

*The Error
of Eternal
Conscious Torment*
Its Effect on the Conscience
of the Believer

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"Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."
~ Romans 12:21.

I have received a lot of correspondence concerning the subject of the *salvation of all mankind*. Some have written of their enlightenment after having read the material in this book as it originally appeared in the pages of the *Bible Student's Notebook*[™].

Then of course there have been those who have not agreed with what has been written. Overwhelmingly these have been good-spirited. Interestingly one recurring theme shows up in many of these letters. It is the confession that the writer wishes they believed in the *salvation of all*.

"I WOULD LOVE TO BELIEVE"

Here are a few excerpts from four recent letters. I find these lines very touching. Read these short lines carefully and see if you cannot identify with the words written. See if they don't express something that has been in your own heart.

"I do not see the reconciliation of all mankind. I wish I did. It would be great if all these lost souls would someday come to the truth."

"Don't get me wrong, I would LOVE to believe there is no hell and that everyone gets saved in the end. I don't like the idea of Hell and I don't understand how or why God would send anyone to a place like that. Doesn't seem fair at all ... I would like nothing more than to find out you are correct in your beliefs in this area."

“I’d really like to believe that all will be saved. I have a real hard time with someone in eternal torments.”

“I have never been comfortable with eternal punishment in fire for the lost. It has always haunted me that God could torture lost souls in fire forever.”

These four brothers in Christ are not alone. The erroneous teaching of “eternal conscious torment” has an affect upon the conscience of the believer. Buried deep within our conscious – in our subconscious – is this part of God that we do not like. It is so unlike Him. It is so unlike who He wants us to be. We do not like this “dark side” of God.

As we have come to see in this short work, this “god” with a dark side is not the true God of Scriptures. This eternally sadistic “god” is one of religion. The true God of the Scriptures is good. His very nature is love, grace, forbearance, and forgiveness. He is far greater than we ever imagined Him to be.

The point here is that this religious teaching of “eternal conscious torment” has an adverse effect upon the very conscience of the believer. It obstructs his true understanding of his Father, inhibits the enjoyment of his relationship with Him, and skews the way he sees and relates to all the rest of God’s dear creatures.

THE TESTIMONY OF BIBLE TEACHERS

Other sincere brethren have not held to the *salvation of all*, but have nonetheless also written concerning their own personal anguish over the issue also.

Albert Barnes, the famous biblical commentator (*Barnes’ Notes*) describes well such agony of spirit:

“That any should suffer forever, lingering on in hopeless despair, and rolling amidst infinite torments without the possibility of alleviation and without end; that since God can save men and will save a part, He has not proposed to save all – these are real, not imaginary, difficulties. ...

“My whole soul pants for light and relief on these questions. But I get neither; and in the distress and anguish of my own spirit, I confess that I see no light whatever. I see not one ray to disclose to me why sin came into the world; why the earth is strewn with the dying and the dead; and why man must suffer to all eternity. I have never seen a particle of light thrown on these subjects, that has given a moment’s ease to my tortured mind. ...

“I confess, when I look on a world of sinners and sufferers – upon death-beds and graveyards-upon the world of woe filled with hosts to suffer for ever: when I see my friends, my family, my people, my fellow citizens when I look upon a whole race, all involved in this sin and danger – and when I see the great mass of them wholly unconcerned, and when I feel that God only can save them, and yet he does not do so, I am struck dumb. It is all

dark, dark, dark to my soul, and I cannot disguise it.” – Albert Barnes, *Practical Sermons*, (page 123).

Even **Sir Robert Anderson** lends his voice to this dilemma:

“According to the most careful estimate, the population of the world exceeds one thousand four hundred millions. Not one-third of these are Christians even in name; and of this small minority how few there are whose lives give proof that they are traveling heavenward! And what is the destiny of all the rest? Any estimate of their number must be inaccurate and fanciful; and accuracy, if attainable, would be practically useless. As a matter of arithmetic it is as easy to deal with millions as with tens; but when we come to realize that every unit is a human being, with a little world of joys and sorrows all his own, and an unbounded capacity for happiness or misery, the mind is utterly paralyzed by the effort to realize the problem.

“And these fourteen hundred millions are but a single wave of the great tide of human life that breaks, generation after generation, upon the shore of the unknown world. What future then awaits these untold myriads of millions of mankind? Most of us have been trained in the belief that their portion is an existence of endless, hopeless torment. But few there are, surely, who have carried this belief to middle-age unchallenged. Sometimes it is the vastness of the numbers whose fate is involved that startles us into skepticism. Sometimes it is the memory of friends now gone, who lived and died impenitent. As we think of an eternity in which they ‘*shall be tormented day and night forever and ever*,’ the mind grows weary and the heart grows sick, and we turn to ask ourselves, Is not God infinite in love? Is not the great Atonement infinite in value? Is it credible then that such a future is to be the sequel to a brief and sorely tempted life of sin? Is it credible that for all eternity – that eternity in which the triumph of the Cross shall be complete, and God shall be ‘*all in all*’ – there shall still remain an underworld of seething sin and misery and horror?” – Sir Robert Anderson, *Human Destiny*, (Chapter 5: The Restitution of All Things).

Even more recently Mart De Haan wrote:

“I wish I didn’t have to believe in hell. While seeing the need for eternal justice, the thought of cruel and unusual punishment that lasts forever sounds morally wrong to me ...” – Mart De Haan, *Radio Bible Class Newsletter*, (November 2006).

ARE WE MORE KIND, GRACIOUS AND LOVING THAN GOD?

Is it possible for the redeemed to be more kind, gracious and loving than their God? Deep in our innermost beings we cannot honestly fathom the concept of “*eternal conscious torment*.” Its cruelty and callousness is terrible beyond comprehension. Even though some may teach it, very few have given their minds the permission to dwell upon it in its fullness.

Yet the fact is that we are *not* more kind, gracious, and loving than our heavenly Father.

He Is Love

“God is love” (I John 4:8b)

His Love Will Never Fail

“Charity never faileth” (I Corinthians 13:8a).

He Teaches Us to Be Like Him, and to Love Our Enemies

“Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you ... Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:27, 36).

He Teaches Us to Forgive Them Infinitely

“How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?’ Jesus saith unto him, ‘I say not unto thee, until seven times: but, until seventy times seven.’” (Matthew 18:21-22)

He Teaches Us Not to Be Overcome by Evil, but to Overcome Evil by Good

“Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21).

Our Father Teaches Us These Things Because They Are Who He Is

Religion has grossly misrepresented God. Those who have professed to be in His service have done His honor a disservice. He has been exceedingly slandered.

God is Good Beyond Our Wildest Dreams

“O give thanks unto the LORD; for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever” (I Chronicles 16:34).

“... For He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever ...” (II Chronicles 5:13).

“... For He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever” (II Chronicles 7:3).

“Praise ye the LORD. O give thanks unto the LORD; for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever” (Psalms 106:1).

“O give thanks unto the LORD, for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever” (Psalms 107:1).

“O give thanks unto the LORD; for He is good: because His mercy endureth for ever”
(Psalms 118:1).

”O give thanks unto the LORD; for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever” (Psalms
118:29).

“O give thanks unto the LORD; for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever” (Psalms
136:1).

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