christ dealt with the guilt of the whole world's sin. But there is one thing that the cross of Christ has not yet accomplished, and that is the removal of man's rebellion.

In our chapter on judgments we pointed out that the flesh is to be destroyed. The word "flesh" (Greek, *_sarx_*) is the word used for "carnal." "The carnal [*_sarx_*] mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom.8.7). This carnal mind is enmity against God because it is blind. Now when this carnal mind, which is enmity against God, and which is blind, is destroyed, the enmity and the blindness will both disappear. The person will then be free to choose according to the truth.

Judgment destroys the flesh, the carnal mind which blinds, which is enmity against God; but judgment does not grant redemption. It only destroys rebellion! Redemption was purchased on the cross.

For instance, when the Prodigal was feeding hogs in the "far country" he "came to himself," according to Jesus. Did he have a "hogpen redemption?" Well, hardly. He got some sense in the pigsty--it was there his willfulness and rebellion left him--but he was not saved till he got back to his father.

If soldiers become Christians on the battle front, do they therefore have a "war redemption"? Well, hardly. Men in the danger and horror of war no doubt begin to think as they never thought before; but war does not save. At best, it can only awaken, and turn men to the Christ they have ignored. And if they are saved at all it is because they accept in all sincerity the Saviour Who bore their sins on Calvary's cross.

Now the Prodigal didn't have to go home. He was not compelled to do so; he wanted to. But he didn't want to until he got to feeding hogs. The men in the foxholes of battle are not compelled to become Christians, they want to. But they do not want to until the horrors of war grip their minds and hearts. The point is that both the Prodigal and the soldier come to the place where they choose to "arise and go to the Father."

And yet even this is not ultimately the man's own doing, any more than the good desires and actions of an earnest Christian are his own doings. "For it is God Who worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil.2:13). And this gracious will of God is to be completely wrought out in Christ. "It is in Him and through the shedding of His blood that we have our deliverance--the forgiveness of our offenses--so abundant was God's grace, the grace which He, the possessor of all wisdom and understanding, lavished upon us, when He made known the secret of His will. And this is in harmony with God's merciful purpose for the government of the world when the times are ripe for it--the purpose which He cherished in His own mind of restoring the whole creation to find its one Head in Christ, yes, things in heaven and things on earth, to find their one Head in Him" (Eph.1:7-10, Weymouth). No, we do not have a "hell redemption." We have a redemption of infinite grace and love, made known, and made effective for us, by the sacrifice of our blessed Lord on Calvary's cross. It is a God-planned, Christ-accomplished, blood-bought redemption sufficient for all creation.

(5) One of the commonest objections to the doctrine of Reconciliation is the insistence that the story of Dives and Lazarus (A detailed exposition of this subject may be found in the booklet, "Lazarus and the Rich Man," by Alan Burns- Concordant Publishing Concern) pictures the fate of the wicked and the righteous, and that this makes Reconciliation not only impossible, but a rank

denial of the plain teaching of Scripture. What shall we say about this?

In the first place, the story of Dives and Lazarus is usually considered without any reference to its setting. Near the close of Jesus' ministry He had eaten dinner with a Pharisee, at which time He not only healed a man with dropsy, but gave some pointed instructions about how to give a dinner party. When He left the house, great throngs accompanied Him (Luke 14:25).

Many of this great company were publicans and sinners. In Luke 15:1,2 we read, "Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners to hear Him, and the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." It is against this background of criticism that the teachings of Luke 15 and 16 are given. Those teachings are called a parable. "And He spake this parable unto them, saying," (Luke 15:3). The Greek is very definite in making the word for parable clearly a singular noun; it is, "the parable this." Five seemingly separate stories enter into His teaching to carry the truth of "this parable." The Lord's regular method of teaching all, except the inner circle of His disciples, was by parable. "All these things spake Jesus *in parables* unto the multitudes; and without a parable spake *He nothing* unto them" (Matt.-13:34). "But privately to His disciples He expounded all things" (Mark 4:34).

Jesus loved the publicans and sinners and wanted to help and save them. But these self-righteous Pharisees and scribes, whose business it should have been to teach the people the love of God and to invite them to love and obey Him in response to His grace, not only hated these publicans and sinners, but ostracized and excommunicated them from all the privileges of Jewish worship and fellowship.

Hence, in the presence of both leaders and outcasts, Jesus gave this parable; part of it to bring hope to the outcasts, and part of it to condemn the leaders for their heartlessness and neglect. The first part, consisting of three stories, was for the encouragement of the publicans and sinners; the last part, consisting of two stories, expresses His condemnation of the Pharisees and scribes.

First came the story of "The Lost Sheep," and the solicitude of the shepherd to bring it back to the fold.

Then Jesus told the story of "The Lost Coin," and the eagerness of the woman to find it again.

The third story was about "The Lost Son," and the yearning of the Father for his wayward boy to come home again.

These three stories all tell the same truth. God is anxious for all the lost to return to Him, whether they become lost just through heedlessness, like a wandering sheep, or whether they are lost because of the carelessness of someone else, as in the case of the lost coin, or whether they are lost because of their own willfulness and rebellion, like the lost son. God wants them back. How these stories must have thrilled the hearts of the publicans and sinners, who longed for fellowship both with man and God!

But this parable is not finished when Jesus has told of the love of God for the lost. It contains also his condemnation of those who were supposed to teach these sinners about the love of God, but who didn't do what they were expected to do because their hearts were so full of self-righteousness and pride. They not only hated the Gentiles, but they also hated all the sons of Israel who failed to keep their man-made regulations. Through their influence and authority, many of the chosen people were permanently excluded from all public worship in Israel.

The story of "The Unjust Steward" becomes crystal clear in the light of this historical background. Some

details may seem puzzling, but the story as a whole shines like the sun in the sky. "There was a certain rich man who had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods" (Luke 16:1). In this story, "the rich man" stands for God; the steward represents the leadership of Israel; while the rich man's "goods" seems to carry a double meaning. First, God's "goods" represent His Word, His truth, the message of His love for a lost world; this was being wasted by the steward. Instead of sharing it with all, it was most selfishly kept for the favored few. Next, God's "goods" included His chosen people who were the custodians of His message to men. All the Jews, including publicans and sinners, were called to be His witnesses to an idolatrous world. But the Pharisees and scribes who were the "steward," who were supposed to dispense God's Word and care for God's people, not only ignored the publicans and sinners, but actually excluded them from the worship of God and the privileges of religion. Instead of being faithful stewards of God's grace, they were haughty dictators, actually withholding God's message from those to whom it belonged, and excommunicating many whose rightful place was within the religion of Israel. No wonder Jesus called them "unjust stewards." Indeed, in the story, when the unjust steward was caught, he went further into deceit and trickery in order to protect himself. "He that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much." Did the Pharisees and scribes recognize themselves in this story? And what did the publicans and sinners think?

The last section of this parable is the story of Dives and Lazarus. In it Jesus changed His figures by using some of the traditions of the Talmud. The idea of a place of torment under the earth is Talmudic; the concept of Abraham's bosom is Talmudic. In fact, the whole story of Dives and Lazarus is an adaptation of a story in the Talmud. But in this last section of the parable as well, Jesus is still keeping in mind the Pharisees and scribes on the one hand, and the publicans and sinners on the other. He is not describing the fate of all the saved and all the lost, as so many earnest Christians believe.

From what you know of Jesus' teachings, could you say that He would use the figure of a rich man, well-clothed, and well-fed, to represent all the sinners of mankind? Is that condition in itself representative of all iniquity? Again, will you insist that a poor beggar, full of sores, is a proper representative for all the righteous of mankind? Some of the beggars of our land, full of sores, are rotting away because of loathsome diseases contracted in sin. Will you insist that all righteous men could be properly symbolized by such a person as a beggar, full of sores? The terms of the parable are strange, to say the least, to be thus universally applied.

Another problem in this story is the picture of "hades." It is translated "hell" in some versions. This is a whole subject of study in itself. Suffice it to say that the Hebrew word *sheol* means to ask, to interrogate; and the noun form of the word refers to something unperceived, unseen, or unknown. When a man dies there is a great question in the mind and heart of one who looks on. Hence this word came to mean, "The invisible state of the dead, the place and state of those [who are in question]" (Cocceius), "who are out of the way and to be sought for" (Bate).

In this view, it seems nearly to answer to the Greek *hades* (by which the LXX almost constantly renders it), the invisible, or the unseen, and to our old English word "hell," which though now scarcely used but for the place of torment, yet being a derivative from the Saxon *hillan*, or *helan*, or from *holl*, a cavern, anciently denoted the concealed or unseen place of the dead in general. (In parts of England men still say, "I plan to hell my potatoes," meaning to bury them in a hole or pit, that is, a covered place. Formerly, a lover would take his sweetheart into a "hell" to kiss her, that is, into a place where others could not see.)

"*Sheol* does not mean the sepulcher; another Hebrew word is used for that. Instead, it refers to that which is common to all, the common receptacle of the dead. When Jacob said he would go down mourning into *sheol* to his son, it did not mean 'hell' as the place of the damned, for he never thought his son to be gone thither, nor into the grave, properly so named, for he thought his son had been devoured by a wild beast; but into the place of the dead" (see Parkhurst's Hebrew Lexicon, p.673; see also Gesenius, p.798.).

Sheol is often translated "hell" in our common versions. So also is the Greek word *hades*, which has the same meaning. Sometimes these words are translated "the grave," or "the pit," instead of "hell." Then, too, the Greek word *gehenna*, the place where everything such as refuse was burned up, is translated "hell," along with the word *tartarus*. In popular usage, "the lake of fire" is also understood to mean "hell." It is no wonder that folks do not know what "hell" really is. Now if you will check each and every occurrence of the Hebrew word *sheol* and the Greek word *hades*, you will find that they are never used to picture a place of torment except in this story of Dives and Lazarus. In only three places is the idea of sorrow or pain used (2 Sam.22:6; Psa.18:5; 116:3), and there it is used as synonymous with the pain of dying. *Hades* or *sheol* is sometimes described without being named. It is "darkness" (Psa.143:3); it is "vast and never full" (Pro. 27:20); it is not a place of torment (Job 3:11-19). But to Dives, *hades* was a place of torment. Read the story and compare with other uses of "hades."

Again, it is difficult to be certain where literal and figurative language are to be distinguished in this story. For surely some of it seems to be literal, and some of it seems to be figurative. But just where the one leaves off and the other begins may not always be clear. For instance, the description of their human lives seems very literal--they lived thus and so and they died. When the beggar died, he "was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom." This was the title of the part or section of *sheol* or *hades* to which the righteous went at death, according to Talmudic tradition. Did the beggar's body go there, or only his spirit? "The rich man also died and was buried." That sounds literal enough to suppose that his body was really put into a grave somewhere in the earth. But when he awakened in *hades*, near enough to Abraham and Lazarus to converse with them, it was his tongue that was tormented in the flame. Was that his literal tongue, or only his figurative tongue? Was his literal tongue buried with his body? If so, what was suffering in *hades*? Some reader will insist that I am sneering at the story of Dives and Lazarus. I am not. It is the common interpretation of that story that I am calling in question. Whatever it may mean, it is surely not a parable of the fate of all the wicked on the one hand, and all the righteous on the other hand.

Another point that should be noted, is that Lazarus began his bliss, and Dives began his punishment, from the moment of death. There is no reference to a resurrection on the one hand, or to a judgment on the other. Everywhere else the Bible is consistent in teaching the necessity of resurrection before judgment, and of judgment before penalty. Neither of these is even hinted at in the story of Dives and Lazarus. If this is a parable of the ultimate fate of all the righteous and of all the wicked, how can it be reconciled with general Biblical teaching?

The real meaning of the story of Dives and Lazarus is that it is Jesus' ironic adaptation of a story out of the Talmud which He applies to the Pharisees and scribes on the one hand, and to the publicans and sinners on the other. The one group constituted the favored class of Jewish society in that day; the other were outcasts. The one had the enjoyment of political, social, economic, and religious standing; the other was destitute of them all.

And so this parable is finished. It contains three stories emphasizing the love of God for sinners and outcasts, and two stories portraying His condemnation of those who should have been just stewards of the grace of God, but were not; His condemnation of those who fared so sumptuously every day without sharing the social and religious privileges which they enjoyed with those who had none of them. There is nothing in the story of Dives and Lazarus to overthrow the doctrine of Reconciliation.

HOW COMPLETE IS REDEMPTION?

It would pay every Christian to ask himself the above question, and turn to the Scriptures to find the answer.

For it seems that very few folks have any conception of how clearly the answer is given. Most of us have the tendency to confound God's *method* with His *object*; to mix up His *process* with His *purpose*; to confuse His *technique* with His *goal*.

There are no less than seventy (70) clear statements of that goal to be found in the Bible, besides many suggestions and allusions to it. Out of these many statements, let us look somewhat carefully at only four. In them we will find the answer to four aspects of the question at the head of this chapter. That is, we shall find how complete redemption is: (1) in its extent; (2) in restored fellowship; (3) in loving attitude; (4) in devotion to God.

(1) How complete is redemption in its extent? Probably no clearer word regarding that question can be found in the entire Bible than in Ephesians 1:9-11, which reads, "Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself: that in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him: in Whom we also have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him Who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." The purpose or plan of God is one which pleases Him: the secret of that plan has been revealed to men; that plan is to gather together, or head up, all things in Christ. Twice in the quotation above that expression "all things" is used. The Greek words are *ta panta*, which is literally, "the all." They are the common Greek expression for "the universe." Paul means that the entire universe is to be gathered together, or headed up, in Christ. And that agrees with Romans 8:21, "because the creation itself [not creature] shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." Surely no part or parcel of that universe can permanently remain out of Christ!

(2) How complete is redemption in restored fellowship? Let us study Colossians 1:20,21: "And having made peace by the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things to Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things on earth, or things in the heavens...And you, that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled." Here again is the expression "all things," *ta panta*, which is used here universally. God intends to do for the universe exactly what He has already done for the Colossians, reconcile it. What chance is there for part of that universe to be held in eternal torment and unending estrangement, if it is all to be reconciled? And how can part of it be exterminated if it is all to be reconciled?

(3) How complete is redemption in the loving attitude of the redeemed? Philippians 2:9-11 reads thus: "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him the name which is above every name: that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

In my early ministry I used to explain this as a sort of compulsory adoration by beings who couldn't help themselves: a sort of "Heil Hitler!" from conquered subjects. But how little I knew of what Paul wrote. The word translated "bow" is *kampto*, found in the Bible only in Paul's writings, which means to bend, and is always used of worship. "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father," wrote Paul in Ephesians 3:14. No compulsory adulation that! And the word translated "confess" is also used to mean "praise" or "acclaim." The same Greek word is used to express Jesus' gladness as recorded in Matthew 11:25 and Luke 10:21. He said, "I thank [or "acclaim"] Thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth." Now according to Paul, every being in heaven, and in earth, and in the underworld is to bow the knee in the same worshipful humility that characterized Paul himself, and every tongue is to thank or praise or acclaim Christ as Lord in the glad spirit that characterized our Lord Himself. The loving attitude of the whole universe is to be complete and perfect.

(4) How complete is redemption in the matter of devotion to God? Well, let us look at 1 Corinthians 15:22-28. Here is one of the most remarkable statements in the entire Bible. It tells us how and when all things in the universe are to be brought into subjection to God. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming. Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For He hath put all things under His feet. But when He saith all things are put under Him, it is manifest that He is excepted, which did put all things under Him. And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be All in all." What shall we say about all this?

First, the time element. This Scripture looks far beyond the time of anything told us in the book of Revelation. Christ does not reign "for ever," as the false translation tells us so often, but He reigns "till"; "till He hath put all enemies under His feet"; till He has put down "all rule and authority and power." Revelation 20:4 says, "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them," which is indicative that rule is still being exercised. Revelation 21 tells us of the New Jerusalem, and at verse 24 it says, "and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it," Here, too, we still see the presence of the exercise of rule and power. Similarly, Revelation 22:15 lists the wicked people outside the city, enemies that are not yet under His feet. Hence, it becomes evident that 1 Corinthians 15:22b,26,28, reaches far beyond Revelation in time.

Second, let us consider the life element. "For as in Adam all die, even so, in Christ, shall all be made alive." I used to say that it meant that all would be restored to life simply to be judged. But that is not what Paul wrote. There are two Greek words for life, *bios*, which always means physical life or the means to sustain physical life, and *zoe*, which means the principle of life, spiritual life, or immortal life. Now the verb Paul used here is a compound which, I am sure, means to make alive spiritually or immortally. It cannot mean merely to make alive physically. The word used suggests that, and the illustrations used sustain the contention.

Christ is "the firstfruits." But He was raised immortal. "Christ, being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him" (Rom.6:9). That is, He is immortal. "Afterward they that are Christ's at His coming." And how are they to be raised? Immortal, of course. Read the whole of 1 Corinthians 15 in order to see.

But Christ, and they that are Christ's, however, do not include all who died in Adam; they are only a handful compared to the remaining ones. When are the rest to be raised to immortality? Well, in the words, "Then cometh the end," the word "cometh" is in italics, showing that Paul did not use that word at all. It was supplied by the translators and, in this case, completely changes the meaning. Paul is talking about the order in which all are to be made alive. The word translated "order" means a "group," or "rank," or "band," like succeeding groups or bands in a parade. Christ is the first order; they that are Christ's are the second order; and the rest constitute the third order to be made alive, "when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power."

These three orders constitute the "all" who are to be made alive spiritually or immortally. Some will insist that this is a mere assumption in order to support an opinion. But there are two facts in the Greek of the passage that prove the statement to be correct. In the first place, the Greek word *hekastos*, translated "every man," or, more accurately, "each," is regularly used to signify each one of several items. If there were only two items or individuals, the word meaning "both" would be used. This same distinction is also regular usage in the English language, so that there should be no difficulty in understanding it.

In the second place, two other words are used which make the conclusion inevitable. The adverbs *epeita* and *eita* make unquestionable the significance of three orders. They are words used to mark succession of time or order, meaning that that which precedes the statement which they introduce is related in time or order to what follows, and that what follows is related in the same way to what precedes. So that the Greek words *eita to telos* meaning, "then the end" (or "consummation") simply have to refer to the "order" or "rank" that is referred to in the preceding verse.

Paul is writing about three orders or classes of mankind to be made alive, and these three orders constitute all of mankind. And, "all" are to be "subject." In verses 27 and 28, one verb, meaning "put in subjection," is used six times. It is variously translated "put under," "subdues," and "be subject." But it is the same word in Paul's own writing. He seems to pile up words to make clear his meaning that all things in the universe are to be brought into subjection to God. In 1 Corinthians 15:22-28 he uses the word "all" twelve times, and in just the last two verses he repeats the idea of subjection six times. One wonders what else he could have written to make men understand his meaning. He is saying as clearly as words can say that the ultimate goal of God is the bringing into subjection of all beings in the universe, both in heaven and in earth. If our theology, or our "orthodoxy," or our church creed will not allow us to believe the plain statement of Scripture, then we ought to throw away our theology and our creed. "Let God be true, and every man a liar." Christ will succeed in bringing the entire universe into subjection to God. Praise His Name!

THE CONSUMMATION

"The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Cor.- 15:26). One of the thoughts that gripped me that day in 1940, and held me almost spellbound in the half-opened door, was this: According to the Bible the first death would be all past for the church at the time of the second coming of Christ, and later it would be all past for the wicked and lost. The only death left will be the second death. Will the second death be destroyed, also? Or will it be the means through which death itself will be abolished (Heb.2:14,15)?

Many people do very careless thinking about death and its conquest. The writer used to believe, as many folks do, that death would be destroyed as soon as the act of dying stopped. How partial a viewpoint that is.

This entire present earthly scene is under the condemnation of death. Even our scientific definition of life confesses it: "Life is the sum total of the forces that oppose death," it says. And everyone knows that life here and now can oppose death for only a brief time at best. "The path of glory leads but to the grave."

In one of his books, Glenn Clark discusses the problem of why a rotten apple in a barrel of good ones will spoil the whole lot, but a good apple in a barrel of rotten ones is powerless to make the rotten ones sound. He says that the good apple has the stroke of death in it. When the stem was severed from the tree its source of life and health and growth was removed. Even a good apple is a dying thing.

He should have added that death was hovering near the apple while its stem was still fast to the tree. Just let the wind swing the apple against a limb near at hand and break the skin, immediately rot sets in. Let a bird pick a hole in it, or a worm enter its body, at once the forces of decay and death have gained an entrance, and the end is putrefaction. "In the midst of life we are in death."

The first warning against disobedience, according to the Bible, is "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." The words "thou shalt surely die," are often translated "dying thou shalt die," or "thou art dying to die." That is, "dying" is a process, and "to die" is the final act or event in the process. When Adam sinned, it was life and vitality that he lost; it was death and dissolution that he received. The word "death" means vastly more than the act or event of dying; it means not only the state into which one passes in the act of dying but

also the condition which makes such an event and such a state possible.

For death is not only a condition or state which affects the physical body; it is primarily the state or condition of the spiritual life in which unregenerate men now live. Until men are made alive in Christ they are "dead in trespasses and sins," here and now. It will be the condition or state of the lost "in the ages to come," "having no hope, and without God in the world." Anyone apart from God in Christ is "dead," whether in this life, or in any other. "He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:12). Physical (i.e., literal) death is only one of the results of a previous spiritual "death." When Adam sinned, fellowship was broken between himself and God, "in Whom we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). It was not merely his physical demise after 930 years that constituted his death, but his separation from God on the very day he sinned was the inner reality of his death. That separation with its fear, its alienation from God's love and care and intimate fellowship, is the real death that is to be destroyed (Luke 15:24,32; Rom.-8:6,7; Eph.2:15; Col.2:13).

How silly it is to teach, then, as the writer used to do, that when the act of dying is ended, death would be destroyed! He locked up the vast majority of mankind in eternal torment, blind to the fact that he was just holding them in death forever. In the economic realm, we use the term "freezing" to signify static continuance in financial immobility. So did the writer "freeze" the great majority of men in the death of eternal fire!

And when he changed his thinking, in order to get rid of such an awful God as eternal torment pictures, and accepted extermination, he did no better--so far as destroying death is concerned. If death is the absence of life--and that must be true of anything that ever had life and later on lost it--then extermination is only another method of decreeing eternal death on the vast majority of mankind. In the case of either "eternal torment" or "extermination," death would reign forever!

Death will be destroyed by putting life in its place. That nullifies the objection made by many that the teaching of Reconciliation destroys the hope of everlasting life. They say that Jesus' words in Matthew 25:46 make punishment and future life the same length: "And these [the wicked] shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." If the punishment of the wicked is only age-lasting, not everlasting, then the reward of the righteous is also age-lasting, and not everlasting. This is their argument, and so far as the above quotation is concerned they are correct. Now the promise of "eonian life" is a marvelous provision. It is the proclamation to all who believe, of the privilege of living in Christ in this present life, and living with Christ, reigning with Christ, and being like Christ, "in the ages to come" (Eph.2:7). During those eons when He is bringing the entire universe into harmony with God, the church will share with Christ in all that glorious activity. But the assurance of unending life is not in this offer, wonderful as it is. For the eons will end! Rather, the assurance of unending life lies in the promise that we shall be made immortal when Christ calls us into that fellowship of service with Himself. Our alienation and separation from God are already ended in this life, through Christ. But it is not until His second coming that immortality is conferred, through change for living saints, and through resurrection for dead saints. Immortality is life over which death has no power. So it embodies unlimited life.

The only way that death will ever be destroyed is to replace it with life. The only way to get rid of darkness is to obliterate it with light. The only way to get rid of error is to supplant it with truth. The only way to get rid of sorrow is to submerge it in joy. So, some glad day, "Death will be swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor.15:54)! And God will do this by destroying, for every being in the universe, all alienation and separation from God. But that can take place only when the Lord of life has proven Himself Lord over death! Not till then will the Son "deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father." When that joyous day comes, men will answer their own questions, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Cor.15:55) by the triumphant shout, "Thanks be to God Who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor.15:57). "For as in

Adam all die, even so in Christ, shall all be made alive" (1 Cor.15:22).

.....By Dr. Loyal Hurley

(Quotations from Edwin Lewis in "Philosophy of Christian Revelation" and from Ferre in "The Christian Fellowship," are made by special permission of Harper Brothers and Company.)

THE GOOD NEWS GOSPEL

Consider carefully some facts stated about this gospel of Christ as revealed through the apostle Paul. "It is the gospel of God concerning His Son" (Rom.1:1,2). It was made known to Paul through a revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal.1:- 6-12). "In it the righteousness of God is revealed" (Rom.1:17). "It is the **power** of God unto **salvation**" (Rom.1:16). It is the **power** that saves the irreverent and unrighteous from the condemnation and wrath of God (Rom.3:21-5:19), the **power** that saves true believers from the reign of Sin in their lives (Rom.6:1-23). But specifically, what *is* this gospel, about which so many wonderful things are declared?

The word "gospel" means simply "good news." Yet what good news is it concerning God's Son which reveals the righteousness of God, which is also the power of God unto salvation?

In its simplest form this gospel is stated in 1 Corinthians 15:1-7 as follows: "Now I **am making known** to you, brethren, **the gospel** which I bring to you, which **you accepted** also, in which **you stand** also, through which **you are saved**, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was entombed, and that He has been raised the third day and that He was seen by Cephas, thereupon by the Twelve, thereupon He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once."

This gospel is the good news that Christ died for our sins, was entombed, and has been raised from among the dead. This gospel is not one fact, but three. It is not only that Christ died for our sins; it is also that He was entombed, **and** that He has been raised. The resurrection is indispensable. Apart from His resurrection, His death would have no saving value. "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain--you are still in your sins," is the inspired statement found in 1 Corinthians 15:12-19. His resurrection distinguishes Him from all other spiritual leaders. Others have lived, taught, performed miracles and died. Jesus Christ is the only One Who died for our sins, has been raised, and now lives as the Saviour of the world.

In its fullest sense, this gospel includes the meaning of the death, the meaning of the entombment, and the meaning of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This includes all that the Son of God accomplishes for the entire creation in His death, in His entombment, and in His resurrection life. To grasp the meaning of this gospel in its fullest sense, it is necessary that we understand the revelation God has given through the apostle Paul as set forth in the Sacred Scriptures.

THE GOSPEL REVEALS GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

First, the gospel is revealed in the way God dealt with Jesus Christ when He became sin for us. In the death of Christ on the cross, we see God dealing righteously with sin. What a dreadful thing sin is to call forth such a severe penalty! What great sinners we are that we should justly deserve all that Jesus Christ endured! He did not die because of any wrong He had done. "He knew no sin" (2 Cor.5:21). He did not submit to death because He could not help Himself: "No one is taking my soul from me, but I am laying it down of Myself" (John 10:17,18). "Christ died for the sake of the irreverent" (Rom.5:6-9). "He was given up because

of our offenses, and was raised because of our justifying" (Rom.4:25).

Whatever the penalty of sin is, Jesus Christ endured it to the full in order to become our Saviour. If the penalty of sin is either annihilation or endless punishment, Jesus Christ could not be the Saviour of anyone, for He was neither annihilated nor endlessly tormented. Christ *died* for our sins! If it were not for the death, the resurrection, and the present life of Jesus Christ, the final end of every human being would be death.

Second, the gospel reveals the righteousness which God Himself provides for mankind. Man cannot attain to righteousness by his own efforts, because of the devitalizing power of the mortality, or death, which is operating in him. Note carefully the positive and clear statement of Scripture: "Through one man sin entered into the world, and through sin *death*, and thus *death* passed through into all mankind, *on which all sinned....Sin reigns in death*" (Rom.5:12-21). Because sin "reigns in death," man is as helpless to cure himself of his sinfulness as he is to cure himself of the death that is working in him.

God's cure for death and His remedy for unrighteousness, is the life and the righteousness of Jesus Christ. "For if, by the offense of the one, *death reigns* through the one, *much rather*, those obtaining the superabundance of grace and the gift of righteousness shall be reigning *in life* through the One, Jesus Christ" (Rom.5:16,17; 6:1-23). "A righteousness of God is manifest...through the faith of Jesus Christ, for all, and on all who are believing, for there is no distinction, for all sinned and are wanting of the glory of God. Being justified gratuitously by His grace, through the deliverance which is in Christ Jesus...toward the display of His righteousness in the present season, for Him to be just and a Justifier of the one who is of the faith of Jesus" (see Rom.3:19-28). "Now to the worker, the wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as a debt. Yet to him who is not working, yet is believing on Him Who is *justifying the irreverent*, his faith is reckoned for righteousness" (Rom.-4:4,5). "Having been now justified in His blood, we shall be saved from indignation, through Him. For if, being enemies, we were conciliated to God through the death of His Son, much more, being conciliated, we shall be saved in His life" (Rom.5:9-11).

To those who believe in what Jesus Christ has accomplished on their behalf, the Scriptures declare: "Yet you, *of God*, are in Christ Jesus, Who became to us wisdom from God, besides righteousness and holiness and deliverance, that, according as it is written, He who is boasting, let him be boasting in the Lord" (see 1 Cor.1:18-31).

Third, the gospel reveals the righteous basis upon which God assures the ultimate salvation of all mankind. (see 1 Tim.4:9-11 and 2:3-7; Rom.5.12-19; 1 Cor.15:20-28, Phil.-2-5-11; Col.1:15-20).

Because of what Jesus Christ has done, and will yet do in behalf of all mankind, the righteousness of God assures the salvation of all in due time. The "sacrificial work" of the Son of God has been finished on the cross (John 19:28-30). The "saving work" of the risen Son of God has only just begun, and will continue until *all* have been delivered from sin and death. Note carefully the clear statements of Scripture: "Christ died for the sake of all, consequently all died...God was in Christ, conciliating the world to Himself, not reckoning their offenses to them" (2 Cor.5:-14-21). "Who gave Himself a Ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1 Tim.2:1-7). "For even as in Adam, all are dying, thus also, in Christ, shall all be made alive" (1 Cor.15:20,28). "For even as, through the disobedience of the one man, the many were constituted sinners, thus also, through the obedience of the One, the many shall be constituted righteous" (see Rom.5:18,19).

Those who believe the gospel in this life, are saved for the eons or ages. They are justified by God's grace (Rom.-3:24). They are reconciled to God (Col.1:21). They receive the Spirit of God, and are set free from the dominion of sin in their lives (Rom.8:9-11 and 6:1,23). They will experience the deliverance of their bodies when Jesus Christ returns (1 Cor.15:50-58). They will share the glory and the labor of their Saviour during the

coming eons (Eph.2:14 and 3:8-11). Those who do not believe in this life will be resurrected and judged at the time of the great white throne (Rev.20:11,15). God will deal with them justly according to their deeds (Rom.2:1-16). Then those whose names are not in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire, the second death (Rev.20:15). This, however, is not their final end, for they will be *made alive* at the conclusion of the eons when Jesus Christ abolishes the *last enemy which is death* (1 Cor.15:25,26). Then, they too will be justified (Rom.5:18,19), reconciled to God (Col.1:20), and be made immortal (1 Cor.15:22; Rom.8:18-23; 2 Tim.1:9-11). Then, *all* will be subjected to God the Father and God will be *All in all* (1 Cor.15:27,28).

Some believe and teach that Jesus Christ either cannot or will not save all. It is a source of sadness that so many who profess to know Him and to love Him should slander Him in this manner. Surely He does not lack the ability; He has already saved the chief of sinners (1 Tim.-1:15). Neither does He lack the love; "He died for all." What He has promised in His Word, He will certainly do. "Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all welcome (for for this are we toiling and being reproached), that we rely on the living God, Who is the Saviour of all mankind, especially of believers. *These things be charging and teaching*" (1 Tim.4:9-11).

Joseph E. Kirk

THE EONS OF THE BIBLE *with Concordance*

The teaching of the Scriptures about the eons provides answers to frustrating questions concerning the meaning of human existence. God's purpose in creating man, and God's purpose of the eons are inseparably related. Many are unfamiliar with this important subject because the facts have been concealed by incorrect and misleading translations of the Bible from the original languages into English.

The eons are the longest periods of time referred to in the Scriptures. Time-wise, they are of indefinite duration, but event-wise, they are distinctly marked off by great cataclysms which affect the whole earth.

FACTS REVEALED CONCERNING THE EONS

THE EONS HAVE A BEGINNING

Literal Translation-vs-KJV:

Heb.1:2: God made the *eons*-vs-God made the *worlds*

1 Cor.2:7: before the *eons* -vs- before the *world*

Tim.1:9: before *times eonian* -vs- before the *world began*

THE EONS END, INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY

Heb.9:26: the end of the *eons* -vs-the end of the *world*

1 Cor.10:11: the end of the *eons* -vs- the ends of the *world*

Matt.24:3: the end of the *eon* -vs- the end of the *world*

HOW MANY EONS ARE THERE?

Col.1:26: hid from the *eons* -vs- Past hid from *ages* (at least two ages have past)

Luke 20:34: this *eon* -vs- this *world* (this present age)

Eph.2:7: *eons* to come -vs- *ages* to come (At least two more to come, thus--a minimum of five eons indicated)

THE PURPOSE OF THE EONS

"...according to the *eternal (aionian) purpose* which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph 3:11)

"...that in the dispensation of the *fullness of the times (ages)* He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth--in Him. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will" (Eph 1:10-11).

The above verses talk about the purpose of the eons ("eternal purpose," AV). If the eons have a purpose, what is it? We believe the gospel makes it clear that the purpose of the eons is--CHRIST!

"Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil.2:9-11).

"For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross" (Col 1:19-20).

The words "eon" and "eonian" occur 199 times in the New Testament.

They are translated as follows in the King James Version:

AION or EON		AIONIOS or EONIAN
Ages: 2	Never: 7	Everlasting:25
Course: 1	Evermore: 4	Eternal:42
World: 40	Eternal: 2	World:3
Ever: 72		Ever:1

The fact that the same word translated "for ever," "everlasting," and "eternal" is also translated "world," is a shocking surprise to many believers. Had God meant "world" in these places, He would have used the Greek word *kosmos* which means world. In the best literal translations, the words *aion* and *aionios* are consistently rendered "age" and "age-abiding" or transliterated "eon" and "eonian." See Rotherham's Emphasized Version; Young's Literal Translation; or the Concordant Literal New Testament.

God made the eons (Heb.1:2) and fitted them out (Heb.-11:3) for the accomplishing of His purpose (Eph.3:8-11; 1:9-11). During the eonian times, sin, suffering and death enter God's creation, serve their purpose and are abolished by Jesus Christ (1 Tim.4:9-11; Col.1:20; 1 Cor.15:22-28; Rom.5:18,19; Phil.2:9-11; John 12:32,33; 1 John 3:8).

The existence of God is not confined to the eons. He made the eons; therefore, He existed before they began. At the conclusion of the eons Jesus Christ will do away with sin (Heb.9:26) and will abolish death (1 Cor.15:22-26). All will then be subjected to God and God will be All in all (1 Cor.15:27,28). Therefore, God continues to exist after the eons have ended. The statement "from everlasting to everlasting thou art God" (Psa.90:2, AV), is literally, "from age to age thou art God." This does not limit God's existence to the eons any more than the statement, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Ex.3:6), excludes Him from being the God of others also.

The same is true of the reference to Him as "the eonian God" (Rom.16:25,26). During the present wicked eon (Gal.1:4), Sin reigns, Satan who is said to be "the god of this eon" (2 Cor.4:4) blinds and deceives mankind, and death swallows up the race (1 Cor.15:22). But notwithstanding, God is over all and is in supreme control. He is the eonian God.

Neither is it true that if the eons end, the life of believers in Christ must end. Believers do receive eonian life. But if this is all that God promised, there would be no assurance of life beyond the eons. However, at the end of the eons God abolishes death from His universe (1 Cor.-15:26). This is accomplished by imparting the resurrection life of Christ to all who have not previously received it. Eonian life assures one of life up to that point. Beyond that, death is impossible.

In the Greek Scriptures endlessness is never expressed in terms of eons or of that which is eonian. The Scriptures never speak of "the endless eons of eternity." Endlessness is expressed by the use of negatives: "not," "no not," "un-," "less." For example: "of His kingdom there shall be no end" (*ouk estai telos*; Luke 1:33); "endless life" (*akatalutou*; Heb.-7:16); "endless genealogies" (*aperantois*; 1 Tim.1:4); "nevermore" (*ou me eti*; Rev.18:21-23).

COMPLETE CONCORDANCE

The Noun "Aion" and its Adjective "Aionios" Translated, Eon and Eonian

EON IN THE SINGULAR

1. *The present eon*--Gal.1:4; 1 Tim.6:17; 2 Tim.4:10; Titus 2:12 (world).
2. *This eon*--Matt.12:32; 13:22; Mk.4:19; Lu.16:8; 20:34; Rom.12:2; 1 Cor.1:20; 2:6, 6, 8; 3:18; 2 Cor.4:4; Eph.1:21; 6:12 (world).
3. *The eon of this world*--Eph.2:2 (course of this world).
4. *From the eon*--Matt.21:19; Mk.11:14; Lu.1:55; Jn.6:-51,58; 8:35; 12:34; 14:16; 2 Cor.9:9; Hb.5:6; 6:20; 7:17, 21; 1 Pet.1:23,25; 2 Pet.2:17; 1 Jn.2:17; 2 Jn.2; Jude 13 (forever); Heb.7:24 (ever); 7:28 (for evermore); 1 Cor.8:13 (while the world standeth).

5. *Not for the eon*--Mk.3:29; Jn.4:14; 8:51, 52; 10:28; 11:26; 13:8 (never).
6. *Before all the eon*--Jude 25a (AV omits) RV "before all time."
7. *From the eon*--Lk.1:70; Acts 3:21 (since the world began); Acts 15:18 (from the beginning for the world; Out of the eon Jn.9:32 (since the world began).
8. *The conclusion of the eon*--Matt.13:39,40,49; 24:3; 28:20 (the end of the world).
9. *The coming eon*--Mk.10:30; Lk.18:30; Heb.6:5 (world); that eon Lk.20:35 (that world).
10. *For the day of the eon*--2 Pet.3:18 (for ever). Compare Deut.32:7; Mic.5:2; 7:14; Mal.3:4.

EON IN THE PLURAL

1. *God made the eons*--Heb.1:2; equipped the eons Heb.11:3 (worlds).
2. *Purpose of the eons*--Eph.3:11; King of the eons 1 Tim.1:17 (eternal).
3. *Before the eons*--1 Cor.2:7 (before the world); From the eons Eph.3:9 (from the beginning of the world); Col.-1:26 (from ages).
4. *For the eons*--Matt.6:13; Lk.1:33; Rom.1:25; 9:5; 11:36; 16:27; Heb.13:8 (for ever); 2 Cor.11:32 (for evermore); *_for all the eons_* Jude 25 (ever). "all" omitted in some MSS.
5. *The on-coming eons*--Eph.2:7 (ages to come).
6. *Conclusion of the eons*--Heb.9:26 (end of the world). R.V. "end of the ages."
7. *Ends of the eons*--1 Cor.10:11 (ends of the world). R.V. "ends of the ages."

EON TWICE IN THE SAME PHRASE

1. *The eons of the eons*--Gal.1:5; Phil.4:20; 1 Tim.1:17; 2 Tim.4:18; Heb.13:21; 1 Pet.4:11; 5:11; Rev.1:6; 4:9,10; 5:13,14; 7:12; 10:6; 11:15; 14:11; 15:7; 19:3; 20:10; 22:5 (for ever and ever); Rev.1:18 (for evermore). A comparison of Rev.11:14,15 with 1 Cor.15:27,28 makes it clear that the expression "the eons of the eons" does not mean an endless succession of eons. Christ reigns for "the eons of the eons," after which He delivers up the kingdom to the Father and Himself becomes subject, that God may be All in all.
2. *The eon of the eons*--for all the generations of, Eph.3:21 (throughout all ages, world without end). In the Authorized Version, the Greek word for "generations" is wrongly translated "ages" in this passage. The eon of the eons is the last and greatest eon of them all, which consummates in the realization of God's purpose in the salvation of all.
3. *The eon of the eon*--Heb.1:8 (for ever and ever). This is a reference to the last eon which issues out of the one which precedes it.

THE ADJECTIVE EONIAN

1. *Before eonian times*--2 Tim.1:9; Titus 1:2 (before the world began).
2. *In eonian times*--Rom.16:25 (since the world began).
3. *Eonian life*--Matt.19:29; Lk.18:30; Jn.3:15,16,36; 4:14; 5:24; 6:27,40,47; 12:50; Acts 13:46; Rom.6:22; Gal.6:8; 1 Tim.1:16 (everlasting); Matt.19:16; 25:46; Mk.10:17, 30; Lk.10:25; 18:18; Jn.4:36; 5:39; 6:54,68; 10:28; 12:25; 17:2,3; Acts 13:48; Rom.2:7; 5:21; 6:23; 1 Tim.6:12; Titus 1:2; 3:7; 1 Jn.1:2; 2:25; 3:15; 5:11,13,20; Jude 21 (eternal).
4. *Eonian redemption*--Hebrews 9:12 (eternal).
5. *Eonian salvation*--Hebrews 5:9 (eternal).
6. *Eonian glory*--2 Cor.4:17; 2 Tim.2:10; 1 Pet.5:10 (eternal).
7. *Eonian kingdom*--2 Peter 1:11 (everlasting).
8. *Eonian inheritance*--Hebrews 9:15 (eternal).
9. *Eonian "things not seen"*--2 Corinthians 4:18 (eternal).
10. *Eonian house*--2 Corinthians 5:1 (eternal).
11. *Eonian habitations*--Luke 16:9 (everlasting).
12. *Eonian consolation*--2 Thessalonians 2:16 (everlasting).
13. *Eonian covenant*--Hebrews 13:20 (everlasting).
14. *Eonian gospel*--Revelation 14:6 (everlasting).
15. *Eonian God*--Romans 16:26 (everlasting).
16. *Eonian Spirit*--Hebrews 9:14 (eternal).
17. *Eonian power*--1 Timothy 6:16 (everlasting).
18. *Eonian judgment*--Hebrews 6:2 (eternal)
19. *Eonian condemnation*--Mark 3:29 (eternal damnation).
20. *Eonian fire*--Matthew 18:8; 25:41 (everlasting); Jude 7 (eternal fire).
21. *Eonian chastening*--Matthew 25:46 (everlasting).

22. *Eonian extermination*--2 Thessalonians 1:9 (everlasting).

23. *Eonian*--Philemon 15 (for ever).

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