

Christ's Ultimate Victory

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*M*any people do not believe that the Bible is divinely inspired because of seeming contradictions which they find in it. Many passages say that all persons will be saved through Jesus Christ, who came and died for this purpose. Many other texts seem to affirm a perpetual torment for those who refuse to accept Him, or who only fail to give a cup of water to the thirsty.

Many persons reject faith in a God Who, as they have been taught, decrees eternal torment for acts or failures of finite beings. *"My brethren, these things ought not so to be."*

It is firmly believed that the Scriptures are God's inspired Word, therefore some way should exist for harmonizing these apparent differences and removing grounds for such serious conditions.

The purpose of this work is to summarize so much of this teaching as has satisfied the writer's own troubled conscience on the subject.

The principles used in producing this harmony are:

1. To consider the subject with an open, unprejudiced mind.
2. In cases of doubtful meaning, to prefer that which glorifies God the most, for He can never be exalted higher than He merits.
3. In cases of seeming contradictions, and doubtful or ambiguous meanings, to always prefer that meaning which tends to harmonize rather than to reject the inspiration of God's Word.

THE PROPOSITION STATED

It is believed that the Bible teaches:

PART I

Our only hope of salvation from sin is through Jesus Christ. Since Christians generally believe this, no further proof is necessary.

PART II

Christ's ultimate victory; or that sometime, somewhere, Christ, the world's Savior, will win to Himself every human being. Texts supporting this view immediately follow these propositions.

PART III

The texts which seem to make punishment and the consequences of sin perpetual are incorrectly translated.

PART IV

Finally, it is believed that the Bible does not teach that the only time in which one may repent, believe and be saved is limited to this present life on earth.

PART II

Some Texts Supporting the Belief in Christ's Ultimate Victory

1. When the Angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds watching their flocks by night, He said,

*Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to **all people**. For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:8-12).*

It is very evident that not all people are receiving this joy in this life, indeed, a large majority of all people have never heard of the promise made to the shepherds; and in civilized, so-called Christian lands, how very few, relatively, show by their lives that they have this blessed joy.

2. John the Baptist, as he saw Jesus, cried out,

*Behold the Lamb of God, which **takes away the sin of the world** (John 1:29).*

Sin, the very root and ground of sins; **World**, yes more, the cosmos, the universe. Did John

the Baptist, who was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb, know or believe what he said? If John spoke the truth, then sometime, somewhere, every human soul will be redeemed through Christ Jesus. What a glorious, comforting thought.

There are many other passages from John's gospel which indicate a similar result. The following are quoted:

3. "That [The Word] was the true Light which **lights every man that comes into the world**" (John 1:9).

Apparently it has not done so in this life.

4. "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but **that the world through Him might be saved**" (John 3:17).

Is it reasonable to believe that God will be defeated in His purpose?

5. "The Father loves the Son, and has put **all things** into His hands" (John 3:36).

*All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me; and him who comes to Me I will in no wise cast out. And this is the Father's will Who has sent Me, that **of all that He has given Me I should lose nothing**, but should raise it up again at the last day (John 6:37-38).*

Will God's will fail?

6. Jesus Himself says,

*I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw **all men** unto Me (John 12:32).*

John then explains,

This He said, signifying what death He should die.

Surely He was thus lifted up. Perhaps one may say that He *draws* but does not succeed in bringing to Himself; but the Greek word here translated *draw* means to effectively bring. It is used again in John 21:6, where the text says, "and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes." They were pulling at the net but were not able to draw it, *i.e.*, bring it to land.

Please note also to what extent He draws them, "unto me." We have noted how He had previously said, "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out." Does not this give assurance of final salvation of all?

7. "I am not come to judge the world but **to save the world**" (John 12:47).

Again we say, will our Lord be defeated in His purpose by the willfulness and wickedness of one of His creatures?

Paul, in his letters, makes many statements which indicate he believed in the final salvation of all. Of the many we quote the following:

8. *“Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of One the free gift came upon **all men** unto justification of life”* (Romans 5:18).

*For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall **all** be made alive* (I Corinthians 15:22).

Practically the entire fifth chapter of Romans and a part of the fifth chapter of II Corinthians treat of the subject of how all sinners have been reconciled to God by the death of His Son.

9. *“Because **the creature** itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God”* (Romans 8:21).

10. *“That at 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”* (Philippians 2:10-11).

Would it be possible for every tongue in heaven, earth and hell to confess Jesus the Christ to the glory of God unless they all had experienced His saving grace? John says,

Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him, and he in God (I John 4:15).

Paul says,

... No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 12:3).

Is there any more glorious promise in all of God’s Word?

11. *“Who will have **all men to be saved**, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth”* (I Timothy 2:4).

The words here translated “will” and “knowledge” are the strongest words possible in the Greek.

Will the will of God be subservient to the will of man His creature? It is absurd that the will of the creature can overcome the will of the Creator.

Another verse of similar meaning is,

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (II Peter 3:9).

12. “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus; who gave Himself a ransom **for all**, to be testified in due time” (I Timothy 2:5-6).

Truly we are bought with a price; the price has been paid. Will the God of heaven fail to secure that for which He paid such an all-sufficient price? We cannot believe it.

13. “That He [Jesus] by the grace of God should taste death for **every man**” (Hebrews 2:9).

Again, will He fail to receive that for which He died?

14. “The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to **all men**” (Titus 2:11, R.V.).

15. Let us close this side of the subject with these verses from I Corinthians,

*Then comes the end when He [Christ] has delivered up the kingdom unto God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and authority and power. For He must reign, until He has put all enemies under His feet ... And when all things shall be subject 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** (I Corinthians 15:24-28).*

Evidently Christ cannot turn the Kingdom over to the Father and God be “All in all,” until He has completed the work which He came to perform, and of which at least a part was, as He Himself said in Matthew 18:28,

For the Son of man is come to save that which is lost.

In this connection, please remember that the Greek word here translated “lost” is very frequently translated “perish” and “destroy.” It is translated “perish” in the well known John 3:16. It is translated “destroy” in the text, “fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).

Therefore, He came to save the lost, perished and destroyed. What a marvelous thought! “With God all things are possible.” Surely, with Paul, “I am persuaded that neither death nor life,” yea, nothing, “shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

PART III

So-Called Eternal Life and Eternal Punishment Considered

The doctrines of eternal life and eternal punishment rest chiefly on the meaning of two Greek words, the noun *aion* and the adjective having the same root, *aionios*. The noun is found more than one hundred times in the New Testament. The first meaning of the word given in almost every Greek-English lexicon is *age*, and in every place where this word is found in the New Testament, this meaning makes perfect sense.

However, in the King James Version it is translated in sixteen different ways, but only twice as *age*. *Aion*, in the accusative singular, preceded by *eis ton*, (lit. in the age) is translated *for ever*. Likewise the plural, *eis tous aiona* (in the ages) is also translated *for ever*. This is inaccurate, for if the singular means *for ever*, there is no place for a plural. Further, the usual meaning of the preposition *eis* is *in, into, unto, to* and *toward*, and not *for*. Five times *aion* is mentioned as having a beginning, four times as having an end, and four times as being something still to come, all of which are inconsistent with the meaning of *ever*. To avoid these impossibilities, the word in these instances, is translated *world*, but the meaning *age* fits every case. Twenty times the above expressions are followed by *ton aionion*, (of the ages) and the whole is translated *for ever and ever*, a collection of words with no particular meaning, for if the one part means forever there can be no ever to follow. The evident meaning of the expressions is *the age of the ages* or the plural, *the ages of the ages*; for time – past, present and future – is composed of ages; one or two of which take precedence of all others.

The translation of *aion* as *age* in the last sentence of Matthew 12:32 admits of hope even for those guilty of the unpardonable sin. The sentence then reads,

But whosoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age, neither in the age to come.

The fact that the sentence states that the sin is unpardonable in that and the succeeding age, surely implies pardon at the end of that period. If the law condemns a refractor to punishment during a specified period, it surely implies that the punishment will cease when the term ends.

In reference to the derivative adjective *aionios*, it is a law of language that an adjective, having the same root as a noun, must be related to it in meaning. Therefore, if *aion* represents a limited period of time, as is indicated by *age*, then a similar limitation must affect the derived adjective. It is also a law of language that the adjective must always designate the same condition or quality to whatever noun it qualifies; that is, the adjective always qualifies the noun and not the noun the adjective as some translators seem to think.¹

This adjective is translated *eternal* or *everlasting* 67 times in King James Version. There are three occasions where it qualifies the word meaning *time*. Since *time*, by its very nature, is temporal, not eternal, in these three places the two words are translated “*world began*.” If *aionios* can ever properly qualify time, it cannot mean *eternal*. If it does not mean *eternal* in these three places, it cannot mean that in any other place, even if to question this translation defies the generally accepted opinion of many Christians and the statement of most creeds.

Robert Young in his *Analytical Concordance* gives the meaning of *aionios* as *age lasting*, and in his translation, *age during*. Joseph Rotherham’s translation makes it *age abiding* and Richard Weymouth’s translation, *of the ages*. A.E. Saxby suggests that the adjective indicates a *quality*, rather than duration.

1. A.E. Saxby treats this fully in his *In the Mouth of Two or Three Witnesses*.

Fortunately, the key to the real meaning of *aionios* is given by our Lord Jesus Himself. He says in His intercessory prayer,

And this is life eternal [aionios life] that they might know Thee the only True God and Jesus Christ Whom You have sent (John 17:3).

This definition probably includes both quality and duration, thus harmonizing with the meanings given above. It is surprising that this simple definition has not long ago brought harmony to conflicting faiths.

If *aionion* life is that life which causes us to know Him, the only true God and Jesus Christ Whom He sent, then since the meaning of the adjective must always be the same; *aionion* punishment, correction, etc., must be that which will cause us to know God and His Son, Jesus Christ. That is, the purpose of the punishment is corrective, (as all punishment should be) to cause the recipient to know Him, and when this is accomplished, the punishment will cease. Thus, *aionion* fire and destruction will burn (spiritually) and consume all that prevents the sinner from knowing Him and receiving Christ's salvation.

The expressions, *aionion* God and Spirit are those manifestations of God and Spirit which cause His creatures to know Him. The *aionion* kingdom, glory, covenant and salvation are all for a similar purpose, that we may know Him and Jesus Christ Whom He sent. In fact, *aionion* time is for this purpose. This meaning of *aionios* seems to satisfy every use of the word in the entire Scriptures, and harmonizes perfectly with the passages quoted in Part II already given.

What is it to know God and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent? It is to know His attributes; His Justice. More will be given on this subject in Part IV.

The Scripture is abundant with God's limitless love, compassion, mercy and willingness to pardon.

God commended His love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

It clearly makes known His unbounded grace and power by which He,

Is able to keep you from falling, and present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy (Jude 24).

It makes known His companionship, His advice, correction and instruction by which you are able to walk before Him. May all join with Paul in that deep spiritual utterance, recorded in one of his prison epistles,

That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection from the dead (Philippians 3:10-11).

The Judgment of Believers

The Scriptures plainly teach there is a judgment for saint as well as sinner. Paul says,

For we most all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to that he has done, whether good or bad (II Corinthians 5:10).

By saying “we” Paul includes himself in this judgment. Also note it covers bad as well as good. He also says,

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 declare every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abides ... he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; yet he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire (I Corinthians 3:13-15).

This was spoken to God’s laborers, His husbandry, Christians. We all are to have a fiery judgment, but, thank God, all shall be saved after the dross has been burned out.

The Second Death

In this discussion of *aion* and its adjective *aionios*, it is realized that all passages in the Bible which might seem to indicate an eternal punishment have not been considered. One of these already has been quoted in the third paragraph of our propositions, namely Revelation 21:8. This tells how the worst of sinners shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone; which is the second death. Please note that there is nothing said that would make the punishment interminable. Therefore, since there are statements which indicate a final universal salvation, we must conclude that this too will have its end.

Further, C.H. Pridgeon calls attention to the fact that the word for brimstone, *theion*, also means divine, and in ancient times was used to purify, even as now. May this not be the purpose in casting sinners into it that their evil natures may be consumed and they come forth, purified by the fire, much as has been described in I Corinthians 3:14-17, treated above.

In the ninth chapter of Mark there are several verses where Christ directs that if hand, foot or eye causes one to stumble to cut off the offending member, rather than having the two to be cast into hell (Gehenna), “*into the fire that never shall be quenched.*” It might be inferred that because it mentions the fire as unquenchable, that the punishment was unending, but it does not say so, and for the reason given above, we must judge this to be a false conclusion. Further, the fire in Gehenna, referred to, went out ages ago.

John the Baptist says that when His Lord comes,

He will thoroughly purge His floor and gather His wheat into the garner, but will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire (Matthew 3:12).

Some believe the chaff represents sinners; but wheat and chaff are of the same stock and may it not mean that the useless, unprofitable elements in Christians are thus removed, as described in I Corinthians 3:13-15, quoted above?

PART IV

How May the Ultimate Salvation of All be Accomplished?

Only Through Jesus Christ, God's Son, Our Lord.

Our blessed Lord was not only the Lamb of God when He hung on the cruel cross of Calvary, but through all ages. He was,

Slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8).

Before the first being was created, God planned that His Son would be born of woman, suffer, be despised, rejected, die His ignominious death, and rise again as our Redeemer. Thus was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

It would seem that a certain responsibility must rest upon our Creator for our existence with elements in us which may and apparently have permitted the vast majority of mankind to go down to the grave without accepting and receiving the saving grace of Jesus Christ. If perpetual torment is the only fate of this innumerable multitude, then is not God, to a degree, responsible for this atrocity? This is contrary to our conception of a God of love. Therefore, search has been made to discover where this error lies and to attempt its removal. God's justice demands that, to the degree that God is responsible for our ability to sin, so is He duty bound to provide a sufficient and effective cure. Christ's sacrifice from the world's foundation will at last avail.

More than half of every generation since Christ died have never even heard His name. Can it be that He who counts the very hairs of our heads and lets not a sparrow fall to the ground without His notice, has no effective saving plan for these lost human creatures? He who provides for the fowls of the air, should He not have a plan for every detail of every life and the ability to accomplish it? We believe just such a plan exists.

The Example of Paul

All have not had equal opportunities for salvation in this life. Mr. Eugene C. Callaway, in his *Harmony of the Eons*, calls attention to Saul's conversion, of which he says he was "*born out of due time*," literally, abortive, that is before time. He was not saved by *faith* as we, but by *sight* as the Jews will be when Christ returns and they look on Him whom they have pierced, and the nation is born in a day. If Christ will thus blind and knock down a man by His presence and glory in order to save him, He must, in justice, be willing to do equally as much for the salvation of any other sinner, for He is no respecter of persons; and as He did this for Saul afore time, He must do what may be required to save others after this life ends if it has not been accomplished before.

When this is all done, then we will see Christ's work completed. The Lamb of God will have removed from the Universe the last vestige of sin, with all its evil consequences, and God **"shall be ALL in all."**

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Associate of Charles H. Pridgeon, *Pittsburgh Bible Institute*. The writer's only purpose is to establish faith in the Holy Scriptures, and to exalt His Savior, Lord and King, Christ Jesus.

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