

Lesson # 72 The Great White Throne Judgment (GWTJ) – Rev. 20:11-15

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¹¹Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹²And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. ¹³And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. ¹⁴Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

“Some of the great leaders in the history of the church express...urgency derived from the fact of the lostness of persons apart from Christ. The 17th century preacher, Samuel Rutherford once told a person “I would lay down my dearest joys in the gap between you and eternal destruction.” Hudson Taylor said, “I would have never thought of going to China had I not believed the Chinese were lost and needed Christ.” DL Moody told an audience in London, “If I believed there was no hell, I am sure I would be off tomorrow for America.” He said he would give up going from town to town, spending night and day “urging men to escape the damnation of hell.” William Booth said he wished that his Salvation Army workers might spend “one night in hell” in order to see the urgency of their evangelistic task.”ⁱ

I. Introduction

Hebrews 9:27 says, *“And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,” (NKJV).*

This is a verse that many evangelists use to present their case, and yet, it is only one verse among many in the Bible that point us to a final judgment, which is yet future to all of us.

It describes a court that will not be called on account of rain; & will not be snowed out. There will be no remands for the litigants or appeals to a higher court. There is no higher courtⁱⁱ. The judge on the bench will not be partial or biased but will judge in perfect righteousness all who appear there. This day has been foreordained and decreed by God to occur on His timetable and nothing will interfere with His plan or timing.

In our lifetime, we have all witnessed (and likely laughed at) many of the cartoon panels depicting ‘hell’ or seen the stand-up comedians like Steve

Harvey, Richard Pryor, etc. as they parody how people in the crowd at the GWTJ might act and talk as they await their turn before the One on the throne. Although it is understandable that people want to make light of this very somber event, the reality of it is no laughing matter.

Those wanting to deal with their thoughts about hell in a more theological or pseudo-biblical way, tend to diffuse what the Bible says about judgment & hell by seeing it as a place where people are annihilated or snuffed out of existence (Annihilationism); or kept there just long enough to purge their sins and be purified so they can enter heaven (purgatory, universalism); or concoct opportunities for those who have never heard the gospel to make a choice for Christ after death (Post-mortem Evangelism); or provision is made for people from any religion to enter heaven based on the devotion to whatever god they believed in (pluralism, inclusivism) and their devotion will be credited as if they followed Christ (He is in fact, the only way); or reincarnation where a soul is deposited into a new animal or person time after time until they get life ‘right’ and finally enter Nirvana, a state of blissful nothingness; and some think that there is even an alternate place where the not so wicked go rather than eternal hell. Like some sort of minimum security prison (Sidlow Baxter) even though the Bible never indicates such a place exists; etc.

Rob Bell, in a 2011 book that caused an evangelical uproar, “Love Wins”, attacks the orthodox view of Hell by asking series of rhetorical questions not intended to be answered but to skew the readers’ viewpoints and force them to consider inclusivism, universalism and even post-mortem evangelism.

Here are a few quotes from Rob Bell’s book:

He attacks the eternality of Hell; *“So when we read “eternal punishment”, it’s important that we don’t read categories and concepts into a phrase that aren’t there. Jesus isn’t talking about forever as we think of forever. Jesus may be talking about something else, which has all sorts of implications for our understandings of what happens after we die.”ⁱⁱⁱ*

“Will all people be saved, or will God not get what God wants?”^{iv}

On post-modern evangelism: *“And then there are others who ask, if you get another chance after you die, why limit that chance to a one-off immediately after death? And so they expand the possibilities, trusting that there will be endless opportunities in an endless amount of time for people to say yes to God...At the heart of this perspective is the belief that, given enough time, everybody will turn to God and find themselves in the joy and peace of God’s presence. The love of God will melt every hard heart, and even the most “depraved sinners” will eventually give up their resistance and turn to God.”^v*

He believes there is no way for God to get glory from Hell; *“...untold masses of people suffering forever doesn’t bring God glory. Restoration brings God glory; endless anguish doesn’t. Renewal and return cause God’s greatness to shine through the universe; never ending punishment doesn’t.”*^{vi}

“Then there is inclusivity. The kind that is open to all religions, the kind that trusts that good people will get in, that there is only one mountain, but it has many paths. This inclusivity assumes that as long as your heart is fine or your actions measure up, you’ll be OK.”^{vii}

If annihilation or any of these other hopeful human options are the final judgment, as some say, there is no need for this court. God could simply snuff people out as they died, and there’d be no need for Hades either in that case. The Bible is clear, however, that this final judgment will take place, and if it is to be just, it must make sense from a biblical perspective, which it does.

The world and humanity have a beginning – recorded for us in Genesis 1-3, and mentioned throughout Scripture. The world and humanity have an end, recorded for us in the book of Revelation and throughout Scripture. It is from this courtroom described in Rev. 20:11-15 that all who die apart from Christ will be condemned to eternity in Hell. Daniel 12:2 says that some will be resurrected to stand at this court to their “shame and everlasting contempt.”

It is a somber, sobering and terrifying topic to study as we recognize that billions of people – many of them our own loved ones, neighbours & co-workers - will stand without an advocate, without any support whatsoever to give an account of their lives to their creator, the Lord & Judge of the universe – God Himself in the person of Jesus Christ. They will stand apart from the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and not a single sin they ever committed will be forgiven. Instead, they will face alone the fierce and just wrath of a Holy God based solely on their words, deeds, thoughts, & motives. Since God’s standard for entrance into His Kingdom is perfect righteousness, and these have not accepted His forgiveness in Christ nor had Christ’s righteousness imputed to them, they will all be found to have come far short of the standard of God’s perfect glory! No one at the GWTJ will be found righteous, because the righteous have already had their judgment at Calvary.

Those being judged at the GWTJ are humans, and only wicked humans. The saved have by this time had their sins judged at Calvary by way of a substitute sacrifice where God’s wrath for the Elect fell on His Son, Jesus Christ in their place as their Lamb. We have found this Lamb prominently displayed in heaven throughout our study of Revelation, seated on the throne. Christians also are judged at a different courtroom scene - the Bema

Seat Judgment of Christ, but not for their sins – only to establish rewards for faithful service provided based on Eph. 2:10, and as described in I Cor. 3:11-17; 4:1-5; II Cor. 5:9-11; I Cor. 11:32a. IOW – the rewards are based on what a Christian does with the gift of eternal life granted to him / her. Sin per se will not be judged at the Bema Seat.

The Demons and Satan, the Antichrist & False Prophet have already been judged by this time as well, and are already in Hell serving their time – cf. Rev. 19:20-21; 20:10.

One of the main claims of inclusivism & pluralism is that “all roads lead to God”, and here, we see that, in one sense, they do. All people who counted on that theology and rejected the exclusive claims of Christ will arrive here at this throne in God’s cosmic courtroom at His appointed time, so they have reached God, but not in the way they ever imagined or hoped. It will not be Buddha, Baal, Sun Yung Moon, Charles Taze Russell, Ellen White, Mary Baker Eddy, L. Ron Hubbard, or any other pretender sitting on this judgment throne.

Most men have been deceived into believing this event will never take place at all, that sin will never be judged, and even the popularity of Darwinian evolution has as its main selling point the eradication of the certainty of a God who will judge us based on our works. Modern, outspoken atheists see the concept of Hell as a concocted threat used by the church to try to control peoples’ morality and keep them coming to church so the church can survive on their money. For others who do envision some sort of final judgment, God will use balance scales to determine if we did more good or bad in our lives and the good will cancel out the bad and we’ll end up in heaven. This is actually the most prevalent North American viewpoint, even among many so-called Christians. This account in Rev. 20:11-15 is not a strident or colourful description of the terrifying details, but is a simple rendering of what John sees as he is given a vision of this future event, an event he mentioned in his gospel at JN. 5:29, where he called it “the resurrection of judgment.” This is the second resurrection.

Human history as we know it will have ceased to exist by this time, and all that is left for God to deal with in order to fulfill all righteousness is to finally judge the world for its’ wickedness and to mete out eternal sentences.

Everyone at the GWTJ has lived a life of varying duration at some point within history and then has died. Their now ‘eternal’ bodies have been reunited with their souls (Rev. 20:12-13) to stand before God as judge to receive in those bodies the spiritual judgment for the sins committed in those bodies. These are bodies designed by God to last eternally, which is the length of time they will all be in Hell.

II. A Cosmic Throne

v. 11

Verse 11 describes in plain language the most incredible physical event apart from creation itself as the universe as we know it, now no longer necessary to support life or point to the glory of God (because now everyone sees His glory), is dissolved in what Peter describes in **II Pet. 3:7-10** as “with a roar”! This scene is so absolutely off the charts unique & gigantic that words could never adequately express what it must be like to experience such a scene! Some theologians disagree with this interpretation of what these 2 verses mean, but I believe that this is what is being said. Jesus Himself prophesies that heaven and earth will pass away – see **Matt. 5:18; 24:35**.

This throne is unlike the throne depicted earlier in Revelation, and will be “sitting” somewhere in a no longer existent universe, perhaps suspended in timeless eternity by a transcendent God whose majesty we can barely comprehend and yet, as believers, we revel in. The new heaven and new earth are not described until Rev. 21 - 22.

It is called the GWTJ not because of its size, but due to its significance, authority, majesty, power and the all encompassing scope of its judgment. It is “white” to describe its purity, justice, righteousness and total sovereignty. It is the judgment bench of the absolute sovereign ruler of all there is and no one will be here by accident or oversight. No one will be plea bargaining here, because their fate is already sealed. The GWTJ will not determine guilt, but rather it will prove & confirm it and will then will mete out the degree of punishment the condemned people will receive – cf. **Ps. 9:7; Dan. 7:9-10; Rom. 2:5**. The guilt of those who stand at this judgment will be set in stone.

Notice John’s description in Rev. 20:11b of the One who sits on the throne. Who is this terrifying, awesome person who has all authority?

Throughout Revelation, John tells us it is God who is seated on His throne – His royal throne – **Rev. 4:2; 5: 1,13; 7:10,15; 19:4**. He alone has the authority to judge His creation & creatures. Notice the mention of the Lamb in many of these verses. See also **Isaiah 6:1-4; Ezek. 1:26-28; Dan. 7:9-10; JN. 8:50**. It is God who is seated here on the GWT judging man, and most immediately assume that this is the Father.

However, although it is true that this Judge is God, we must compare scripture with scripture to see that it is God in the person of Jesus Christ – the Lamb who is this final judge. Notice **Rev. 3:21; Rev. 22:1,3; JN. 10:30; JN. 12: 41**; and especially take note of **JN. 5:22,26,28; Acts 17:30-31 & Rom. 2:16**. The unmistakable conclusion we must arrive at is that God will judge the wicked through Jesus Christ – the One who spent 33 years as a human being

and can not only sympathize with His people as their High Priest, because He died to redeem them, and as God, He also knows the hearts of wicked men.

John continues in Rev. 20:12 that he “saw the small & the great standing before the throne and the books were opened”. Billions of people from all of human history stand here shoulder to shoulder- the rich & famous, the moral God-rejecters, the self-righteous, the faceless throngs from the broad road, the petty, cowardly, mass murderers, crooked politicians & abortionists, arrogant scientists, godless news-people, great historical figures like Attila the Hun, Ghengis Khan, Napoleon Bonaparte, Muhammed, Alexander the Great, Marc Anthony, Cleopatra, Judas Iscariot, Nero Caesar, Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, Mao Zedong, religious hucksters and deceivers, and our loved ones, unrepentant to the end.

This verse says they are standing before this throne. They cannot escape this scene, and are truly under the full authority of the Lord Jesus Christ – as Paul predicted in **Phil. 2:9-11**, quoting Isa. 45:23 – bowing under the absolute authority of this God. They would not acknowledge Him on earth, merely giving Him feigned obedience (Ps. 66:3 – NASB), but now are under total submission to Him, without any chance of that submission serving to free them from His wrath. There will be some there who will have called Him “Lord” on earth, and argue for lenience based on their ‘good’ religious deeds in life - cf. MT. 7:21-23 – but who are now compelled to realize to their utter horror and personal experience that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God unprotected by a Saviour or Advocate (Heb. 10:23).

God’s judgment will be absolutely just and will take into account the amount of gospel ‘light’ people had, because they did not have control over that. His justice flows from His holiness and is perfect justice. People today want a God who is only partially just. They want Him to eradicate the evil they see in others, to slap people down who do violence to them or their loved ones or the innocent, but they want Him to look the other way when they commit sins and to give them a pass on their own shortcomings. They mistakenly see God as one of them, a man, but cranked way up. God describes & rebukes this very common error in **Psalm 50:16-23** (esp. v. 21).

III. The Books

v. 12

John continues in v. 12 – “the books”. It may strike you as odd that an omniscient God will use “books” to prove His case against sinners in order to condemn them to Hell. Books that list sins, life and death are noted throughout Scripture. The Book of Life or the Lamb’s Book of Life is apparently a list of all those who will be saved throughout history, having

been written before the foundation of the world – cf. Phil. 4:3; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 21:27; 22:19. Other books mentioned: Ex. 17:14; 32:32-33; Deut. 29:20; Ps. 9:5; 69:28; 55:8; 109:13-14; Dan. 7:10; Malachi 3:16 & others.

Rev. 20:12 defines for us what these books are all about. Two specific types of books are mentioned here – “books” out of which “the dead are judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done” (ie. their deeds) – see **Jude 14-15**. Another book (singular), the Book of Life – **v. 15**, tells us why this book is opened. If your name is not found in that book, then you are bound for eternal Hell – cf. **Rev. 21:27; 22:19**.

These books (and perhaps even the imagery of books) are a condescension to our humanness. God does not need to read about our sins in a book, or record them there so He'll remember them, because He knows everything about everyone – cf. **Heb. 4:12-13** – so the books are there as a record against those who stand condemned. They are evidence. No one can say to God, “You are mistaken, I never did such and such”, because the record in the books will verify God's judgment. We do not know if these “books” will be actual books or scrolls, or some sort of video recording of every person's actions and thoughts., but we know they'll be comprehensive.

We can rest assured that the records will be accurate and complete in every detail, including the thought and intentions of the heart. The reading of them will result in great shame & contempt (**Dan. 12:2**). The fact that only 1 book records Life is probably due to the fact the other books record details of sins over a person's whole life, while the Book of Life records only names of the Elect, the sin details having been taken care of at Calvary. Notice **Col. 2:13-14**. The lists of the sins of the saved are nailed to the cross, willfully forgotten by an omniscient God who knows everything, yet our sins are put behind Him (**Isa. 38:17**); are as far as the east is from the west (**Ps. 103:12**); & are buried in the depths of the sea (**Micah 7:19**). One book of Life is sufficient when the record of your wicked deeds have been erased. David reminds us that, “blessed is the man whose sins have been forgiven” – **Ps. 32:1-2**.

For some, the books will contain reams of pages of sins, for others, smaller amounts of sin records, but for all, the key is this: if you have unforgiven sin on your account, even one, your name will not be found in the Lamb's Book of Life.

IV. Death & Hades Have Fulfilled Their Purpose vv. 13-14

Rev. 20:13 now tells us that the bodies of these dead, reunited with their souls out of Hades have been resurrected from the sea and the grave. Even if they had been vaporized in a nuclear blast or eaten by a shark, and dead for

thousands of years, God knows where every molecule and atom of every dead person is and can simply reconstruct them for their appearance here. He will call them all back to stand here before His GWT. No one will escape this judgment, no matter what state their body is in now. Hades has reached the end of its' usefulness as a sort of holding cell, and death, at least physical death, the first death, has come to an end, so these are thrown into the Lake of Fire to symbolize they are eternally banned – Rev. 20:14.

Again, in v. 13, we are reminded that these people are judged by their deeds, by what they did while alive. The suffering of Hades was in soul only, as the body remained in the grave, but in Hell, the suffering will involve body & soul reunited for eternity – cf. **MT. 10:26**.

Death & Hades are thrown into the Lake of Fire because the elements of the universe are gone, and there is no place for them in heaven (Rev. 21:17). There is no more sea, no more land, and no death to hold anyone, and no need for Hades to imprison anyone. After this judgment, God will never sit as judge again.

V. The Lake of Fire

v. 15

We've been told in this account that God is judging people based on their deeds, as recorded in the books. For there to be a judgment, there has to have been a standard violated, and the One judging must have the authority to enforce that standard. Sinners will be judged based on God's standard, so it is important to see what that standard is.

“Be ye perfect” – **MT. 5:48; Romans 3:20-23; Gal. 3:10-11; James 2:10; I Pet. 1:15-16**. No one's deeds will ever live up to this standard, and that's what makes the gospel such good news, because God provided a way to avoid being personally judged by this standard at the GWTJ when He poured out His wrath on His own beloved Son in our place at Calvary, who acted their as our innocent substitute.

People will be judged on their thoughts and motivations which were the impetus for their deeds and even good deeds with incorrect motives are sinful. Even when the outward actions seem to be righteous, God knows the intents of the heart and will bring into full public view every evil thought, hidden to man but not to God – cf., **LK. 8:17; Rom. 2:16**; and people's words will condemn them too – **MT. 12:37; LK. 12:3**. According to **Romans 1:18-21; 2:14-15; JN 1:9**; no one will have any excuse. Their works, the outworking of their heart will be judged too – those deeds recorded in the books will record their inner evil – cf. **MT. 23:27-28** – even the secret evil – **LK. 12:3**. The sad thing is that all of these sins could have been placed on Christ, but these

hapless sinners would not come to Him that they might have life – JN. 5:40; 8:24. Every person's life will be justly and uniquely evaluated, and their subsequent punishment will accurately reflect that evaluation.

If all at the GWTJ end up in Hell anyway, why is there the formality of a trial? Why not just gather all the wicked together and dump them en masse into Hell? The justice and righteousness of God has a lot to do with the answer to those questions. Although hell is undoubtedly eternal, and there is no hope for escape or sentence reduction or eventual release, the Bible speaks of degrees of punishment in hell, which accounts for one of the reasons for the GWTJ. One reason I treated the Judgment of The Sheep and Goats in Mathew 25 (in a previous lesson) as a separate judgment from the GWTJ is that the GWTJ is personal, whereas the Sheep & Goats Judgment appears to be a more national or group judgment.

Does Hell Consist of Real Fire?

One of dodges people attempt to use to diffuse the reality of Biblical hell is to say that the fire is not real fire. They claim that since hell was prepared for the devil and his angels, and they are spiritual beings, which ostensibly means that fire is no big deal to them, then the fire is a mere symbol or emblem of what hell is like.

David Platt shatters that misconception here, *“We say things like, “We had a hell of a time.” Or, “We played a hell of a game.” Or, “That was a hell of a song.” The way we talk about hell shows that we have no idea what we are talking about.*

Hell is a place of fiery agony. Hear Jesus in Mark 9:43-48: “If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire...And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell., ‘where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’” In the words of Revelation 20:15, “If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” Similarly, Revelation 21:8 envisions hell as “the lake that burns with fire and sulfur.

You say, “Well, isn’t fire just an image in these passages? Aren’t these verses symbolic?”

Maybe, but if they are symbols, what are they symbols for? A wintry retreat or a summer vacation? No, these are symbols that stand for something much worse. Surely burning fire and smoking sulfur are not symbols for a nice place to be. They are symbols for a terrifying place to be.”^{viii}

The lengthy section that follows is my attempt to demonstrate both the fairness of the idea of eternal Hell for the punishment of temporally committed sins and how degrees of punishment fits into God's decree of condemnation for sinners.

VI. Is Eternal Hell a Just Punishment? **Heb. 2:1-3**

Hell is a horrible reality. It is fearful beyond expression or imagination. Last week we saw that this awesomely terrible reality is an echo of the glory of God. The Bible assumes that it is a just and righteous recompense to all who sin. And for that to be true, how infinitely valuable and worthy must be the glory of God that sin belittles and scorns! In other words the horror of hell is an echo of the infinite worth of God's glory.

And if the death of Christ can justly deliver millions of people from deserved eternal torment, how infinite must have been the torment of the Son of God when he took our place.

So the justice of hell stands as an everlasting witness to the infinite greatness of the glory of God, and the infinite greatness of the suffering and righteous of Christ to redeem all who repent and believe in him. Hell is an echo of the glory of God.^{ix}

We live in a society where we understand what justice is or is not. It would not be justice to be caught speeding by 20 km / hr and to be sent to prison for 3 years. A fine and loss of points on your license is a just penalty for that offense. It would not be just to have murdered someone, be found guilty and then to be fined \$ 75 and released. It is not just when a “good Samaritan” helps someone in serious, life or death trouble, and then is sued because rescuing them left them with a broken leg or arm. It is not just to have a company sued for \$ 7 million because a customer spilled a coffee in her lap due to her own negligence because the coffee was hot! What about situations where a homeowner confronts a burglar, shoots them in self defense, and then the burglar is set free and the homeowner goes to jail? People are understandable outraged when they hear of situations like these, because of the obvious injustice.

When we come to the biblical doctrine of Hell, given the average Christian's (never mind the unchurched) knowledge of the Bible and their very low view of God, His sovereignty and glory, it should come as no surprise that most (and the number is increasing with every survey taken) people do not believe that eternal punishment in Hell is a just punishment for sins committed during a finite life on earth, no matter how sinful the sinner was. I have heard all too often – “My loving God would never send anyone to an eternal hell.”

I want us to proceed very carefully here, because this section could very well be the most important in this whole study to open people's eyes to the truth of judgment and Hell, and especially to help us recognize the immense value of Jesus sacrificial death on behalf of sinners.

Those of us who recognize sin often think of sin as those Ten Commandments, the "Thou Shalt Nots", lists of things we should not do or say or think, and certainly, those things are sin. However, how often do we consider God's glory as we live out our lives, never giving Him a thought until some calamity befalls us or a loved one and we must seek Him out?

I have quoted John Piper here again as he brought into my study of Romans something about sin a number of years ago that I had never considered to that point, and it blew me away, and it is appropriate to what we are now looking at.

What makes sin sin is not first that it hurts people, but that it blasphemes God. This is the ultimate evil and the ultimate outrage in the universe.

The glory of God is not honored.

The holiness of God is not revered.

The greatness of God is not admired.

The power of God is not praised.

The truth of God is not sought.

The wisdom of God is not esteemed.

The beauty of God is not treasured.

The goodness of God is not savored.

The faithfulness of God is not trusted.

The promises of God are not relied upon.

The commandments of God are not obeyed.

The justice of God is not respected.

The wrath of God is not feared.

The grace of God is not cherished.

The presence of God is not prized.

The person of God is not loved.

The infinite, all-glorious Creator of the universe, by whom and for whom all things exist (Rom. 11:36) - who holds every person's life in being at every moment (Acts 17:25) - is disregarded, disbelieved, disobeyed, and dishonored by everybody in the world. That is the ultimate outrage of the universe.^x

In understanding the scope of our sin and why it merits eternal punishment, we need to see that it is not the length of our sin that counts. IOW, not how many sins did I commit during a 72 year life, but what was the depth of that

sin, and I think John Piper addresses that here at least in part and in doing so, he shows us a depth of sin that goes beyond sinful events and exposes the heart issue of sin. We would never think it to be a just punishment to incarcerate a man who spent 5 minutes beating a helpless man nearly to death to 5 minutes in prison to pay for his 5 minutes of evil, but people argue that temporal sins should not merit an eternal punishment. A person who lives to be 70, and commits just 1 sin per hour, will have committed about 611,520 sins by the time he/she dies!

One sin by Adam plunged the world into a downward spiral of tears, sorrow, death and pain that we still experience today, and yet we sin daily, hourly and consider our own sins as inconsequential, tiny and insignificant, so much so, that as Christians, we seldom go to God to confess those sins and seek His forgiveness. God is worthy of so much more than that – not just from His children, but from the world.

“Our problem is not simply that we have made some bad decisions. Our problem is not just that we’ve messed up. Our problem is that we are – at the very core of our being – sinfully lost, cut off from God, condemned by God, and consequently destined for hell.”^{xi} David Platt

I am trying to demonstrate for you here that eternity in Hell is a just punishment for the tarnishing and disregarding of God’s glory by sinning against Him. According to **Psalm 51:4**, our sin is ultimately & foremost against God, and a remedy is provided in Christ and **Psalm 51:1-2, 16-17** tells us how to approach God in order to demonstrate what Heb. 11:6 tells us is the only thing that pleases Him – faith. Without this faith in God, we are on our way to Hell and justly so – notice **Heb. 10:26-31**.

The Bible is replete with verses and entire passages which tell us that the thing which is of chief importance to God is His glory (or His name / same idea). Jonathan Edwards concluded from his extensive study of God’s word that God’s sinlessness or Holiness consists primarily in His love for His own glory. Now, if this were a man claiming this, we would attribute great arrogance and conceit to that person, but this is God we are talking about, and we must realize that the One greatest worshipper of God is God Himself. If this were not so, God would be an idolater. He alone is worthy of worship, so to worship anything outside of Himself would undercut the glory of who He is. Notice **Isaiah 48:9-11**.

Since God’s chief aim in creation and in all that occurs is to display His glory, it follows, and Scripture concurs that He takes pleasure in those who delight in Him and in His goodness, which is evidenced by their faith and obedience to Him. Cf. I Sam. 15:22-23; Ps. 147:10-11; Matt. 3:17; Rom. 8:32.

If God uses His omnipotence to work all things together for good to those who love Him, (and the ultimate payoff for this is in eternity) then it follows that this same omnipotence is directed just as forcefully in the opposite direction against those who do not delight in Him – cf. Ezra 8:22; Ps. 7:11; 76:7; Isa. 28:13; 28:21-22; Jer. 16:17-18; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6; etc.

If God did not react this way to those who, by sinning, oppose His glory and do not fear Him, the implication would be that His glory is not an important enough treasure to be guarded with full available strength. God's love and His wrath are not irreconcilable opposites, but are simply 2 ways in which He makes it clear that He fully honours His name.^{xii} God is as loving to those He loves as He is strongly opposed to those who will not worship Him or delight in Him.

People mistakenly and fatally believe that God's common grace and blessings of a temporal nature upon them, even as unbelievers, is somehow evidence that He is pleased with them and their sin, but notice **Rom. 2:5**. People think they are good because they see no ongoing evidence of rebuke from this patient God, but they store up wrath for themselves by ignoring God's estimate of the fact that they are helpless sinners who are not ascribing honour to Him or thankfulness for the blessings they are enjoying, which come from Him – cf. James 1:17. **II Peter 3:3-7** supplies another viewpoint of these people who scoff at the idea of the return of Christ to judge them.

In order to maintain credibility in His eternal graciousness, God must match the severity of the punishment to the eternal scope of the sin. Any argument for eternal Hell must rest on the connection between the depth and severity of the sin and the goodness and grace of the God against whom the sin is committed. He reveals His goodness and mercy only to have it soundly rejected by those who don't want it because they feel they don't need it, and who hate Him for pointing out their guilt. Their condemnation is just.

The greater the one sinned against, and the greater the benevolence of what is promised and the more adored and revered the One making the promise is, the more heinous is the insult in not believing the promise of that One. He has promised eternity with Him / eternal life and immeasurable joy if we will but trust in the salvation He has provided in Christ, and yet people settle for temporary sinful pleasures He has condemned in His word and in their consciences. C.S. Lewis put it like this, *“We are like children, who would rather continue to make mudpies in our backyard, because we cannot conceive of a holiday by the sea.”*

If we were to make a cream pie and throw it into the face of our buddy at a party, there would be laughs and jocularities. However, what happens to people who make a similar pie and throw it in the face of the Canadian Prime Minister (which happened to Jean Chretien)? The perpetrator got some time in jail. What was the difference? Why no laughs? The target of the pie made the difference.

God must punish this enormous sin with the greatest possible severity, and the Biblical doctrine of eternal Hell meets that requirement and protects His glory.

People do not want to acknowledge any dependence on God, because their pride (that oldest of sins) will not allow them to. Notice this very revealing passage – **Jer. 2:9-13**, and cf. **Rom. 1:25**. People exchange this God for a lie – the lie – that God is either not there, or is not feared if He is seen as being there. While we are in Romans 1, look at **vv. 20c-21**. Because they are without excuse, they know God is there (no true atheists exist), but do not glorify Him as God, are not thankful to Him for all they have and are. God's glory is robbed from Him because He does not receive the glory He so fully deserves and which is visibly displayed by the created order around us all. For this reason, for the depth of man's sin, not the duration of it, eternal Hell is absolutely just and anything short of it is unjust. The bible is clear that hell is eternal & inescapable. Since Jesus is the One who spoke more than anyone about the eternal nature of Hell, are we prepared to argue that He was either lying or ignorant of some aspect of a temporary Hell He just did not know about?

Degrees of Punishment

Another important consideration – important and well worth looking at here is the idea of degrees of punishment in Hell. Jesus mentions, as does Luke that there will be degrees of punishment in eternal Hell. We have already established that Hell is eternal, so we know that the degrees do not have anything to do with an early release from Hell, these degrees must be related to the severity of the torment in Hell. Here are verses to refer to: **Matt. 10:15; 11:24; 12:41-42; 18:6; LK. 10:12; 10:14; 11:31-32; 22:2b; Acts 1:25; James 3:1.**

DA Carson postulates these 4 points as potential ways that degrees of punishment may be affective in hell;

1. Perhaps people will experience different degrees of remorse
2. They will receive more or less pain
3. It may be psychological differences, especially having to do with the presence of Jesus Christ and His angels – cf. Rev. 14:10

4. The 'worm' of memory may play a large role as people recall parents' prayers, missed opportunities to accept Christ, etc.

In any case, the one thing it cannot be is length of time served in hell, and we also must accept that God is absolutely just and righteous. (from a lecture DA Carson gave which I did not record the date or occasion)

Donald Macleod comments, *"...there is a limit. The wrath is bounded by equity. God will not banish for the mere pleasure of it. He will banish only because it is right and only to the extent that that it is right. We can have an absolute confidence that God, the righteous judge, will take absolutely everything into account, including our excuses and any pleas we offer in mitigation. Not one soul will be in Hell who does not deserve to be; and no one's Hell will be darker or deeper than what is right. God's wrath cannot be compromised by miscarriages of justice. If we are sure that our lives are defensible, we have nothing to fear."*^{xiii}

There is no room for the consideration of degrees of punishment in the intermediate state – Sheol or Hades, and from Luke 16:19-31, there is every indication that those in that place are all under the same torment. In fact, since the time spent in Hades involves time (time will not be discarded until Rev. 20:11), many are in Hades now, and have been for thousands of years (pre-flood sinners like Cain), who have committed (at least in our estimation) lesser sins than some who have only recently gone to Hades.

For example, Adolf Hitler has been in Hades since 1945, and as of 2013 has spent 68 years there, awaiting final judgment. An unnamed Polynesian who died without Christ in, say AD 1220 has been in the same Hades for 793 years, 728 more years and counting than the evil man who murdered 10 million people. Here is where Annihilationism is not very well thought through, because it would be unjust for both to get the same punishment at the GWT, and the Polynesian to have received more years in Hades than Hitler, merely because he was born earlier in history! (unless one's soul is annihilated at death, which is not the biblical position)

No, only an eternal Hell allows for there to be degrees of punishment after death, allowing for some way for God to mete out punishment to justly fit the degrees of severity of the sin debt of each person. We are not privy to how He will do this, but we trust with Abraham that the Judge of the world will do right (Gen. 18:25; Ps. 95:13; 98:9; 7:11; 9:4-8). There will be no early release from Hell, no time off for good behaviour, because with the grace of God removed, no one will be able to become better in Hell, so Hell is eternal – no escape. All who end up there are 100% guilty and no passage of time or amount of punishment achieved will ever convert guilt into innocence. No one in Hell will ever repent, because repentance requires the grace of God to be

extended to people – all that is left when God's grace is withdrawn is curses, condemnation and utter despair. Although the Bible never explains how degrees of punishment are meted out, we must simply trust God.

I am wrapping up this section of our study with a couple of passages from John MacArthur's sermon series on the GWTJ.

And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

It's a passage that ultimately consigns all of the ungodly of all the ages to eternal hell. Hell is, of course, as it is taught in the Scripture, distinctively a Christian doctrine. But Christianity is not the only religion in the world that speaks about punishment after death. In fact, virtually every major religion in the world teaches some form of punishment after death for sins committed in this life.

For example, one strand of Islamic doctrine says that each individual is questioned by two angels, one named Mooncar(?) and the other Nakier(?), before walking across a bridge that stretches over hell. The faithful then cross safely into paradise while unbelievers fall into a place with seven grades of punishment, including being roasted, boiled and afflicted with pus. Other Islamic teaching says that they will be burned until their skins are destroyed at which point they will be given new skins so the process can be repeated.

Buddhism mentions many hells to be endured on an unpleasant journey toward Nirvana, a kind of blissful non-existence. Classical Buddhists' teaching has seven hot hells, each surrounded by torture chambers which include fiery pits and quagmires while other versions of hell speak of cold hells which have less traumatic punishment for minor offenders. According to certain Chinese Buddhists, devils in human form inflict all kinds of gruesome torture including pulling out slanderous tongues with red-hot wires and pouring molten lead down liars' throats.

In Taoism the god of walls and moats sends the wicked to one of several hells where they are punished for a fixed period of time. Hinduism has twenty-one hells tailor made to match a person's behavior on earth. Hinduism says if you fail to feed the hungry while you were living, you might be chained to a rock where birds come to eat your stomach. An adulterer might be forced to embrace a beautiful woman whose temperature is white hot while the worst offenders face incarceration in a series of lower hells where they are scorched in hot sand, boiled in jars, or eaten by ravens. Janism(?) a spinoff of Hinduism has no fewer than eight million, four hundred thousand hells as well as a bottomless abyss where the worst sinners are kept forever.

What does all this signify? It signifies that people have an innate sense of justice. They have an innate sense of retribution, a feeling that somehow some day, some way they will pay, that perhaps on the other side of the graves wrongs will be righted and evil will finally be punished and crushed. Those grotesque guesses are

certainly not representative of biblical truth, but they do point to the conscience and its activity in the human heart that stirs up a sense of culpability, shame, remorse, regret in view of future and perhaps eternal accountability. And this is a stubborn instinct in man that he may be punished for his sin.

Farther along in the same sermon already quoted from above, MacArthur says;

If you want to insult the Spirit of grace who offers salvation, insult the Son of God who was set apart as the only sacrifice, insult the One who gave His blood, insult the Son of God, then you can be sure that you will receive a severer punishment than anybody who broke the law of Moses.

You say, "Well who is going to exact that punishment?" The same God offered grace, verse 30, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," and again the Lord will judge His people. "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

The judgment of the great white throne is coming. But only those who choose to be there will go because to be there you have to reject the Lord Jesus Christ.

Father, as we conclude this most serious, sobering portion of Scripture that shakes us to the very core, we just ask that Your Holy Spirit would help us, first of all, to examine our own lives, and, O God, if there's anyone hearing this message who does not know Jesus Christ, who is not genuinely forgiven, who is not genuinely redeemed, bought back out of sin, and headed for heaven, may they know that, may Your Spirit make it abundantly clear to them so that they aren't self-deceived and end up saying, "Lord, Lord," and hearing, "Depart from Me, I never knew you. "

Lesson # 72 Appendix # 1

What About Infants Who Die?

One of the toughest trials a person could ever go through is the death of a child. It is out of the natural & expected order of things and when it occurs, parental guilt at not having been protective enough (even when the death could not have been prevented) or feeling helpless is a common reaction.

Many people place this question in the same category as the section that follows this one – “What about those who never hear the gospel?” – but these are very different issues, as we will see as we get into the details.

When the child dies as an infant, it is even more tragic and is then compounded by the query of the parents as to the eternal disposition of this little one who has died. Our immediate inclination is to certify that babies go to heaven for sure, without question, but what does the only authority that matters say about it? What does God’s word say? That is the only thing that can bring real comfort.

As we turn to the Bible, we come to find that there is not a single verse or succinct passage that specifically tells us that babies who die go to heaven. A survey of theologians can be variably either comforting or discouraging. Liberal theologians don’t see babies being born with a sin nature, so they immediately say – “babies go to heaven.” Roman Catholic theologians used to recommend immediate baptism of babies, because, prior to Vatican II, it was believed that unbaptized babies may go to a place called Limbo, where their souls are suspended between heaven and hell. They still baptize infants but Vatican II eliminated the doctrine of Limbo. Some say that only the babies of Christian parents go to heaven, while others say without question that all babies go to heaven. A third position posits that some babies die and go to heaven, while others die and go to Hell, and what makes the difference is God’s sovereign choice, which reflects the way He saves adults. I believe that, while the evidence is certainly not voluminous in the Bible, that the second opinion is correct, based on what the Bible does say about this topic.

John MacArthur, responding to Larry Ling’s question, “What about the 2 year old who was crushed at the bottom of the World Trade Center?”, on “The Larry King Live” show broadcast on CNN shortly after Sept. 11, 2001, said, “Instant heaven!”^{xiv} I agree with him.

Recent statistics tell us that close to 10 million babies per year die; most in the poorest and most primitive (& incidentally pagan) nations where the infant mortality rate approaches 150-200 / 1000 live births. One of 4 conceived die in the womb as miscarriages, usually at about 12 weeks; and

the abortion rate in the USA alone is running at about 1.3 million per year (as of 2000^{xv}). All of these babies have souls and will spend eternity in 1 of 2 places – Heaven or Hell. Will all go to heaven, or all to Hell, or some to both? What does the Bible say about it? There are quite a few places for us to glean some clues from, although there is no specific verse or verses which state anything outright on this subject.

David's Two Sons

To me, one of the strongest arguments the Bible presents for showing that infants who die go to heaven is found in David's reaction to the deaths of 2 of his sons. The first account is found in **II Sam. 12:14-23**.

As a direct result of David's sin with Bathsheba and her husband, Uriah, God, through the prophet Nathan spares David from immediate death as a result of his sin, but the consequences of that sin is described for us in **II Sam. 12:7-14**. The consequences were to be fourfold:

- V. 10 – the sword (or violence) would not depart from David's household – he would be at war until he died, and there is more than a hint of personal, family tragedy here as well.
- V. 11 – those of his own household would rise up in adversity against him.
- V. 11 – his wives would be taken from him and given to his neighbours in a very public way.
- V. 14 – the child born of this sinful union between himself and Bathsheba would die, and in v. 15, we read, "And the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and it became very ill."^{xvi}

What I want us to focus on here is David's reaction to this death and then we'll compare that to his reaction to another son's death. Notice v. 16, as David prays, fasts, stretches out on the ground and pleads with God to spare the child's life. He would not allow his servants (v. 17) to help him up or to feed him. The child subsequently does die (v. 18) on the 7th day, and the servants are afraid to tell David. However, his reaction to the news of the child's death surprises them – see **vv. 20-23**, and in vv. 22-23 we find our first clue regarding the disposition of babies that die.

David prayed for and hoped for God's grace in sparing his son's life, but was prepared to accept with full trust God's answer of "No". In v. 23, David provides us all with hope for babies who die, when he says, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

Those who believe babies do not go to heaven argue that all David means by this is that he would one day share a grave with his son^{xvii}, but that does not fit the context of the reaction of David. If that's all he meant, he could have

done that without the fasting, praying and laying on the ground. There is no comfort in that, and David, by his reaction is showing that he is comforted. Others say that David figured he would end up in Hell because of his sin, and he'd see his child there, but David was saved by God's grace, and he knew it. The evidence for that is overwhelming – **Ps. 23:6; 42:1-2; 51:10-12; 139:17-18; Rom. 4:5-8.** David expected to be in heaven, and he expected to see his now dead son there too.

Now let's move forward to the second son's death. The account of that is spread from **II Sam. 15:6; 16:20-21; 17:1-4,14; 18:9-17; through 18:28-19.** Here we find David's son, Absalom, from his wife Maacah, who had grown up and decided to rebel against David and attempted to muster an army of men in order to kill David and ascend to his throne. When he gets his hair caught in a tree, he suspends there, helpless, and Joab, along with 10 other men kill him.

So here is a son well past the age where he is now responsible for his actions, in willful sin and rebellion against his own father, who chose evil over good, and dies unrepentant. What is David's reaction now? Note **II Sam. 18:33-19:1,4.** Weeping, mourning, with no hint of hope or comfort or expectation expressed of seeing him again. His mourning is so violent that the people are stirred up negatively against David – cf. **II Sam. 19:5-6.**

This contrast is encouraging, and if that is all we had to go on, I'm not sure that we would not be somewhat convinced already that babies go to heaven. However, there are other passages which give us more clues to build our case on.

Before we look at those other cases, perhaps we should look at why anyone would even question whether or not a baby would go to heaven when it died. Some do believe that babies who die do end up in Hell, and this is the main reason why Roman Catholics baptize infants, and is also one reason why Protestant Paedobaptists do the same, although the Protestant (Reformed) doctrine of paedobaptism has a more complex argument for it than just that. For liberal theologians, it is not a concern, because they do not believe that anyone is born with a sin nature in the first place, so there is (to them) no sin in the baby's life until they actually sin.

Adam's Sin

Romans 5:12-18

In vv. 12-14, the key verses for our discussion, Paul is remarking that (especially v. 14) people die even though they have not personally sinned or transgressed a specific law, and it is possible that, at least in part, he is referring to children who die. They may not have been alive for long enough to commit personal sin or to recognize right from wrong, therefore their death

(which is the wages of sin) must be as a result of some other sin that is applied to them. Paul points out that even from Adam to Moses (v. 14) where 1 law was broken by Adam to corporate, to national, to global law in Exodus, people died. Death is the wages of sin, so the sin that is the root cause of infants' deaths is imputed sin, Adam's sin passed down from generation to generation.

It is for this reason that the very first promise of a Messiah – Gen. 3:15 – calls Christ “the Seed of the woman”. His virgin birth is of extreme importance here, and although we may not recognize how the mechanics of it work, somehow God performed this signal event to allow Jesus to be born of a virgin without a human man's participation in the conception, so that Jesus was born without a sin nature. The only fact we can draw from this is that the sin nature must somehow be passed down through the male, rather than the female.

Verses like **Gen. 8:21**; I Kings 8:46; Job 14:4; Ps. 51:5; 58:3; 143:2; Prov. 20:9; Eccl. 7:20; Isa. 48:8; Jer. 17:9; JN 3:6; Rom. 3:10-12; Eph. 2:3; and so many others serve to demonstrate to us that all humans are born with a sin nature, and in fact, since the first (biological) birth of everyone involves that sin nature springing to life, is it any wonder that Jesus tells the Pharisee Nicodemus in **JN 3:3,7** that we must be born again?

If you are following this, a case is made that babies who die were born with a sin nature, and so they are considered sinners in God's eyes. They haven't put their sin into practice yet, but they have Adam's fallen nature, so a case could be made and it is often (and rightly) argued that babies deserve Hell too.

Al Mohler comments on this point:

“The Bible reveals that we are born marked by original sin, and thus we cannot claim that infants are born in a state of innocence. Any biblical answer to the question of infant salvation must start from the understanding that infants are born with a sin nature.”^{xviii}

Let me state right here that I believe babies go to heaven, not Hell, but they do not go to heaven on the basis of their innocence. In God's sight, they are guilty because of Adam's sin, but they go to heaven based on His grace and mercy. I believe that God does save all babies who die before the “age of accountability” is reached.^{xix} John MacArthur explains this well; *“A child who has not reached moral culpability is a child who has not reached sufficient mature understanding to comprehend convincingly the issues of law and grace, sin and salvation. Only God knows the time when a child becomes “accountable.”^{xx}*

RA Webb makes this case: *“Any such theology as would yield safely to our hands the doctrine of the universal salvation of infants dying in infancy, and at the same time be true and faithful to the Scriptures, must recognize and construe the following propositions;*

1. *All infants dying in infancy are by nature guilty and depraved.*
2. *All infants dying in infancy, if saved at all, are saved by the atonement of Christ, and in no other way.*
3. *All infants dying in infancy, if saved at all, must be regenerated and sanctified by the grace of the Holy Spirit.*
4. *All infants dying in infancy, if saved at all, must be saved by an application of redemption to them prior to death.*

All schemes devised to explain the salvation of dead infants by dodging any of these propositions must necessarily be foredoomed.”^{xxi}

The salvation of infants is one way we can see people from every tribe, tongue and nation before God’s throne in Rev. 5. In fact, it is possible that this is an answer as to how representatives from every tribe, tongue and nation can be seen at the throne in Revelation 5.

Certainly, if a baby is allowed by God to grow up, their sin will become very personal and **they will be judged on the basis of their deeds** unless they are born again. However, we also know that God has each person’s life timed and decreed – **Job 14:5; 7:3; Ps. 139:13-16; Isa. 49:1; Jer. 1:5**; etc. – so if one dies at birth, in the womb, at 1 year old, 7 or 96, this is what God has planned for that life – including their interactions & relationships with others, friends, family, co-workers, neighbours, etc. - within His redemptive plan for the entire world. (cf. Acts 17:25-26)

Think about salvation by grace of all those infants who die in famines of starvation or in wars; those born to pagan parents with no hope of ever hearing the gospel should they grow old. Given the contrast between this life and heaven, who would not choose death as an infant if they had the choice? Note **Job 5:7; 3:10; Eccl. 6:3-6.**

I underlined & emboldened the phrase above, **they will be judged on the basis of their deeds**. As I pondered this issue, and read some more on it, this aspect of the argument was very convincing.

While all who are born inherit a sin nature from Adam, we are also told numerous times in the Bible that the judgment of those who are going to Hell for eternity is based on their deeds / their personal conscious unrighteousness, not on an inherited sin nature, Romans 5 notwithstanding. The inherited sin nature accounts for why babies may die physically, but not for their spiritual death.

Notice some key verses – judgment is as a result of:

NT

- II Cor. 5:10 – “things done in the body”
- MT. 16:27 – “according to his works”
- Rom. 2:6,8 – “according to his deeds”; who obey unrighteousness”.
- MT. 12: 36,37 – “condemned for your idle words”
- Rev. 20: 12, 13 – “according to their works” or ESV “what they have done”.

OT

- Jer. 17:10 – God searches the heart to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doing
- Ezek. 18 – see separate section on this chapter

In none of these passages is anyone said to be condemned based on original sin inherited from Adam, but rather on the things they did or said while alive, and while capable of distinguishing whether or not those things were right or wrong.

Here is what Roger Nicole says on this subject:

“It must be recognized that all humans, including infants, are under the curse of Adam’s sin & so God does not owe any one salvation. Yet, when we examine the picture of judgment in Scripture, we find that condemnation is meted out in terms of sins committed while in the body (& here he lists the verses I have noted above)....

Those who die in infancy have no personal guilt of that type since they die before the age of accountability. One could say therefore that they share in the guilt of Adam since they die (Rom. 12:14) but it is not apparent that they will ultimately be condemned since they did not commit any of the personal sins that constitute the basis of the condemnation meted out at the last judgment to the non-elect.

One could, therefore, infer that infants dying in infancy are incorporated without an act of their will in the condemnation of Adam & similarly are ingrafted without an act of personal faith into the saving benefits of the work of Christ. The Bible does not discuss this at length because there is no way in which these can be reached by preaching and they do not fall under the logic of Romans 10:13-15. These infants need to be regenerated, of course, and it is not stipulated when: any time between the mother’s womb and the time of their death would be possible. This outlook would enormously increase one’s understanding of the scope of election.”^{xxii}

John Piper’s position is that babies who die are of the elect, but he draws a conclusion in that position that I cannot agree with. Here is what he says, *“Apart from a knowledge of him (Jesus), none who has the physical ability to*

know him will be saved.” Then this footnote is added, “I state it like this so as to leave open salvation for infants and the mentally handicapped who do not have the physical ability even to apprehend that there is any revelation available at all. The principle of accountability in Romans 1:20 (God makes knowledge available “in order that they might be without excuse” is the basis for this conviction. The Bible does not deal with this special case in any detail, and we are left to speculate that the fitness of the connection between faith in Christ and salvation will be preserved through the coming to faith of children whenever God brings them to maturity in heaven or in the age to come.”^{xxiii}

The addition of the last sentence in Dr. Piper’s argument above does not make sense. If God takes these infants to heaven when they die, there should be no sense of them waiting for “God to mature them, then give them faith”.

However, it is my belief that only the Calvinist position can assured us that God will save babies by His grace and mercy, because salvation of anyone is all of Him. Think about the gyrations an Arminian thinker must go through to believe that infants are saved, even though they have not exercised so-called free will, or accepted Christ. Their own theology comes against them in this case, and a committed, logically thinking Arminian should admit that it is more likely that babies have died and gone to Hell rather than to heaven because they did not exercise their free will to accept Christ..

James R. White, a committed Calvinist whom I respect greatly, has a slightly different viewpoint on this. He says that he believes that not all babies are saved, but only those God chooses out of that group, just as He is sovereign in adults being saved^{xxiv}. I see & respect his point, but I do not agree with him here, because we are dealing with imputed or inherited sin only rather than experiential sin. Part of his argument is the fact that babies do die, and there I agree with him. However, that is only physical death and says nothing necessarily about the spiritual state of the child. Good mature Christians die too, but physical death does not mean for them that they have not gone to heaven. He further is concerned that babies instantly going to heaven after death would make abortion the biggest evangelistic tool ever conceived.

If babies are part of the Elect, then millions per year are swelling heaven’s ranks, perhaps more so than adults, due to high infant mortality rates in many parts of the world. Now, believe me when I say that there are already idiots out there who support abortion because they believe this is somehow a method of evangelism, as the aborted babies go to heaven (this is in fact, one of James White’s arguments against this position). A.H. Strong postulated that perhaps this is the very reason God made no clear statement on this issue in His word – because people would figure the surest way to get their

children to heaven would be to kill them! Not only is there no way to evangelize babies because of their incapacity to comprehend sin & justification, but A.H. Strong has hit upon a key reason why Scripture does not come out & say what we have been saying here in any particular verse or passage. However, that does not mean that the answer cannot be gleaned through careful exegesis and comparison of Scripture to Scripture to see what God has said about this important topic.

Jesus' Declarations

Matt. 18:3-6,10,14; 19:14; MK. 10:14; LK. 18:16

In these verses, once again we have hints, but no direct statements that all infants who die will end up in heaven. In Matt. 18:3-5, Jesus is using a child to illustrate the innocence and humility required by anyone who seeks to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

In v. 6. He warns those who might consider it OK to draw a child into sin (and by child here, He is referring not just to small children but those young in the faith) to think again, because they would be better off drowning in the sea with a millstone hung around their neck. So, although He is expressing His own love for children, and in v. 4, compares the humility of those in heaven to that of children, He has said nothing thus far that firmly says, "every child goes to heaven." He says only that "whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven." (v. 4)

In Matt. 18:10, He is saying that the children's angels always see the face of the Father in Heaven, which is not necessarily saying that the children do. This verse strongly hints at guardian angels for children to oversee them and keep them safe on earth, but really is not saying that these children go to heaven when they die. However, Matt. 18:14 & 19:14 (of which MK. 10:14 & LK. 18:16 are parallels), seem to make bolder statements.

Matthew 18:14

One of the first questions that came to my mind when I read this is this: "How is this verse different from **II Pet. 3:9**?" We have looked at II Pet. 3:9 many times and showed that it is not talking about universalism or free will choice for salvation, but instead the return of Jesus Christ and the fact that he has a specific number of Elect He will save before that time arrives, but Matt. 18:14 is different.

The first & most important distinction is context. Matt. 18:1-14 is about the question Jesus' disciples asked Him in v. 1, "Who is the greatest in the

Kingdom of Heaven?” It is in response to this question that Jesus illustrates His reply by showing them the humility and innocence of children, those whom they arrogantly tried to keep from getting to Jesus. It is in this context that Jesus warns those who would attempt to draw these innocents into sin of the dangers of Hell-fire.

One of the keys here is found in v. 6, in the phrase, “whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin...”. Now take note of **vv. 2-4** and realize that the child is a comparative illustration – cf. “unless you turn and become like children” (v. 3); “whoever humbles himself like this child”, is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus is referring to those who are saved and the humility and innocence they are to exhibit is in their Christian walk.

By the time Jesus gets to **vv. 10-14**, the comparison switches over to a shepherd and his sheep, again, an allusion to “His sheep” (JN. 10) who hear His voice, and 1 of the 100 of these, His sheep, is lost. Verse 11 says, “For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost”. Whom does Jesus save? The Elect, His sheep. In JN 10, His sheep are His elect, not people in general, so if He seeks out this 100th sheep, and is not worried about the 99, (also His sheep), then He has already found them and the one He seeks is also saved.

The dire warning of vv. 6-9 is for those who would draw another believer aside into sin, keeping them from being innocent and humble like a child, not necessarily because they are literal children, but because their demeanor as believers is to be LIKE children.

In this regard, in v. 14, where Jesus says, “Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.”, the word, “perish” is not to be taken in the sense of eternal damnation, but of the perishing of their sanctification, by being drawn into sin and breaking the fellowship of their relationship with Christ. Even the context following this verse refers to the sin of one brother against another and the prescribed way to deal with that, since the risk of Hell is too great and must be warned against.

With regard to the idea of children in heaven, this passage does have value in that Christ is saying that children do possess a comparative innocence and humility that reflects what heaven will be like. I believe it is obliquely telling us that children will be in heaven. What age do you envision yourself being in heaven?

Matt. 19:13-14

Bolder support for our comfort is found in these 2 verses and are in the correct context. Verse 14 – “for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.” There is no question that the “of such” refers to the little children the disciples were rebuking for “bothering” Jesus, but Jesus allows them to come to Him, and this is His reason to do so.

It is possible that He is expressing a concept that, in heaven, all who go there will remain in a state of childlikeness, at some apparent age of innocence, like a 5 or 6 year old (don't you wonder what age we'll seem to be in heaven?) but that is not certain. He does seem to be indicating that little children like these make up the citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Deuteronomy 1:39^{xxv}

In this verse, the text refers to an important distinction that had been made by God after the 12 spies had gone into Canaan to spy it out as the children of Israel approached the Land. However, 10 of the 12 fearfully and faithlessly recommended that a mistake had been made by God, and they should not enter the Land because it was too dangerous. Note **Num. 13:25-33**.

The immediate result of this bad report by these 10 spies is that the people believe them and complain against Moses and Aaron – cf. **Num. 14:1-4**. God, wanting to destroy the people for this faithlessness and start a new nation with Moses (14:11-12), responds to Moses' prayer of intercession (14:13-19) and stays His hand, but He does act against this rebellion. His edict is found in **vv. 20-38**.

- V. 20 – God pardons the people in general from immediate judgment & death (vv. 11-12)
- V. 21 – interestingly, a reference is made to God's glory, tying that to what follows in v. 22ff
- Vv. 22-23 – all those who had seen God's glory displayed in the Exodus from Egypt and in the wilderness thus far – water from a rock, the manna, the quail, etc. – and yet were unfaithful to trust God (“these 10 times” is a reference to the 10 bad spy reports) – would die in the wilderness without ever seeing or entering the Promised Land
- V. 24, v. 30 – Caleb and Joshua, alone among the adults, the 2 faithful spies would enter the Land and be given an inheritance in it.
- V. 25 – Israel is sent away into the wilderness away from the Land for a period of 40 years – the intention of which was to kill off those who would not be allowed to enter. Note **Num. 14:33-34; Heb. 3:16-19**.

- Vv. 36-37 – the 10 spies who had brought the bad report died almost immediately from a plague sent by God upon them. Immediate judgment!
- V. 29 – all would die in the wilderness except those in Israel's census who were under 20 years old. V. 31 – all the little ones, whom the people used as an excuse, that “they would be prey” for the Canaanites & Amalakites (cf. v. 3) would be shepherds in the wilderness and would enter the Land.

Note carefully that those denied entry into God's promised land were only those capable of having made a deliberate and disobedient decision to not trust God, especially after all they had seen Him do! Those (here at least) under the age of 20, were seen by God as not having been culpable or a party to that rebellion. We cannot leap to the conclusion that 20 years old is the age of accountability as a result of this account, but it does mean that God makes some sort of judgment that certain people, due to their age and relative experiential ‘innocence’, should be exempt from certain punishments.

It is apparent from all the accounts we've been examining that God does have a sense of difference between one who has grown enough to practice personal sin and one who has not yet reached that point (different for each individual) where they have a comprehension of their own disobedience against God. Until that point is reached, I believe we can safely accede that God has them under His grace and will save them if they die.

One verse in **Isa. 7:16** provides an interesting viewpoint. Read **vv. 10-17**. This is a prophetic passage, and we are all familiar with v.14 – of Christ and His nature as Immanuel or “God with us”, so v. 16, in that context, is talking about this One who would be virgin born as a man, yet also God. The phrases I want us to focus our attention on are, “That He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good” (v. 15); and “For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good” (v. 16). The point is this – even in the life of Jesus Christ Himself, He spent time as an infant and for a time did not know to refuse evil and choose the good. IOW, He was not held accountable for it. If we believe he was truly 100% human, we have to at least admit this in theory. Compare **Luke 2:52**. Here, in Isaiah 7 we see in v. 15 that he will choose only good once He has attained that age where the choice is clear – His mind is sufficiently developed to understand the offense. For regular humans, the same must be true – there is a time from birth to some early age – 1, 2 ,3, 7, 10? - where the wrong acts are not considered to be experiential sin. After that point is reached, those things are on their account and they will not be spared judgment except that it falls on Jesus Christ.

Jonah 4:11

Jonah 4:11 describes the 120,000 children of Ninevah who almost came under God's judgment as "those who cannot discern their right hand from their left", and this is given as one reason why God had mercy on that city at the time of Jonah's mission.

Ezekiel 18:1-32

This lengthy passage describes a number of scenarios having to do with people's personal culpability for their own sins. God is specifically ensuring that the people of Israel understood that they could not look to past generations and blame them for the sins they were committing themselves and thus remain unrepentant. Each person was either righteous or unrighteous & lived & died according to their own actions^{xxvi}.

Israel – in full rebellion against God at the time – was using Exodus 20:4-6 & Deut. 5:8-10 (parallel passages) to justify their sin, assuming they were under condemnation for their ancestors' sins anyway – which was a complete misapplication of the principals behind those passages.

The real idea behind these Scriptures, which highlight the 3rd Commandment, is this: once a family leader begins to slide into unauthorized sin by making and worshipping an idol, the children are being taught that this is the correct way to worship. Because that pattern of idolatry becomes set in their lives, they will tend to follow it, and then their children will follow them, and so on and so on. As a result of this heinous abrogation of God's command, God will allow this sin to progress through the family line for generations, until He decides to step in by grace and change someone's heart to put a stop to this sin. Just follow the example of the Kings of Israel as detailed in I & II Kings & I & II Chronicles to see how this played out in real life.

Conversely, **Ex. 20:6** gives the positive view of the family generations of those who do keep this commandment. Recall what **Deut. 6:1-7** says about the responsibility of the Israelite with regard to his family?

But back to Ezekiel 18. How does this chapter support my thesis that babies who die will go to heaven? Notice v. 4 – "The soul that sins (commits sins) shall die". In v. 13 – "if he has done any of these abominations, he shall surely die, his blood shall be upon him". Verse 17 – "he shall not die for the iniquity of his father"; verse 20 – "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of

the wicked shall be upon himself.” Also note vv. 25-29 regarding God’s fairness & read v. 31.

All these things describe that not original sin or inherited sin, but only committed sins condemn. Babies do not willfully sin or even understand the concept of sin. Verse 20 is extremely important here (it is virtually a summary of what chapter 18 is about) – you are judged for your personal wickedness, and then v. 31 supplies the remedy of a new heart & a new spirit (& see Ezek. 36:25-27), which again, a baby could never comprehend the concept or necessity of.

Psalm 22:9-10; 139:13-16; Job 10:8-12

Here again is another passage (Ps. 22:9-10) which more than hints of a salvation that began prior to birth, or certainly before the psalmist was weaned and grew to adulthood. Notice that the only thing one can appeal to in hope, very prevalent in this Psalm is that God is the One who saves. Notice Ps. 139:13-16 – “You are He who brought me forth from the womb.”, & compare Job 10:8-12 “You made me trust while on my mother’s breasts, and v. 10, “I was cast upon You from birth, from my mother’s womb You have been my God.”

God is in control of our lives while we are still in the womb, and if that is so, when we compare that thought with all those verses that talk about “before the foundation of the world” & our salvation, then this is obviously before we were born or even conceived! Have you ever considered the number of Bible characters who mention their life being under God’s control before they were born? See Isaiah 44:2 (Israel); 44:28 (Cyrus); 49:1, 5; Jeremiah 1:4-5; Galatians 1:15; Romans 9:10-13; Acts 17:26; Deuteronomy 7:6-8; Judges 13:1ff; Ezekiel 16: 4-14; Exodus 9:16 (Pharaoh); and John the Baptist – Luke 1:41, and notice Luke 1:15, where John the Baptist is said to be “filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb.” There is at least one case of definite salvation before human birth!

Ezekiel 16:20-22; Jeremiah 2:34; 19:4

I have put these verses in the same section because the context of them is similar. In Ezekiel 16, God reminds Israel that He is the One who saved them and nurtured them, and made them grow & prosper (vv. 1-14), but then (v. 15ff), they “played the whore” and went after idols. When we arrive at verse 20, God rebukes them for sacrificing their own children to appease their false gods. Notice the wording of v. 20 – “your sons and daughters...borne to Me”, and v. 21 – “...you slaughtered My children”, and in v. 22 reminds them that He cared for them when they were helpless children.

In both Jeremiah 2:34 & 19:4, the same topic of sacrificing children to idols is the context, 2:34 in the NKJV – “the blood of the lives of the poor innocents” was being shed by these idolators. This verse is not as clear in the ESV, NASB or HCSB...”innocent poor”. In Jer. 19:4, again God calls these sacrifices “the blood of innocents.” Although these are not the strongest part of our argument here, they are worthy of note since they show God’s special concern for little children who were being murdered by their parents.

Some might argue here that none of this proves that God would have saved these people if they had died before birth or as a small child, and technically, they’d be correct I suppose. However, I believe we find here biblical evidence that nothing escapes God’s attention and love. The points from Ps. 22:10 I find most compelling are: “You made me to trust while on my mother’s breasts” – v. 9, and “From my mother’s womb You have been my God.”

I am hopeful, that with this Scriptural evidence now presented, we can all have a certainty & comfort that God does deal with those without the mental capacity to comprehend the gospel and infants in a way which is true to His gracious & just nature. They do not go to heaven because they were born sinless, but rather because they have not committed personal sins to be judged, and their inherited sin is taken care of at the cross of Christ as they are considered part of the elect, and go to heaven as one of God’s elect.

John Piper weighs in on the debate with this,
“If a person does not have access to understand the revelation of God’s glory in this world, if he lacks natural capacity to understand it, then Paul can be taken to imply (Romans 1:18-20, “without excuse”) they will have an excuse at the judgment. God only executes wrath on those who have capacity to see His glory and refuse to embrace it. Infants, I believe, do not have this capacity.”^{xxvii} An infant cannot “suppress the truth in unrighteousness; so he cannot become “futile” in his thoughts.

To complete this section in our notes, I will quote one last time from RA Webb’s excellent book, *The Theology of Infant Salvation*;
p. 291 (on the fact that only elect infants die in infancy)
“Providence must delay the death of the reprobate infant until he comes to maturity, and translates his original sin into conscious actual sin, so there may be a basis, not simply in law and truth, but in conscience and experience for penalty. Consequently a reprobate infant cannot die in infancy; such a result would defeat the ends of justice. Consequently and conversely, all infants dying in infancy are elect, redeemed, regenerated and glorified. The death of an infant, therefore, is the irrefragible proof of its salvation.”

Lesson # 72 - Appendix # 2

What About Those Who Never Hear the Gospel? What About the Pagan?

Apart from the oft asked question, “Why is there evil in the world if God is so good and so omnipotent?”, one of the toughest questions an evangelist will ever face is this one, “What about the people who have never heard of Christ? Surely God won’t condemn them to Hell just because they never worshipped Jesus, whom they never knew even existed?” Though often put to us as a red herring when someone we are witnessing to does not want to face their own guilt and sin, it is a good question with implications that test our commitment to God’s word, and seeing Jesus as the only way to heaven.

Out of this question and many theologian’s inability to provide a biblical answer for it, has grown a swelling variety of theories on ways other than Jesus that people may escape Hell by. Many of these we have looked at – Universalism, Annihilationism, Inclusivism, Post-mortem evangelism, etc. People who are so often man-centered rather than God-centered cannot conceive of how sending someone to Hell who never had a chance to hear the gospel and respond to it is just.

Although quotes from a wide array of theologians and authors could be trotted out to show some of the positions people take on this theme of the fate of those who never heard of Jesus or the Gospel, here are a few from very respected theologians most of us have heard of;

John Stott takes what he calls an agnostic stance – *“I believe the most Christian stance is to remain agnostic on this question...The fact is that God, alongside the most solemn warnings about our responsibility to respond to the gospel, has not revealed how he will deal with those who have never heard it. We have to leave them in the hands of the God of infinite mercy and justice, who manifested these qualities most fully in the cross. Abraham’s question, “Will not the judge of all the earth do right?” (Genesis 18:25) is our confidence too.”*^{xxviii}

J.I. Packer has said, after a lengthy paragraph in his own book (God’s Words – and this is not quoted by Thiessen) that certifies he does not believe in Post-Mortem evangelism the following;

“We may safely say (i) if any good pagan reaches the point of throwing himself on his Maker’s mercy for pardon, it was grace that brought him there; (ii) God will surely save anyone he brings thus far (Acts 10:34f; Rom. 10:12f); (iii) anyone thus saved would learn in the next world that he was saved through Christ. But we cannot safely say is that God ever does save anyone in this way. We simply do not know.”^{xxix}

Are we compelled to cave in under pressure and say that perhaps God uses a different standard for entrance into His Kingdom for this category of people, even though He never wrote it down for us in His Bible? Are those who have never heard the gospel responsible to respond to it? The answer to this question is biblically easy, but from a social and racial viewpoint it is extremely divisive. For example, in a mission field where the gospel has never gone, and the people of that area are very conscious and loving of their ancestors, the implications of the gospel and hell if one has never heard it are socially devastating. That truth may make the theology not the issue to be overcome, but rather the social ethics. For this question, it is helpful for one to have a fairly comprehensive knowledge of the Bible, of God's character, and the nature of salvation by grace through faith.

As believers, and as those who read their Bibles, we should acknowledge that Jesus, by nature of Who He is, is the exclusive Saviour of the world. This is not based on an isolated verse or text, but is the result of studying prophecy, types, shadows, direct special revelation (God's Word) in verse after verse and passage after passage. In today's politically correct, post-modern, post-Christian society, many are ready to jump on the bandwagon of Inclusivism (or Accessibilism) where every religion has a chance to get you to heaven. Faith in Jesus Christ is Exclusivism (or Ecclesiocentrism) – because it restricts salvation only to those who trust Him, consciously knowing Him as Who He says that He is. I underlined “consciously” there because some say people can know Him unconsciously, and be saved by Him despite that fact, something the Bible knows nothing about – that is a human invention.

Since we do live in a pluralistic society, we must recognize that we should support legal tolerance towards other great religions – IOW – laws that protect their right to practice their beliefs, unless their fanaticism turns violent towards others; and social tolerance should be encouraged as we seek to understand their point of view and expect the same courtesy from them for us as Christians; but as for intellectual tolerance, we must not be so tolerant that we go along with the idea that every religion is equally valid and true, and that there is nothing in them we should reject that is not virtue, because that sort of tolerance is illogical and feeble minded. It begs the question of “what is truth?”^{xxx}

If the church's one mainstay is truth, then we must defend that truth and insist that Jesus Christ is the unique and only savior / there simply is no other way – cf. JN 14:6; Acts 4:12; I Tim.2:5; Mark 14:35-36 + many other verses. He is uniquely God's Son, the Lamb that was Slain; the Passover Lamb; the Seed of the Woman; etc. The Bible leaves absolutely no gap into which another saviour can be wedged.

Robert L. Reymond says this, *“To abandon classic Christological teaching in favor of a religious pluralism, if Christ is indeed God incarnate, is tantamount to the gravest breach of the First Commandment, and it will involve one in unspeakable infidelity to Jesus Christ the Lord of Glory who, according to Holy Scripture, wears a diadem out-rivaling all the diadems of all the world’s great religious and political leaders. To do so, in a word, would mean that the church has simply ceased to be Christian at all!”*^{xxxii} By very definition, Christianity must insist that Jesus is the only way even at the cost of offending people and risking persecution for the hatred that position generates in others who do not share it.

In order to reveal the biblical answer to our original question, we are going to look at the validity of the position taken by those who preach and teach Inclusivism. We will look at the points they believe supports their position, and then see what the Bible says about that position. Their main theories seem to be 3 in number.

1.) Credit for faith in an alternative religion

As we’ve already seen in a previous section, one of the most vocal spokesmen for the position of Inclusivism (& post-mortem evangelism; & annihilationism) is the late Clark Pinnock, a university professor from McMaster in Hamilton, ON. His case is a bit odd, since he does insist that Christ is the only saviour, but also believes that people of faith in other religions will be saved by Christ, even though they do not know Him or believe in Him. IOW, their religious faith, though misplaced, is credited to them as if they had faith in Christ, as long as they have been faithful to the god they have known about within their own culture.

2.) Faith generated by general revelation (Creation)

Others agree that Jesus will save many who never heard of Him through God’s **general revelation** of Himself in nature or creation. John Sanders, who incidentally, like Clark Pinnock is an Open Theist, believes this way. Millard Erickson, another popular Christian author surprisingly concurs. Millard Erickson has even developed a set of 5 essential elements of his “gospel” message found in nature:

- The belief in one good powerful God.
- The belief that man owes this God perfect obedience to his law.
- The consciousness that he does not meet this standard, and is therefore guilty and condemned.
- The realization that nothing he does can offer God can compensate Him (or atone) for this sin and guilt.

- The belief that God is merciful, and will forgive and accept those who cast themselves on his mercy.

Erickson then states, “May it not be, that if a man believes and acts on this set of tenets he is redemptively related to God and receives the benefits of Christ’s death, whether he consciously knows and understands the details of that provision or not?”^{xxxii}

3.) We cannot be certain so we should remain agnostic about it. This is the position of John Stott, already quoted earlier.

Is the Scripture silent on this matter as John Stott claims, or must we retreat to the positions taken by Pinnock, Sanders and others? How does the Bible refute these positions and point us to an answer?

Is General Revelation Enough to Save?

There is a very obvious place to go in God’s word to see what He says about this – **Romans 1:18-31** - His general revelation of Himself and of His common grace. Romans 1-3; 1:19-20; Ps. 19:1-6 tells us that all people, all cultures throughout history have received a general revelation from heaven and possess an awareness of God’s eternal power, His existence, and His divine nature, so that “they are without excuse.”

Romans 2:14-15 tells us that all people, even without having been given the law of Israel, have a conscience in which God has implanted His moral law. People know that death is the result of flaunting God’s revelation of Himself (Rom. 1:32); they refuse to glorify God as God and are not thankful to Him (Rom. 1:21); and they pervert their knowledge of God by turning to idolatry (Rom. 1:23). Terrance Thiessen comments on this:

“...God gives to every human being a revelation sufficient to elicit saving faith, provided they are enabled by grace. In other words, no one who will be eternally condemned will have lacked the revelation or the enabling to be saved; no one will be lost through no fault of their own.”^{xxxiii}

Far from loving God and Christ as a result of this general revelation, the people of the world love darkness, not light (**JN 3:18-20**); there is none righteous (Ps. 14:1-4; Rom. 3:9-10) or seeking God; all are dead in sin (Eph. 2:1) & are children of wrath (Eph. 2:3); alienated from God’s life (Eph. 4:18); are ignorant of God’s truth (Rom. 1:25); are hostile toward Him (Rom. 8:7); disobedient (Titus 3:3) and fall short of His glory (Rom. 3:23)! Far from having the ability to save the world, general revelation is the ground for God’s just condemnation of the world!^{xxxiv}

4.) Accessibilism – a Soft Word for Inclusivism

Terrance Thiessen calls his position “Accessibilism”, and insists it is not the same as Inclusivism. He defines his position this way – *“Accessibilism asserts that Jesus Christ is exclusively God’s means of salvation and that the covenantal relationships God established with Israel and the Church, in working out his saving program, are unique and unparalleled. Accessibilists believe, however, that there is biblical reason to be hopeful (not simply agnostic) about the possibility of salvation for those who never hear the gospel. So they do not restrict saving work to the boundaries of the church as ecclesiocentrists do. On the contrary, they posit that God makes salvation accessible to people who do not receive the gospel. Although they grant that non-Christians can be saved, they do not regard the religions as God’s instrument in their salvation.”*^{xxxv}

The Biblical Position is this:

People are lost not because they have heard and rejected the Gospel of Christ, but more to the point, because they are sinners by nature & experience, and have failed to live up to the light of the law of God they have been given, even if it is minimized to the panorama of Creation. Even if the standard they fail to live up to is their own conscience, never having heard of Christ, they will be condemned to Hell as a result of their sin.

Remember, apart from God’s drawing of anyone to salvation^{xxxvi}, no one will come to Christ, so who is it that will respond apart from God’s effectual call to follow this aforementioned 5 point outline of Millard Erickson’s for general revelation as a gospel and be saved? The Bible clearly presents man as unable to acknowledge God and to come to Christ unless God first acts to change their heart. All are sinners and all are bound for Hell apart from God moving to save them.

Geography & History

Well, one might argue, “But they were born by no fault of their own in a time &/or place where they had no chance of ever hearing the true gospel.” The Inclusivist decides that this just “luck of the draw” and people ought not to be penalized for that which they had no control over, ie.) “the hand they’ve been dealt”, or “the luck of the draw”. The Bible does address that issue – in **Acts 17:24-27; 30-31**. The scope of these verses, especially vv. 26-27 is absolutely breathtaking. Everyone’s life throughout all of history is captured by these verses and notice God’s purpose, in v. 27, “that they should seek God”. I take this to mean that they seek Him based on the light they’ve been given. Since God has put them geographically & historically exactly where He wants them with regard to their seeking Him, and if He has decided whom He will draw

to Himself, then it is God who has decided how much to expose them to or keep them from exposure to His gospel. See **II Cor. 4:3-6; MT. 11:25-27**. It is God's sovereignty that decides whom He will save (**JN 3:5-8; Titus 3:5; II Tim. 1:9; Rom. 9:16**) and by what means He will do so, but according to the Bible – our only authority – it will always be by the Cross of Christ, the event everything in the Bible points towards.

Isn't that the point of evangelical missions – getting God's gospel message to as many people in the world as we can in the time we've been given, so that they can properly worship this great God? If God will save people apart from Christ, why command us to obey the Great Commission and what is the point of the focus on evangelism in the NT – cf. **I Cor. 3:5-7**? Why not just let people be and let them become faithful in their own way? Even in 2013, there are billions of people in the world who have never heard of Jesus Christ. Wouldn't they have a better chance at salvation if they never heard the gospel and were just good people? (if Inclusivism in some form is valid)

If some people in remote places and times are God's elect, He will use some means of getting them the gospel – cf. **Rom. 10:13-17** – the way everyone is saved. Notice **I Chronicles 28:9b; Jer. 29:12-14**. There have been many recent (over the last 5 years) conversion stories by Muslims and others who have become Christians because, they claim, Jesus came to them in a dream, and they got saved because of that. Is this legitimate? I am not sure, but I feel it is not biblical. Although there are biblical accounts of people receiving dreams and visions where no other apparent way to get a message to them was available (ie. the Magi – to flee Bethlehem before Herod's soldiers got there – Matt. 2:12), that is not what God uses in the Bible to get the gospel to people, even when He has provided a vision or an angel to point these 'seekers' out to true believers so they can be evangelized or instructed in the faith.

Let's look at one place where God made sure the gospel got to "a seeker". Look at **Acts 8:26-37**. The angel of the Lord could have taught this man about Christ, and angels do appear to men in the NT and OT, but instead, Philip is sent – in a miraculous way perhaps (his leaving was certainly miraculous). We are certainly left with the impression that had Philip not gone to this man, his confusion of reading God's word combined with general revelation would have left him lost. God got the gospel to him, and he was saved – cf. **II Pet. 2:9**.

The NT Refutes Inclusivism

The NT is full of verses that declare the necessity of conscious faith and trust in Jesus Christ for salvation. It gives no hint of any options apart from Him.

Take note of these verses – JN. 14:6; 10: 7-10; 10:14,15,25-30; LK. 24:46-47; Acts 4:12; I JN. 2: 1-2; 2:23; 5:12. As we saw in Romans 1-3, those who attempt to live by God’s law, their own law or any law of morality, will fail and perish. The context is that this idea of perishing is not some sort of annihilation, but is eternal in nature. So it is Paul’s contention that those who have never heard of Jesus’ gospel will perish. It is God’s gospel and it is not the prerogative of Paul, Peter, James, John, you or I to change it to suit politically correct ideas. The Bible is not silent about the destiny of those who have never heard. If we truly believed as Pinnock & others do that people can be saved apart from Christ, it would be a better idea not to evangelize them, because if they hear and reject the gospel, they apparently have less hope than they would have had if we had not intruded with the gospel. It is not an intelligent evangelical position to believe that Jesus Christ is not the only way or that all other faiths funnel through Him without conversion to Christianity. Jesus is not just some North American tribal God as some today think.

Faith in Christ’s atoning death on Calvary’s Cross is not just one way that God forgives sin, the NT is clear that it is the only way! Note **Rev. 5:8-10**; I JN. 2:1-2; 3:23; 5:10,12; JN. 10.

Further Rebuttals to the Inclusivist Position

The Inclusivists argue that OT Jews were saved apart from conscious faith in Jesus Christ, and technically, that is true. However, we must remember that (Rom. 4) the OT saints trusted in God’s future provision of the Messiah – Gal. 3:24, whom we know to be Jesus, but for whom they had no name (except for “Immanuel” – God with Us” – Isa. 7:14), only promises, types and prophecies.

Think about all the prophecies, sacrifices, feasts, the Passover Lamb, Day of Atonement, the priesthood, etc. that pointed inexorably to the Messiah. They did not know His name, but they were made aware of His coming, His person, His character, and were not following some idol, but in the One true God to supply for them that ultimate and final sacrificial Lamb. See **JN. 1:29** – John’s proclamation here would only have made sense to a people who had been waiting for this very person. Even so, however, only a remnant of God’s people were saved within Judaism, and most rejected Christ when He came, even with irrefutable credentials of who He was.

Inclusivists also point out “holy pagans” in the OT who appeared to be saved, though they were not Jews, and were not looking for a Messiah. They mention Melchizadek, Job, Jethro (Moses’ father-in-law & a Midianite Priest), Namaan the Syrian, the Magi & Cornelius in Acts 10-11.

However, when we examine the biblical accounts of these men, we find that, although they started out life as pagans, their salvation depended solely on Jehovah God. Melchizadek was a priest of “the Most High God” whom Abraham identifies as Jehovah in Gen. 14:22, and he was the OT type of Jesus as High Priest and King (Ps. 110:4; Heb. 7-10), and he certainly worshipped the true God and trusted in Him for his salvation. Job 1:21 says he worshipped Yahweh and looked for the redeemer God would supply (Job 19:25). Jethro no doubt was a pagan until he was brought to faith through his relationship with Moses and the people of Israel (Ex. 18:8-12), and Namaan the Syrian was brought into contact with a Jewish slave girl as well as a great prophet of God (II Kings 5:15-18). And what of the Magi, the wise men? Here we find eastern astrologers (probably coming to Israel because of Daniel’s earlier influence) in order to worship this King of Israel. We may be certain that, even if it is not recorded, the Holy Spirit taught all of these people to place their trust in the future atonement of the Messiah.

That Cornelius was saved when Peter went to him, not before, is a fact easily supported by simply reading the account in Acts 10-11. Note especially **Acts 10:34-48**. Cornelius had been drawn by God to seek Him, and earnestly seeking God, praying & fasting (Acts 10:1-2; 10:30), he was realizing that he was a sinner and one day would stand before the true God to give an account of his life. He knew he was unable on his own to do right, and he prayed that God would show him mercy so he could see how to be acceptable in God’s sight. And what happened? Did the angel save him and allow him to keep his pagan religion? No. He sent for Peter so he could hear what the one true God had to say, and Peter came, preached Christ to him and he was saved. This is yet another example of how God sends more light to those seeking Him with the little amount of light He has provided them with.

The other main argument of the Inclusivist is that people are saved by faith, not the content of their theology. Clark Pinnock says, *“Faith in God is what saves, not possessing certain minimum information {about Christ}... A person is saved by faith even if the content of faith is deficient... The issue God cares about is the direction of the heart, not the content of the theology”*. *In sum, according to Pinnock, and Inclusivists in general, it is not what one believes about God that counts; what counts is that he believes in God. Said another way, people are saved, not by the content of their faith, but by their psychic act of faith in God.”^{xxxvii} (underlines are mine)*

Robert Reymond counters Pinnock’s assertion with, *“the act of faith per se does not and cannot save. Faith’s value depends upon its’ object. Speaking more precisely, it is not even faith in Jesus Christ that saves. It is Jesus Christ who saves the sinner who places their trust in Him... To the degree*

that the evangelical Inclusivist believes that people of other religions may be saved apart from a conscious knowledge of Christ, just to that same degree are they implying that the evangelical faith is irrelevant and obsolete. And that implication, regardless of the degree to which one may espouse it, is a direct attack upon the uniqueness and finality of Jesus Christ, the only Savior of the world!”^{xxxviii}

We must stop this pluralistic idea that is becoming more & more acceptable in evangelical circles that those who have never heard of Christ will somehow bypass all the warnings of the Bible and end up in heaven by default.

The fact that Jesus states a number of times that the judgment day will be “more tolerable” for those who had less light – cf. **Matt. 10:6-15; 11:21-24** – does not present us with the license to assume that they will not be judged at all. Certainly those people born in remote times and places where the gospel never penetrated geographically qualify as having less light than those who hear the gospel every Sunday for their whole lives in a NT Church, and have free access to God’s word in 16 versions and who have been blessed by God’s common grace on a daily basis.

We have to decide as believers what the world & history is all about. Is it simply random chance unfolding minute by minute as a combined result of the decisions, births and deaths of billions of people? Or is it the unfolding plan revealing the will, decrees and purposes of God for every person which is then lived out by people in real life? He is the One who started it all with the intention of using whatever span of time He has assigned for this world & each life in order to bring it all to an ultimate climax which He has designed to maximize His glory.

If you do not see it as the latter, you will never have the ability to cultivate and live out a God-centered viewpoint which sees all He decides to do with His creatures and creation as absolutely just, because He is the standard for all justice.

Are we prepared to label God as unjust if He does not assign a special category of salvation for those whom He has placed in time and place knowing they would never be exposed to the gospel? Remember that Rom. 3:23 says that ALL have sinned. This problem is not much more of a problem really than the problem of reprobation of those who do hear the gospel and reject it. They reject because they are not of God’s elect. Only those He has chosen will accept the gospel. One could hear 1,000 sermons in a good Bible church and still not respond in the positive if God does not draw him to Christ and regenerate his dead spirit, because he does not desire to respond.

Sentimentality is at the root of a lot of error in this topic. People realize that, if Hell is real, and is as bad as the Bible portrays it, then they don't want any 'good' person to go there, and that is how they envision the faceless millions on some remote plain or island in the South Pacific. It's OK if Hitler, Stalin, Mao Zedong, Saddam Hussein and Osama Bin Laden go to Hell, but not the moms and pops and their relatives for sure, who are basically 'good people'. If someone's only flaw is that they have not heard the gospel, then a fair God must give them an opportunity to hear the gospel, even if that is after they die. This is the position that most people believe.

God could make everyone on earth aware of the gospel by having angels flying through the skies with big banners declaring the gospel message and blaring it over loudspeakers, but He has not done that. So either He is powerless to get the message to everyone, or as part of His divine decrees, He has decided that some will not hear that message. He is no less just if that is His plan. After all, it is His world, isn't it?

Ultimately, it boils down to this: Is God fair or just? Well, that question is asked and answered in the NT. In the Mt. Everest of passages on God's sovereignty with regard to salvation, Romans 9, we see Paul addressing this very issue of God's fairness in choosing some but not all to be saved.

Briefly, Romans 9 is written to respond to a question that has arisen out of the greatness of the salvation promises given in Romans 8. The question arises as Paul realizes that people will say, "But Israel had the same promises, and they have remained largely apostate. In light of that fact, how can God be trusted to fulfill His promises to us?"

Romans 9:6 is the key verse in Romans 9-11. God's word has not failed, because those He has chosen for salvation are being saved, and have been saved historically. Those who hear Paul's argument from v. **6 to 13** and understand his argument, must ask this question, which Paul asks in **v. 14**. If God chose some but not all, and if they had no say, then God is not fair! That's the objection that is raised. Note Paul's answer to this objection in **vv. 15-17**. By very definition, God has every right to have mercy on whom He decides to have mercy, and if He decides to harden some, leave them in their sin and condemn them to Hell, that is His prerogative too. Cf. **Ex. 33:18-19**.

Of course, this response leads to the 2nd objection that Paul anticipates – **Rom. 9:18**. Note his response to that objection in **vv. 19-23**. It is not for us to know, and this answer is reminiscent of God's reply to Job's inquiries about His fairness at the end of Job, where He demonstrates that it is impertinent at best and blasphemous at worst to challenge God's right to rule over His creation sovereignly, as He sees fit. We just don't have a big enough or sinless

enough brain to begin to bring God to task and judge Him by our standard of “fairness”!

“You say, “Well, what happens to the innocent guy in Africa who never hears the gospel?” The answer to that question is simple. Based upon the authority of God’s word, the innocent guy in Africa who never hears the gospel will absolutely go to heaven. The only problem is that the innocent guy in Africa does not exist. If he were innocent – which is the way this question is normally phrased – why would he need the gospel? He has no sin to be saved from. However, there are no innocent people in the world waiting to hear the gospel. As we have seen, there are guilty people all over the world needing to hear the gospel, and that’s why we must go to them – precisely because they are guilty. No one is innocent.”^{xxxix} David Platt

So, what is the fate of those who die without ever having heard the gospel? Eternity in Hell. Jesus “never knew them”, never chose them, never called them, never justified them, so He will not glorify them. Will their punishment in Hell be just? Of course, because God is the judge and He is just and righteous, and His punishment in Hell is designed, according to Jesus, to inflict greater wrath on those who had greater light, and less wrath on those who had less light. Some get mercy, but no one gets injustice.

If we cry out to God for fairness, we must be cautious as we recognize that fairness for us would be Hell for eternity. We don’t want justice, we want grace and mercy, which is unearned, undeserved. Moses deserved Hell every bit as much as Pharaoh did, yet God’s purpose prevailed and Pharaoh got justice, while Moses got grace.

Abraham said it best, and this is perhaps is a good place to leave it – at Jesus’ feet – in Gen. 18:25, when he said, *“Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”* NKJV.

God, in His greatness, goodness, grace and mercy knows how to deal with those who never heard and will be just in His condemnation of them, because apart from Christ, condemned is what they will be.

What should our response be to this? We need to realize that Jesus has commanded us to go into the world and preach the gospel. We need to do that, and if we can’t go to foreign lands, we do it in our own sphere of influence and provide prayer and monetary support for those who can and do go. The following quote is from Russell Moore’s essay, “The Man on the Island”:

“But what if, one may ask, the man on the island acknowledges the Creator God revealed in general revelation, and is convicted by the Spirit of sin—a sin uncovered by the law written on his heart. What then if this man throws himself on the mercy of God for forgiveness? Some otherwise very conservative evangelical theologians have left open this as a possibility, though they caution that we do not know how often, if ever, this happens. This question, however, is misleading. It is something akin to asking what if an individual never sins and perfectly obeys God, would he still need salvation through Christ. Such a situation simply does not exist. The heart must believe, Paul writes to the Romans, in the historical fact of the resurrection while the mouth must confess the sovereignty of this particular individual, Jesus of Nazareth (Rom. 10:9-10). The apostle anticipates the question of the man on the island and answers it decisively: “How will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?” (Rom. 10:14) God calls sinners to Himself by His Spirit through the preaching of the gospel of Christ. This passage ends with the boldest of mission thrusts. Since faith “comes from hearing” (Rom. 10:17) and since there are those who do not hear, God graciously sends messengers of His glorious gospel.

As Ronald Nash notes, evangelical objections to the exclusivity of the gospel often serves as a “romantic” comfort for those who “could sleep better if there were less urgency or no urgency in getting the gospel to the unevangelized.” Sentimentalism, however, replaces true affections with a fleeting wave of synthetic emotions. Sentimental compassion for a hypothetical man on an island is an amazingly easy endeavor for evangelicals in carpeted, air-conditioned Bible study classrooms. A Spirit-inflamed burden for real men and real women on real islands might be more costly, perhaps requiring even the tossing aside of DVDs and SUVs to cross the globe with the gospel for those who will never otherwise hear it. Could it be that if more young Timothys were to lose sleep over the destiny of this man on the island that God might raise up a missionary force unparalleled in the history of the Christian church to call millions to faith in Christ”^{x1}

Lesson # 72 - Appendix # 3

An excerpt from “Christless Christianity” by Michael Horton
Baker Books; 2008; pp. 36-37

This excerpt is a partial transcript from the NBC drama, “ER”, during which a dying policeman is asking a chaplain about what awaits him as a result of his sin.

“Lying in his hospital bed while he is dying of cancer, a retired police officer confesses to a chaplain his long-held guilt over allowing an innocent man to be framed and executed. He asks, “How can I even hope for forgiveness?” and the chaplain replies, “I think sometimes it’s easier to feel guilt than forgiven.” “Which means what?” “That maybe your guilt over his death has become your reason for living. Maybe you need a reason to go on.” “I don’t want to ‘go on’”, says the dying man. “Can’t you see that I’m dying? The only thing that is holding me back is I’m afraid of what comes next.”

“What do you think that is?” the chaplain gently inquires. Growing impatient, the man answers, “You tell me. Is atonement possible? What does God want from me?” After the chaplain replies, “I think it’s up to each one of us to interpret for ourselves what God wants,” the man stares at her in bewilderment. “So people can do anything? They can rape, they can murder, they can steal-all in the name of God and it’s OK?” Growing intense, the dialogue draws to its climax.

“No, that’s not what I’m saying,” the chaplain responds. “Then what are you saying? Because all I’m hearing is some New Age, God-is-Love, have it your way crap!...No, I don’t have time for this now.” “You don’t understand,” the chaplain counters. “No, you don’t understand!...I want a real chaplain who believes in a real God and a real Hell!”

Missing the point of this man’s struggle, the chaplain collects herself and says in the familiar tone of condescension disguised as understanding, “I hear that you’re frustrated, but you need to ask yourself-“ “No,” the man interrupts, “I don’t need to ask myself anything. I need answers and all of your questions and all your uncertainty are only making things worse.”

With no more to evaluate than his tone, she encourages calm. “I know you’re upset,” she begins, provoking his final outburst of frustration: “God, I need someone who will look me in the eye and tell me how to find forgiveness, because I am running out of time!”

This is an excellent illustration from a very unlikely source to show that despite man’s attempts to ‘tweak’ God’s word and make hell more palatable or non-existent, people innately believe that judgment follows death and

people are hungry for real answers, not for theological pablum that says nothing and saves no one.

Lesson # 72 - Appendix # 4

God's Love and His Wrath – Does a Loving God send people to Hell?

One of the toughest and entrenched positions against the Doctrine of Hell is the idea that eternal Hell is not compatible with a God of love, mercy, goodness & grace. It is when we begin to discuss the relationship between God and man's sin that the biblical concept of God's love gets skewed and people begin to waver in their commitment to biblical doctrine. We are OK when God's love is sending His sunshine during picnics and rain in time for our crops, but when we see in His word that He is angry with sinners or hates certain people, and that he will punish the wicked with eternal torment in Hell, we want to disconnect ourselves from real Christianity and become politically correct Christians. Is God "bound to forgive everyone, because that is His job", as was proposed by Catherine the Great? Or does God's love leave room for Him to repay wickedness with vengeance? Does He love the people in Hell too?

It is not only bad theology, but preposterous to ignore the clear expressions of God's wrath found throughout the Bible. Passages like **Isa. 13:4-9; 5:11-16 & Joel 3:9-16; 19-20** are typical of many in the OT. These kinds of things are not limited to the OT, however. For sheer violence, we've seen that the book of Revelation contains some very expressive and graphic passages regarding God's wrath.

God's wrath is what the Bible is warning us all about throughout, starting in Gen. 3. His wrath is what the main thrust of redemption is all about – salvation from the wrath of God, which finds its ultimate expression at the Great White Throne. That's why Jesus came and died. Apart from God's wrath and Hell, there is no need for the love and grace of the Cross.

God's wrath is not technically one of His attributes. Instead, it is a function of His holiness operating against sin. If sin did not exist, God's wrath would never be displayed, but God's love is always there. We cannot dilute God's wrath without doing violence to His holiness.

So how do God's love and His wrath co-exist? Well, the standard cliché is, "God hates the sin, but loves the sinner", and it has some truth to it, but mostly gives a false impression to the unwary. Fourteen times in the first 50 Psalms, for example, the text tells us that God hates the sinner, and that His wrath is on the liar, etc. Note **Ps. 5:5-6; 7:11; 11:5; Romans 9:13**; etc. See also the wording of **I Sam. 2:22-25**, which is an expression of God hardening men's

hearts. In our human experience, we cannot see how wrath and love can co-exist, as both are such strong emotions and seem to be antithetical to one another.

God's wrath, however, is not out of control blind rage, but is instead a reasonable and purposeful response to offences against His holiness. Since His love is not generated by the loveliness of the objects of His love, it is entirely possible for His love and wrath to be directed at the same people at the same time. Since God is perfect, He must be wrathful against rebellious men, because they have committed offences against His glory, and yet He must also perfectly love because He is a loving God. It is not the sort of love which allows offences to go unpunished however. This is in part the sentiment expressed in Rom. 5:8, although we also have to acknowledge that there is a wrath against God's enemies which does not end in their salvation – Rom. 2:3-6.

Some try to understand God's wrath and love working together by seeing the OT God as more wrathful than loving, while the NT casts a softer shadow, with God's love being magnified over His wrath. Yet, the climax of the NT, as expressed in Revelation and in the warnings of Christ about Hell in the Gospels, carry a weight of wrath that goes far beyond the mostly temporal judgments of the OT, and shows us the scope of eternal torment at the hands of this God of love. For sheer terror, note Hebrews 10:26-31.

Another related misconception of God's wrath & love is that God the Father is full of wrath, but gentle Jesus has come along to mollify that wrath and to placate this angry God, because Jesus loves us so. This idea forgets that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are a unified trinity, intent on the redemption of the Elect, moving purposefully in one direction, and in fact, it is the Father who sent the Son to die so that sinners might be saved! God's wrath over sin had to be propitiated, and God provided the remedy Himself in the person of His Son. Therefore, we can honestly say,
 God's love is expressed in the NT cross.
 God's wrath is expressed in the NT cross.

Now, while God's love for people and His wrath against them may co-exist, we have to recognize that God's love is not universal in its limits. His love does not guarantee the salvation of every single person on the planet, despite Arminian attempts to squeeze that sort of love out of God based on I Tim. 2:4 and 2 Pet. 3:9. His love for the Elect is a special love, specific and infinitely greater in degree to His general love for all humanity, as expressed in His common grace – JN. 3:31. His love is unconditional for the Elect, who, once saved, never again come under His wrath – cf. Rom. 8:1. The outworking of God's wrath does not always end up being salvific – cf. Isa. 55:10-11.

God loves the non-elect enough that He extends the gospel offer to them (in most cases) and He warns them in His word to avoid the wrath to come. However, His love for those who will ultimately be lost is not the same sort of love that He has for His chosen ones, because it is a love of compassion, sorrow, pity or pathos. It is not incompatible with revulsion but is sympathetic to their plight. Note **Matt. 23:37; LK. 19:41-44; MK. 10:21.**

God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked – **Ezek. 18:32; 33:11** – and Isa. 28:21-22 refers to God’s temporal judgment of Ephraim and Jerusalem as “His strange work”. IOW, it is not God’s desire to judge and condemn those He loves, but He is compelled by His own perfect righteousness and man’s wicked assaults on His holiness to do so.

God’s love, in some form or degree, rests on all of His created humans. In the case of those He saves, a special electing love is extended to them, not as a result of their merit, deservedness or response to His love, but by His own will – cf. **JN. 1: 12-13; Romans 9:15-16; Titus 3:5**, etc. All others are extended common grace, a form of His providential love, as they are kept alive, enjoying life (mostly) and the relationships God has provided for them, business success, entertainment, sports, love, family, all the while extending the gospel invitation &/or the voice of His creation calling out to them to repent and seek Him, yet they seldom do. In fact, they never do unless He effectually calls them to Himself. Now, since we don’t know who the Elect are, we are to evangelize whoever we can and realize that God can save the most hardened and evil sinner – ie. Saul of Tarsus – Acts 9.

There is no question that God’s love abides, in some form or another on everyone while they are alive. Surprisingly, I consulted numerous Systematic Theologies and commentaries and could find virtually no information on God’s love for the damned after they have died. Here are some comments which are related, but there appears to be no clear consensus.

Gerald Bray states a position I do not agree with;

“...even if there is no chance of reversing the verdict in the case of a person who has been condemned to hell, there is something in us that says that life is better than death because where there is life, there is hope. To this feeling, we may add the consideration that God will not destroy what he has made because, however far from his original will and purpose, he still loves it. Even if Satan does not want to live and desires his own destruction, God will not permit it because of his deep love for him and for those who serve him. Their disobedience has not turned him to hatred, even if he must punish them for it. For all eternity they will still be his creatures, and their continued existence will bear witness to his glory and power at work in them just as much as in everything else that he has made.”^{xi}

Wayne Grudem makes a valid point when he says,
“With respect to the argument from the love of God, the same difficulty in reconciling God’s love with eternal punishment would seem to be present in reconciling God’s love with the idea of divine punishment at all, and, conversely, if (as Scripture abundantly testifies) it is consistent for God to punish the wicked for a certain length of time after the last judgment, then there seems to be no necessary reason why it would be inconsistent of God to inflict the same punishment for an unending period of time.”^{xlii}

John Frame comes closest to expressing an answer to my question;
“We have seen that God’s love always observes the boundaries of His righteousness. Even in redemption, God takes enormous pains, so that, in showing love, he may be just (Rom. 3:26). The sacrifice of Christ insures that God’s redemption is both loving and righteous, so that Scripture can even appeal to God’s righteousness as a ground for his forgiveness of sins, and thus God’s righteousness becomes a form of his love. But it is also God’s righteousness that insures the final punishment of those who reject his love – that is, his wrath against them. Without the wrath of God against those who finally disbelieve, God’s love is no longer righteous. So God’s righteousness binds together his love and his wrath. God’s righteous love must be wrathful, if at the end of history, there remain any unrepentant people...So when people reject him, he is filled with holy jealousy, and the result is wrath. When we see God’s love, not as a mere sentimental affection, but as a covenant commitment, we see it as a jealous love that leads to wrath when it is abused.”^{xliii}

I understand that He loves people who are unsaved even though they reject Him, and even though He knows they are not among the elect – cf. **MK. 10:21**. However, personally, I see no sense in assuming that God loves the damned after He has judged them and they have been thrown into Hell. It is probably an aspect of His love for them up to the GWT Judgment that compels Him (along with His righteousness) to deal with each individual in a righteous way as He judges them, but following that judgment, and their sealed fate, there would be no reason for God’s love in any form to continue to fall on them. At that point such love would appear as a farce.

Furthermore, I do not accept the models put forth by CS Lewis, Tim Keller and others who say that, since the wicked want separation from God so badly, that is what He gives them out of his love – the desires of their hearts. No – that places the emphasis on why they are in Hell on their own wants, and God becomes a granter of their wishes instead of their judge. This is instead about what God is compelled by His holiness to do.

Rather, I would postulate that His love ceases for them at that point and His love for the Elect overshadows His general love as His vengeance against the wicked which has most to do with His offended holiness also has an aspect of righteous vengeance on behalf of the saints who had suffered at the hands of these wicked, and even the moral wicked who, by their acquiescence to the world's schemes & persecution against believers, allowed the martyrdom of millions. Note the interplay in **Rev. 19:1-5; Ps. 58:10-11; Heb. 10:26-31; MT. 7:23; 25:41 & II Thess.1:6-8**. Part of the despair of hell is the fact that one will never experience God's love in the form of common grace again.

I cannot logically conceive of God's love remaining on the reprobate after they have died and gone to Hell. Their punishment is immediate (Hades) and justly deserved. In the end, they will be judged and thrown into the Lake of Fire for eternity with no hope of ever escaping that fate or entering into heaven. They spent a lifetime spurning God's overtures of love, being unthankful to Him, never acknowledging His greatness or majesty, the offer of a saving relationship with this God who is love, ends at death. There is no way to bring together God's love for the damned and their eternal experience in Hell, except as seeing His love for His elect and His keeping of His promises of judgment for His enemies to them.

How Will We Be Able to Enjoy Heaven With Loved Ones in Hell?

Jonathan Edwards declared in a sermon entitled, *"The Torments of the Wicked in Hell – No Occasion of Grief in the saints in Heaven"*; *"Then there will be no remaining difficulties about the justice of God, about the absolute decrees of God, or anything pertaining to the dispensations of God toward men...the heavenly inhabitants will then be perfectly conformed to God in their wills and affections. They will love as God loves and that only."*^{xliv}

Michael Allen Rogers adds, *"Edwards's answer to how we could ever be at complete rest about this perplexing issue is that only human relationships sealed by commonality of belonging to Christ will endure beyond this life. We simply will have no occasion to remember others. Isaiah 65:17 speaks from the Lord: "For behold , I create a new heavens and new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind." Difficult as it may be to accept, all memories of people separated from Christ will be swept away in the sea of God's perfect justice. The unrest we feel over them today cannot finally endure."*^{xlv}

Next lesson - # 73 – Rev. 21:1-8 The New Creation

ⁱ Quoted in DA Carson - ed, Telling the Truth, Zondervan, 2000, by Ajith Fernando, p. 372

ⁱⁱ This is a paraphrase of a paragraph from a sermon by Steven Lawson, the title of which I have forgotten.

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- iii Rob Bell, *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*; Harper One, 2011; pp. 92-93
- iv IBID, p. 98
- v IBIB, p. 106-107
- vi IBID, p. 108
- vii IBID, P. 154-155
- viii David Platt, “The Glory of God, the Lostness of Man, and the Gospel of Christ”, in “Finish the Mission”, John Piper & David Mathis (editors), Crossway Books, 2012, p. 56
- ix John Piper, from a sermon entitled, “The Echo and Insufficiency of Hell Part II”; off of website, desiringgod.org – preached 6/21/92
- x John Piper again – this time from the sermon “The Greatest Thing in the World” – Romans 1-7; Sept. 2, 2001
- xi David Platt, p. 55, *Finish the Mission*
- xii I am grateful for much of the information in this section to Daniel Fuller, whose excellent book, “The Unity of the Bible”, Zondervan, 1992, was very helpful, especially pp. 187-204
- xiii Donald McLeod, *Behold Your God*, Christian Focus Publishing, 1990, reprint 1995, p. 128
- xiv John MacArthur – from CNN Transcripts, The Larry King Show, broadcast date Sept. 29, 2001, “Where Was God?”
- xv *Finer & Henshaw Statistics 2003*, accessed on the internet
- xvi It is possible that this baby is some typical sense foreshadowed David’s more famous Son, Jesus Christ, who would also die as a result of the sins of others (& of David). This is perhaps why the baby is never named.
- xvii This is the position of James R. White, whose position it is that God elects some infants who die to salvation, and others are by-passed and end up in Hell.
- xviii R. Albert Mohler, from an article by Albert Mohler & Daniel L. Akin, “The Salvation of the ‘Little Ones’: Do Infants Who Die Go To Heaven?”, p. 1, from Dr. Mohler’s Blog dated July 16, 2009, accessed online
- xix No one can determine what age that is with any certainty but God. There is no magic age or IQ level at which one crosses over the line and commits personal sin they are aware of. It is going to be different for every individual based on their upbringing, life experiences and God’s grace.
- xx John MacArthur, *Safe in the Arms of God*, Thomas Nelson, 2003, pg. 37
- xxi RA Webb, *The Theology of Infant Salvation*, Sprinkle Publications, 2003, pp. 56-57
- xxii Ronald H. Nash, quoting Roger Nicole, in “What About Those Who Never Heard?; John Sanders, editor, IVP, 1995, pp. 118-119
- xxiii John Piper, in “Let the Nations Be Glad – The Supremacy of God in Missions”; 2nd edition, Baker Books, 2004, p. 133, FN 27
- xxiv One place this statement by Dr. White is made is on his podcast, *The Dividing Line* (aomin.org), the 4/25/13 broadcast at about 53:20 and following in a 60 minute broadcast
- xxv I am thankful for Bruce Demarest’s book, “The Cross & Salvation”; Crossway, 1997, pp. 303-305
- xxvi *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* – editor, Frank Gaebeline; commentary on Ezekiel by Ralph H. Alexander; Vol. 6; a986, Zondervan, p. 824
- xxvii John Piper, quoted in Michael Allen Rogers, *What Happens After I Die?*, Crossway Books, 2013, p.245
- xxviii John Stott, quoted in Terrance Tiessen, “Who Can be Saved? Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions”, IVP, 2004, pg. 38
- xxix IBID, pg. 39, quoting J.I. Packer from his own book, “God’s Words”, IVP, 1981, pg. 210
- xxx Robert L. Reymond, essay entitled, “That Very Pernicious and Detestable Doctrine of Inclusivism”, p. 2, Knox Theological Seminary, 12/1/06
- xxxi IBID, p. 3
- xxxii IBID, p. 6 – I must confess here that when I looked through Millard Erickson’s “Christian Theology”, I could find no immediate evidence of this position in his soteriology. It may be that it is stated in some other work of his and not in his systematic theology. I have recently found some evidence of this position by Erickson in Terrance Tiessen’s book, “Who Can be Saved” and he refers to a book by Millard Erickson entitled, “How Shall They be Saved?”, which I have not yet located a copy of
- xxxiii Thiessen, pg. 105
- xxxiv IBID, p. 7

^{xxxv} IBID, pg. 33

^{xxxvi} John 6:44, 65; 8:47; Jeremiah 13:23; Romans 8:7-8, 29-30; 9; I Cor. 2:14; 12:3; etc.

^{xxxvii} IBID, Reymond, p. 10

^{xxxviii} IBID, p. 11

^{xxxix} David Platte, Finish the Mission, p. 63

^{xl} Russell D. Moore, article "The Man on the Island: facing the Truth About Those Who Never Hear the Gospel", accessed online 3/2/13 on www.henryinstitute.org/documents/The-Man-on-the-Island.pdf

^{xli} Gerald Bray, God is Love, Crossway, 2012, p. 372

^{xlii} Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, Zondervan, 1994, p. 1150

^{xliii} John M. Frame; The Doctrine of God; P & R Publishing, 2002, p. 467

^{xliv} Jonathan Edwards, quoted by Michael Allen Rogers, What Happens After I Die?, Crossway Books, 2013, p. 194

^{xlv} IBID, Rogers, p. 194