

# OpenTheo

## Hell: Three Christian Views



### Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

In "Hell: Three Christian Views," Steve Gregg presents three different interpretations of the concept of Hell in Christianity. While the traditional view is based on divine retribution, there are alternative views that include the destruction of the wicked and the belief that everyone will eventually repent and be saved. Gregg emphasizes the importance of knowing God and following Jesus' example of loving enemies and putting away anger. He argues that the traditional view of eternal conscious torment in Hell is not fully supported by biblical scripture, and that alternative interpretations better align with God's character of love and mercy.

### Transcript

Well, the talk tonight is called Three Views of Hell. I want to first of all say that I believe in Hell, okay? And I think that the Bible describes an ultimate punishment, an ultimate judgment of the last day when Jesus comes back. I believe that he will judge the living and the dead.

And according to a couple of places like Matthew 25, where you have the sheep and the goats, or, of course, Revelation chapter 20, we find that there will be a judgment where some will be condemned to go to the lake of fire. Now, there are people who deny this. There are people who don't believe in Hell at all.

I'm not one of them, and I'm not going to talk about those people, because among those who, like myself, do believe in such a final judgment, there are three very different opinions as to what is accomplished there and what its purpose is. We have to remember that whatever exists is what God wanted to exist. This is something that when I was growing up I wasn't real clear on.

The traditional view of Hell is that Hell is a place of divine retribution, that those who have lived their lives in rebellion against God, of course, are worthy of eternal punishment, because the God they've offended is an eternal God. It's an infinite offense and therefore deserves infinite punishment. This is the traditional understanding.

And there are some scriptures that seem to argue for this view, or else, of course,

Christians would never have held it if there weren't scriptures that seem to teach it. The problem is there's also scriptures that seem like they may teach an alternative to that. And this is what has led to confusion, actually, from the earliest time in church history.

We may suppose that because we read certain verses of scripture a certain way and understand them a certain way, that this is the way that all Christians have always understood them. And that's just not the case with a great number of things. As I've gotten older, I've been in the ministry, I've been teaching the Bible since 1970, so it's been 49 years.

In those years I have been surprised at how many things I had to look at afresh, which I thought were settled. They were settled in my mind early on. And in many cases I had no question that all Christians believed them, and that the Bible taught them.

And yet as I studied the scripture more, and as I became more conversant in church history and what the early church taught, and as I conversed with people who had different views, I became aware that there are respectable reasons for questioning many of the things that I thought were settled. Now, I will not myself change my view on any subject unless the Bible can be convincingly shown to me to teach something different than what I've taught. Because my original teachings, the ones I received as a youth, and the ones I've taught all my life, those were supported by scripture.

And my one commitment as a teacher is to make sure that I will teach nothing that I cannot defend from good exegetical scriptural analysis. What I didn't know is that exegesis of scripture involves examining and sometimes cross-examining the presuppositions you're bringing to the passage, and that some people who have not brought the same presuppositions at the outset have not seen the passages as teaching the same thing that I thought they were teaching. And I want to just say right now that when I present the three views of hell to you, which have been held from earliest church history and are still held by evangelicals, they're very different from each other, and I do not know which one is correct.

I know the pastor said, someone asked him, if Steve doesn't know which one he believes, why should we listen to him? Because of that, because I don't know which one is correct, I can be somewhat more objective in presenting them all. Usually, if you know what you think, you can let other people know what other people think, but not usually very objectively, because you're pretty sure what the other people think is wrong. So no matter how much of their arguments you present, there's always a certain subtext that, although they make these arguments, of course they're wrong.

I'm not going to have that subtext, necessarily. I believe that there are interestingly valid ways of seeing the major passages on the subject of hell, which have, without any violence to the inspiration of scripture, or to the commitment to exegesis, or all the basic doctrines of the Christian faith, can be seen more than one way. Now, when you leave

here, therefore, you may end up being like me.

It's not my desire to make you like me. It just may be inevitable. And like me means I'm not sure, because when I look at the arguments for one view, I can see them.

When I look at the arguments for another view in the scripture, well, I can see them, too. And when I look at the third view, well, I can see that, too. All of them are God-honoring, Christ-honoring, scripture-honoring positions.

And I don't mind that I don't know the right answer. I'll tell you what, I'm glad there's more than one possibility, because I was raised thinking there was only one answer, and that was that anybody who does not find Christ in this lifetime is going to be consigned to eternal conscious torment, which is what we call the traditional view. It's been held by the Church from the time of Augustine, around 400 AD, on through the medieval church, the Roman Catholic, and then the Reformed Church, and almost all the evangelical churches have simply carried on the Augustinian position.

Now, Augustine was not the first person to hold that view, but the view he took was not the only view that earlier Christians held. I don't want to go too much into church history, because many of the names from church history might not mean anything to you, and after all, it's not important so much what people in church history thought, it's important what the Bible teaches. But just to show that the earliest Christians who spoke Greek as their native language, which is the language they read the New Testament in, which is the language the New Testament was written in, in other words, people who knew Greek better than any Greek scholar today does, because it was their language from birth, they did not see these as unambiguous statements in the Bible about hell.

They believed different things, and they allowed liberty to believe different things. That's an interesting thing. There are church fathers in each of these three camps, and it's not like all the really good guys were in this view or that view, and then the kind of weird flaky guys were in this other view.

Church fathers of equal credibility and equal respect were in each camp. For example, the idea that eternal conscious torment is the fate of all unbelievers, and there's no relenting, there's no end to it, they cannot be improved by it, they can't end it, they can't stop it. This idea was taught in the early days of the church, second, third century, essentially, by church fathers like Tertullian.

Now, Tertullian's a very famous church father, and he was one of the ones who believed that hell is eternal torment. In fact, he believed not only will the lost all be eternally tormented, but he believed all the saved will be delighted about it. Tertullian was kind of a harsh character in his teaching, but he famously taught that when you look into hell from heaven, and you see your own child, or your own grandmother, or your own neighbor who is your friend who didn't make it into heaven, and you see them writhing in

pain in hell, you'll rejoice that the justice of God is being done to them.

I have a hard time with that. I don't have a hard time, well, I have to admit, I have a hard time now taking the traditional view, knowing the other possibilities, but most of my life, and I've been a Christian since I was a child, I'm a conservative one, most of my life I accepted without question the eternal torment view. I didn't know there was another view that the Bible could be thought to support, and yet I never could have been persuaded that when I see my friends and family members burning in hell, that somehow that's going to make me happy, and say, well, I'm sure glad to see justice is being done here.

Because really, if justice is being done, then I should be in hell too. I'm not escaping hell because of justice, I'm escaping hell because of God's generosity, and why should I rejoice in my escaping punishment, and not be wishing that everyone had? This is something that a lot of things Tertullian said that are not very acceptable to me, although I can see how an eternal torment view can be wrought out of certain passages of Scripture. Another Christian father named Tatian also held this view, and Athenagoras also.

Now, these were in the second century, these were like 170, 175, in the case of Tertullian, 195 AD. So, just like a century after the apostles, the last of the apostles had died. This was a view of these particular church fathers, and it's the view that Augustine later held, and he became so influential that he kind of knocked all the rivals out of the ring.

Not because he gave better arguments. As a matter of fact, if you read the arguments that Augustine gave for this traditional view, and he had several chapters that he wrote on it in the City of God, he really only made one argument for it. The only argument he made for it was that, since the Bible says that the righteous go into everlasting life, and the wicked go into everlasting punishment, this would be Matthew 25, 46, that both of these must be equally everlasting, and therefore there must be a, you know, some are enjoying everlasting happiness, and some must be everlasting wickedness.

And he just really didn't have much of a scriptural case beyond that. Now, that's a good scripture for the case. That's one of the best.

If you want to find support biblically for the eternal conscious torment, I have to say, Matthew 25, 46 ranks high on the list of those that could possibly be making that case. The thing is, it's not the only thing the Bible says, and even it is a verse that can be accommodated by those of the other views. But that became the traditional view of the Latin church through Augustine, and that was around 400 AD.

But before him, there were some other views, too, right alongside with that view. For example, Tertullian and Athenagoras and Tatian, those who were teaching the traditional

view were contemporary with Irenaeus. Now, Irenaeus may be a name you remember.

I don't know if you've heard it or not. He was a disciple of the apostle John. Well, he was actually an apostle of Polycarp, and Polycarp was a disciple of the apostle John.

But Irenaeus was in the church in Ephesus where John had lived and died in his later years, and he was sort of a one-generation-removed disciple of the apostle John. Now, Irenaeus taught that those who do not receive eternal life through Christ, that is, those who don't become Christians, will be deprived of eternal existence, is what he said. He used that phrase many times in his writings.

They will be deprived of eternal existence. Now, that sounds like eternal existence is not the default condition of humans. It is a condition that the saved obtain and the rest don't, and this view is called conditional immortality.

There were other church fathers who taught the same thing even before Irenaeus. In fact, before Athenagoras and Tertullian and all those traditionalists, there was the letter of Methetes to Diognetus, which is an early church document from A.D. 130, approximately, and he said that those who go to hell will be afflicted unto the end, he said. Well, eternity doesn't have an end, and so it raises questions.

Did Methetes believe, or Diognetus, did he believe that hell is eternal torment, or did he believe it has an end? He said these people will be afflicted unto the end. Sounds like maybe they'd be afflicted for a while, but maybe not forever. Hard to know.

It's rather vague. Also, a very well-respected book in the early church was called The Shepherd of Hermas, around anywhere from 90 A.D., which would be within the lifetime of the apostle John, to as late as 150 A.D., which is still earlier than Tertullian. But The Shepherd of Hermas also spoke about those who go to hell as being consumed.

Now, the Bible uses that term, too, in some places. Something which is consumed no longer exists once it's been consumed. And so we have, alongside what we call the traditional view of eternal conscious torment, there were church fathers, even earlier, who used language that sounded like they didn't believe in eternal conscious torment.

They believed that when people go to hell, they will be destroyed, they're consumed. After all, the Bible does say the wages of sin is death. God did tell Adam and Eve, the day you eat of it, you will die.

That is, everywhere, said to be the punishment for sin. And they believed, apparently, that that was true. There's many references to people, the wicked, being destroyed, being consumed, dying, vanishing like smoke.

That's the kind of language that is used of the judgment of the wicked in many, many places in the Bible. And, of course, the idea that there'd be an eternal torment, which

seems to be taught, maybe, in a few verses, they had their own ways of looking at them, which we'll talk about in a moment. All I want you to know is there was this other view.

In addition to Tertullian's view, there was the view of Irenaeus and others. And some of them earlier, who apparently, at least the language they used, sounds like they didn't assume the wicked would be punished forever. Now there's another church father in roughly the same period of time, Clement of Alexandria, Egypt, contemporary with Tertullian, and his disciple Origen.

Now Origen, if you've heard anything about Origen, you might remember he was branded as a heretic by the Roman Catholic Church. So was Luther, so was Hus, so was Wickliffe, so was Tyndale. Many people in the modern church remember Origen as a heretic because he held a lot of views that were abandoned by the traditional church and seen as wrong.

Interestingly, when Augustine wrote his defense of the traditional view, which was not yet traditional until he made it so, he felt that he had to defend that view against Origen's views because even though he was a couple hundred years after Origen's time, Origen's views apparently were the most prominent. Origen believed, now this is going to be really hard for some of you to stomach, but we're going to talk about the scriptures that all these views use. Origen believed that those who are lost were lost against the will of God, that God's not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that they should turn from their evil ways and live, that someday every knee will bow and every tongue will confess to Jesus to the glory of God, and several things like that.

And what Origen thought is that if Jesus died for everybody, then he should get everything he paid for. Now, not everybody turns to Christ in this life, but nobody stands above God telling him what he can and cannot do, and if he wants everyone to repent, there's nothing that would artificially confine him from saying, well, I'll even let you repent after you die if it comes to that. Now, of course, Origen believed this would not be something like everyone sees a lake of fire and says, okay, I repent.

You know, I mean, you'd say, well, everyone would repent if they saw the lake of fire. Well, but the idea is it has to be sincere. No one is saved without sincere repentance in this life or any life.

Repentance has to be a change of heart. Origen believed that people who spend time in hell, their hardness of heart will be melted, that their resistance will be broken down, that even they will see God as he really is for the first time when they die, and that they will see how many wrong ideas they had about him. So Origen believed that somehow, because God has paid for everybody, he should own everybody, and therefore he will pursue them.

As Jesus said, if a man has a hundred sheep and one goes astray, he leaves the ninety-nine and goes after that one until he finds it. And they believe that God will go after the lost sheep until he finds them. And if he doesn't find them in this life, he'll keep pursuing them and seeking their repentance.

Now, this is usually called, Origen called this restorationism. Sometimes this view is called universal reconciliation or something like that. Some people might call it universalism, but this is a problem because it's not universalism in the sense that that term is often used.

When we think of universalism today, many people like Unitarians or Universalists, their view is that all religions lead to God. It doesn't matter what you did. God's just too nice.

He wouldn't send anyone to hell. So when you die, no matter what religion you were, no religion at all, you go to heaven. That's the Unitarian non-Christian form of universalism.

Origen's view was no one gets saved without Jesus. It's just that he didn't believe that death was the last opportunity for people to get saved by Jesus. He believed that everyone would be saved eventually, but no more differently than we did, except they came along later.

They'll be saved because of the sacrifice of Christ, because of their faith in Christ, and without that, no one can be saved. Origen believed, as all evangelicals do, that no one can be saved except through Christ. He just didn't believe that this life was the only opportunity that lost people would have to be saved through Christ.

So that was the third view. Now, those are the three views of hell. I want to talk about each of them a little more, what the scriptures are used for them.

But Origen, by the way, was the most influential theologian prior to Augustine. Every church history you read, I've read many of them, they say the two greatest theologians in the early church were Origen and Augustine. Now Augustine felt he had to defeat Origen's views about this, and much later, once Augustine's views became those of the Catholic Church, the Catholic Church eventually denounced Origen as a heretic, like they denounced other people, some of whom we would not necessarily call heretics ourselves, because we're not Roman Catholics.

But from a Roman Catholic point of view, Origen was a heretic, and so are we. So I mean, we have to be careful saying, well, you don't want to think about Origen because he's a heretic. Well, yeah, yeah, he's called a heretic, but we have to consider the source.

Who called him that? Now Origen did hold a lot of views that we would not accept. I mean, he held a lot of strange views, and yet he was the most influential theologian in the third and fourth centuries until Augustine. And it is said there were six catechetical schools, that is theological schools, in the ancient church after Origen's time.

And one of them, the one in Carthage, which is where Tertullian was, and North Africa in general, where Augustine later was, that was the Latin school. And that gave its theology to the Roman church, which became the Roman Catholic church, by the way. And Tertullian's view was of eternal conscious torment.

And that's the one of the six schools in the ancient world, that's the one school of Christianity that taught eternal conscious torment. That was Carthage, North Africa, which was feeding its theology to the Roman church. Which was a Latin church.

The church in Ephesus, which is where Irenaeus was, it taught conditional immortality, which is the idea of, I didn't quite explain why that's called that, but you might be able to grasp it. Conditional immortality, the second view, is that people are not naturally immortal. Immortality is the gift of God.

Eternal life is a gift from God given only to those who receive Christ. So if you don't have Christ, you don't have immortality. Immortality is conditional.

And the Bible nowhere says that people who don't have Christ are immortal. But it does say, God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, a word in the Greek means be destroyed, shall not perish but have everlasting life. So there's two options.

One is to have immortality, and the other is to not, and those who don't perish. Everybody knows John 3.16. We should have just thought about it a little more. Anyway, those who hold the conditional immortality believe that.

But I'm going to show you that there are scriptures for all these views. But what I was surprised, I wrote a book on this a few years back. It's available.

It's called All You Want to Know About Hell, Three Christian Views of God's Final Solution for the Problem of Sin. And I don't have them for sale. Of course, when a man wrote a book and comes to speak someplace, he should bring several cartons of it and have his wife selling them in the back of the room.

But I don't sell my books. You can't even buy it from my website. You can buy it from other places, but not me.

I'm not a salesman. But I did research. I read 30 or so books by people on all different sides.

And I summarized the arguments into a book that actually gives all the arguments for each of the views and all the arguments against each of the views. And I myself say several times in the book what is true. I don't know which view is true.

I'm not an advocate of one view. When I talk about any view, it might sound like I'm an



advocate of it, because I'm trying to give you the case for it. But then when I talk about the next view, I sound like an advocate for that one, too.

I just want to be fair to all the views and let you know that these views, a couple of them might seem heretical to us from our standpoint in the 21st century. But in the first four centuries, Irenaeus, Origen, Tertullian, they all taught views different from each other. But none of them considered the others heretic.

They respected each other. It was never thought that any one view of hell was part of Christian orthodoxy, because they considered it was ambiguous in scripture. And I have to say that I didn't grow up thinking it was ambiguous.

But the more I studied the scripture on it, the more I would have to agree it is ambiguous. And I might say this. It's OK.

I'm not going there. I don't have to know what's going on there. But one thing that is important, I do have to know God.

I do have to know what kind of a God I'm worshipping, what kind of a God I'm following. Because Jesus said that we should be like him. For example, Jesus said, I say unto you, love your enemies, do good to those who persecute you, bless those who curse you, so that you might be sons of your Father in heaven.

For he is good to the unthankful. And he causes his son to rise on the evil and on the good. And if you only love those who love you, you're only like the publicans.

But be like your Father. Be merciful as your Father in heaven is merciful. And so Jesus says, listen, we are supposed to be like our Father.

And that has a lot to do with the way we think about our enemies. So how does God think about his enemies? Because when we figure that out, we'll figure out what we're supposed to be like toward our enemies. An awful lot of people think that God's default attitude toward all people until they get saved is hatred and anger and wrath.

Now, does God have wrath? Of course. Anyone who's got moral convictions gets angry. There's a lot to get angry at.

The question is, does he hold on to his wrath, like forever? Actually, the Bible says no. The Bible says he does not. It says we shouldn't either.

The Bible says be angry, but don't sin. Don't let the sun go down on your wrath. Put away wrath.

So righteous people are supposed to not hold on to their anger. They're supposed to put away their anger. And many places in the Old Testament tell us that God is like that.

He's slow to anger and plenteous in mercy, it says. And in the Old Testament, it says, he will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger forever. And so this idea that God is forever angry and by default angry may not be a balanced biblical picture.

It certainly doesn't seem like the picture Jesus taught. Now, someone says, many people say, but Jesus taught about hell more than anyone else did. You want to know something? You won't find any reference to hell in the epistles in the New Testament.

Paul never mentioned it. Peter didn't mention it, except he mentioned Tartarus as a place where the fallen angels go. And James and John didn't mention it until it is mentioned in the book of Revelation, which happens to be the most symbolic book in the Bible, raising certain issues in interpretation that aren't as problematic in some other parts of the Bible.

The point I want to make is that there is an ultimate judgment, but different opinions about it have always existed among those who are the leaders of the church who read the New Testament in the original language because that was their language that they knew. By the way, Augustine and Tertullian didn't. Augustine and Tertullian were Latin fathers.

Augustine himself said that he couldn't read Greek. He read Latin. So he read the New Testament in a Latin translation of the Greek.

And yet his views on this subject prevailed and became normative in the Roman, that is, the Latin church, and eventually the Reformation carried on some of the same views. But is it justified? Now, I would have thought, before I began to do my research on this many years ago, that there's plenty of verses about eternal torment. There's, for example, Revelation 20, in verse 10, that says the beast and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire with the dragon, and they're tormented day and night forever and ever.

Now, that's the clearest statement in the whole Bible about eternal torment. It says they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. And that does sound like eternal torment, to be sure.

But the only people, or the only beings, that are said to be tormented day and night forever and ever are the devil and the beast and the false prophet, none of which are exactly ordinary people. And when you read later on in the same chapter, in verse 14, that death and Hades were also thrown into the lake of fire, well, death and Hades aren't even creatures. Death isn't a person.

Hades isn't a person. This is symbolic language. Earlier in Revelation, death and Hades were represented as people.

A horse rider, the fourth horseman, was death, and he was followed by Hades. But death and Hades aren't really people. Revelation is written as a symbolic drama to get across

this conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan and the fall of Jerusalem, I believe.

But whatever it may be about, we have to admit it's written in symbolic language. If you've got death riding a horse, when death isn't even a human being and doesn't ride a horse, I mean, you've got, frankly, you've got horsemen coming out of the sky in Revelation, but probably not literally. And then you find this death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire, where the beast and the false prophet and the devil are also.

And then all who are not found written in the book of life, in Revelation 20, in verse 15, all who are not found written in the lambs of life are cast into the lake of fire. But it doesn't say what happens to them there. Many times we assume, since the devil and his angels are tormented day and night forever and ever, and then the wicked people are thrown into the same place, well, they must be tormented forever and ever also.

In the parable of the sheep and the goats, in Matthew 25, 41, Jesus said to the goats, depart from me into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. And from this, I would have argued at one time with some conviction that if the wicked are going off into eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, then they must be going to the same punishment that the devil and his angels are. And that may be, in fact, what we're supposed to believe.

And that may mean that they're going to be tormented day and night forever and ever like the devil is. That could be, in fact, what it's teaching. But I have to rethink it in view of the fact that there are scriptures that might teach an alternative.

And to say that something is thrown into eternal fire, well, the fire may be eternal. Are the people who are thrown into it eternal? If the devil is tormented day and night forever and ever, it may be because he's capable of existing forever and ever and is tormented. But are people capable of existing forever and ever? If I have an incinerator in my backyard and I throw some tin cans into it, they're going to be there a long time in the fire.

They'll be there until I take them out, I suppose. I mean, they're not going to burn up. But if I throw my trash in the same incinerator, it's going into the same fire, but it's not going to have the same fate as the cans.

The cans are going to stay. The fire's going to burn up. I mean, the paper's going to burn up.

So the fact that they're thrown into the same lake of fire doesn't tell us what happens to them after that. And the Bible doesn't really say. Now, the same parable in verse 46, Matthew 25, 46, says that he says of the sheep, these go into everlasting life, but the others into everlasting punishment.

OK, so we've got the sheep go into everlasting life. That's certainly everlasting conscious bliss. But the wicked go into everlasting punishment, the same word everlasting.

And this is often said to be proof that the experience of suffering pain and suffering and punishment in hell is as enduring as eternal life is. They're both said to be eternal. And therefore, they say that must be eternal conscious torment.

But what is it that's said to be everlasting there? The punishment is. Well, what is the punishment? He doesn't say what the punishment is. He said the punishment is eternal.

But what is the punishment? Well, the Bible says the wages of sin is death. The Bible says the soul that sins, it shall die. The Bible even describes the lake of fire as the second death.

This language does not necessarily encourage the idea that people who go there are still alive, because death means something different than being alive. Now, when I was raised with the traditional view, I had a lot of arguments to answer these kinds of things. When the Bible said to Adam and Eve, you'll die, and the soul that sins shall die, and the wage of sin is death, I was taught, and therefore I repeat it like a good parrot, I was taught, die, death just means separation.

It doesn't mean unconsciousness. It just means separation. Death means separation, just like physical death is separation of the soul from the body.

The eternal death is eternal separation of the conscious lost from God. And that worked for me for some time before I, again, had to do my question, where am I getting that idea? Like, what language are we talking about when we say death means separation? I can't find it in a Greek lexicon or Hebrew lexicon or even, frankly, an English dictionary. I can't find it.

What language, in what language does death mean separation? I don't know of any language that that's the meaning of death. It's a convenient definition of death for people who believe that people never die. Oh, well, they can be alive and be separated.

That's like death. So death just means separation. We can't make up definitions for our convenience.

I know of no lexical basis for saying that death means separation, though I said it for decades. You know, sometimes this happens. You say something for decades, then you decide, maybe I should look this up.

Never know where I got that. And I have to say, I have to challenge that. I don't believe there's any authority behind the statement that death means separation.

I think that's just a way of saying people who die can still be alive, but they're separated,

and that's the death that they're experiencing. Well, it could be. It could be.

I just don't have any biblical reason for believing that that is so. The Bible doesn't say that anywhere, nor do the languages that the Bible's written in have any lexical basis for giving it that interpretation. That's a theological interpretation, not an actual interpretation of the words in the Bible.

The Bible says that people who sin will die. Now, when God said to Adam and Eve, don't touch that tree, or he said, don't eat of that tree of knowledge of good and evil. The day you eat of it, you'll die.

Now, I believe he told the truth, but the point is, regardless what death means, if, in fact, their eating of it was not going to result simply in death, but in a deathless life of eternal torment, then he greatly understated the penalty. I mean, if I told my kids, now, don't touch the paint. It's wet.

If you touch it, you're going to get a slap on the hand. And then they touch it and say, I'm going to have to cut your hand off. Well, you didn't say you're going to cut my hand off.

I said you're going to get a slap on it. I'm going to cut it off, then I'm going to slap it. No.

I mean, that'd be ridiculous. If I'm going to cut their hand off, I should tell them I'm going to cut their hand off. I shouldn't say, well, you'll get a slap on the hand.

If you're going to be tormented forever and ever and only wish that you could die, but you never can, then why does God say, you'll die? It's a little misleading, it seems to me. Unless he had a subtext that we don't read about, where he said, and death means separation. But as far as we know, he didn't say that.

Neither there nor anywhere else in Scripture. And we never find anything in the Bible later that says that the penalty for sin is anything other than death. Even, we got that one in Genesis, when God tells him, you'll surely die.

In Revelation, it says, this is the second death. The lake of fire is the second death, it says in Revelation 20 and verse 15. Now, it's interesting, if he had said, the second death is the lake of fire, which would be kind of the same thing, but a little different emphasis.

It says, they're going to be thrown into the second death, but that's the lake of fire. That might be saying, don't think that the second death is what you think it is, it's not really death as you think it, it's really this lake of fire, which is an eternal torment place. But instead, he says, they're thrown into the lake of fire, and that's the second death.

They had one death before, they got raised from the dead, they went to the judgment, they were condemned, and they're thrown into a second death, like they died again. The

assumption being, they were dead once, now they're going to be dead again. Now, those are some of the arguments that are used by those of the second view, the conditional immortality view.

You know, the Bible says, and I might as well turn to some of these passages, for the sake of time, I usually just quote them if I can, but I would like to turn to this passage, it's a very important passage about salvation, and about eternal life, and about what the Christian message is. In 1 John 5, verse 11 and 12, it says, this is the testimony that God has given us eternal life. Apparently, we didn't have it before he gave it to us, so it was not our default condition before we were saved.

God has given us eternal life, we didn't have it already. And this life is in his Son. Okay, so, the eternal life is in Jesus.

He who has the Son has life. He who does not have the Son of God does not have life, and in the context of the life, he means what he calls eternal life. God has given to us eternal life.

Those who have the Son have that, because that life is in the Son. Those who don't have the Son don't have that life. What life? Eternal life.

Immortality is spoken of this way by Paul. Remember I told you, Paul doesn't mention hell anywhere in his writings. Jesus did a few times, and Revelation does.

But Paul and Peter and James never mention it in their writings, in their epistles. But in 2 Timothy, or excuse me, 1 Timothy 6 and verse 16, speaking about Christ, Paul says, 1 Timothy 6, 16, who, that is Christ, alone has immortality. Now, when you say that somebody has immortality, and then you emphasize that he alone has immortality, it means that other people don't have it.

If Paul had simply said, Christ has immortality, he's immortal, we'd say, oh, wonderful, we're glad to hear it. So are we. But he says, no, Christ alone has immortality.

Well then, what about me? Do I not have it? No, only Christ has it. Well then, how do I get it? Because this life is in his Son, and he who has the Son has life. God has given to us eternal life in Christ.

I become part of Christ as a Christian. I become part of his body, part of his identity. He's my head, I'm the member of his body.

And the life that is in him is the life that's in me, just like the vine and the branches. Christ is the vine. We're the branches if we're attached to Christ.

The life that is in the branches is the same as the life that's in the vine itself, because they are one organism with it. We have eternal life in Christ, but whoever doesn't have

Christ doesn't have eternal life. Christ alone possesses immortality.

If you look over at Romans chapter 2, since we're talking about Paul's views on things at the moment, Romans chapter 2, Paul's talking about the final judgment, and in verse 5 he says, But in accordance with your hardness of heart and impenitent heart, you are treasuring up for yourselves wrath in the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. He describes that. He says, Who will render to each one, according to his deeds, eternal life to those who, by patient continuance in doing good, seek for glory, honor, and immortality.

You mean you have to seek for immortality? We're not essentially immortal? You see, I always thought that when God made man in his own image, God's own image means immortal. That people, unlike animals, were created immortal beings. Because God is.

But that was an assumption. God is also an omnipresent being, but I'm not. God is also omniscient.

I'm not. God is also invisible. I'm not.

To be made in God's image, that statement itself doesn't tell us which of God's characteristics we share with him. And we don't share, for example, omniscience, or omnipotence, or omnipresence, or invisibility, or immortality. God alone is immortal.

Jesus alone is immortal. We have to seek for immortality. Where do you find that? You seek it by finding it in Christ.

That's what Paul's saying. Those who seek for immortality. That means people, before they find it, don't have it.

We are not immortal. Now, as I understand Genesis, chapter 2 and 3, God made Adam from the dust of the earth. And when Adam sinned, God said, you're going to go back to the dust.

He didn't say you're going to go to eternal torment. He says, from the dust you came, and to dust you're going to return. Oh, that's all.

Well, that's not nothing. When you become a being in the image of God, and you can go back to dust, and be nothing but dust again, that's significant. That's a significant loss.

Especially if you could have had eternal life by eating of the tree of life, which I believe is the emblem for Christ himself. Jesus said, if you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you'll have eternal life. God said, if you eat the tree of life, you'll have eternal life.

But I'm not going to let you do that now. Adam and Eve were made potentially immortal, but they weren't made immortal. They could be if they ate of the tree of life.

Without eating of it, they couldn't be. And when God said, in the day you eat of it, you'll surely die. Actually, in the Hebrew, what that says is, in the day you eat of it, dying you shall die.

In other words, they wouldn't necessarily be dead that day, but they would embark on the experience of dying, with the result ultimately that they would die. He said, in the day you eat of it, dying you shall die, is what it says in the Hebrew. Now, that could be prevented if you eat of the tree of life.

But if you eat of this other tree of knowledge, I won't let you eat of the tree of life. So death will simply take its natural course, as it does with the animal. There's no statement in the Bible that suggests that human beings are by nature immortal.

And it is stated that whosoever believes in Christ will not perish, as animals perish, and as apparently sinners perish, but will have everlasting life. So this is the doctrine of conditional immortality. Some people call it the doctrine of annihilationism.

But annihilation only refers to one aspect of it. The idea of this second view of hell is that sinners do not have everlasting existence. Like Irenaeus said, they'll be deprived of everlasting existence.

And so they don't have eternal life. They will come to an end. They will no longer exist at some point, is the idea of this viewpoint.

And that eternal life is available to all in Christ. Those who reject Christ reject this beneficent offer. But they don't win for themselves eternal torment.

They simply lose out on being able to experience what God made people to experience, which is supreme joy and righteousness and all the things that apparently we were made to desire and we do desire. Now, missing out on that is a big thing. Now, what about that statement we talked about earlier, in the sheep and the goats, that said these goats will go off into everlasting punishment? Well, those who believe in this particular second view that I'm talking about, they believe that the punishment is everlasting, but not the punishing.

The punishment is death, and that's forever. The process of dying is not forever. It's not everlasting punishing that they're getting.

They get an everlasting punishment. They're punished with the punishment that the Bible describes for the sinner, death. And it's everlasting.

It's irrevocable, irreversible. Once they're dead, there's no more chances for them. That's the idea.

It's an everlasting punishment. It's not a punishment that takes forever for it to continue



happening, but it's one whose effects are permanent. If you're dead and you never come back to life, that's everlasting.

If you died as a punishment, that was an everlasting punishment. And so this is how it is understood by the second viewpoint. And it's an important viewpoint, since Irenaeus and many others of the early church held it possibly earlier than the eternal torment view was around.

At least our witnesses for this second view in the early church are earlier than the witnesses we have for eternal torment. Now, let me just put this in perspective. When I was an advocate, I'm not an advocate of any one view now, but when I was an advocate for decades, I was an advocate of eternal conscious torment, I assumed that there must be a great number of scriptures in the Bible that support it.

But when I began to research it critically, looking at it, because I found out some Christians didn't always believe this, I wanted to see what I had a basis for and what I didn't have a basis for. I began to realize that most of the verses I applied to eternal conscious torment didn't say anything about eternal conscious torment. For example, there are passages that talk about people being sent out to outer darkness, where there's weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Well, that might be a reference to hell. It's not universally agreed among scholars that it is, but it could be. Maybe that is a reference to hell.

Maybe hell is outer darkness, where there's weeping and gnashing of teeth. But it doesn't say how long that goes on. You see, my assumption was people are naturally immortal.

Made in God's image means immortal. And if we're naturally immortal and we're separate from God in outer darkness, we must be there forever and ever and ever and ever. And if there's weeping and gnashing of teeth, it must be forever and ever and ever torment.

But when he speaks of being thrown into outer darkness, where there's weeping and gnashing of teeth, he doesn't say how long that lasts. I was importing that thought from other passages. When Jesus talks about the wheat and the tares and that the wheat are gathered in the barn and the tares are thrown into the furnace of fire, and he said when the net brings in the fish, the good fish and the bad fish, he says he takes the bad fish and puts them in a furnace of fire.

I figured, well, that's got to be a reference to hell. And no doubt it is. I think it is.

Some people doubt it, but I think it is a reference to hell. But being thrown into a furnace of fire is not self-explanatory as to how long it takes them to burn up and no longer be there. Most things that you throw in a furnace of fire, you throw to get rid of them so that

they won't be in existence anymore.

That's what furnaces are for. And I would import into reading these passages about a furnace of fire, weeping, and gnashing of teeth, I would import the assumption of eternal conscious torment in passages that made no reference to that at all. What I did find when I really looked for it is the passages that most sound like eternal conscious torment.

Let me give them to you, and I'll tell you what the second view would say about these passages. I already mentioned Matthew 25, 46. These will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into everlasting life.

OK. Well, the everlasting punishment sounds at first blush like it's talking about eternal torment. But it's the punishment, not the punishing, that's said to be everlasting.

It's not a verb. It's a noun. The punishment is the thing, the death, or whatever.

Whatever the punishment is, it's forever. But it doesn't mention torment forever. If the punishment is, in fact, death and nonexistence, that's forever, but it's not eternal torment.

What's another major verse for it? There's not very many. I was surprised how many there were not, because I kind of thought it was all through the Bible. By the way, there's no reference to the final hell in the Old Testament at all.

So everything we know about hell and the final judgment, we get it from the New Testament. So that's why I'm only looking at the New Testament. There's nothing in the Old Testament to find there on the subject.

But in the New Testament, in 2 Thessalonians 1, verse 9 says of the wicked, these shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord. These wicked, he said, will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord. That's what the punishment.

We saw in Matthew 27, there's going to be an everlasting punishment. What is the everlasting punishment? Paul says, they're punished with everlasting destruction. Everlasting destruction sounds like they're destroyed and forever they're destroyed.

They never come back. Now, I used to think, coming from the traditional view, I would read into this that they were punished with everlasting something, not absolute annihilation, certainly, because they have to suffer forever. So destruction, I thought, well, that doesn't mean annihilation.

And there are ways to show that that doesn't have to mean annihilation. For example, Jesus said, you don't put new wine into old wineskins, because if you do, the wine breaks

the skins and both are destroyed. Well, the wineskins are destroyed, but it's not annihilated.

If you bring a wrecking ball and crush this building, it's not annihilated, it's just destroyed. The building's been destroyed, but it's not gone. The ruins are here.

And so in the traditional view of hell, when Paul said, these will be punished with everlasting destruction, it was thought that it means, destruction just means ruin, not nonexistence. And in support of that, almost all the traditional authors point out that Paul says, this is everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord. And there are many new translations about that actually add a word that's not there in the Greek.

Away from the presence of the Lord. They put in the word away. If you look at the NIV, I think even the New American Standard makes this, which is not nice.

It's adding words that are not in the text. You'll read, these will be punished with everlasting destruction away from the presence of the Lord. So they're saying, see, that's separation from God.

It's eternal separation. You can't have eternal separation if you don't exist, so you must exist forever and eternally separated. The problem with that is, as I said, they're adding words that aren't in the Bible.

The phrase, from the presence of the Lord, is found one other place in the Bible. It's in Acts chapter 3, where Peter is preaching, and he says to the Jews, repent so that times of refreshing may come to you from the presence of the Lord. Not away from the presence of the Lord.

The times of refreshing come from the presence of the Lord. So does the destruction come from the presence of the Lord. These will be destroyed, will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.

The destruction comes from that. Paul actually said, in chapter 2 of the same book, that when Jesus comes, the man of sin will be destroyed by the brightness of his appearing. This destruction comes from the presence of the Lord.

In Revelation chapter 20, he says, I saw him that sat on the throne, and from his face the heavens and the earth fled away. There was no more place for them. From the presence of himself, everything vanishes.

Everything is fleeing away. This comes from the presence of the Lord, this destruction. But it's destruction.

It may be that it doesn't mean annihilation, but there's no excellent reason to say that it doesn't. Now, but this is one of the verses, I always thought this talked about eternal

conscious torment. There's no mention of conscious torment here.

There's mention of destruction. That's not quite the same thing. Then we have, essentially beyond that, we only have the book of Revelation.

And in the book of Revelation, there's this really important passage. Oh, I'm sorry, there's another passage I'll bring up. In this one, it's Revelation 14.

And verse 10 and 11, it speaks of the sinner. It says, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of his indignation. 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 ascends forever and ever. And they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receives the mark of his name. Now, I always thought this was the very strongest verse in the Bible about eternal torment, because it says the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever.

And they have no rest day nor night. And maybe that is talking about eternal conscious torment. I mean, I'm not ruling out the possibility that it could be saying that.

I'm saying what I once thought was the only possibility, I realize is not the only possibility. Because this doesn't actually say it's even describing hell at all. This is something that happens in the presence of the holy angels and the presence of the Lamb.

I thought hell was separation from God. This says, these will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the Lamb. This is not separation.

When is this taking place? Well, there are many views of Revelation, but it's not necessary to assume this is hell. Because why do we get it that it is? Well, a number of things. It says fire and brimstone.

We know that the lake of fire in Revelation 20 has fire and brimstone. But then so does what comes out of the mouth of the horses that have lions' heads and snake tails. In chapter 9 of Revelation, prior to this, these creatures, these horses with heads like lions, fire and brimstone comes out of their mouth.

So we've already got reference to fire and brimstone being a means of judgment in Revelation. And that's not talking about hell in that case. True, hell also later on, the lake of fire, is said to have fire and brimstone.

But it's not the only place in Revelation that there is fire and brimstone. So that leaves things a little open. But then there's this also.

When it says, the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever, and they have no

rest day or night. This is essentially a quotation from Isaiah chapter 34. Isaiah chapter 34 is not talking about hell.

In fact, it's talking about a judgment that came on Edom in the 6th century BC. But in the apocalyptic language of the prophets, which Revelation uses, and Isaiah sometimes uses, and Daniel uses, and other prophets use, this is symbolic language. It's poetic language.

But in chapter 34 of Isaiah, we find that Revelation is mimicking the language of the destruction of Edom. It's not necessarily talking about hell. He says in verse 5, Isaiah 34 5, my sword shall be bathed in heaven.

Indeed, it shall come down on Edom, and on the people of my curse for judgment. The sword of the Lord is filled with blood, et cetera, et cetera. Then coming down a little further, it says in verse 8, for it is the day of the Lord's vengeance, the year of recompense for the cause of Zion.

Its streams shall be turned into pitch, its dust into brimstone, its land shall become burning pitch. So you've got fire and brimstone. It shall not be quenched day or night.

Its smoke shall ascend forever. This is the language of Revelation 14:11. The smoke of their torment ascends forever.

Now, the language of fire and brimstone and torment and smoke, this is in the prophets and in Revelation borrowed from the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis chapter 19 became a paradigm that the prophets used figuratively to represent the destruction of Edom, the destruction of Jerusalem, and other judgments that God brought, just like he brought judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah. The difference is he brought literal fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah, and that gave a precedent for them to speak of God's judgment in that figurative language, too.

Fire and brimstone, just like Sodom. In fact, in Revelation, Jerusalem is called Sodom. Revelation 11:8 says that the two witnesses' bodies lie in the streets of that city that is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, where our Lord was crucified, it said.

So Jerusalem, where our Lord was crucified, is called Sodom in Revelation. So the language of the destruction of Sodom is borrowed in the apocalyptic imagery, and it's reminiscent of Sodom, so we have the reference to fire and brimstone. But we see the Old and the New Testament picks up this fire and brimstone image, and the smoke ascending forever.

The Bible says when God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, Abram got up the next morning and he looked in the direction and he saw the smoke ascending like the smoke of a furnace. Now, the city was burned up the day before. There was no one suffering in Sodom and Gomorrah the next morning, but the smoke kept going up.

It was a testimony to the fact that that city had come under God's judgment. And when Revelation says the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever, it doesn't say that their torment continues forever. Their torment has happened.

The smoke, indicating that they had been tormented, is ascending forever as a memorial, that the loss of these people is forever remembered as if the smoke is going up forever. Now, I say as if it's going up forever, because later in Revelation 19, it talks about Mystery Babylon, when it's destroyed, it says its smoke goes up forever and ever too. Same language.

This is apocalyptic language from the Old Testament. And to say this is a reference to hell is usually done by people who do not have any knowledge of the apocalyptic language of the Bible. Or if they do, they're reading into it something that's not there.

There's no reference to this being hell. This is something else. It could be anyway.

Again, I'm always allowing that the traditional view may be correct. It's one of the options. But the verses that most strongly seem to support it don't necessarily say it.

We've just about exhausted, in this survey just now, all the verses in the Bible from which you can get the doctrine of eternal torment. I mentioned also in Revelation 20 where the devil is tormented day and night forever and ever in the lake of fire. Beyond that, we've got nothing left.

We've got it all down now. What do we have? Oh no, there's one more thing. I told you there's one more I had to get back to.

I'd forgotten this one, so I have to remember it. I don't want to leave anything out, really, because I don't have an agenda here. I don't want to obscure some evidence so that you'll believe something I want to believe.

I don't know what I believe. And I want you to know that some things that you believe might not have as much of a scriptural basis as you think. Though I have no purpose to disabuse you of it.

I'm putting out the evidence. I'm a teacher, not an indoctrinator. I want to educate you.

Here's what is there. Make up your own mind. That's what I feel I'm free to do.

I haven't yet quite done it, because I'm still, all the evidence is still swirling around in there. But here's a passage many people think is about eternal torment, if I might, in Mark chapter 9. Verse 43, Jesus said, if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It's better for you to enter into life maimed rather than having two hands to go to hell, or in the Greek, Gehenna.

Into the fire that shall never be quenched, where their worm does not die and their fire is

not quenched. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It's better for you to enter life lame rather than having two feet to be cast into Gehenna, into the fire that shall never be quenched, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

He says the same thing about the eye. But three times in this he says about Gehenna, where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. Now, fire that isn't quenched sounds like eternal fire.

And worms that don't die sound like immortal worms. So I guess worms are made in God's image, too, because they have immortality as well. Only God and worms have immortality, and Christians.

Now, this is figurative language, and it's not original with Jesus. He's quoting from Isaiah 66. And if you look at Isaiah, it's the very last verse in Isaiah.

Jesus is quoting it. And I won't say all my reasons, but at this point, I don't think Isaiah 66 is talking about hell. Many people do, because Jesus used these verses, and he applied it to Gehenna.

But I don't think Gehenna is hell, either. So that's me. You've got to read my book if you're interested in a whole chapter on Gehenna.

But anyway, at the end of Isaiah, chapter 66, verse 24, it says, they, meaning the righteous, will go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against me. For their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched, and they shall be in abhorrence to all flesh. That's where Jesus got that line.

Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. It's that right from Isaiah. What's it say? The righteous will go out and look at the corpses, not living beings, not souls, corpses, dead bodies.

There will be dead bodies, and the righteous will see them. There's no reference to them being conscious. Corpses are never regarded in the Bible to be conscious.

They are, by definition, dead. We'll go out and look at the corpses. Their worms don't die.

That doesn't mean there's immortal worms there. It means that they're decaying, and they'll keep decaying until there's nothing more for the worms to eat, and then they'll have some more corpses to eat. But the point is, the worms will have an ongoing feast.

We could say mankind will not die, too, but will die, but will have children, grandchildren, and so forth. And to say the worms will not die, it's not meaning that they're immortal, like God is immortal. Basically saying they'll be there for the duration.

They're going to keep being there, and this decay is going to go on and on. And the fire is not quenched. Now see, everywhere we find the fire that is not quenched, as Jesus

used it there in Mark, we think, oh, that's eternal fire.

Well, is it? The word quenched means put out. It doesn't mean burn out. A fire that cannot be quenched might still burn out.

In fact, in ancient times, before they had fire departments, every fire that was a big one, they couldn't quench it. They'd have to wait for it to burn out. An unquenchable fire isn't an eternal fire, necessarily.

It just means it cannot be put out. By presumably people. The reason I say presumably people is because this phraseology is used, we saw it already in Isaiah 34, when it said the destruction of Edom.

It says its fire will never be quenched. In Jeremiah, multiple times, Jeremiah speaks of the Babylonians coming in and destroying Jerusalem in 586 BC, and it says, this is my wrath which shall never be quenched. It's a fire that shall never be quenched.

What it's saying is when God's wrath is unleashed, people cannot stop it. Just like a forest fire that no human being could put out. It doesn't mean it'll be there forever.

Eventually it'll burn everything up, and it won't burn anymore, it won't need to. But it wasn't quenched, it just died down. Quenching is a specific human activity of putting a fire out.

And we sometimes assume that the many times the Bible talks about a fire that is not quenched, that it's talking about eternal fire. But if you get a concordance out, and I would hope you do at least that much research before you make up your mind about something, look up unquenchable fire, look up cannot be quenched, will not be quenched, those phrases in the Bible. Look what they're talking about.

Most of the time it's talking about the destruction of Edom, the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. It's talking about earthly wrath of God, which comes by divine decree, and humans cannot stop it. That's the point.

They can't quench it. It's bigger than they are. No one can stop the wrath of God when it comes.

But it doesn't mean, it's not stating that it will never burn out or that it will never be done. Fires that cannot be quenched, forest fires for example, they'll eventually burn out, even if no one quenches them. Now, you might say, well that sounds like a lot of fast talk in there, you know, it sounds like you're just trying to debunk the traditional view.

Well, I'm trying to sound that way, because I'm trying to present other views. But I also want you to know that this is the case for the traditional view. The scriptures I've given



you are all the scriptures there are that have ever been exegeted in such a way as to find eternal conscious torment.

And as I pointed out, most of them don't say a word about eternal conscious torment and are quite capable of being understood variously. Now, you don't have to be convinced of these other variations. I'm not trying to convince you, I'm just trying to let you know.

Because it took a long time for anyone to let me know. And since I'm a teacher, I've been teaching for 49 years, I wish somebody had let me know what I'm letting you know a long time ago. Not so I wouldn't believe in the traditional view, but so that I'd know there are other possibilities, I wouldn't be forced to read it into passages that aren't necessarily saying it.

I'd like to be able to be open-minded where there's call to be open-minded. And so what I'm saying is that this traditional view can be answered by the second view, which is, of course, conditional immortality. And there's a huge number, by the way, of Christians moving in the direction of conditional immortality today.

Let me just show you a verse in Matthew 10 that strikes me as having a pretty strong statement that seems to talk about that. It's in Matthew 10, and verse 28, Jesus said, Do not fear those who kill the body, they cannot kill the soul. But rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna, which is usually translated hell, almost always translated hell.

Now, what did Jesus say God can do in hell? He can kill the soul as well as people can kill your body, but they can't kill your soul. But God can kill your soul. He can destroy your body and your soul in hell.

Now, again, I used to think destroy could just mean ruin or damage seriously or something like that. It didn't have to mean annihilation. But Jesus uses the equivalent as killing the soul.

People can kill your body, God can kill your soul. People can't kill your soul. If the soul is killed, doesn't that mean it's dead? Doesn't the destruction of the soul then, isn't it equated with the killing of the soul in this statement? This sounds very strongly to me like a scripture for conditional immortality.

Now, by this time you've decided probably that I'm a convinced believer in conditional immortality. Well, I do believe it's got a very strong case. But there's a third view too.

And that is the view of universal reconciliation. Some call it Christian or evangelical universalism. Or as Origen called it, because it was his view, he called it restorationism.

Now, let me tell you what the arguments were for that. I want to say that the number of scriptures for universal reconciliation are not as numerous. There's not as many

scriptures for that as there are that seem to support conditional immortality.

Because on the subject of conditional immortality, you can find something like 400 verses in the Bible that speak of the fate of the wicked being to die, to perish, to be destroyed, to vanish, things like that. And that does sound like an awful lot of scriptural support. I will say this about that support.

A great number of those scriptures are talking about the temporal destruction of nations and wicked men and not talking about post-mortem destinies. So a lot of those scriptures aren't necessarily telling us what happens after the last judgment to these people, but what happens to them how they die. The scriptures often talk about God destroying the wicked, talking about what happens to them in this life and how their life comes to an end.

So not all the scriptures that use those verses can necessarily be applied to hell. But some can. Certainly when Jesus said, men can kill your body, but they can't kill your soul, God can destroy your body and your soul.

That sounds pretty much like he's talking about post-mortem, after they've killed your body. So there's a lot of scripture that supports conditional immortality, and I think it's a very sound and very respectable view. But before we decide to close the case, there's more than one might think on the third view.

But it's not based on quite as many verses of scripture. There are verses of scripture, just not hundreds of them on this. And even Origen, who believed that all people, even those who go to hell, will eventually repent and be saved, he even said he didn't want to teach this to the generality of the population, because sinners may presume upon it and may not see motivation to be saved if they could be saved in hell.

But I don't know that a sinner who believed as Origen believed, would have motivation to presume on God. Because the idea is, hell is a place of torment. And if someone says, Steve Gray doesn't believe in hell, that's not true.

I do believe in hell. I believe in a hell of torment. I don't know that that torment goes on forever.

That's a different question. I do believe, if the second view is correct, that people will be tormented proportionate to their guilt, but not necessarily forever. And if Origen is correct, people will be tormented until they are brought around to faith in Christ.

Just like some of us came to faith in Christ through some pretty hard circumstances. Let's face it. Not everyone was raised a Christian.

Many people come to Christ because they've come to the end of their rope. They can't get any lower. Their life is total misery.

They've endured fiery trials, which have brought them to faith in Christ. That this could continue after death is not unimaginable. The question is, does God want to? And this is the most important thing about this third view.

It's all based on God's character. What does God want to happen to people? Well, if He wants it, who says He can't have it? Who does God answer to? What law is there above God that says, sorry, even if you want everyone to be saved, you can't. You're going to have to cut off their opportunities at death.

And God says, what if I don't want to cut it off? Well, you've got to anyway. Wait a minute, wait. If God cuts off opportunities at death for repentance, it's because He wants to.

Whatever hell is, is what God wants it to be. And this is why it's so important for us to at least wrestle with these issues, because the character of God is the most important thing for the Christian. Because I'm to be like Him.

If God is eternally vengeful toward people who, who for a short time in life are rebellious against Him, but they've got an endless, you know, unending wrath of God, then that's a certain kind of character of God that I should know about. But if He's not like that, that's kind of a slander of God, isn't it? I mean, I don't want my enemies to suffer forever. Certainly not my children, who happen to be, some of them are strained at the moment.

If they died in that condition, and I was in God's position, well, I'd say, well, snooze you lose. You're dead. You're going to hell.

I'm going to punish you forever and ever. Now, God has the right to do that. Don't let anyone understand me to be saying God can't do that if He wants to.

The question is, why would He want to? God does whatever He wants to do, but God says, the Bible says, God wants everyone to repent. He's not willing that any should perish. And we know this as Christians, that if a person were to truly repent with his last breath, though it was Adolf Hitler himself.

Now, some Christians have trouble with this, but I think if we follow the Bible, we have to assume that this is true. If Adolf Hitler himself had truly, genuinely repented of his sins and turned to Christ in his dying breath, like the thief on the cross, I think Jesus would say, today you'll be with me in paradise. We accept deathbed repentance because the Bible teaches that that is something God will accept if it's genuine.

Not fake repentance, but real repentance. If it's genuine, God will accept it. Right up to the moment of death.

But right after the moment of death, not so much. God loves the world so much, He'd die for them, but only until they die. After that, He doesn't love them anymore.

Now, they haven't changed. They're just not breathing anymore. They're the same person before and after they died, presumably.

I mean, we don't know what changes in the person when they die, but something really changes in God, according to many people's view. Many people believe that God would do anything to save people if He could, while they're alive. But after they're dead, eh, He's not that interested.

I was not willing that they should perish, but now that you did, you know, I could still give you more opportunities. I could still deal with you. I could still wait until you come around, even after death.

But I just, you know, I'm not that patient. God is patient. And the argument is this.

The Bible says in many places that Jesus died for everybody. Now, some people say, well, if everyone gets saved, even those who go to hell, that wouldn't be just. Well, is it just that you got saved? Why is it just that you are saved? Not because you deserve it, but because Jesus paid for you.

Would it be just if other people He paid for got saved? They just came in later. And here's another issue. The Bible tells us that through the cross, Jesus accomplished a tremendous victory over His rival, Satan.

That He conquered him. That He made a show of Him openly. He triumphed over him.

That the cross is the victory over the powers of darkness. Now, if I understand, the devil's the one who really wants people to be separated from God. God's the one who wants them to be reconciled with Him.

If one of the two first views are correct, God loses. Either through eternal torment or through annihilation, He loses the majority of the people He paid for. Now, that could happen.

If God is just so, if free will is that important to Him that He says, I'm sorry, you made your free will choice. I can't violate that. You just go on and be tormented forever or be annihilated.

Then I could see it. God could do that. But what evidence do we have in Scripture that when a person dies, God no longer loves them? That He no longer wishes that they were saved? And what is it that's changed in Him at the moment of their death? Because nothing, as far as we know, changes in them, except they're not breathing and their heart's not beating.

What is it in God that changes in His heart toward a sinner at the moment they die? He would have died for them again the moment earlier, the moment afterwards. Ah, I'm not

interested anymore. In fact, not only am I not interested, I want to punish you and torment you forever and ever because I've just had a change of mind about you.

And I don't really know that the Bible supports that picture of God. Now, the biggest objection to this, of course, is the Bible nowhere says that people have an opportunity to repent after death. And that is true.

The Bible does not teach that anyone who has died can repent after that. It also does not teach that they cannot. The Bible is silent on it, which leaves us to be uncertain.

What might God do according to His own nature, according to His own character? What would you do? Now, you might say, well, I'm not God. True, but hopefully you're more like God than you were when you started out. You know, we've become more like Him.

We're being transformed by the renewal of our minds. We're becoming like Christ from glory to glory into that same image. The more I become like Christ, the more I think I could never stop holding out opportunities to my children.

Ever. If I were in God's position and could hold out opportunities even after they die in sin, I would certainly hold it out. If I had the choice.

Now, I don't. But God does. But I can hardly think that God loves them less than I do.

If God loves anyone less than I do, then He's not the God I think He is. Greater love has no one than this, that He laid down His life for His friends. But if Jesus laid down His life for my children, He loves them as much as I do.

More, maybe. So, I mean, the whole issue here, I realize people say, well, that's just appealing to emotion. That's just appealing to sentiment.

Well, it's really appealing to the character of God. The question is, do we have any information from Jesus Christ or Paul or the prophets even concerning God's heart toward sinners? If we have that information, then to extend that information to the question that is not answered plainly in Scripture. Namely, what really does happen to these people after they go to the lake of fire? Do they burn up immediately? Do they get punished for a while and then burn up immediately? Do they burn up forever? Are they conscious forever? Or are they continuing to be refined as fire, through fire, like gold? Or like, you know, getting the dross out of them? I'm not answering that question.

I'm saying that is left less clear in Scripture than we have been led to believe. And where things are unclear, certainly one of the deciding votes has to be, and to my mind, the major vote has to be, what is the character of God? What's consistent with God as Jesus revealed Him? Jesus is a friend of sinners. God is a friend of sinners.

You see, in the kind of Calvinistic, Augustinian viewpoint that we've inherited from the

Roman Catholic and the Reformed churches, we have the impression that the default attitude of God towards sinners is hatred and anger and wrath. And even a baby who dies is going to go to hell because they didn't repent. That's what actually many Calvinists have taught.

And because God's default toward humans, even from birth, is hatred. I mean, Jonathan Edwards, with his famous sermon, Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God, he depicts God that way. He hates you.

You're worse. You're more loathsome to him than a spider or than the most awful insect. You know, I mean, sinners in the hands of an angry God makes God out to be a hater of sinners.

But the Bible makes God out to be a lover of sinners. God so loved the world. You mean the Christians? No, they weren't around yet.

When God so loved the world and sent His sons, there weren't any Christians. There were only sinners. And God loved them? Yes.

How much did He love them? Well, enough to die for them. Isn't that like the epitome of love? There's no greater love than that. If God loved sinners before Jesus came, enough to send Jesus to die for them, what limits are there to His love? You know, the Bible often, John in 1 John, a couple times says anyway, God is love.

It never says God is wrath. Wrath is one of His attributes. God, like any sensible, moral being, has anger and disgust and loathing toward certain moral or immoral behavior.

God gets angry. I get angry at my children, too. Because I love them.

Not because I'm thin-skinned. I would never disown my children just because I was offended that they weren't giving me the honor that children should give to their father. I would be angry because the choices they're making are damaging.

They're not living up to what I thought they would live up to. They're missing out on what I know they could experience if they were doing the right thing. Isn't this the basis of God's anger towards sinners? Not that He's easily offended and thin-skinned.

No, He's slow to wrath and plenteous in mercy, the Bible says. He's not easily angered. When He is angered, that's a function of His love because God is love.

Even His anger is an expression of His love. If someone thinks that God has, by equal parts, love and anger, they don't have the Scripture on their side. God is love.

The Bible never says God is wrath. Three times the Bible says God is and then there's a word following. They're all in John's Gospel.

God is light and God is love. And the other one escapes me at the moment. But they speak of God's, what He is.

God is not sometimes light and sometimes darkness. In fact, John says God is light. In Him, there's no darkness at all.

God is love. Completely love. That doesn't mean He doesn't punish.

A loving parent does punish. He that spares the rod hates his son. But he loves his son enough to not spare the rod.

Why? So his son will receive correction and be reconciled with him. Now, again, none of this is arguing from specific Scripture. Let me give you, because I'm just about out of time here, let me give you some actual specific Scripture, if I might.

And that is, let's see, I've got a bunch of Scriptures in my notes. There's more than I indicated. Look at Colossians 2. This is an important one for the third view.

I told you it would sound like I'm advocating. No matter what view I advocate, I sound like an advocate, because that's the best way to present. You thought a moment ago that I believed in conditional immortality.

Well, maybe I do, but I'm not so sure. Now you think I believe in universal reconciliation. Maybe I do, I'm not so sure.

I just want to see the biblical case. And right now, I'm in limbo, because the case is interesting. There's a strong case for more than one thing.

But in Colossians 2, it says in verse 15, I'm sorry, it should be Colossians 1, I'm sorry. It says, He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth and that are visible and invisible, whether thrones, dominions, etc.

Now, all things are created by Jesus. He modifies that by saying, all things in heaven, all things in earth, all things visible, all things invisible. That's what Jesus created.

Now look at verse 20, or 19 and 20. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and that 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.

Now it says in verse 15 that Christ created all things in heaven and earth and that God's intention is that Jesus would reconcile all things in heaven and earth to Himself through the cross. The same things that were created are the ones He wants reconciled. There's no suggestion that some of the things that He created are not going to be reconciled.

He gives the same kind of modifiers. All things in heaven and earth, He made them. All

things in earth, He intends to reconcile them.

This is why Origen believed that God is committed to the salvation of the whole human race, which makes some sense if we believe that Jesus died for the whole human race. You know, Jesus could conceivably die for people that He would never get. I spent most of my life believing that was a given.

Jesus didn't get most of what He died for. And that could be the way God set things up, but then why would it be so often said that Jesus is the winner and the devil's the loser? If there's a competition for the souls of men between Jesus, or God, on the one hand, and the devil on the other, and at the end of the game, the devil has all the chips, except for this little one up here that God has. Well, the devil came out the winner in that game.

Whether those chips end up annihilated or tormented forever, God lost them forever. And therefore, Jesus, who paid a huge price for all people, ends up really the sucker. I don't mean to be irreverent, but I mean it's kind of that way.

I paid for everything, but I only got this? Only this? Now, that could be the case, but why would that be described as a huge victory over Satan? Why would the cross be seen as triumphing over Satan and making a show of him up and humiliating him and so forth when Jesus got this little fragment of the population when he bought them all? He got ripped off. And that God could be ripped off is not inconceivable, but it is hard to understand why a God who gets ripped off like that would be described so much as the victor in the situation. That's an interesting thing to wrestle with for me.

In Ephesians 1, in verse 10, very similar to Colossians 1, Ephesians 1, verse 10 says 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. God intends to gather together in himself, in Christ, all things that are in heaven and earth. Same thing Colossians said.

Now, Paul wrote Ephesians and Colossians very near the end of his life, and they have profound mysteries in them that aren't found in some of his other earlier writings, but it sounds to me that he's talking like Origen about this kind of thing. And, of course, there's a much better scripture that's more specific, I think, is in Philippians chapter 2. I'm going to have to leave much out here, of course. But in Philippians chapter 2, we know this verse that Jesus became obedient to the point of death.

In verse 9, Therefore God has highly exalted him, given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and those in heaven and those on earth and those who are under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. I will say that when I held strongly to the traditional view, I knew this verse well. I just thought this means the time will come when all the people who won't bow and won't confess him will be annihilated, or actually in hell, but they won't be bowing and confess him as Lord.



I thought, well, maybe at the judgment day, just at that one moment, when Jesus comes back and the wicked finally see they are toast, and they'll finally be forced grudgingly to bow their knees and say, okay, Jesus is Lord. But it says they will do it to the glory of God the Father. I don't think God has any interest or glory from forced confessions.

I don't think he likes false repentance. I don't think he pretends. If you pretend to love him or honor him, I think he knows better than that.

They are going to do this to the glory of God. They're going to glorify God by confessing Jesus is Lord. And confessing Jesus is Lord, that's what the Bible says saves you.

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you'll be saved, Paul said in Romans 10 and 9. So, everyone's going to confess Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Now, some traditionalists have said about this verse, but it says every knee should bow and every tongue should confess. Not that they will, only that they should.

However, Paul is quoting a verse from Isaiah where God says, as I live, declares the Lord, every knee will bow and every tongue shall confess to me. So, Paul is using that scripture where God's not saying it should happen, he's saying it will happen. And so, there's many other scriptures like this.

Now, I have to say, there's good reason to be undecided, but there's a very good reason to be thinking about alternatives. Again, because God is who he is and hell tells us who he is as much as anything does. Because you know a person's character not only by how they treat their friends, but how they treat their enemies.

And Jesus said we should love our enemies and do good to them, even bless those who curse us, because God does that to his enemies. Now, a God who torments people forever and ever in hell, it's hard to make a case that he really loves those enemies like he's telling us to do. It sounds like he's very vindictive.

Especially in view of the fact that even the traditional camp often says the souls in hell are not naturally immortal. God keeps them alive in order to torment them forever. This is what many of the leading theologians that I read on this said in their books.

Yeah, they said, yeah, people wouldn't stay alive without God. God makes them stay alive forever so they can suffer forever. Oh, that's real sweet.

Do you know a human being that would do that to his enemies? Would you call that person a Christian who had that attitude towards enemies? Would you say that person had the love of Christ who wanted to torment people endlessly? And wouldn't have to. See, God, if he wanted to, he could annihilate them and put an end to it. He could give them more opportunity until they repent.

Or he could torment them. He can do what he wants to. So whatever hell actually turns out to be is what God wants it to be.

So what a person wants to do to his enemies is a declaration of his character. And if he's vindictive, then we have to live with it. If he, let me make this last point.

I know there's so many more to make, but I'll just stop with this last one. We, I think, have reason to believe that God wants to put an end to sin. Sin entered the world through the rebellion of Adam and Eve against God.

And Jesus came to restore what was lost. He came to create a new heavens, new earth, where there's no sin, where there's righteousness. In other words, God, who has labored with the sins of men and sought to redeem us from them and sought to, you know, overcome them, we believe, we should believe, I think, that God is somehow going to be done with sin.

Someday there will be no more sin in the universe. If there's still sin anywhere in the universe, at the end, God hasn't really dealt effectively with it. And the traditional view holds that those who are tormented forever and ever are cursing God, hating God.

In fact, some say that's what justifies him keeping punishing them forever because they're continually sinning. So, and that's forever? So sin never ends? Yeah, well, God just marginalizes it, puts it out in some area where we don't have to think about it. Well, but wait.

He didn't defeat sin then. He just doesn't pay attention to it. Out of sight, out of mind.

That means God never was able to defeat sin, finally. Now, if he annihilates all sinners, that defeats sin. There'll be no more sin in the universe.

Or if he converts all the sinners, even after they've been to hell, that settles it, too. The two alternatives to our traditional view actually have God gain a desirable end, namely, ending sin forever. There's no more sin anywhere in the universe.

The traditional view, he doesn't ever bring an end to sin. He just tolerates it in another realm where he doesn't have to think about it. And if you ask, why then, how can we be happy in heaven if my children or grandchildren or grandparents are in hell burning and suffering forever and ever? How could you be happy in that? Well, they sometimes say, well, because we'll think like God then.

So God is happy about that? What kind of God do you serve? A God who's happy to see people tormented forever and ever? I don't see Jesus as that kind of God. He's a friend of sinners. Well, we've got to quit here and we'll have Q&A.

I've raised some questions that I haven't answered. In fact, I haven't answered any of

them. I've done nothing but raise questions.

That was my intention, to get you to think more broadly on the questions because they are there and because they've been there since the earliest church history, these three views. I'm not here to sell books. I don't sell books.

But if you buy my book, I do cover each of these things in far more detail. But I'm going to give this over to Pastor Steve. Thank you.