

Does the Bible Teach that All Men Are Immortal?

John Hepp, Jr., www.kingdominbible.com

Immortality is the eternal life of blessedness promised to the godly only (1 Cor. 15:51-55). We do not all have “immortal souls” that will keep us from perishing.

Preface

We are all mortal: “destined to die once, and after that to face judgment” (Heb. 9:27). But what about “after that”? Will we all eventually live somewhere forever? *Are we immortal in that more important sense?* Current evangelical tradition says yes. In our bodies, it says, we will consciously spend eternity in heaven, the new earth, or hell! If so, many will suffer everlasting torment, with no prospect of ending their horrible existence. Not just really bad people like Hitler. Even people who “do what is right,” as God said about Cornelius before he was converted (Acts 10:1-2, 35).¹ If they don’t hear and accept the gospel, God will torment them forever. Forever they will wish they were not immortal. Many scorn that teaching and consider it revolting. I will show that there is insufficient biblical evidence to sustain it.

Some Scriptures do picture lasting torment. The Lord’s story about the rich man and Lazarus, for example. After dying, the formerly rich man found himself “in hell, where he was in torment” (Luke 16:23). So he begged, “Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire” (16:24). A picture of unrelenting torment, for who knows how long. Here are other related passages.

[The angels] will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matt. 13:42)

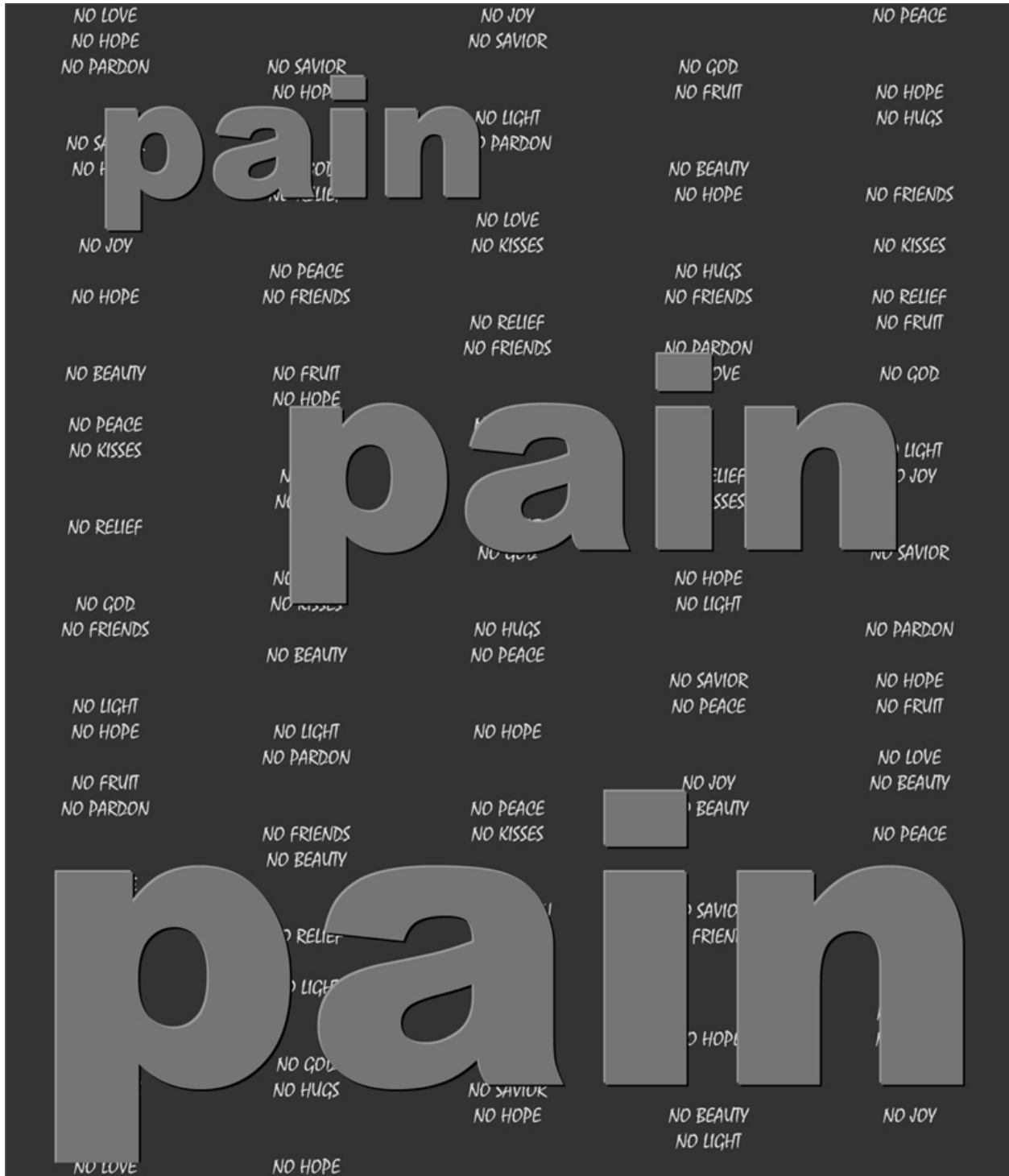
Then [the wicked] will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life. (Matt. 25:46)

If anyone worships the beast, he, too will drink of the wine of God’s fury....He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast.... (Rev. 14:9-12, partly parallel to 20:10)

But this evidence is not clear-cut. In nearly all these passages the duration of the suffering is unclear. The “torment” and “agony” of the formerly rich man (Luke 16:23-24) would end if he finally expired (see Matt. 10:28, Luke 12:47-48). The “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 13:42) would continue only while God was “burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Matt. 3:12). The “eternal punishment” of the wicked (Matt. 25) may refer to its unalterable result rather than a continuous process. Only in Revelation 14:9-12 (and 20:10 in part) is the suffering pictured as non-ending. If that picture must be interpreted literally, those so tormented will in effect be immortal. Each one will drink oceans of pain far larger than our minds can imagine. On the next page I will try to represent a drop of water from those oceans.

What Unbelievers Will Have in Hell

If they are immortal, as some teach, this condition will never cease or improve.
Miles of such pages could not even begin to represent it all.



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Terrible to accept. As we are now, no normal human being can accept complacently this picture of non-ending suffering. If God wants it to be so, we can only try to swallow it. We cannot escape by supposing that everyone will eventually be converted. Many Scriptures contradict that notion. For example: “Whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him” (John 3:36).² However, there is strong Scriptural evidence that the picture is wrong.

Scriptures that teach or imply man’s mortality. Here are samples showing that God has given conditions for attaining immortality. Only those who meet the conditions will attain it. All the rest will suffer punishment but eventually cease to exist.

[God,] who alone is immortal. (1 Tim. 6:16)

“The man...must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” (Gen. 3:22)

To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. (Rom. 2:7)

To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. (Rev. 2:7)

That servant who knows his master’s will and does not get ready...will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. (Luke 12:47–48)

Be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matt. 10:28)

These verses cannot contradict those quoted earlier. Every word God has spoken is pure. “Let God be true and every man a liar” (Rom. 3:4).³ So what do we do about apparent contradictions? We struggle to see what each passage means in context. We seek evidence whether the language is literal or figurative and whether the belief it reflects was temporary or final. We try to become aware of our preconceptions that color each passage we read, of wrong traditions that keep us from seeing what God says. Our traditions and our thinking are worthy of trust only insofar as they reflect the perfect revelation He gave us.⁴

In this paper I will refute the tradition that all men will live forever (see Chart A on p. 7).⁵ From the Bible and Church History I will propose five sets of arguments that conditional immortality better fits the biblical revelations.

Contents

<i>Preface, with portrayal of hell</i>	p. 1
<i>Clarifications</i>	p. 6
<i>Sets of Arguments Favoring Conditional Immortality</i>	
A. Man Is Mortal	p. 7
The Scriptures ascribe immortality to God but mortality to man.	
B. How to Become Immortal	p. 14
A central theme of the Bible is how God provides for immortality.	
C. Destruction of the Wicked	p. 21
Nearly all relevant Scriptures point to ultimate destruction of the wicked.	
D. A World without Evil	p. 30
God’s purpose for Christ requires for the wicked to cease to exist.	
E. Church Fathers on Immortality	p. 31
The early Church Fathers believed in conditional immortality.	
<i>Appendix: What Is Immortality?</i>	p. 36
<i>Charts</i>	
A. Immortality (Living Forever): Two Views	p. 5
B. Genesis 1–4: Beginnings of the World & Civilization	p. 9
C. Romans 5:12–21: Universal Results from Adam & Christ	p. 13
D. Life or Eternal Life in the Synoptic Gospels	p. 19
E. “Unquenchable fire” in Matthew 3:12	p. 22
F. An Apocalyptic Description of Unending Torment	p. 27
G. The Most-Used Scriptural Arguments for Eternal Torment	p. 34
H. Some Scriptural Teachings Supporting Conditional Immortality	p. 35
<i>Notes</i>	p. 38

Does the Bible Teach that All Men Are Immortal?

Chart A Immortality (Living Forever): Two Views	
View A. Conditional Immortality (the view I consider biblical)	View B. Natural Immortality (the currently traditional view)
1. Man was created as a body/soul unity with the prospect of becoming immortal.	1. Man was created as a naturally immortal soul clothed with a mortal body.
2. Personal immortality is the same as eternal life and must be attained.	2. Personal immortality is not the same as eternal life and cannot be lost.
3. At the Fall man lost the initial prospect of immortality and was sentenced to death, defined as man returning to dust.	3. At the Fall man was sentenced to death, the separation of soul (which continues) from body (which returns to dust).
4. Since soul and body are mortal, death ends man's existence unless God intervenes.	4. Since soul is immortal, man lives on after death (with a body if God provides one).
5. At the Fall spiritual death began as the initial stage of physical death.	5. At the Fall spiritual death began, separation from God, distinct from physical death.
6. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, immortality/eternal life is promised to everyone who believes in Him.	6. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, an additional and higher form of immortality/eternal life is promised to everyone who believes in Him.
7. When Jesus comes again, He will raise all the dead but grant the glory of immortality/eternal life only to believers.	7. When Jesus comes again, He will raise all the dead with imperishable bodies but only believers with glorious bodies.
8. Only those will live forever to whom Jesus will give immortality/eternal life.	8. Everyone will live forever, but the condition of those alienated from God is not called "immortality" or "eternal life."
9. Because they will receive immortality, believers will qualify to inherit/rule in Christ's coming eternal kingdom.	9. Believers will get bodies with eternal life and qualify for blessing; unbelievers will get imperishable bodies but be punished.
10. In the lake of fire (the Second Death) God will punish and destroy the wicked and destroy death forever.	10. In the lake of fire (the Second Death) God will separate the wicked from Himself and torment them forever.

Codes like A1 or B8 will refer to Chart A. For example, A1 will mean the first cell under View A ("Man was created..."); B8 will mean the eighth cell under View B ("Everyone will live...").

Clarifications

Objectives & Procedure. This study is written for evangelicals, who believe in the divine inspiration of the Bible. It studies a basic characteristic of man in relation to God's character. The subject has many aspects affected by deep-rooted traditions. If you are content with mere proof texts, you will give up quickly. I struggle for clarity but cannot cope with unconcern.

My objective is to give biblical evidence for "Conditional Immortality," the view that only believers will live forever. This is in contrast to "Natural Immortality," the currently dominant view that every person will exist forever. As proof I propose five sets of arguments (listed in Contents) from the Bible and Church History. These arguments are supported by a total of thirty "Articles" numbered from 1 to 30.

Chart A (p. 5) may help you make order, especially if you print it separately and refer to it often. In two columns it contrasts what the two views (as I see them) assert about several issues. I will refer to its parts by code. "A2," for example, will refer to the claim that "personal immortality is the same as eternal life and must be attained." I will add the A2 label to explanations of that claim or to evidence for it. Likewise, "B8" would label explanations of issue 8 (all or in part) as stated in the right column, but "contra B8" would label evidence against it.

Quotations. In this writing Bible quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the New International Version 1984. In these Bible quotations I show emphasis by using *italics* or **bold print**.

Other quotations are mostly from three writings. Those assuming man's immortality are most often from Arthur W. Pink⁶ and Ajith Fernando. Those espousing conditional immortality are mostly from Edwin Froom.⁷

Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in Genesis, Volumes I and II* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1922).

Ajith Fernando, *Crucial Questions about Hell* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991).

Edwin Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, 2 vols. (Washington: Review & Herald Publishing Association, 1965, 1966).

These authors sometimes show emphasis in material they quote by using *italics* (which I retain). Therefore, I show my own emphasis by using **bold print**. I do not necessarily agree or disagree with *italicized* or **bolded** material.

Terms. I use the word *man* in a generic sense, to refer to any human being or the human race. The words *soul* and *spirit* are used as synonyms, not for different non-material aspects.

Sets of Arguments Favoring Conditional Immortality

A. Man is Mortal

The Scriptures ascribe immortality to God but mortality to man.

The articles under this section will show the following about immortality: (a) what the Bible means by it as applied to God and man, and (b) how God originally offered it to man but temporarily withdrew the offer. These arguments depend partly on accepting the early chapters of Genesis at face value and as of prime importance. One's convictions from Genesis will tend to color all the additional evidence. A and B labels refer to Chart A; e.g., B2 means column B cell 2.

1. Only God is immortal, which means He can never cease to exist. First Timothy 6:16 says that God “alone is immortal.” The Greek is literally “who alone has immortality [*athanasian*].” The key Greek word means “non-susceptibility to death” (*thanatos* is death). So the verse means that of everyone who exists, only God the Creator will inevitably (unconditionally) live forever and never die.”⁸ Is that true because “God is spirit” (John 4:24) and has no literal body to die? No, because angels are also spirits (“ministering spirits,” Heb. 1:7, 14) but not immortal. He “alone is immortal,” meaning that only He is essentially immune to death. Saying this about God shows that *immortality* cannot refer primarily to the body and therefore *death* cannot mean separation of body and soul (contra B3). They must mean something more basic. His immortality must mean He will exist forever; His death would mean He would cease to exist.

To repeat, why does the Bible affirm that God is non-mortal (cannot die)? Not because He is spirit (though He is), with no body to separate from, but because He is essentially eternal and will live forever. That is the normal meaning of “immortal.”

In contrast to God, man is mortal (Rom. 1:23; A1-4). And since his Fall every “man is destined to die once” (Heb. 9:27).⁹ You just saw that in God’s case death would mean cessation of existence. Current tradition claims that death has a different meaning for man: the separation of soul/spirit from body (B3). But starting in Genesis 1–3, I will show that death is not defined as separation (contra B3). For man (just as it would for God), it means ultimately ceasing to exist. Unless God intervenes, death ends in man’s complete cessation (A4).

Many evangelical Christians do not agree with what I just said about man. I will express their opinion in the words of Arthur W. Pink (see Clarifications). Pink sprinkles on his pages such statements as “Man possesses an imperishable soul” (I:35; B1, 4) and “We have been created by the Eternal God, we possess a never-dying soul” (I:49). What evidence does Pink give for saying this? None. Apparently he assumes that such statements are corroborated by biblical revelations somewhere and need no proof. Ajith Fernando agrees with Pink that men are imperish-

able. Furthermore, he purports to address the issues in his chapter “What about Annihilationism?” (pp. 37–44). In it he tries to adduce biblical evidence against conditional immortality. Yet, Fernando is also unaware of his presuppositions. Therefore, he says absolutely nothing about such key passages as 1 Timothy 6:16 or Genesis 2-3—and the issues they raise.¹⁰

2. To certain men God will impart immortality, which is eternal life (A2, 6-8). The Bible reveals how the “sting of death” (1 Cor. 15:56) can be removed. We will consider this in more detail in my second set of articles. For now notice two of the New Testament promises of immortality: Romans 2:5b–7 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-54. The first one is part of a discussion of the coming judgment. Like other such descriptions of God’s judgment (e.g., Matt. 25:31–46),¹¹ it equates immortality with eternal life.

You are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God “will give eternal life to each person according to what he has done.” To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.¹² (Romans 2:5b–7; A7, 8)

The second promise pairs (as equivalents) immortality with imperishability.

When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality...then the saying...will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” (1 Cor. 15:50–54)

Such promises clearly imply (a) that immortality is essentially the same as eternal life and (b) that we do not have it yet but will receive it later (A7, 8). Now we will further consider what it means in man’s case—and the fact that men have never had it by nature.

3. In each man’s case immortality will require a body. God is immortal without a body; men cannot be immortal (or even continue to exist, A4) without one. That is because man is not essentially a spirit (as God is) but a body infused with spirit from God. That basic truth is taught in Genesis 2, as we will consider in the next paragraphs and Chart A. Keep referring to this verse:

*The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground
and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,
and the man became a living being. (Gen. 2:7)*

Genesis 2:7 should be understood in its context of Genesis 1-4, which is summarized in Chart B. Read the first column, which covers the majestic introduction in 1:1 to 2:3. That introduction gives the overall picture of the original creation.¹³ After it, the chart continues with Genesis 2:4 to 4:26, the first of numerous main sections in that book. Each main section begins with the title “This is the account of...” (Gen. 2:4; 5:1 [slightly different]; 6:9; and so on). This first section, divided into two parts, takes up the subsequent history as far as Lamech’s civilization. It begins

with a **supplementary record of man’s creation** (Gen. 2:5–25), also shaded in the chart. This supplement gives added details about the creation of man and woman, also their first conditions. God made man to be a “living being” (2:7; Hebrew *nephesh hayah*). He had already made “living creatures” (same Hebrew words) in the sea (1:20) and on the land (1:24). But He used a different method to create man. He first “formed the man from the dust of the ground,” then breathed life into him. Not a body-clothed spirit but a spirit-infused body (James 2:26; A1, contra B1).

Chart B		
Genesis 1–4		
Beginnings of the World & Civilization		
Introduction, 1:1 to 2:3 Original Creation	First Main Section, 2:4 to 4:26 History until Lamech’s Civilization	
Overall record of original creation (six days plus rest), including man & woman	Supplementary record of creation of man (as a spirit-infused body) & of woman, 2:5–25	Subsequent History, 3:1 to 4:26

Why does Genesis give this supplementary record of man’s creation? In part to show his unique relation to God. But probably to show also that he is essentially a body infused with spirit. If so, he cannot/will not become immortal without his body.¹⁴ His soul cannot indefinitely exist in separation (A1, 4). In the case of the wicked, God not only can but will “destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28; A10).

4. The method and product of creating man do not imply immortality. As just pointed out, calling the newly created man “a living being” does not suggest his special character. The same label was used of animals also (contra B1). However, notice again God’s unique method: He “**formed the man from the dust** of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Gen. 2:7). As you saw in Article 1, some suppose man’s divinely supplied spirit makes him immortal. But not so, as God quickly revealed. His warning not to eat from “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” had to do with mortality. “When you eat of it,” God said, “you will surely die” (Gen. 2:17). We do not have to speculate what dying meant. God made its meaning unmistakable after man fell: “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you **return to the ground**, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and **to dust you will return**” (Gen. 3:19; A2, 3; contra B3). Not “*your body* will return” but “*you* will return”! God was announcing the reversal of our creation; we return to dust. That is mortality.

Nevertheless, current traditions consider man as virtually immortal, as having a spirit that automatically survives death. They do not teach that man is essentially a body with spirit but a spirit with an optional body (B1). They redefine death not as returning to dust but as separation of

spirit from body (B3). I will consider those views in Articles 6 and 7. For now suffice it to say that they do not come from the Genesis story. There is no evidence there that man can continue apart from the body God “formed...from the dust” (A4).

5. Being in God’s image does not imply immortality but dominion (A9). This Article 5 introduces us to the subject of the kingdom, which is the Bible’s main theme. God will make some people immortal in order for them to inherit the coming kingdom (James 2:5). If this seems confusing, it may be because you have heard diverse teachings about the kingdom, some of them unbiblical. Please make an effort to understand the main ideas and evaluate them biblically.¹⁵

Twice in Genesis 1:26–28 man is said to be in the image of God. Nevertheless, he is mortal; witness the evidence just cited in Article 4 (“you will die”). God’s image in us is not absolute; man is unlike God in many ways. For example, he is neither omniscient nor omnipotent. What, then, does that image mean? The answer is right there in 1:26–28, which presents man as God’s final and crowning step in creation. For six days He had made order and inhabitants. Now He made a creature enough like Himself to be His representative and exercise dominion (“let them rule”) over all creation.

That purpose for man remains constant throughout the Bible, in spite of the Fall. For example, it was restated in Psalm 8:6: “You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet.” Commenting on that very psalm and purpose, Hebrews 2:5-10 denies that it has been fulfilled: “at present we do not see everything subject to him” (Heb. 2:8). Hebrews assures us, however, that this purpose of God will be fulfilled in “the world to come” (Heb. 2:5). “The world to come” is the kingdom Jesus will inaugurate when He returns, as He Himself promised.¹⁶ In that day man will realize his rulership potential as God’s image (A9).

Here I can illustrate one risk in the tradition of “realized eschatology” as many currently hold it.¹⁷ They believe that most prophetic promises about the kingdom are being fulfilled for us in unexpected ways. Most of those holding to that form of the tradition seem to mistake the perspective of Hebrews 1 and 2. Those chapters point to the coming kingdom, “the world to come, **about which we are speaking.**” So says the author (2:5). He also calls that coming world the “salvation” that believers “will inherit” (1:14) and “such a great salvation” (2:3).¹⁸ That equates the future glorious kingdom with salvation, a common practice in both Testaments (e.g., Isa. 12:3; 25:6-9; 1 Thess. 5:8-9; 1 Peter 1:5). Most of salvation, like “eternal life” (see Article 16), is future (“our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed,” Rom. 13:11). Why is it rare nowadays to hear that taught? Probably because so many teachers have a “realized eschatology” mindset. Eager to promote an “abundant life,” they interpret as present what refers to the future.

6. After his Fall man lost the access to immortality (A3). That loss is made evident by comparing two facts before the Fall to two facts after it.

Before the Fall,

- Man had access to the tree of life (Gen. 2:9).
- Man was warned that “when you eat of [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] you will surely die” (Gen. 2:17).

After the Fall (some consequences of man’s sin),

- God cursed man, saying in part, “Return to the ground; since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return” (Gen. 2:19).
- God expelled him from the garden because “he must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever” (Gen. 3:22).

These facts make it evident that the tree of life pictured the offer of immortality. After the Fall, his dying (= returning to the ground) and not eating from that tree showed that man was being kept from immortality (A3).

7. Man’s death in the Fall was basically physical (A3, 5, contra B5). This is a corollary of the point just made. Reread the four biblical facts in the previous article. The curse of returning to dust and being excluded from the tree of life clearly refers to physical death. Nevertheless, some interpreters claim that Adam’s death was primarily spiritual (non-material). In contrast to the account in Genesis, they allege either that his spirit was separated/alienated from God or that it ceased to exist. Arthur Pink, for example, says, “God faithfully warned man that if he ate of the forbidden fruit, he should surely die. And **die he did, spiritually**” (I:15; B5; bolding shows my emphasis of right or wrong statements). A few pages later Pink reiterates that interpretation:

In the day that Adam sinned, he died spiritually. Physical death is the separation of the spirit from the body; spiritual death is the separation of the spirit from God. When Adam died, his spirit was not annihilated, but it was “alienated from God.” (I:18; B3, 5, 8)

In succeeding pages Pink keeps insisting that death at the Fall was not physical but spiritual. For example, he speaks of

God’s original threat to Adam, namely, spiritual death (for he did not die physically that same day), which is the separation of the soul from God. (I:54)

This shows one reason Pink makes Adam’s death primarily spiritual. He misunderstands God’s “original threat” in Genesis 2:17. The King James Version translates it word for word: “**in the day** that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.” Well, Adam lived many more years after he ate. So since he did not die physically **on that day**, Pink concludes that he must have died spiritually. But “in the day” is a Hebrew idiom in which “day” can mean much longer than twenty-four hours. NIV translates it correctly: “**when** you eat.” A few verses earlier the same idiom refers to creation week: “...the heavens and the earth **when** [in the day when] they were created” (2:4). So God’s warning meant that during the new epoch of his existence, Adam would die physically. And so he did, as the texts in Article 6 have shown (A3).

There is another reason Pink wrongly concludes that the Genesis 3 penalty is spiritual. It is because he assumes that man's spirit/soul is immortal (B1). If so, then spiritual death is not only more important than physical death but also distinct from it. Certainly we are spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1, 5; Col. 2:13), which condition no doubt began at the Fall (A5). Yet, Genesis 3 says nothing about it, much less as the main point. Even Pink recognizes the penalty was physical:

The divine record of the Fall is the only possible explanation of the present condition of the human race. It alone accounts for the presence of evil in a world made by a beneficent and perfect Creator. [And it alone] explains the mystery of death. Man possesses an **im-perishable soul, why then should he die?** He had breathed into him the breath of the Eternal One, why then should he **not live on in this world for ever?** (I:35; B1-3)

In this quotation Pink alleges man's immortality but acknowledges the obvious physical meaning of death in the Fall. Yet, as you saw earlier, he usually disregards that meaning. He usually overlooks the physical nature of the curse and misunderstands the physical consequences of being excluded from the garden and the tree. As you will see later, his summaries about the Fall quite omit physical death. Many other conservatives follow Pink's lead.¹⁹ But they can hardly find convincing evidence of their "spiritual death" view in the Genesis account itself (contra B5).²⁰ Some seem oblivious to what Genesis says for the same reason as Pink. They give more importance to a metaphorical sense of death, which they import from other Scriptures.

It is true that spiritual death is a metaphor based on physical death. All the fearfulness, finality, and loss of the one are mirrored in the other. But the metaphor doesn't deny or supersede the original. Compare another metaphor: "When your words came, I ate them" (Jer. 15:16). But spiritual eating in no way supplants physical eating, such as, eating the fruit in Genesis 3. Neither does spiritual death supplant physical death.²¹ In fact, both aspects began at the Fall and cannot be separated.

8. All men die (not attaining immortality when they die) because of Adam's sin (A3, contra B5). This fact is illustrated in succeeding chapters of Genesis (see "he died" in Gen. 5:5, 8, 11, 14, et al.). And it is taught explicitly in the main New Testament commentary about Adam's sin, Romans 5:12–21. That passage is considered difficult, partly because of current confusion about the terms *death* and *died*. But it is important enough to read and study repeatedly.²² In Chart C I have summarized its parts. It is a key step in Romans, the book that shows why the gospel of grace works so powerfully. Notice the title I have given the passage. It shows that Christ's supreme act of obedience can change the whole world just as Adam's sin did. It compares and contrasts the effects of the two men's actions. *The whole argument assumes that Adam's death was physical.*

Chart C Romans 5:12–21: Universal Results from Adam & Christ		
Part 1. All in Adam		Part 2. All in Christ
Because of Adam’s Sin, all in him die, vv. 12–14		Because of Christ’s Obedience, all in Him will live, vv. 15–21
This Principle Stated & Proved		Contrasts & Similarities to the Influence of Adam
Stated, v. 12	Proved, vv. 13–14 by the death of everybody (“death reigned”) between Adam and Moses, when there was no law to punish	Three Contrasts, vv. 15–17 Three Similarities, vv. 18–21 “so also”
“just as”		

Continue to study Romans 5:12-21 with the help of Chart C. Look at Part 1 (vv. 12-14) and Part 2 (vv. 15-21). Part 1 gives Adam’s side in the comparison, namely, that Adam’s sin brought (physical) death to all men in him. It states that principle (to which I will return) in verse 12, then proves it in verses 13-14. Part 2 gives Christ’s side in the comparison, namely, that He brings life to all men in Him.

Now return to verse 12, the beginning of Part 1: “Therefore, **just as** sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned...” This is the principle of Adam’s influence: “all sinned” and incurred the death penalty not as separate individuals but in Adam. That same principle is reiterated in nearly every verse of Part 2. For example: “the many died **by the trespass of the one man**” (v. 15). Especially relevant to our study is the argument by which the apostle proves that principle in verses 13–14.

- After Adam disobeyed the law God gave him, then died, “death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses.”
- The people born during that period from Adam to Moses, though punished by death, had no divine law to disobey and make them guilty.
- Therefore, their death must have been for Adam’s sin, not their own.

Remember that the object of these verses is to prove that one man’s action can affect everybody. “[B]y the trespass of the one man, death reigned” (5:17). The whole argument depends on the physical and observable nature of the evidence. Unless “death reigned” refers to physical death (as abundantly witnessed in Genesis 3-5), it cannot be seen or convince anyone. Thus, this passage confirms that Adam’s sin and the curse resulted not merely in “spiritual” death but in mortality for all. No one will naturally live forever. Nevertheless, “the obedience of one” will

change that. Through Him “*will* those who receive God’s...grace and...the gift of righteousness reign in life” (5:19, 17, notice the *future tense*, as in 1 Cor. 15:22).

B. How to Become Immortal

A central theme of the Bible is how God provides for immortality.

The articles in this section have some repetition for emphasis. They will show the following about immortality: (a) The purpose of Christ’s first coming was to make it possible. (b) It will enable us to reign as originally planned. (c) It will be granted at our resurrection. (d) In one quite limited sense believers already have it.

9. God wanted man to have immortality (live forever), but man lost the opportunity (A3).

This reiterates my earlier argument. “In the middle of the garden” God put “the tree of life” (Gen. 2:9). Was this an actual tree—and therefore a sacrament²³—or is the record a figure of speech? I suppose that since the garden and man were material, the tree was also material. But material or not, the message is the same: God was making eternal life possible. However, He withdrew that immediate offer when He expelled us from the garden and set a guard. He does not want man to “eat and live forever” (Gen. 3:22) with the curse on him and on the earth. The obvious meaning would seem to be that we lost our chance at immortality.

How does Arthur Pink interpret this tree and this judgment? As a sample, consider more of his remarks on Genesis 3:21ff. First, Pink emphasizes God’s mercy in slaying animals to provide clothing for Adam and Eve. This, he says, was a perfect type of the Lord Jesus laying down His life for His sheep. Then Pink continues with the following paragraphs (italics are his):

Adam and Eve were driven out of Paradise. The moral significance of this is plain. It was impossible for them to remain in the garden and continue in fellowship with the Lord. He is holy, and that which defileth cannot enter His presence. Sin always results in separation.... [B5]

Here we see the fulfilment of God’s threat. He had announced, “In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely *die*.” Die, not only physically—there is something infinitely worse than that—but die spiritually. Just as physical death is the separation of the soul from the body, so spiritual death is the separation of the soul from God...When it is said that we are by nature “dead in trespasses and sins,” it is because men are “*alienated from the life of God* through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph. 4:18). In like manner, that judicial death which awaits all who die in their sins—the “Second Death”—is not annihilation as so many are now falsely teaching but eternal separation from God and everlasting punishment in the lake of fire. And so here in Genesis 3 we have God’s own definition of death—separation from Him, evidenced by the expulsion of man from Eden. [B5]

The barring of the way to the tree of life illustrated an important spiritual truth. In some peculiar way this tree seems to have been a symbol of the Divine presence (see Prov. 3:18), and the fact that fallen man had no right of access to it further emphasized the moral distance at which he stood from God....

Summing up, then, this important division of our subject—God and the Fall—we discover here: An exhibition of His condescension in seeking man; an evidence of His mercy in giving a blessed prophecy and promise to sustain and cheer the heart of man; a demonstration of His grace in providing a covering for the shame of man; a display of His holiness in punishing the sin of man; and a typical foreshadowment of the urgent need of a Mediator between God and man. (Pink, I:45–46)

There is much that is good in Pink’s “summing up” paragraph. But did you notice before that, how he twists the meanings of the judgment and the tree? (a) Pink insists that Adam’s death was spiritual and consisted of separation from God, which was “God’s own definition of death.” Instead, God called it returning to the dust. (b) Pink surmises that the tree of life is “in some peculiar way...a symbol of the divine presence,” from which he says man was barred. But nowhere does it say that God barred us from His presence; notice His conversations with the murderer Cain in 4:6-15. Instead, He barred us from the tree that would allow one to “live forever” (3:22-24). In his summary Pink quite eliminates any reference to our going back to dust or being barred from that tree. Why does he miss such obvious points? Is it because he has arrived at more important conclusions? Or the obvious ones do not fit his traditions?²⁴ Instead, we should simply accept what the record clearly implies: Living forever—which equals eternal life, which equals immortality—was offered but was lost.²⁵

10. In His first advent Christ suffered to make immortality available (A6). In view of man’s mortality and increasing failure (Gen. 3–11), God chose Abram/Abraham through whom to bring salvation. He prospered Abraham and the nation He created from him (Gen. 12ff). He later made that nation into His prototypical kingdom on earth (Exod. 19:5–6; 25:22; Ps. 114:1–2). This finally led to the first advent of the royal Christ (the title of the Anointed Ruler), who was also God’s Lamb. In the works He did during His first advent, Jesus gave overwhelming evidence of His royalty (Matt. 11:2–6). But He did not begin His rule (Luke 19:11–15). Instead, He suffered in order to make men immortal: “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10; cf. 5:26, 29; 11:25).²⁶ The apostle Paul referred to this purpose in his final epistle:

God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, **who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light** through the gospel. (2 Tim. 1:8–10)

11. As the sin of one brought death, the righteous act of another One will bring life (A6).

This is the main point of the comparison in Romans 5:12–21, as you saw in Article 8 and Chart C. The mournful result of Adam’s sin will be reversed by the free gift of God through one Man: “justification that brings life for all men” (Rom. 5:18). As stated in preceding articles, that fullness of life will be no less than the promised kingdom: “For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned...how much more **will** [those justified] **reign in life** by the one man, Jesus Christ” (5:17). This statement reflects God’s purpose in creating man to rule. (a) Adam’s sin brought universal death, which hindered the fulfillment of that purpose, but (b) immortality through Jesus the Messiah will fulfill it (A9).

12. He will make men immortal to enable them to reign forever on earth (A9). Revelation 5:9–10 gives thanks to the Lamb for His purpose and action: “With your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation...and **they will reign on the earth**” (Rev. 5:9–10). Not all men will rule, of course, but only those who “have part in the first resurrection...They will reign with him” (Rev. 20:6). Notice that they will be raised to “reign **on the earth**,” not in heaven. We do not go forever to a supposedly spiritual (non-material) kingdom in heaven but pray, “your kingdom come...on earth...”²⁷ We do not ourselves establish or extend His kingdom because, as Jesus explained, it “is not from this world” (John 18:36, Greek). Instead, as predicted by the prophets (e.g., Dan. 2:34–35, 44–45), God will bring it from heaven (“kingdom of heaven”). It will be “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1; 2 Peter 3:13), designed for those redeemed and resurrected. Indeed, it requires immortal people to inherit it (1 Cor. 15:50).

Though the coming kingdom is “not a matter of eating and drinking” (Rom. 14:17), yet it will have such material elements. We will need our bodies in order to “take [our] places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 8:11). In it we will return to God’s garden and eat always from the tree of life (Rev. 2:7; 22:2). We will “reign for ever and ever,” as God planned and promised (Rev. 2:26–27; 22:1–5). The curse will be lifted, and all things will be made new (Rev. 21:5; cf. Isa. 35). He will make each believer immortal in order to inherit/reign in such a kingdom.

13. Our confident hope in immortality (and the kingdom) gives us courage (A9). If immortality and inheritance in the kingdom constitute the Christian hope, we expect the Bible to say so. And it does. “When the Son of Man comes in his glory...he will sit on his throne [and] will say, ‘Come...take your inheritance, the kingdom...’” (Matt. 25:31, 34). Even negative statements imply that same future for us. “Do you not know that the wicked will not **inherit the kingdom of God**?” (1 Cor. 6:9, 10). That implies that we who are now “saints” (holy) will inherit it. However, we must become immortal to do so, as several passages say or imply. I will quote from three of them written by the apostle Paul.

- 1 Corinthians 15:50-54. “Flesh and blood cannot **inherit the kingdom of God**, nor does the perishable **inherit the imperishable**...the dead will be raised **imperishable**...the perish-

able must clothe itself with the **imperishable**, and the mortal with **immortality**... When the perishable has been clothed with the **imperishable**, and the mortal with **immortality**, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’”

This whole chapter is proving *bodily resurrection*; verses 35-49 even discuss “With what kind of body.” So “flesh and blood” probably refers to our present bodies, which must be changed. After the resurrection we will no longer be “flesh and blood” nor “perishable.”

- 2 Corinthians 5:1–2, 4. Here Paul speaks of our hope when we die (“if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed”). Even then we know “we have **a building from God, an eternal house** in heaven. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our **heavenly dwelling**... We do not wish to be unclothed [that is, to die] but to be clothed with our **heavenly dwelling**, so that **what is mortal may be swallowed up by life**.” When we are clothed with that eternal building from God—that eternal house, that heavenly dwelling—we will no longer be mortal.²⁸ To what “heavenly dwelling” does Paul refer? To the glorious resurrection body, as he shows in the previous context: “we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead **will also raise us** with Jesus” (2 Cor. 4:14—the same thought as 1 Thess. 4:14). “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2 Cor. 4:17).

- Romans 8:18–25 says the same thing and relates it to all nature:

First, Paul asserts, “Our present **sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory** that will be revealed in us.” (Rom. 8:18)

Second, “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For **the creation** was subjected to frustration [but] **will be liberated** from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.” (8:19–20)

Third, “we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as **we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies**.” (8:23)

In other words, our coming glory will at least include our full “adoption...the redemption of our bodies.” And when that happens, all “creation will be liberated” from the curse. Thus will come the promised kingdom we constantly pray for (Luke 11:2). When it does come, “Oh, that will be glory for me” (A7)! Keeping our eyes on that goal helps us endure (Heb. 12:1–3).

14. Believers will attain immortality when they are raised from the dead (A7). We have just been reminded from 2 Corinthians 5 and Romans 8 of a coming renewal for us and for all nature. Some such passages tell us when this will take place: not at our death, of course, but at the resurrection. Reread 2 Corinthians 4:14, 17 just cited: God “**will also raise us**” from the dead as He raised Jesus, and will give us “eternal glory.” Jesus said the same thing plainly in Matthew 19:28–29: at “the renewal of all things, **when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne**... [every believer] will inherit eternal life.” As seen in earlier articles, eternal life is the same as immortality (A6).²⁹ It is the goal of “the road that **leads to life**,” in contrast to the goal of “the

road that **leads to destruction**” (Matt. 7:13–14; see also 25:46 and Rom. 2:7). The current belief that immortality comes at death is a mistake. Listen again to the great resurrection chapter, which explicitly states the timing: “In Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ the firstfruits; then, **when he comes, those who belong to him**” (1 Cor. 15:22–23). In the conclusion it glories in that victory: “When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality...**then** the saying...will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory’” (15:50–54).

15. Belief in conditional immortality accounts for the New Testament emphasis on the resurrection (A7). The chapter just cited (1 Cor. 15) says that resurrection of the body is absolutely essential to Christianity.

For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ **are lost**.³⁰ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.³¹ (1 Cor. 15:16–19)

Dead believers would be lost if there were no coming resurrection and Christ had not already been raised. As the chapter goes on to show, our hope of glory is our own resurrection, not our death.³² Accordingly, bodily resurrection was a main theme in Acts, apparently in every evangelistic message. For example, the first persecution began when priests and others “came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus **the resurrection of the dead**” (Acts 4:1–2). Here and in the quotations below, the Greek word for “dead” is plural, referring to more than Jesus. That is especially obvious in Acts 24:15. Look at some summaries of Paul’s message to unbelievers, especially from the last chapters of Acts.

- “Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and **the resurrection**.” (Acts 17:18)
- “I stand in trial because of my hope in **the resurrection** of the dead.” (Acts 23:6 and 24:21)
- “I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a **resurrection** of both the righteous and the wicked.” (Acts 24:15)
- “O king, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me. Why should any of you consider it incredible that **God raises the dead?**” (Acts 26:8)

It should be obvious that the early church did not consider death to be our goal. We will receive what is promised only when we are raised. But that is not what most of Western Christianity believes nowadays. Bodily resurrection is no longer in favor and is unimportant in most modern creeds and most funeral services. That is because we think all men are automatically immortal. We mistakenly think that a saint “sleeping” in death already has everything in heaven. If he has everything, what could a resurrection body really do for him (contra B1, 2)? I do not mean to deny any advantage “to be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:7; cf. Phil. 1:23). But to be raised and receive our eternal inheritance (Rev. 11:17–18) will be far greater.

16. Since we will become immortal at the resurrection, how should we interpret John 5:24? That verse says that the believer already “has eternal life.” Yet, according to the first three Gos-

Chart D Life or Eternal Life in the Synoptic Gospels ³³		
Matthew	Mark	Luke
7:13–14 Enter through the narrow gate.... small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life (<i>zoen</i>), and only a few find it.		
16:25 whoever wants to save his life (<i>psuchen</i>) will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.	8:34–37 [same as Matt.]	9:24; 17:33 [same as Matt.]
18:8–9 better to enter life [<i>zoen</i> , also 19:17] maimed or crippled [9, with one eye] than to have two hands or two feet [9, two eyes] and be thrown into eternal fire [9, the fire of hell]	9:43–47 [same as Matt. except] enter the kingdom of God	
19:16 What good thing must I do to get eternal life ? [first use of “eternal life,” which is equivalent to phrases in the next verses]	10:17 [same as Matt. except] inherit eternal life	18:18 [same as Mark]
19:23–24 hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heavena rich man to enter the kingdom of GodWho then can be saved ? [This is equivalent to “inherit eternal life” in 19:29.]	10:23, 24, 25 [same as Matt. except only] enter the kingdom of God	18:24, 25 [same as Mark]
19:28–29 At the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you... will inherit eternal life .	10:29–30 [same as Matt. except] in the age to come	18:30 [same as Mark]
22:23–33 Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection....Jesus replied, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection.... people will neither marry....He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”	12:19–27 [same as Matt.]	20:27–38 [same as Matt. except specifies or adds] this age, that age, can no longer die , are God’s children...for to him all are alive
25:34, 46 Take your inheritance, the kingdom.... The righteous [will go] to eternal life .		

pels, eternal life will be granted at Jesus’ Second Coming. See Chart D. As Jesus said in a description of that coming: “Then [the wicked] will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to **eternal life**” (Matt. 25:46; cf. 7:14). He identified that life with fullness of life in

the kingdom He will then inaugurate: “Take **your inheritance, the kingdom** prepared for you” (Matt. 25:34; cf. 19:16–29).

To reiterate, the Synoptic Gospels all say that believers will get eternal life when Jesus comes again. But the Gospel of John adds quotations to the effect that we already have it.

“Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me **has eternal life** and will not be condemned; he **has crossed over from death to life.**” (John 5:24)

Similarly, John writes his first epistle so that we can “know that we **have passed from death to life**” (1 John 3:14; cf. 5:13). Such statements seem to contradict the verses that promise immortality at the resurrection. Actually, John has quotations on both sides of this question, even in the same context. That is true in the context of John 5:24. Notice that some of these statements agree with the first three Gospels and make the gift of life future.

Just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it...A time is coming and has now come, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and **those who hear will live**...A time is coming when all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good **will rise to live**, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.³⁴ (John 5:21, 25, 28–29)

Both sides are true: We already have eternal life but will get it fully in the resurrection. This affects our interpretation of “life...to the full” in John 10:10, which cannot be limited to what we already have.³⁵ John’s writings do not deny the basic facts of the good news—but they supplement those facts. John neither contradicts nor discounts the huge change that awaits us at the resurrection. But he emphasizes the assurance we already have by faith and by the gift of the Spirit and His work in our lives. He dwells on the fact stated in 1 Corinthians 3:22, that even the future is ours already.³⁶

The Book of Acts is like the Synoptic Gospels in respect to “life” as the goal of faith. In this sense it usually or always refers to life in the future.³⁷

Acts 3:15—you killed the author of life
Acts 5:20—the full message of this new life
Acts 11:18—repentance that leads to life
Acts 13:46—not...worthy of eternal life
Acts 13:48—appointed for eternal life
[also probably implied by “the Way”: Acts 9:2; 19:23; 24:14]

The same thing is true in the Epistles.

Romans 5:21—grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life
Romans 6:22—the result is eternal life
Romans 6:23—the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life

Galatians 6:8—from the Spirit will reap eternal life

Titus 1:2—the hope of eternal life [also 3:7], which God...promised

James 1:12—when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life

One more point. It is obvious that we obtain eternal life by hearing His word and believing it. Genuine faith in Him, the kind that perseveres, is the only requirement from us.

C. Destruction of the Wicked

Nearly all relevant Scriptures point to ultimate destruction of the wicked.

The articles under this section will show (a) that most biblical references to the judgment of the wicked point to their destruction and (b) that neither God's character nor poetic nor parabolic descriptions require His tormenting them forever.

17. Pictures of fire or unquenchable fire imply destruction (A10, contra B10). One of the best-known pictures of non-ending destruction is the last verse of Isaiah, often reflected in the New Testament:

And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind. (Isa. 66:24)

Is there anything about these “dead bodies,” “their worm,” or “their fire” that suggests unending consciousness? Instead, they picture unremitting (nonstop) destruction of the wicked. Mark 9:43–48 warns about being thrown into the same place: “hell, where the fire never goes out...is not quenched” and where “their worm does not die.” Consider two more typical examples where the Gospels use the same pictures.

- John the Baptist praised the One who would come after him. First, that One would baptize not in water like John, but in the Spirit. Also He would judge, “gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Matt. 3:12). The interpreter must decide which of the following is the meaning of “unquenchable fire.”

Chart E “Unquenchable fire” in Matthew 3:12 Does it refer to...		
TIME?	OR	POWER?
how long it burns		how strong it is
that it will never be put out		that it cannot be put out

If the phrase refers to time, what the fire burns might remain whole and conscious forever. If it refers to power, it **cannot be put out** until it finishes consuming! The fact that John pictures chaff burning in this fire favors the power meaning. Chaff does not last long in fire.³⁸

- A second example concludes the Lord’s parable of the Wheat and the Weeds. The owner of the field represents the Lord Himself when He returns to set up His kingdom. Notice, when He instructs the harvesters, what the purpose of the fire is: “First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles **to be burned** [Gr. *katakousai*, to be burned up]; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn” (Matt. 13:30). He repeats that purpose when He later explains the parable:

As the weeds are pulled up and **burned** [Gr. *katakaietai*, burned up] **in the fire**, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. (Matt. 13:40–43)³⁹

The fire will burn up the wicked, which would normally mean destroy them.⁴⁰ But in the “furnace...there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Does that mean that they will weep forever and never be destroyed? Only a pre-conceived notion would so insist.

18. The wicked will be raised, not to live but only to be judged and punished (contra B9-10). “Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment” (Heb. 9:27). All Christians believe that it is the Lord Jesus “whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead” (Acts 10:42). He will not only judge the living, as just seen in Matthew 13, but also the dead. “All who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise **to live**, and those who have done evil will rise **to be condemned**” (John 5:28–29). Reread my comments on this passage in Article 16. As noted there, in these words Jesus contrasts **future living** with **future being condemned**. As in other Scriptures, the unrepentant are not promised immortality but punishment. Both good and evil will be judged, but only the good will “live” (A7).

The same thing is pictured in Revelation 20:11–15. The apostle first saw “a great white throne and him who was seated on it” (Rev. 20:11). Then he “saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne” to be judged (20:12). “The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done” (20:13). The most important criterion in that judgment will be whether “anyone’s name [is] found written in the book of life” (20:15). Nevertheless, “what they had done as recorded in the books” (20:12) will be made public, for the righteous as well as the wicked. The whole universe will then see the “evidence that God’s judgment is right” (2 Thess. 1:5). The same purpose, principles, and results for the judgment are seen also in Romans 2:1–16 and Matthew 25:31–46. In each passage Jesus is the Judge. In each passage He judges both the godly and the ungodly according to their works. In each passage He gives eternal life (also called “immortality” in Rom. 2:7) only to the godly (A7).⁴¹

19. Punishment in “the lake of fire, [which] is the second death,” points to extinction (A10, contra B3, 5, 10). Revelation 20:11–15 concludes with the outcome of the judgment, primarily for the wicked. “Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:14–15). Observe three things about this outcome.

- John saw each person judged “according to what he had done” (Rev. 20:13; cf. v. 12 and Rom. 2:6). This criterion, often repeated in Scripture, is here applied only to the condemned, who will have missed the “first resurrection” (Rev. 20:5-6). Its normal meaning, in agreement with various Scriptures (see Articles 22 and 23), would imply *different sentences* for different sinners. Not all the ungodly will receive the same punishment. Either the length or the severity (or both) of suffering in the lake of fire will vary depending on one’s works.
- Since fire and death both point to destruction, that lake needs to exist only until destruction is complete. Later we will consider certain passages that seem to make the lake eternal.
- Throwing death and Hades [their contents?] into that lake (Rev. 20:13) marks the end of those two. (Is there a better suggestion of what it means?) This is confirmed by the expression “no more death” in Revelation 21:4. The complete end of death contradicts the idea that it means separation from God rather than ultimate extinction. If it meant separation, the unsaved would continue in “death” forever; it would never cease!

20. The similar figure of speech *Gehenna* (“hell”) also points to extinction (A10). Final punishment is pictured in different ways. Sometimes it is a horrible darkness (e.g., Matt. 22:13; 25:30). More often, it is a fire in *Gehenna* (e.g., Matt. 5:29, 30), usually translated “hell.”⁴² Apparently *Gehenna* is equivalent to the lake of fire. Its name came from the Valley of Hinnom outside the wall of Jerusalem, where fires continually consumed garbage. Hell is awful, as our Lord implied twice in one sermon: “It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” (Matt. 5:29 and 30). That punishment will be irreversible, eternal (*aiônios*) like immortality (Matt. 25:46). It should make us “be afraid of the One

who can **destroy both soul and body** in hell” (Matt. 10:28). As you have seen before, hell fire will torment those in it but its main function will be to destroy. The Greek verb in Matthew 10:28 is *apolesai* (from *apollumi*). This verb and cognate nouns refer not to torment but to loss or destruction in many aspects.⁴³ As pointed out in an earlier note, the process is sometimes pictured using the common verb for “eating” (Heb. 10:27, “raging fire that **will consume** the enemies of God”). Psalm 104:35 uses the same picture: “Let the sinners **be consumed** out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more” (KJV). It seems unreasonable to insist that anyone would survive after God destroys both soul and body by His consuming fire.

Other words for destruction. Besides *apollumi* there are many other verbs and nouns that usually or often mean *destroy* or *destruction*. Below are some samples (using the KJV). The first three are Hebrew, which has many verbs with that meaning. The rest are Greek, selected, along with cognate and combined forms, from only one family.

- *abad, destroy* (Lev. 23:30), *perish* (Ps. 73:27)
- *shakat, mar or ruin things* (Lev. 19:27), *destroy people* (Gen. 7:4)
- *shamad, destroy* (Deut. 1:27), *annihilate, exterminate* (Gen. 34:30, lexicon BDB)
- *phtheiro, destroy* (1 Cor. 3:17), *corrupt* (Rev. 19:2)
- *phthartos, mortal (corruptible, Rom. 1:23)*
- *aphthartos* (the opposite of *phthartos*), *immortal, incorruptible*. Describes God (Rom. 1:23), the Christian inheritance (1 Peter 1:4), the seed for our new birth (1 Peter 1:23).
- *diaphtheiro, kill* (in battle), *destroy* (“*destroy them which destroy the earth,*” Rev. 11:18). Even about Christians: “*though our outward man perish*” (2 Cor. 4:16).
- *phthora, corruption* (Gal. 6:8; Rom. 8:21. In the latter text NIV says “bondage to *decay*”).

Nearly every such word has its own range of meanings. Occasionally a word clearly implies annihilation. For example, material things are “*destined to perish [eis phthoran] with use*” (Col. 2:22). But mostly the goal of each passage is destruction without regard to any kind of later survival or non-survival. So it is hard to prove that these words imply annihilation, but even harder to prove that they imply survival.⁴⁴

21. The Bible indicates that Hades/Sheol is temporary. The King James Version uses the word *hell* to translate both *Gehenna* and *Hades*. (In Matt. 16:18 KJV says “gates of hell” but NIV says “gates of Hades.”) But that is misleading; the terms are not synonymous. Hades, usually equivalent to Hebrew *Sheol*, represented to Jews and others the destiny of all who die, not just the wicked. Sometimes (as in Matt. 16:18) it meant death. But usually it meant the grave or the supposed place of disembodied “spirits.” Hades was not *Gehenna* but, in Jesus’ time, included *Gehenna*. For example, in Jesus’ parable in Luke 16:19–30, the formerly rich man found himself “in Hades [literally], where he was in torment” (16:23). Jews would understand that Lazarus was in Hades also (16:22), in a different compartment separated by a “great chasm” (16:26).

But the concept of Hades was not wholly true to divine revelation. It was a cultural construct until the coming of “Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light” (2 Tim. 1:10). If the concept was flawed, why then did God make use of it? As a bridge to the truth—the same reason He uses many flawed words and concepts. Remember the example I gave earlier from the Book of Job. In that book God quoted from Job’s friends many high-sounding but wrong opinions, which He twice blasted in Job 42:7–9. Similarly, He did not expunge wrong attitudes and words from some of the psalms. This fact affects our interpretation of the startling poetry in Isaiah 14:9–20, about “the spirits of the departed” in Sheol. In their shadowy bodies they “**rise from their thrones**” (Isa. 14:9) to greet and taunt “the king of Babylon,” who comes to join them (14:4). Should we accept that picture as sober theology? That is doubtful. Furthermore, don’t forget that even what is true about Hades is temporary. As you saw in Revelation 20:13, Hades and death will both be brought to an end in the lake of fire. They are not everlasting.

22. God will not keep men alive to punish them forever (A10). I have affirmed that “destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28) suggests extinction. How long will that take? In other words, how long will the wicked be punished? God instructs us in Isaiah 28:23–29 how to apply measured punishment that fits the crime. “When a farmer plows for planting, does he plow continually? Does he keep on breaking up and harrowing the soil?” (Isa. 28:24). Of course not, because “His God instructs him” (28:26). Accordingly, Jesus will not give the same punishment to everyone but “to each person **according to** what he has done.” Yet, current tradition says that He will not destroy anyone but will keep them alive and punish them forever. This creates a moral dilemma. Why would the Son or His Father endlessly punish sins committed during this brief life?

Those who believe in unending punishment recognize our human ignorance and the conjectural nature of our answers. Yet, to resolve this dilemma they venture some suggestions, such as the following. (a) The heinous nature of sin derives not from its duration but from the Person who is sinned against. (b) The sin of the ungodly will never cease, since they will never repent. In regard to the first suggestion, no parent, however holy—and especially if holy—would require what unending conscious punishment suggests about God. No matter how heinous the offence, it would not justify unending retribution.⁴⁵ In regard to the second suggestion, Revelation 22:11 may agree, “Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong....” But the story of the rich man and Lazarus shows at least a change in attitude after death, regret if not repentance—though it was too late. Also, if mortal men continue to sin forever, it will only be because God keeps them alive to do so.

To repeat, conditional immortality teaches that punishment by God will be measured and finite. Therefore, it does not create a moral dilemma about His nature.

23. Other figures describing divine punishment point to its limited nature. The Lord will make the punishment fit the crime. He will follow His own instructions in Isaiah 28:23–29 (see above) of how to apply measured punishment. The figures used there—plowing the soil, breaking it up, harrowing it—are common ones for divine punishment. Jesus added that it will be “more bearable” for some than for others (Matt. 11:22–24).⁴⁶ That will require different degrees or durations of punishment, or both. He further warned that some will receive “many blows”; others, “few blows” (Luke 12:41–48). How could such language mean unending punishment?

Consider the perplexity of one who believes that the ungodly will live forever. Discussing “Degrees of Punishment,” Ajith Fernando insists on differences:

The Bible also teaches that the sinfulness of some people is more serious than that of others, and that those whose sinfulness is more serious are headed for a more serious punishment. There are many places in Scripture where this is either taught or implied. (p. 33)

He discusses examples of this principle in Matthew 11:20–24; Luke 12:47, 48; Hebrews 10:26–29; and Revelation 20:12, 13; then comes to this interesting conclusion:

So in hell everyone will not suffer to the same extent. But we do not know in what ways this suffering will be different. (p. 35)

Too bad he couldn’t accept conditional immortality, which provides the best explanation. The ungodly will not live forever but only until their punishment is finished.

24. Even apocalyptic descriptions of unending torment do not prove that all are immortal. As pointed out earlier, pictures of unquenchable fire do not imply immortality. The accompanying “weeping and gnashing of teeth” will last only as long as the punishment does. This fits the considerable evidence that immortality is conditional. In spite of such evidence, however, there are descriptions of apparently endless torment. In Chart F is the clearest one, with parallels.

Unending torment. In Chart F notice Revelation 14:9–11 in the left column and Revelation 20:10 in the middle column. They go further than the last verse of Isaiah (66:24) by picturing unending torment in a “lake of burning sulfur.” This torment will not be hidden but “in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb.” It is “for those who worship the beast” and for the devil, the beast, and the false prophet. It will continue “day and night for ever and ever.”

Chart F An Apocalyptic Description of Unending Torment (Paralleled words are bolded.)		
Revelation 14:9–11	Parallels in Revelation	Parallels in Isaiah 34
<p>9...If anyone worships the beast... 10 he, too [like Babylon the Great], will drink of the wine of God’s fury.... He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. 11 And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast....</p>	<p>19:3 The smoke from [the great prostitute] goes up for ever and ever. 19:20...The [beast & the false prophet] were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. 20:10 And the devil...was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. 21:8 But the cowardly... their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.</p>	<p>9 Edom’s streams will be turned into pitch, her dust into burning sulfur; her land will become burning pitch! 10 It will not be quenched night and day; its smoke will rise forever. From generation to generation it will lie desolate; no one will ever pass through it again.</p>

Apocalyptic hyperbole. These pictures are awful. Yet, like the parallel quoted from Isaiah 34 (in the third column of Chart F), they are not intended to be interpreted literally. As many interpreters recognize, they are a feature of the “apocalyptic literature” used throughout Revelation. Apocalyptic literature presents realities, including spiritual realities, in highly figurative forms.⁴⁷ I will quote two more of the examples of apocalyptic hyperbole in Revelation:

- Under the seventh bowl of God’s wrath, John saw the greatest earthquake in history take place (Rev. 16:17–19). Then “**every island fled away and the mountains could not be found**” (16:20). However, this overturn is not as absolute as it sounds. It leads to the conflict of Armageddon (19:19–21) and the ensuing reign of peace (ch. 20) on the same earth.⁴⁸
- “Earth and sky fled...**and there was no place for them**” (Rev. 20:11). This description also seems absolute but is not. Right after it, the earth is still there, because “the sea gave up the dead” (Rev. 20:13).

There are also Old Testament apocalypses that shed light on Revelation 14:11 and 20:10. For example, compare a description from the “Isaiah Apocalypse” (Isa. 24–27): “The earth falls,

never to rise again” (Isa. 24:20). This result looks eternal, but it is not. It is followed by “On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast” (Isa. 25:6–8). Similarly, the third column of Chart F quotes from Isaiah 34:9–10. That is a poetic picture of punishment similar to Revelation 14:11 but referring to a whole country. Edom’s “burning sulfur [and] blazing pitch...**will not be quenched night and day; its smoke will rise forever. From generation to generation it will lie desolate; no one will ever pass through it again.**” Sounds eternal, doesn’t it? Yet, the next verses (Isa. 35) picture a restored world and mankind, which many prophecies describe as universal. In that kingdom “the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9). Such a world would leave no trace of a smoking Edom. Whether the same area gets transformed or all gets replaced, in either case the absolute language is not literal.

I conclude that the few pictures of continued punishment may be hyperbolic. They should not be pressed to contradict descriptions of the new earth—or other doctrine already established, such as, conditional immortality.

25. The story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31) does not prove immortality.

This was a parable Jesus spoke to Pharisees (16:14).⁴⁹ In it are certain details relevant to our discussion. A formerly rich man found himself “in hell [Gr. *Hades*], where he was in torment”⁵⁰ (16:23). He begged Abraham to send Lazarus “to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire” (16:24). Failing that, he asked Abraham to send Lazarus to his five brothers and “warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment” (16:27–28). So the story certainly emphasizes suffering in Hades. Will that suffering last forever? There is no indication in the story; nothing there requires that the wicked will live forever. So it is unlikely that Jesus was here teaching the Pharisees unending torment in hell.

Furthermore, He did not intend for anyone to take most of the details literally. His purpose was to show the Pharisees how ungodly, perverse, and fatal their priorities were. To do so, He borrowed concepts from Jewish rabbis.

It is no purpose of the parable to give information about the unseen world...The details of the picture are taken from Jewish beliefs as to the condition of souls in Sheol, and must not be understood as confirming those beliefs.⁵¹

It is risky to make this parable a key source of information about the afterlife; parts of it are untrue to doctrinal teaching elsewhere. For example, we have seen that punishment will be assigned after the resurrection and judgment—not at death. And those in torment will not be able to talk to Father Abraham. Since Jesus here adapted typical Jewish teachings, we must assume that His lessons are limited to points He emphasized, such as

- the rich man’s selfish profligacy and lack of compassion for miserable Lazarus
- the great reversal of their conditions after death, comfort for one and torment for the other
- the awfulness of the unrelieved torment

- the finality of mindset in this life
- the sufficiency of God’s Word, rather than experience, to convict people

26. “Eternal punishment” does not require unending existence as does “eternal life.”

Then [the wicked] will go away to **eternal punishment** (*kolasin aionion*), but the righteous to **eternal life** (*zoen aionion*). (Matt. 25:46)

Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the **earth** will awake: some to **everlasting** (*aionion*) life, others to shame and **everlasting** (*aionion*) **contempt**. (Daniel 12:2)

The first quotation gives the last words of the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24–25). This verse labels both the final verdicts, for the wicked and the righteous, as “eternal” (Gr. *aionion*). It is probably the verse most relied on to teach immortality for everybody. The verse in Daniel is a close parallel—the Greek version of it using the same adjective *aionion* (for Hebrew *’olam*) in the same two positions. Since both verdicts are called “eternal,” many assume that both will be unending and unchanging: that just as the righteous will live and never die, the wicked will be punished—and punished more—and never die. But neither the adjective *eternal* nor the verdict for the wicked requires that.

- This adjective *aionios*, like Hebrew (*ad*) *’olam*, can mean unending, but not necessarily. Sometimes it is used for things that looked unending but had or will have an end. For examples, see Genesis 49:26 (mountains), Exodus 40:15 (the Aaronic priesthood), Leviticus 16:34 (the ordinance for the Day of Atonement), and Psalm 24:7 (the doors of ancient Jerusalem or the temple). All of these ended or will end. Equivalent forms of the same root are used in the same way. The adverbial phrase *eis ton aiona*, for example, can also imply either no end or simply long duration. In the latter sense it tells how long “Naaman’s leprosy” would cling to Gehazi and his descendants (2 Kings 5:27). The adverb *aionion* is similar. Paul wrote Philemon about his slave, “Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back **for good** [*aionion*]” (Philemon 15).
- The verdict for those made immortal will, *by definition*, be eternal, unending life. But *if the wicked are really mortal*, their verdict will result in oblivion. In both cases the verdict itself will be final and unchangeable (*aionios*) and appropriate for the final age (*aion*). Thus, Matthew 25:46 could be paraphrased, “These wicked people will go into irreversible punishment, but the righteous ones into unending life.”

The word for “punishment” (Gr. *kolasin*) in this verse can imply severe pain.⁵² How can such punishment be eternal if the condemned person ceases to exist? The answer is that the punishment refers primarily to the final goal, the result: not unending pain but extinction. For anyone not given immortality (Rom. 2:7), the eternal punishment is extinction. God will “destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). The duration of the pain, whether “many blows” or “few blows” (Luke 12:47-48), will be determined by the perfectly just One.⁵³

The “**everlasting destruction**” (*olethron aionion*) mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 1:9 is probably the same judgment as in Matthew 25.⁵⁴ Its execution will be swift. Its *source* will be God’s presence and power, as seen in the KJV translation of the verse:

Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction
from (*apo*) the presence of the Lord and **from** (*apo*) the glory of his power.

This takes the repeated Greek preposition *apo* to indicate source, as it does in Revelation 1:4, 5 and 12:6. Some versions, however, change its meaning here to indicate the location where these people are punished (“away from” God). To support that change they add a second verb, “and *shut out*,” after the word “destruction.” Thus, they wrongly make the verse say where these people are when punished, rather than the source of the punishment. They also imply that the people and punishment *continue*, which the original does not imply.

D. A World Without Evil

God’s purpose for the Messiah (Christ) requires for the wicked to cease to exist.

The articles in this section show (a) that immortality for the wicked would frustrate God’s purpose for our Lord Jesus, the Messiah, (b) that preaching non-ending conscious punishment may detract from, rather than add to, His honor.

27. God’s purpose to sum up everything in Christ implies extinction of the wicked. One title for the Messiah is “Son of God.” Above all, this refers to the fact that He is God’s Heir (Ps. 2:7–8; cf. Rom. 8:17; Gal. 4:7). God’s purpose for His Heir accounts for everything else He does. It is the key to the “mystery” (revealed secret) preached by all the apostles and elaborated by that name in Ephesians. As stated in Ephesians 1:9–10, God will “bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.”⁵⁵ But this purpose produces a dilemma: How can all be unified under one head if wickedness and its punishment continue forever? That is just what will happen if every human being will live forever. Some answer that everybody will eventually be saved (universalism). But that conclusion is wrong and contradicts many Scriptures (e.g., John 3:36: “whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him”). So the best answer is the one argued in these pages, that evil will finally cease to exist. Only the immortal will survive.

28. It does not honor Christ to preach eternal punishment in order to get more to repent. Certainly punishment in hell will be horrible. We should warn men as Jesus did. But practical considerations should not determine the duration we assign to that punishment, nor any of our theology. Yet, they sometimes do. As noted before, missionary evangelist Ajith Fernando wrote a chapter titled “What about Annihilationism?” In it he does not consider many of the issues I

have raised, including those from Genesis and 1 Timothy 6:16. Yet, he concludes with this practical argument.

Annihilation is very similar to what orthodox Buddhists view as salvation. In the Buddhist scheme the devotee achieves *Nirvana* after a long climb representing numerous rebirths. The *Nirvana* of orthodox Buddhism is quite similar to the annihilation we are responding to here. What to the Buddhist is a reward after climbing a difficult path is similar to the punishment for sin in the eyes of the annihilationist! This has prompted someone to speak of the “bliss of annihilation.”

We will show in Chapter 12 that the prospect of hell is a key source of motivation to repentance....Having spent my life in ministry working with Buddhists, I know how hard it is for them to make their final decision to break with the religion of their people in order to follow Christ. Many who are convinced of the truth about Jesus are yet reluctant to commit themselves to him because of the costliness of such a step. Why should such a person bother to pay this price if the consequence of rejecting Christ is so similar to their goal of *Nirvana*?⁵⁶

Fernando’s argument is purely practical and non-biblical. But even from that viewpoint, it is not certain. Teaching non-ending punishment may turn away from Christ more people than it wins.

E. Church Fathers on Immortality

The early Church Fathers believed in conditional immortality.

The articles in this section (a) quote representative Fathers to show their belief, then (b) suggest that the current tradition of innate immortality was reinforced by Platonic Dualism and Gnosticism.

29. None of the Apostolic Fathers believed that all are immortal. The Apostolic Fathers were the earliest writers in the church after the Bible canon was completed. Froom extensively quotes them (and others) to show that innate immortality was not taught until after A.D. 155. Among the early ones he cites are Barnabas (ca. 140) and Shepherd of Hermas (ca. 154). After the Apostolic Fathers (and just before and after A.D. 200) he cites, among others, the Apologist Justin Martyr and the bishop Irenaeus. For example, he quotes from Justin extensively to show him opposing the notion of innate immortality. Of course, even the earlier Fathers must be measured by the Bible; they were not always right.⁵⁷

Sample quotations from the Fathers’ writings. These are copied from Froom with emphasis and glosses he adds.⁵⁸

It is well, therefore, that he who has learned the judgments of the Lord, as many as have been written, should walk in them. For he who keepeth these shall be glorified in the

kingdom of God; but he who chooseth other things [condemned in the previous chapter] shall be **destroyed with his works**. On this account there will be a resurrection, on this account a retribution. (*The Epistle of Barnabas*, ca. A.D. 130–140)

They only who fear the Lord and keep His commandments have **life with God**; but as to those who keep not His commandments, **there is no life in them**. (*The Shepherd of Hermas*, ca. A.D. 154)

Thou shalt despise that which is here esteemed to be death, when thou shalt fear what is **truly** death, which is reserved for those who shall be condemned to the eternal fire, which shall afflict those **even to the end** that are committed to it. Then shalt thou admire those who for righteousness' sake endure the fire that is but for a moment, and shalt count them happy when thou shalt know [the nature of] **that** fire. (*Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus*, ca. A.D. 130 or later)

But some one will say to us, Was man made by nature mortal? Certainly not. Was he, then, immortal? Neither do we affirm this. But one will say, Was he, then, nothing? Not even this hits the mark. **He was by nature neither mortal nor immortal**. For if He had made him immortal from the beginning, He would have made him God [like]. Again, if He had made him mortal, God would seem to be the cause of his death. Neither, then, immortal nor yet mortal did He make him, **but**, as we have said above, **capable of both**; so that if he should incline to the things of immortality, keeping the commandment of God, he should receive as **reward** from Him immortality, and should become God [like]; but if, on the other hand, he should turn to the things of death, disobeying God, he should himself be the cause of death to himself. (Theophilus of Antioch, died ca. A.D. 180)

Froom has many pages of quotations from Justin Martyr (ca. A.D. 165), first and most prolific of the Apologists. Some of Justin's phrases are often misinterpreted to mean eternal conscious punishment. Two examples are "to undergo everlasting punishment" and "suffer punishment in eternal fire." But Justin explicitly declares that when the fires have done their work, the wicked "shall cease to exist" (Second Apology, chapter 7).⁵⁹ Elsewhere, he says that the wicked will be punished "so long as God wills them to exist and to be punished" (*Dialogue with Trypho*, chapter 5). Here are further examples.

Now the soul partakes of life, since God wills it to live. Thus, then, it will not even partake [of life] when God does not will it to live. For to live is not its attribute, as it is God's; but as a man does not live always, and the soul is not for ever conjoined with the body, since, whenever this harmony must be broken up, the soul leaves the body, and the man exists no longer; even so, whenever the soul must cease to exist, the spirit of life is removed from it, and there is no more soul, but it goes back to the place from whence it was taken. (Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapter 6)

If you have fallen in with some who are called Christians, but who do not admit this [truth], and venture to blaspheme the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; who say there is no resurrection of the dead, and that their souls, when they die, are

taken to heaven; do not imagine that they are Christians. (Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapter 80)

He [Christ] shall raise all men from the dead, and appoint **some** to be incorruptible, immortal, and free from sorrow in the everlasting and imperishable kingdom; but shall send **others** away to the everlasting punishment of fire. (Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapter 117)

Although the church soon adopted the belief in innate immortality, there were always dissenters. Martin Luther is an example.⁶⁰ However, this paper is primarily concerned with Scriptural proofs.

30. The current belief in innate immortality was partly due to Platonism and Gnosticism. **Platonic Dualism** teaches that there are two basic, eternal essences in this world, not just one. Those who agree with it suppose that in addition to God and His people, even the souls of evil men will exist forever.⁶¹ Although that belief was essential to Platonic thought, it did not begin showing up in Christian theology until about A.D. 220. When Christians accepted Platonism, they had to conclude that both the evil and the righteous are innately immortal. They had to redefine eternal life. The first ones to adopt aspects of that philosophy were Alexandrian Fathers, such as, Clement and Origen. Earlier fathers, as you have seen in the previous article, had rejected Platonism. Genesis and other books did not reflect it.

But when Bible students read Genesis through Platonic spectacles, they find what is not there. They assume that when God breathed life into man, it made him immortal. Some think that living forever is implied by being in God's image. Furthermore, to them living forever must not require a body. Death is reinterpreted; it no longer means cessation of the person but separation of soul from body. Eternal life is no longer the same as immortality; it becomes primarily qualitative rather than quantitative. At death the immortal soul receives its reward; it need not await the resurrection or the judgment. And so on.

Gnosticism soon came into the church like a flood and, though later rejected in general, affected many beliefs. Gnosticism dislikes all things material, including man's nature and God's many promises of a material kingdom.⁶² Along with Platonic Dualism, it helped condition many teachers to redefine the predicted kingdom. That redefinition began in the third century and was general by the time Constantine merged state and church. Augustine helped convince the majority, as today, that the church itself is the promised kingdom. Such developments have made real immortality and the resurrection seem unimportant. But they have not altered man's real nature nor God's glorious plans.

In conclusion read the summaries in the two charts that follow and weigh the evidence. Chart G lists the best arguments for eternal torment. Chart H lists some of the biblical evidence you have seen favoring or agreeing with conditional immortality.

Chart G The Most-Used Scriptural Arguments for Eternal Torment

(Weigh these against the evidence for Conditional Immortality.)

Luke 16:19–31, Jesus’ parable of the Rich Man & Lazarus, pictures continual torment but does not imply how long it will last. Must we derive doctrines even from parabolic details that disagree with usual teaching?

Revelation 14:9–11, with a parallel in 20:10, pictures eternal torment. However, these are like other highly-figurative, hyperbolic descriptions typical of apocalyptic literature (see Rev. 16:17–20; 20:11; Isa. 24:20; 25:6–8; 34:9–10). Are they to be interpreted literally or as figurative hyperboles, like the similar descriptions?

Matthew 25:46 puts “eternal punishment” and “eternal life” side by side. The latter by definition requires unending existence. Does the former require the same?

Chart H Some Scriptural Teachings Supporting Conditional Immortality

(The numbers after each item are for my articles in this writing.)

God “alone is immortal,” but man is mortal and perishable. 1, 4

Mortal man can live forever only if he complies with God’s conditions and God grants it. 2, 16

In man’s case immortality is not survival of the soul but eternal life in a glorified body. 1, 3, 4, 14

After the Fall God defined Adam’s death as material (returning to the dust), which implies that when man gains immortality, it will also be material. 4, 7, 9

The main New Testament commentary on Adam’s sin and death (Rom. 5:12–21) assumes and implies, like Genesis, that man’s death and eternal life are basically material. 8, 11

Immortality is sometimes equated with the eternal life that God will grant only to believers. 2, 16

Only when/after He raises the dead to judge them, will Jesus make some imperishable. 14, 15

He will raise the wicked only to judge and destroy them, not to make them “live.” 18

The New Testament presents as our goal and inheritance not death but resurrection and the subsequent glory of the kingdom. 5, 13, 14, 15

The promised kingdom will be both spiritual and material, requiring that its heirs have eternal bodies. 12

The purpose of Christ’s dying in His first coming was to make immortal those people who will inherit the kingdom in His Second Coming. 10, 12, 13

Believers are chosen to rule in “the world to come,” where they will always eat from the tree of life. 5

Admission to or exclusion from the tree of life pictures giving or denying immortality. 6, 9

Although the apostle John emphasizes our present preliminary possession of eternal life, he also ratifies its fullness in the coming resurrection. 16

Pictures of judgment fire nearly always imply destruction, with torment incidental. 17, 19, 20

Just as death and Hades will be thrown into the lake of fire to be terminated, so will ungodly people. 19, 21

Warnings to “be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28) imply an end to such people. 20

Jesus’ parable of the Rich Man & Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31) pictures continual torment but does not imply how long it will last. 25

Though God used Hebrew concepts of Hades/Sheol, He did not fully endorse them. 21

Since God teaches us to apply punishment in measure, He will not punish all wicked people with equal severity or equally long. 22, 23

God’s purpose to “bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” would be spoiled if the wicked continued forever. 27

Appendix: What Is Immortality?

*Here I will show two answers suggested by Larry Dixon in his book The Other Side of the Good News (Wheaton, IL: SP Publications, 1992). His answer pertaining to the godly seems basically correct. His answer pertaining to all men seems both inaccurate and lacking proof. **When I quote from his book, italics will be his but bolding will be mine.***

What Is Immortality? It depends on whom you ask, and when. Here I will show that Larry Dixon defines it two ways on the same pages. In *The Other Side of the Good News*, he defends what for conservatives nowadays is the traditional view of hell. That view, which he labels “orthodox,” includes eternal existence for every human being and eternal torment of the wicked. I consider the biblical teaching to be conditional immortality, which means eternal life/existence only for those who believe in Jesus.

If you look up “immortality” in Dixon’s index, it says the definition is on page 76. That page is in Chapter 3: “The Other Side: Will It Have Any Permanent Occupants” (pp. 69-96). In that chapter Dixon responds to annihilationism (conditional immortality), especially as advocated by John R.W. Stott and Clark H. Pinnock. He quotes Pinnock’s concern that “to be tortured forever and ever...is both morally intolerable and...biblically unnecessary” (pp. 70-74). He then follows “Stott’s four lines of argument *against* the traditional view”: namely, Scriptural Language, Scriptural Imagery, Scriptural Justice, and Scriptural Universalism. I will limit my comments to the “Language” part (pp. 74-79).

The page for the definition of immortality falls in the subsection labeled “Misunderstood Orthodoxy.” But Dixon never says just what it is. He quotes from other traditional writers—and comments on them—but leaves the defining to us readers. For example, read his discussion of the immortality all men supposedly share. He quotes Alan Gomes, who

responds to the charge that the Orthodox have **adopted** the Platonic concept of an **immortal, indestructible soul**. [Instead, he claims they got the concept from the Bible.] Orthodox Christians hold that **the soul’s immortality** is not an absolute but a *contingent immortality*. “The soul, as a created substance, depends on God’s providential support—just as all other created entities do...**not because it cannot be reduced to nothing** by God, but by God’s ordinance in and so far as it is indestructible by second causes...[It] *could be* annihilated by its primary cause, God.” (pp. 75-76)

Dixon’s first definition can be deduced: *Immortality is the eternal existence of all human souls.* God does not “reduce...to nothing” even the wicked man’s soul but sustains it and keeps him going in hell. As evidence, Dixon asserts that the Bible (a) often speaks of the dead as still existing (e.g., Luke 16:1-31); (b) often warns about events after death (e.g., Heb. 9:27); (c) never specifically teaches extinction. If the soul is immortal, that presumably involves the body, which Dixon does not discuss.

But Dixon also has a different definition. He quotes Murray Harris, who speaks of immortality given only to believers.

“[M]an was created neither immortal...nor mortal...but with the potentiality to become either, depending on his obedience or disobedience to God. While not created *with* immortality, he was certainly created *for* immortality. Potentially immortal by nature, man actually **becomes immortal through grace**....This does not imply that existence beyond death is conditional or that unbelievers will be annihilated...” because “in New Testament usage **immortality has positive content**, being more than mere survival beyond death, its opposite is not nonexistence, but the ‘second death’ (Rev. 20:6, 14) which involves exclusion from God’s presence...[F]orfeiture of immortality means the deprivation of **eternal blessedness** but not the destruction of personal existence. All human beings survive beyond death, but not all will become immortal in the Pauline sense.” (pp. 76-77)

Dixon’s second definition can now be deduced: *Immortality is the eternal life of blessedness promised to the godly only*. Dixon’s source specifically states that unbelievers will exist forever but without immortality! Once again, there is no discussion about the body, which should be included.

Next Dixon quotes Louis Berkhof, who refers to both kinds of immortality (unbolded words and bolded words):

“God is indeed the only one that has inherent immortality. Man’s immortality is derived, but this is not equivalent to saying that he does not possess it in virtue of his creation.... **Eternal life is indeed the gift of God in Jesus Christ, a gift which the wicked do not receive**, but this does not mean that they will not continue to exist.” (p. 77)

The first definition is implied by the unbolded words: Man has immortality “in virtue of his creation” and will “continue to exist.” The second definition is implied by the bolded words: “**Eternal life is the gift of God in Jesus Christ**”—not for the wicked. Notice that Berkhof does not here use the word *immortality* for the righteous nor *eternal life* for the wicked. Most traditional writers use both words only for the righteous.

My own argument is that the Bible not only equates eternal life with immortality, but attributes them both to the godly only. Immortality is conditional, implies an eternal body for man, but will not be given to the ungodly.

NOTES

¹ Even before his conversion Cornelius was “devout and God-fearing [and] gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly” (Acts 10:1-2). This was God’s own estimate, who “accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right” (10:35). Therefore, He had Cornelius send for Peter to “bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved” (11:14).

² Despite the lack of Scriptural support, universal salvation is a growing heresy. See Ajith Fernando’s chapter on this subject in *Crucial Questions*.

³ Of course, God’s Word also quotes wrong ideas, such as, those of Job’s friends and some sayings in the Psalms. There is progressive revelation, in which incomplete or distorted human views later get corrected. And there are literary genres like apocalyptic, in which exaggeration and metaphors are not supposed to be taken literally. Our basic approach should be literal but not blindly so.

⁴ To oppose current traditions can be unsafe for two reasons. (a) If one’s contrary view is completely new, it is nearly certainly wrong. (b) Religious leaders do not take kindly to opposition. Rarely can one convince them that their creed is faulty—or get them to consider arguments against it. Even “good friends” may suspect and reject the maverick. In some cases they prefer the approval of their group more than the approval of God (John 12:43).

⁵ The tradition that all men will live forever is now widespread. However, as I will show, it was not held by early Church Fathers. Neither was the current exaggerated form of “realized eschatology.” It has scant biblical support but much influence. It claims that many of the prophetic promises about the kingdom are being fulfilled for us in a different form. See my Article 5.

⁶ Pink’s influence is still strong. I must quote him with caution, for he says,

It is not our purpose to give a detailed and exhaustive exposition of Genesis, rather shall we attempt to single out some of the less obvious treasures from this wonderful mine, in which are stored inexhaustible supplies of spiritual riches. This first book in the Word of God is full of typical pictures, prophetic foreshadowings, and dispensational adumbrations, as well as important practical lessons, and it will be our delight to call attention to a few of these as we pass from chapter to chapter. (I:27)

In spite of writing 206 pages on Genesis 1–20, Pink does not comment on everything of importance there. So I will generally limit my quotations to what he does say repeatedly.

⁷ I was first introduced to this subject in the 1970s, when I read much of Froom’s exhaustive work on it. No doubt I still use some of his arguments, which I tested back then and got mostly tentative answers. But now I will try to give my own logic and exegetical results. I can only hope that some will face the biblical and historical issues in spite of Froom’s Seventh Day Adventism and my own lack of denominational credentials.

⁸ Some opponents try to change the meaning of immortality. (Perhaps they recognize what a powerful argument 1 Timothy 6:16 is for conditional immortality.) An example is N.D. George, who seems to contradict himself: “All men will exist forever, either in misery or bliss. This we should proclaim. But we have found no Scriptures which teach that all men are immortal.” Now note how George attributes a new meaning to 1 Timothy 6:16, which he thinks describes the Lord Jesus (though “invisible” shows it is God). The terms *immortal* and *immortality*, he says,

are generally considered, in the theological world, to mean, *eternal conscious being*; whereas the *Scriptural import* of these terms is, *eternal happiness*, being synonymous with the phrase “eternal life,” which always in the Scriptures means moral purity, coupled with that eternal blessedness which results therefrom... “The King eternal, immortal, invisible.” Now, if the term “immortal” in this text means eternal conscious being simply, how apparent its tautology! for precisely the same signification belongs to the preceding word “eternal.” But if it be understood to mean moral purity and blessedness, as belonging to Jesus Christ, and, therefore, to last forever, how strikingly beautiful is this passage! Eternal! that is, always existing. Immortal! that is, always pure and blessed. Invisible! that is, invisible to mortal eyes....The man Christ Jesus is the only man who has not

been affected by the fall, and who, consequently, did not suffer the loss of immortality by it. (*Annihilationism Not of the Bible*, 2nd ed. [New York: Carlton & Lanahan, 1871], 124–125; emphasis his)

It is true that immortality/eternal life is always associated with blessedness in the New Testament. However, that is not because the concept has that meaning but because only such people will attain it.

⁹ John’s Gospel quotes Jesus’ promise that whoever believes in Him “will never die” (John 11:26). A later article will address this special point of view recorded in John.

¹⁰ Apparently it is common to omit 1 Timothy 6:16 and the Genesis record from such discussions. John Piper omits them in his treatment in *Let the Nations Be Glad!: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 119–128. So does Fernando, whom Piper recommends for “a thorough assessment.”

¹¹ For our present purposes, it is immaterial whether the different descriptions of judgment refer to the same event or not. The important fact is that in each description the principles are the same.

¹² As in other pictures of the coming judgment, the apostle says that God “will give to each person according to what he has done” (Rom. 2:6). The words he quotes are from Psalms 62:12 and Proverbs 24:12 (also in Matt. 16:27). Twice in the following verses (Rom. 2:7, 10), he affirms that glory, honor, and immortality will be for those who “do good.” Since salvation is and will be by undeserved grace, why will good works be acknowledged? Not as earning merit but simply as public proof of saving faith (James 2:18, 26; Matt. 25:34–45).

¹³ The history in Genesis 1:1 to 2:3 is of the original creation, not—as some suppose—of a later re-creation. There are many clear statements to that effect, e.g., in Genesis 2:4 and Exodus 20:11.

¹⁴ Are human spirits conscious in heaven? Do they have interim bodies before the resurrection? Passages such as Matthew 17:3–4; Luke 23:43; John 8:56–57; Hebrews 12:23; Philippians 1:21–26; 2 Corinthians 5:3–9; and Revelation 7:9–17 may require yes answers to both questions. However, we can be sure that such a condition is temporary, to end at the resurrection.

¹⁵ I offer many biblical kingdom studies on my website, www.kingdominbible.com. Under the “Kingdom” category, for example, are “Did Jesus Establish His Kingdom?” and my key survey of “Christ’s Coming Kingdom.” There are also substantial studies of books, such as, Revelation, from the perspective of the kingdom.

¹⁶ Read Jesus’ promises in Matthew 13:40–41; 19:28–29; 25:31, 34, 46 to come and establish His kingdom. These picture the same kind of kingdom the earlier prophets pictured. We are not free to define it any way we wish; they defined it. No kingdom corresponding to those biblical descriptions has been initiated yet. See my website.

¹⁷ We should recognize that there is a certain amount of “realized eschatology.” Some eternal things have begun enough to strengthen our confidence in the coming kingdom. In my website see writings on this subject.

¹⁸ Hebrews 1:5–14 had quoted from seven passages showing the Son to be greater than the angels. They all pointed to His glory in the coming kingdom, in which He will have “companions” (1:9), “those who will inherit salvation” (1:14). Next, and closely related, is the first warning in the book (in 2:1–4), to “pay more careful attention” to what the Son said and “not drift away” from it. What the Son spoke about, and authenticated with many miracles, was “such a great salvation” (2:3). All of this, the book continues, is “the world to come, about which we are speaking” (2:5; cf. the future “salvation” in 1:14). Chapter 2 goes on to discuss the Son’s death as the means of “bringing many sons to glory” (2:10) in that world to come, the kingdom.

¹⁹ Many (most?) who consider the soul “immortal” seem obligated to define “death” in Genesis 2–3 as primarily spiritual. Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), calls physical death “additional.” Excerpts from his “Man on Probation” in the garden:

The penalty is death....“In the day you eat” is a Hebraism for “when you eat.” As God warns, at the time the man and woman usurp the role of God, they damage their relationship with God and with each other. Thus,

they die spiritually. The introduction of physical death is an additional judgment, but it is also a blessing, as we shall see. (260)

For Adam and Eve who die spiritually the moment they eat the fruit, [physical] death is a means of escape from the curse, and it opens the way to eternal salvation that outlasts the grave. Thus, death is our salvation so that we are not condemned to live forever in the fallen world. (267)

²⁰ Pink is not “intellectually challenged” nor dishonest. He finds many of his meanings by handling biblical history as an allegory: to him nearly everything has a hidden meaning superior to the literal one. This is also a common approach for conservatives elsewhere in Scriptures. In their effort to be relevant, for example, some preachers quite overlook the main importance of our Lord’s miracles. These were evidence that He is the One “to come,” the Messiah (Matt. 11:2-6). Instead, they consider them merely treasures of “spiritual lessons.”

²¹ Many well-known terms are used metaphorically without affecting the original meaning. For example, the “widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives” (1 Tim. 5:6). This picture of ruin and uselessness is not designed to redefine death.

²² I also deal with Romans 5:12–21 on my website.

²³ A sacrament both symbolizes and imparts divine grace. To believers, all good things are sacramental.

²⁴ In his book on hell Fernando does not even mention this evidence from Genesis.

²⁵ Compare the conclusions by another conservative writer. Allen P. Ross has written a helpful commentary on “Genesis” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty, Old Testament*, eds. Walvoord and Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985). But on Genesis 3:22–24 he says only this: “God would ensure...that they would not live forever in this state” (p. 33). Ross later published a 744 page book on Genesis: *Creation & Blessing: A Guide to the Study & Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988). In it he adds little about the curse of death. I will quote three paragraphs below. In the third paragraph notice the words I have bolded, which suggest that death seems to imply separation. However, I could find no passage where Ross substantiates that meaning for death—or even uses it in that sense. I carefully searched through his comments on Genesis up to the time of Abraham, also in his appendices.

- The only hope left from the oracles is that the human race will not live forever in this state—death will be a release—and that there will ultimately be victory over the seed of the serpent. (Ross, p. 148)
- The man’s difficult toil in life would continue until he died (a gracious provision in view of the suffering) and returned to dust to become the serpent’s prey once again (see v. 14). His death, then, would not only underscore the fact that the serpent caused death to replace life but also be a reminder that human beings were earthbound, dust. So much for ambitions of divinity. (Ross, p. 147)
- This **concept of death** needs thorough study because it is a major theme in Genesis, especially in the early part of the book concerning the spread of sin. **The basic idea seems to be more of alienation, or separation** rather than cessation or annihilation. The death predicted here certainly includes physical death, as Genesis 5 attests, but it involves **more than just physical death**, in view of the struggle in the surrounding context between God’s blessing and cursing. (Ross, p. 125)

²⁶ Many assume that John 10:10 refers to the present because John 5:24 looks at life as a present possession. See Article 16 about John 5:24.

²⁷ Many prophecies proclaim that God’s coming kingdom will last forever. Messiah “**will reign** over the house of Jacob **forever**; his kingdom will **never end**” (Luke 1:33; cf. Isa. 9:7). Yet, Revelation 20 several times speaks of reigning “a thousand years” (millennium), a relatively short period ending in judgment. Therefore, many interpreters speak of the millennium as though it alone were the promised kingdom. Is that possible? Did the prophets really

refer to a short material kingdom on earth? Will there be a separate and eternal non-material kingdom after it, perhaps in heaven? No, there is no biblical evidence for such a plan. Once the kingdom begins, it will continue forever. The millennium will be merely the grand foyer opening into it.

²⁸ Does the possibility of our being “unclothed” imply that we can exist without a body or require a temporary body? Apparently so, but only temporarily. See Article 3 and my footnote there. But 2 Corinthians 5:1–6 certainly looks beyond that—to the final, certain, and eternal “clothing” to be received in the resurrection!

²⁹ “Eternal life is the same as immortality.” I began to show this in Article 2. But this statement makes no sense to those accustomed to think only in categories peculiar to the apostle John’s writings. They think that eternal life primarily refers to the present. Other books, such as, the Synoptic Gospels and Acts, emphasize a different perspective. As I will continue to show, those books consistently relate the gift of eternal life to the future. See Article 16 and Chart D.

³⁰ “Are lost” in 1 Corinthians 15:18 represents the Greek verb *apolonto* from *apollumi*. This verb does not necessarily indicate that something is abolished, but neither does it imply continuing function. For various NIV translations of it, see the note about it with Article 20.

³¹ What pessimism to say (1 Cor. 15:18, 19) that dead believers might be “lost” and living believers should be “pitied”! Under what conditions would this be true? Certainly, “if Christ has not been raised.” But likely Paul intends to include the initial condition also: “if the dead are not raised.” A Christianity without both a risen Christ and a coming resurrection would be worse than worthless. As Paul’s statement implies, dead believers get neither immortality nor inheritance at the time of death.

³² All three Synoptic Gospels record how our Lord proved that there will be a bodily resurrection. I will refer to the version in Luke 20:27–38. Many interpreters now miss His point because they believe that dead believers are already immortal. They think that the Lord was proving the soul’s survival. But that interpretation misses both the question and the answer. The Sadducees’ question was packaged as a story trying to make “**the resurrection**” look impossible (Luke 20:27, 33). Jesus’ answer discussed those who will “take part **in that age and in the resurrection from the dead**” (20:35). His scriptural proof that “**the dead rise**” (20:37) was that God still identified with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob long after they died. “To him all are alive” (20:38) does not deny their death but its finality. What looks final to man is not final to Him (cf. John 11:11–15). God must and will raise them from the dead to fulfill His promises to them.

³³ Other uses of “life” are not included in Chart D because they are clearly not eternal. Here are examples in Luke, indicating the Greek words used:

- 6:9 Which is lawful...to save life (*psuchen*) or destroy it?
- 12:15 a man’s life (*zoe*) does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.
- 12:22–23 do not worry about your life (*psuche*).
- 12:25 Which of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life (*helikian*)?
- 15:24, 32 This son of mine was dead and is alive again (*anadzessin*).
- 21:19 By standing firm you will gain life (*psuchas*).

³⁴ Notice that “rise to live” (Gr. “resurrection of life”) in John 5:29 indicates the purpose or goal of rising, not its means. In the parallel phrase, “rise to be condemned,” condemnation is also the goal.

³⁵ See also my earlier article on Romans 5:12–21.

³⁶ Just as the future is ours (1 Cor. 3:22), so is the future kingdom. Once the apostle Paul speaks of the kingdom as though we were already in it. As our inheritance it is future (e.g., 1 Cor. 6:10; Eph. 5:5); it has not started. That is our factual relationship to it. But from a legal standpoint, we are already “qualified...to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light...He has...brought [Gr., transferred] us into the kingdom of the Son he loves” (Col. 1:12–13). In other words, we belong to the future. Legally we have died and been raised with Christ, and are

already seated in heaven with Him (Col. 2:12; 3:1). “Your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Col. 3:3–4). But it is confusing and misleading to interpret such Scriptures as implying that the kingdom has already begun.

³⁷ In Acts here are other references to life that is not eternal life: 2:28 “you [God] have made known to me the paths of life.” 8:33 “his life was taken from the earth.” 17:25 “God gives all men life and breath and everything else.” 27:10 “loss...to our own lives”

³⁸ Matthew 18:8 calls it “eternal (*aionion*) fire.” In Article 26 I will show that things that are *aionion* can come to an end.

³⁹ The Lord predicted the same contrast (of sentences for the wicked and the righteous) in Matthew 25:31–46. “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory” (25:31). After being judged, the wicked go into “the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (25:41) and the righteous into eternal kingdom glory (25:34).

⁴⁰ As noted, Matthew 13:30 and 40 use an *intensive* form of the verb for burn (not just *kaio* but *katakaio*). Used thirteen times in the New Testament, this form does not just mean *burn* but “burn down, burn up, consume something by fire” (Arndt & Gingrich lexicon). Another example is 1 Corinthians 3:15, which tells what may happen if anyone’s work “is burned up.” (See also Heb. 13:11.) The picture is the same as when Hebrews 10:27 uses the common verb for *eat*: “raging fire that **will consume** the enemies of God.” Fernando agrees that this is the normal meaning of what the fire does. Nevertheless, when discussing “The Fires of Judgment,” he continues with strange logic:

Annihilationists say that the **main function of fire is not to cause pain but to secure destruction. We agree...**But when people think of fire in connection with punishment, **what usually comes to their mind is the pain** of being burned. So **it is most likely** that the biblical writers used it in this sense. (Fernando, p. 39)

In other words, Fernando decides that the initial pain of being burned in fire is reason to think that the fire will not destroy! Judge for yourself if this is valid proof that the fire represents unending torment.

⁴¹ It seems probable that some pictures of judgment may point to different occasions. Whether that is the case or not, is irrelevant to this discussion. The important thing here is that they all show the same principles and the same final results.

⁴² The KJV is misleading when it translates the Greek word *Hades* as “hell.” For example, it says that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against” the church (Matt. 16:18). Instead, it is “the gates of Hades” that cannot prevail, probably referring to the church’s successful attack on the domain of death. See Article 21 about Hades.

⁴³ The Greek verb translated “destroy” in Matthew 10:28 is from *apollumi*. As I said in a note for Article 15, “this verb does not necessarily indicate that something is abolished, but neither does it imply continuing function.” Here are some samples from the NIV to show its meaning (bolded): “search for the child to **kill** him” (Matt. 2:13); “**lose** one part of your body” (Matt. 5:29, 30); “the **lost** sheep of Israel” (Matt. 10:6); “wineskins **will be ruined**” (Matt. 9:17); “a hundred sheep and **loses** one” (Luke 15:4; cf. v. 6); “ten silver coins and **loses** one” (Luke 15:8, cf. v. 9); “this son of mine was **lost** and is found” (Luke 15:24, 32); “little ones **should be lost**” (Matt. 18:14); “to **have** Jesus **executed**” (Matt. 27:20); “deceives those who **are perishing**” (2 Thess. 2:10); “those who shrink back and **are destroyed**” (Heb. 10:39); “those also who have fallen asleep in Christ **are lost**” (1 Cor. 15:18); “the world of that time **was deluged and destroyed**” (2 Pet. 3:6).

⁴⁴ Messiah Himself was “consumed” by zeal (Ps. 69:9); but that is not fatal. Likewise, it is reasonable that those “cut off” in Psalm 37:22, 28, 34, 38 have no foreseen future, but Messiah (Dan. 9:26) certainly has.

⁴⁵ A well-known Bible teacher has been quoted as follows: “Sin, though committed by a finite person and in the confines of finite time, is nevertheless deserving of an infinitely long punishment because it is a sin against an infi-

nately worthy God.” That logic would require that the slightest sin against God demands payment for ever and ever. Not so. (a) No supposed law of punishment requires God to be far more severe than His creatures are with their own children. (b) God will continue to follow His own instructions in Isaiah 28:23–29 and will not “plow continually.” (c) Our Lord’s sacrifice did not take eternity to accomplish but was done in a brief period of time. Yet, it is more than adequate for any and all sins.

⁴⁶ Rather than “more bearable,” Hebrews 10:29 gives the converse: “How much **more severely** do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot...?” God does not punish all alike.

⁴⁷ Other samples of apocalyptic descriptions in Revelation include (a) heaven, with its inhabitants and activities (chapters 4–5 and elsewhere); (b) the four horsemen inflicting damage under the first four seals (6:1–8); (c) a series of earthquakes, each devastating the whole world; (d) “locusts” that come “from the Abyss,” not to kill men “but only to torture them for five months” (9:1–12); (e) John’s eating a scroll given him by a mighty angel (10:1–11); (f) reaping and gathering grapes (= human beings) with the use of heavenly sickles (14:14–20).

⁴⁸ There is a similar event under the sixth seal. “There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black...the whole moon turned blood red, and the **stars** in the sky **fell to earth**...and every mountain and island **was removed from its place**” (Rev. 6:13–14). Even if the mountains and islands were only shifted, this apocalyptic plague seems absolute. But it is not. For immediately it is followed by “They called to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us’” (Rev. 6:16).

⁴⁹ Is Luke 16:19–31 a parable? Jesus does not call it a parable. But neither does He so designate most well-known parables, such as, Luke 12:16–21; 15:11–32; or 16:1–13. (The one beginning at 16:1 begins just like this one: “There was a rich man.”) If this is a parable, why does the Lord, contrary to His usual procedure, give one character a name, *Lazarus*? Simply because this parable needed a name for the beggar, who was often referred to by others in the parable. *Lazarus* was appropriate, suggesting his helplessness. It was “a common abbreviation of *Elasar*, as it were, ‘God help him!’” (Alfred Edersheim, *The Life & Times of Jesus the Messiah*, two vols. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953] II:279)

⁵⁰ See Article 21 about the use of *Hades* here.

⁵¹ Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel According to S. Luke*, 5th ed., The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1922), 393. Similarly, Alfred Edersheim warns that “it will be necessary in the interpretation of this Parable to keep in mind, that its Parabolic details must not be exploited, **nor doctrines of any kind derived from them**, either as to the character of the other world, the question of the duration of future punishments, or the possible moral improvement of those in *Gehinnom*.” (Alfred Edersheim, *The Life & Times*... II:277, 280f; bolding mine)

⁵² The Greek word for “punishment” in Matthew 25:46 (*kolasis*) is also used in 1 John 4:18. The corresponding verb (*koladzo*) is used in 2 Peter 2:9 and Acts 4:21 (the Jewish council “could not decide how **to punish**” Peter and John).

⁵³ When an eternal thing implies an *action* that accomplishes it, the emphasis may be on the results. For example, “eternal salvation” (Heb. 5:9), “eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:12), and “eternal encouragement” (2 Thess. 2:16) all refer primarily to the lasting results of relatively short actions. Similarly, “eternal judgment” (Heb. 6:2), “eternal punishment” (Matt. 25:46), and “eternal destruction” (2 Thess. 1:9) do not denote continuing actions but unchanging results.

⁵⁴ The word translated “destruction” in 2 Thessalonians 1:9 (*olethros*) is also used in 1 Corinthians 5:5 (probably of physical sickness); 1 Thessalonians 5:3 (sudden “**destruction**”); and 1 Timothy 6:9: “People who want to get rich fall into...many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into **ruin** and destruction.”

⁵⁵ The apostle explains that “Christ” includes both His head and His body (Eph. 1:22–23; as in Gal. 3:26–29). But it seems unnecessary to discuss that now. See the relevant discussions in my website.

⁵⁶ Fernando, *Crucial Questions*, pp. 43–44.

⁵⁷ For example, the early Fathers soon switched to episcopal church polity and the teaching that the church takes over Israel's promises. Some of us call the latter view "Replacement Theology," discussed on my website.

⁵⁸ Froom recognizes that some conclude "that the dogma of the Innate Immortality of the soul and the Eternal Torment of the wicked, as later taught by Tertullian and finally established by Augustine, *was always* the position of the Early Christian Church. But the scholarly investigations of Henry Constable, Anglican Prebendary of Cork, Ireland, led him to reply with positiveness, 'We wholly deny it.'" He then quotes from Constable's conclusion:

From beginning to end of them [the Apostolic Fathers] there is not one word said of that immortality of the soul which is so prominent in the writings of the later fathers. Immortality is by them asserted to be peculiar to the redeemed. The punishment of the wicked is by them emphatically declared to be everlasting. Not one stray expression of theirs can be interpreted as giving any countenance to the theory of restoration after purgatorial suffering. The fire of hell is with them, as with us, an unquenchable one; but its issue is, with them as with Scripture, "destruction," "death," "loss of life." (Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith*, II, 801)

⁵⁹ The following paragraph is from the Roberts-Donaldson English Translation of Justin's *Second Apology*, available at the website <http://earlychristianwritings.com/text/justinmartyr-secondapology.html>. Out of Chapter VII, it has both expressions just mentioned (bolded), for comparison.

Wherefore God delays causing the confusion and destruction of the whole world, by which the wicked angels and demons and men **shall cease to exist**, because of the seed of the Christians, who know that they are the cause of preservation in nature.... But since God in the beginning made the race of angels and men with free-will, they will justly **suffer in eternal fire** the punishment of whatever sins they have committed.

⁶⁰ The following quotation was in the Theopedia article on Annihilationism May 18, 2009 (bolding is mine). By way of introduction the article says that in 1520 Martin Luther (1483-1546) published a defense of forty-one of his propositions. In his twenty-seventh proposition he called the pope's immortality declaration a "monstrous" opinion:

However, I permit the Pope establish articles of faith for himself and for his own faithful—such are: a) That the bread and wine are transubstantiated in the sacrament; b) that the essence of God neither generates nor is generated; c) that the soul is the substantial form of the human body; d) that he (the pope) is emperor of the world and king of heaven, and earthly god; e) **that the soul is immortal**; and all these endless monstrosities in the Roman dunghill of decretals—in order that such as his faith is, such may be his gospel, such also his faithful, and such his church, and that the lips may have suitable lettuce and the lid may be worthy of the dish.

⁶¹ See Froom's documentation that Greek dualism had such influence. Suffice it now to point out that Fernando acknowledges the mistaken character of such dualism. However, he insists that human immortality is also biblical.

What was wrong with the Greek conception was the dualistic separation of the body and the soul as opposed to the wholistic biblical view that conceives of the human being as a unity. If some people obtained their view of the unending existence of persons from the Greek view of human nature, then they have got it from an erroneous source. But they don't need to discard this belief, for the Bible also teaches it. (Fernando, *Crucial Questions*, p. 43)

⁶² Plato also disliked material things. William Shedd quotes him from the *Phaedo* (64, 65):

The philosopher is entirely concerned with the soul, and not with the body; and would like, as far as he can, to be quit of the body and turn to the soul....The philosopher despises the body; his soul runs away from the body, and desires to be alone and by herself. (William G.T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, Vol. III, second ed. [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, orig. publ. 1888], 489)