

**THE CASE  
AGAINST  
ETERNAL PUNISHMENT  
IN HELL**

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## ***THIS PAPER IS FOR...***

*All of those who have always questioned if an eternal punishment in Hell is really true, but have reluctantly accepted it because they have been told that there is no evidence that can dispute this potential reality*

*All of those who have wrestled with reconciling a loving God with the message that He will torment His enemies for all of eternity upon their death*

*All of those who have been haunted by a fear of spending an eternity in the depths of Hell that many Christians profess is the final destination for the majority of mankind*

*All of those who have lost loved ones who died in unbelief and have struggled with the Christian message that their loved ones are now suffering for an eternity in Hell*

*All of those from throughout history that have attempted to shine a bright light on the dark doctrine of Hell by exposing the many weaknesses with the evidence for this doctrine*

*All of those who have become convinced that the doctrine of everlasting torment in Hell is a reality, and have closed themselves off from looking at the vast amount of evidence that disputes the Godliness of this theory*

*Lastly, this paper is for all of those who have the courage and eagerness to search for the truth, regardless of where it leads*

## Introducing the Argument

***“The hallmark of an authentic evangelicalism is not the uncritical repetition of old traditions, but the willingness to submit every tradition, however ancient, to fresh scrutiny and if necessary reform.” John Stott***

In the United States judicial system it is imperative to have a fair and impartial jury, absent of this then each verdict rendered will always be questioned. Imagine if it was legal for the prosecution or defense to reward a jury for a particular verdict, would anyone have confidence in the jury fairly evaluating the evidence? Imagine if the prosecution could legally make its closing argument by saying this: ***If you the jury find in favor of the prosecution each of you will receive a million dollars. However, if you do not find in favor of the prosecution then not only will each of you not receive a million dollars, but all of you will be sentenced to death by the electric chair.*** If the prosecution could end its presentation to a jury like this, how confident would anyone be in the jury’s ability to objectively look at the evidence and make a fair ruling?

The problem when it comes to evaluating some of the doctrines within orthodox Christianity is the fact that we are not dealing with impartial jurors, or more specifically objective witnesses. The orthodox Christian viewpoint on eternal punishment in Hell is accepted as fact by many in the Christian community mostly on the basis of tradition. Those who want to discern the truth as it pertains to everlasting punishment in Hell will need to look at more evidence than just the traditions and words of men, especially in light of the many motivations aside from seeking the truth that compel many Christians to accept this doctrine.

On most Sundays at a Christian Church, or at the end of a person witnessing to others about Jesus, the closing argument by the Christian will often go something like this: ***You can choose to accept what I am saying and in doing so guarantee yourself a spot in Heaven for all of eternity, or you can choose to reject the evidence that I have given you. However, if you reject what I have told you, and I am right then you will not only miss out on eternal bliss in Heaven, but you will be subjected to an eternal torture in Hell. If I am wrong though, what do you have to lose?*** On the surface this is a very powerful argument and I have seen it used many times by witnessing Christians. However, when one digs deeper into this line of reasoning the difficulties with it being a persuasive argument quickly rise to the surface.

The problem with the standard Christian apologetic technique quoted above is the faulty premise in which the whole argument is built upon. For example, most Christian apologetics will say that by accepting Jesus you are not risking your eternal security; only by rejecting Jesus does a person put his eternal future in jeopardy. However, Christianity is not the only religion that puts forth the notion of eternal damnation. There are over one billion Muslims in the world that would say that not only will a belief in Jesus not gain you an entrance into Heaven, but by rejecting Allah the believer in Jesus will be sent to

an eternal torture in Hell. The devout Muslim is just as sincere as the committed Christian in regards to the eventual destination of those who do not believe as he does. However, I would say to both the Muslim and the Christian that “**sincerity does not equal truth**”, and I will need more than sincere proclamations of Hell to believe that this doctrine is true.

When a person accepts the divine nature of an eternal Hell, this person gives up the hope that says, “**With God all things are possible**” because if eternal torture is true then all things are in fact not possible. For believers in eternal torture the world becomes like a sinking ship with its final destination being the pits of Hell. The doctrine of eternal torture tells us that there is no hope that all of the ship’s passengers can be rescued. Life for the believer in eternal torture becomes a race to save as many people as possible, but all the while watching person after person being sent to their eternal doom in the torments of Hell. Believers in eternal torture also give up the ability to offer any hope to those who have lost unbelieving loved ones, all that they can do is tell people to try and save themselves for it is too late for anyone who died in unbelief. The grim realities of eternal torture as awful as they are do not by default give us irrefutable evidence that this doctrine is not a reality. Rather, the very real negative consequences that come from accepting a belief in eternal torture should lead a person to seriously study this doctrine to be sure that there is solid evidence that this idea comes from a loving God.<sup>1</sup>

Another problem with the standard fear based apologetic technique that we have looked at is the fact that Christians who believe in an eternal torture will be faced with a substantial credibility issue. It is not surprising based on how the Christian message is usually presented that a lot of people accept the idea of Heaven and an eternal Hell so easily. Humans are very motivated by personal gain, and by avoiding personal loss. How great of a gain would eternal bliss in Heaven be, and how much of a terrible loss would an eternity of being consciously tortured amount too? Besides, most who believe in an eternal torture accepted this idea the minute they became a Christian and as such a careful examination of this doctrine is usually not undertaken by most Christians. Lastly, can objective observers really trust that Christians have studiously looked at the evidence for eternal punishment in Hell when most Christians sincerely believe that they might be risking their own eternal security by even questioning this doctrine?

To try and get to the divine truth or lack thereof with the doctrine of eternal torment we will use another analogy from the United States judicial system. In death penalty cases in the United States the prosecution must prove its case to a level that is beyond a reasonable doubt, anything less and the prosecution will lose the case. The reason for such a high burden of proof in a death penalty case is because of the enormity of the

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<sup>1</sup> “*For me it is unexplainable how a person who holds the orthodox view [of eternal torment] can at any time have a glad moment in this life. He is constantly mingling with people whose final destiny will be to be tormented eternally without end...To me it is even more unexplainable that such an ‘orthodox’ person can expect even a happy moment in eternity, when he knows that contemporaneously with his blessed estate continues the endless torment and agony of innumerable millions of the accursed. Can he, if he loves his neighbors as himself, yes, even if he has just a little bit of human love and is not solely a selfish wretch, have even a single happy moment?*” -- John Persone Swedish Lutheran Bishop

penalty in which a human being could lose his life. If the United States which is governed by fallible men and women has such a high burden of proof in a death penalty case, we should expect that an all knowing and loving God if He were to institute a judgment such as eternal torture would make sure to equip mankind with proof for this judgment that can be proven beyond any reasonable doubt.

It is with the back drop of proving a case beyond a reasonable doubt that I am putting forth a case against eternal conscious torment as being a doctrine that is from God. With the eternal and temporal consequences of this doctrine all reasonable people should require evidence for this punishment that stands up to the toughest scrutiny and leaves no doubt as to God's authorship of this potential reality. If however, reasonable doubt can be placed on eternal torment, then fair minded people would do well to discard the notion that a punishment this severe and endless is truly from God. The goal of this work is to examine in many different ways if the evidence for eternal conscious torment as defined by the orthodox teaching in the Christian Church is irrefutable, anything less than this would be unacceptable.

It should be noted at the outset that I realize many will view the idea of a non-eternal conscious punishment as an unorthodox Christian position, and many will conclude that those who doubt this eternal punishment simply do not like the hard "truth" of this doctrine as opposed to having some hard evidence against this teaching. This possible quick dismissal of those who doubt an eternal torment would be unfortunate due to the fact that this idea goes back to the very beginning of Christianity, and to those who were reading the New Testament in its original language of Greek. I had no idea before I began looking into the current doctrine of Hell that the belief in everlasting punishment was not a part of orthodox Christianity until about 550 AD, which is over 500 years after the death of Jesus. Many of the first Christian teachers did not, in fact, believe in the eternal damnation of unbelievers. Furthermore, even those early church leaders who did believe in eternal punishment did not make this doctrine a central part of the Christian faith. For example, the church father Tertullian (160-220 A.D.) in his work Apology of the Faith explains in detail 50 doctrines of the Christian faith but not one of these doctrines concerns the everlasting punishment of unbelievers.

Additionally, many Christian councils were held before 550 AD in which Christian doctrines were put forth as orthodoxy such as the make-up of the New Testament, and the divinity of Christ, however in not one of the first councils was the doctrine of everlasting punishment in Hell made a part of Christian orthodoxy. In fact, at the 381 council at Constantinople the Church picked Gregory Nazianzen to preside over the council, and far from a believer in everlasting punishment he was an outspoken Universalist who believed that eventually all people would be reconciled to Christ. If the orthodox teaching of the Church at this time was everlasting punishment, and if this doctrine was at this time a part of the Gospel that Christ delivered to the Saints, then it does seem strange that these orthodox Christians would have a Universalist preside over such an important council.

In rebuttal to these last two points some will say that the belief in everlasting punishment was such the dominant position in early Christianity that there was no reason for this issue to be addressed at the first Christian councils or by those who wrote about many heresies in early church history. To those who think this is the case, I will refer to a quote by one of the forefathers of everlasting torment to show that it is simply false that the belief in everlasting torment was taken as Gospel by almost every Christian.

St. Augustine (354-430 A.D.) speaks of those who do not believe in everlasting punishment, **“There are very many in our day, who though not denying the Holy Scriptures, do not believe in endless torments.”**

## The Absence of Proof in the Bible for Eternal Punishment in Hell

***“There are thousands and thousands and thousands of words in the Old Testament Scriptures, so why isn’t there one word warning us that unrepentant wicked people will be sentenced to an eternity of torture in real fire? Why? The books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy have 186 combined chapters. So why couldn’t at least one of these 186 chapters contain at least one verse which warns of the horrible eternal torture for most of the human race?” R.L.***

I would suspect that most Christians today accepted the idea of eternal torment at the same time they became a Christian, for most it is part of the Christian package. The fact that eternal conscious torment is the current orthodox teaching in the Church is more than enough evidence for most Christians to trust that this doctrine is from God. The problem with simply trusting current day orthodoxy is the fact that throughout history the traditional or majority viewpoint has been wrong at many important junctures. Throughout the history of the Christian Church what was once orthodox would later change, despite the fact that many of these traditions had been in place for over a thousand years.<sup>2</sup> The best example in regards to the dangers of always trusting the current tradition or orthodox view is found in the life of Jesus. When Jesus began his preaching he spoke of things that were not traditional, yet Christians trust that he was correct in his teaching despite the fact that he was in the minority. In fact, if people only went by the established tradition of their times, there would not be any Christians today as Christianity did not exist when Jesus came onto the scene.

As I have examined the evidence for the doctrine of eternal punishment it appears to me that there is reasonable doubt that this doctrine has originated with God. Rather, this doctrine seems to have much to do with the influence of converts to Christianity from other religions and from the translation of the New Testament from Greek to Latin. In this paper I will put forth some highlights from the Bible that will cast serious doubt as to the biblical foundation for eternal torment, those who want to do further research into this topic will find more of the same. I will also detail some of the logical fallacies of this doctrine, and I will look at some aspects of Church history that when combined with the other areas I explore will all work together to cast doubt on the Godliness of eternal conscious torment.

- In most of the English Bible translations today (aside from the KJV) the word “Hell” is not found once in the Old Testament, nor is the concept of an everlasting torment. It is important to remember that the Old Testament makes up about 75% of the entire Bible, and therefore the absence of eternal torture in 75% of the

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<sup>2</sup> Compare and contrast the first teachings of the Church with the Protestant Reformers over a thousand years later. Huge doctrines such as infant baptism, faith versus faith and works, the nature of communion, who could read the Bible, and the institution of the Pope are all items that most Protestants today differ with the first teachings of the Church.

Christian Scriptures should be enough to give someone pause. In addition, one can quickly look at some of the major judgments in the Old Testament starting with Adam and Eve and there will not be one mention from God of an everlasting torment in Hell for anyone. Would it not seem appropriate were it true for God to let Adam and Eve know of the eternal consequences of their decision either before or after they committed the first sin? Had they known before hand about a potential eternal punishment then maybe they would not have made the choice that they did, or had they at least been informed afterward as to the true nature of their punishment think of all the people Adam could have warned in the remaining 900 plus years of his life! Think for a minute of all the things that Moses speaks of in the Old Testament, yet not once does he utter a reference to an everlasting punishment in Hell. Dr. Thayer, a Christian scholar from the 1800's has this to say with regard to Moses' silence on the concept of Hell,

***"Is it possible to imagine a more conclusive proof against the divine origin of the doctrine? If he (Moses) had believed it to be of God, if he had believed in endless torments as the doom of the wicked after death, and had received this as a revelation from heaven, could he have passed it over in silence? Would he have dared to conceal it, or treat so terrible a subject with such marked contempt? And what motive could he have had for doing this? I cannot conceive of a more striking evidence of the fact that the doctrine is not of God. He knew whence the monstrous dogma came, and he had seen enough of Egypt already, and would have no more of her cruel superstitions; and so he casts this out, with her abominable idolatries, as false and unclean things."***

- In every English translation of the Bible the word Hell is found in the New Testament from only 0 to 22 times! To put this in perspective, there are fewer mentions of the term Hell than the number of books that make up the New Testament (0 to 22 versus 27). This fact is quite remarkable if indeed Hell does denote the eventual eternal damnation for the majority of mankind.
- The English word Hell in the New Testament has been translated from three different Greek words which have three different meanings and not one of the three Greek words translated to Hell denotes an everlasting punishment in burning flames. The fallacy of translating three different words to the one word Hell cannot be understated. It would appear that the translators were thinking about doctrine first, and accuracy second. Furthermore, the Greek word *Gehenna* which is translated most frequently into the English Hell in the New Testament is an actual location in Jerusalem that was referenced in the Old Testament—anyone reading this can take a plane ride and visit this place! *Gehenna* used to be a garbage dump where children were at one time sacrificed and then later dead bodies from the general population were put there, but now it is a park and again anyone reading this can physically visit *Gehenna*.
- I would encourage everyone to go through the book of Acts again for the first time, and see for yourself that there is not one conversion to Christianity done

under the threat of eternal torture. It would seem likely that the Apostles who walked with Jesus and were not hampered by traditions or bad translations would be closer to the actual teachings than anyone who would come after them. With this in mind, it does call into question the accuracy of current day evangelism that focuses greatly on the fear of eternal torment because this message is in stark contrast to what we find in the book of Acts.

- All of the above facts are summed up nicely by the Christian scholar noted earlier, and in my estimation will put an exclamation point on the last few paragraphs,

*"The Savior and James are the only persons in all the New Testament who use the word. (Gehenna) John the Baptist, who preached to the most wicked of men did not use it once. Paul wrote fourteen epistles and yet never once mentions it. Peter does not name it, nor Jude; and John, who wrote the gospel, three epistles, and the Book of Revelations, never employs it in a single instance. Now if Gehenna or Hell really reveals the terrible fact of endless woe, how can we account for this strange silence? How is it possible, if they knew its meaning and believed it a part of Christ's teaching that they should not have used it a hundred or a thousand times, instead of never using it at all; especially when we consider the infinite interests involved? The Book of Acts contains the record of the apostolic preaching, and the history of the first planting of the church among the Jews and Gentiles, and embraces a period of thirty years from the ascension of Christ. In all this history, in all this preaching of the disciples and apostles of Jesus there is no mention of Gehenna. In thirty years of missionary effort these men of God, addressing people of all characters and nations never under any circumstances threaten them with the torments of Gehenna or allude to it in the most distant manner! In the face of such a fact as this can any man believe that Gehenna signifies endless punishment and that this is part of divine revelation, a part of the Gospel message to the world? These considerations show how impossible it is to establish the doctrine in review on the word Gehenna. All the facts are against the supposition that the term was used by Christ or his disciples in the sense of endless punishment. There is not the least hint of any such meaning attached to it, nor the slightest preparatory notice that any such new revelation was to be looked for in this old familiar word."*

At this point I have shown that in many key areas the Bible does not teach eternal conscious torment, so the question is where in the Bible does tradition find evidence for this doctrine? Below I will highlight a few of the proof texts that most use in an attempt to prove eternal torment, and the same problems that are found in the texts below can be found in the few other passages that are used as evidence for eternal torment.

With all of the proof texts in the New Testament for eternal torture it is apparent that in the sayings of Jesus where people claim that he teaches eternal torment it is either a parable or in clearly figurative language. Even those who believe in eternal torture do not believe entirely in the literal teachings of the text where they find this doctrine, except of course for the part that they think is denoting an eternal torture. For example, in Mark 9:42-48 Jesus says, **"If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you**

**to enter life maimed than to have two hands and go to Hell (Gehenna), to unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off....it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, (Gehenna) where the worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.**” Do people literally think that Jesus believes a hand or a foot is the true cause of someone’s sin? This would be strange as Jesus is the one who said even a lustful thought would constitute a sin. Additionally, for those who use this text as proof that Jesus literally teaches about everlasting torment, I simply ask if you have cut off your hand or cut off your foot, or plucked out your eye the last time one of these body parts caused you to sin? I personally have met many Christians who believe in eternal conscious torment yet not one of them has personally removed an arm, leg, or eye, despite the fact that they freely admit to sinning every day. Is it intellectually honest to say everything leading up to the end of a teaching is figurative, yet at the very end the passage is literal? Is there any pause or clue from Jesus that would allow for this interpretation?

Another of many examples like the one above can be found in the book of Matthew chapter 5:22. Jesus says, **“I say to you if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment, and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, “You fool,” you will be liable to the hell (Gehenna) of fire.”** Those who believe in eternal conscious torment will use this verse as another proof of the doctrine. Again though, these same people will not take the whole passage as being literal, only the last part about the fire of Gehenna. For starters, where does Jesus say a lack of belief is what causes someone be subjected to Hell? Another reason for this non-literal understanding of this teaching is the fact that Jesus himself uses the term “fool” in Matthew 23:17, and Paul calls many “fools” in Galatians 3:1. I doubt those who believe in the literalness of this passage also believe that Jesus and Paul are destined for an eternity in Hell. Is it really fair then to say that everything in this teaching by Jesus should be taken figuratively except the last part about Gehenna?

Matthew 25:46 is a favorite proof text of those who believe in eternal torment. This verse says, **“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”** For the purposes of looking at this text I will put aside the arguments that show how the Greek word that was translated for eternal did not always denote a time frame of eternal, but I would recommend for those who want to go farther to look into this aspect. However, even if we take this verse at face value we can observe many problems with taking this verse as meaning eternal torture. For starters, this teaching when looked at from the beginning starting in verse 31 is clearly a parable, and as such it is challenging to take this teaching as being completely literal.

Additionally, what does Jesus say earlier in the teaching as to why someone received eternal punishment? He says **“I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these you did not do for me.”** So according to Jesus not doing good deeds for the least will warrant eternal punishment. Those who believe in eternal torment and find proof of it in this teaching do not however believe that good deeds have anything to do with gaining eternal life, rather it is all about faith. How is it reasonable to say that

Jesus is literally warning about an eternal torture, but he is not being literal in explaining exactly how to avoid eternal punishment because for most Christians salvation is based on faith and not good deeds?

Even though I think I have shown the logical inconsistencies in this text as being one that teaches eternal torment, there is one other key point. Even if we accept everything as being literal and teaching of an eternal punishment, this still does not mean that it has to be eternal conscious torture. Eternal punishment can easily mean being annihilated upon death and ceasing to exist, thus losing out on the glories of Heaven. This annihilation would last forever, as would being absent from the infinite pleasures of Heaven, thereby equaling an eternal punishment. So, even if this teaching is taken to be literal in its entirety, it still does not conclusively show that Jesus is warning about eternal conscious torture.

The last text we will look at is probably the favorite of those who teach the doctrine of eternal conscious torment as they find each element of the doctrine in this parable. Luke 16:19-28 reads, **“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hell (Hades), where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘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.’**

**“But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’ He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’ ‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ “He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”**

There are a number of problems in using this teaching as a literal example of eternal conscious torment, unfortunately that does not stop many from using this text as proof of this doctrine. If this teaching is literal then we would also have to conclude that the manner in which one is to avoid eternal punishment is to **“receive bad things”** in our present life similar to Lazarus. Is there even one mention of any type of faith, or good deeds by Lazarus? Is there any mention of unbelief on the part of the rich man that would warrant eternal punishment?

The orthodox teaching of eternal torment says that once someone is in Heaven this person will never have a desire to leave, and certainly a person would never want to cross over from Heaven to Hell even if loved ones are there. If this is the case, then how do those who believe in eternal torture reconcile the part of this teaching that says, **“so that those who want to go from here to you cannot?”** If this teaching is taken literally then we would also have to conclude that there will be people in Heaven who desire to be in Hell, otherwise the passage would have read, **“and no one will ever want to leave the pleasures of Heaven and go where you are, but a great chasm has been fixed so you cannot cross over from your dwelling to ours.”**

Yet another problem for those who want to take this passage literally is the fact that at the end of the parable Abraham says, **“If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”** Let’s not forget who is telling this parable, it is Jesus himself before he has been Crucified and Resurrected. If the words of Moses and the Prophets are sufficient for avoiding eternal punishment, and if someone rising from the dead will not make any difference, then why the need for the Crucifixion and the Resurrection?

Lastly, it has been the common teaching of Christian leaders that once people are sent to their eternal punishment in Hell they are then turned over to their pure sinful nature, and that God is totally absent from this awful place. This would mean that no attributes of God will be present in hell; this terrible dwelling will only consist of the sinful nature of its inhabitants. With this being the case, how is it then that the rich man in the midst of his eternal torture would beg Abraham to send a messenger to his family to warn them of **“this place of torment”**? The rich man does not ask for himself to be taken away from his agony, but he asks Abraham not once but twice to send help to his family. This is without question an act of selfless love on the part of the rich man. How can this be though if this message is one that is literally about eternal conscious torment? How can love exist in Hell if God is totally removed and only the sinful nature of the Lost are the occupants of this wretched domain?

It would appear to me that those who take a part of Jesus’ teachings as figurative and another part of the same teachings as literal are simply trying to make the text fit into a preconceived doctrine as opposed to letting the text speak for itself. At a minimum reasonable people should strive to be consistent in how they evaluate the Scriptures. Without consistency how can people have any credibility when sharing their beliefs on what they think the Bible teaches?

## **The Fruit of the Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment in Hell**

***“What bliss will fill the ransomed souls, when they in glory dwell, to see the sinner as he rolls, in quenchless flames of Hell.” Isaac Watts***

Jesus speaks in the New Testament of evaluating if something is from God by looking at whether or not it bears good or bad fruit. When looking at the fruit as it relates to the doctrine of everlasting punishment in Hell the question before us is; what has the fruit of this doctrine borne? I would argue that this doctrine has led to the murder of thousands that were called heretics by fellow Christians, thousands of women were burned at the stake for being labeled witches, and thousands of others who believed in religions other than Christianity were forced to convert or die. Some might object at my placing the blame of these horrible acts at the foot of the doctrine of everlasting punishment, however the words of those who lit the flames, or drew the sword make my argument for me. From Augustine to Calvin the main reason that Christians used to justify the killing of heretics and witches was the fact that they saw these people as worse than murders whom merely killed the body, where as heretics killed the soul. Besides, if God was going to eventually burn these heretics for all of eternity, then why not follow His lead and punish these people now before they help send others to a destiny of eternal punishment? If those in Church history whom taught eternal torment had truth on their side, why did they also need to use swords and flames to prove their point? I will conclude this paragraph with the words of John Calvin himself who can testify to why he believed it necessary to kill heretics,

***“The mockers who would suffer all false doctrines...are not only traitors to God but enemies of the human race. They would bring poor souls to perdition and ruin, and are worse than murderers.”<sup>3</sup>***

In addition to its historical bad fruits, the doctrine of everlasting punishment also takes away the ability for the Gospel message to bring hope and compassion to the majority of mankind. For example, a co-worker of mine learned a few weeks back that the 17 year old son (an unbeliever) of her best friend committed suicide. I do not have children so I can only imagine how awful it would be for a mother to endure the misery of her son committing suicide. Now, let's say for example a Christian who believes in an eternal torment for nonbelievers goes over to this mother's house to offer her comfort and hope. If this Christian is consistent with his theology he might say, ***“As bad as the pain your son felt when killing himself it pales in comparison to the pain that he is now feeling***

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<sup>3</sup> As a side note, it is odd that the theologian who most famously espoused the glories of pre-destination and the certainty of total depravity would at the same time put forth the notion that someone other than God could help “bring poor souls to perdition and ruin, and are worse than murders.” Calvin believed the heretic to be worse than a murder for helping bring a soul to ruin, which makes me wonder how he reconciled this with his belief that God not only helped people to an eternal punishment but pre-destined them to everlasting torture before the beginning of time. Would this not make God worse than both a murderer and a heretic?

***and will continue to feel for an eternity in Hell.”*** The Christian could then say, ***“However, you have hope, you can avoid the Hell that your son is going through by accepting Jesus into your life and having a personal and loving relationship with him.”*** In this example, what is the mother to do based on the “hope” that the Christian has told her about? The mother can save herself, but by doing so she would then live the rest of her life in what I would consider a Hell on earth by being consumed each day by the thought of her son being consciously tortured for all eternity. Furthermore, the mother might also endure years of guilt for not becoming a Christian earlier in life when she could have helped lead her son to a similar belief and thus enabled him to avoid the perils of Hell. Think about it closely, has this mother truly received “Good News” from the Christian, or has the mother received even worse news than that of her son killing himself?

Some might object at my example above and say that a Christian who believed in the doctrine of eternal torture would never speak that callously to the mother. While I do believe this to be true, it does not change the fact that the reality of one’s belief is still the reality of one’s belief whether it is spoken or not. Besides, what does it say about a person’s beliefs if he cannot be upfront about them?

One thing that I do not think most people do when they hold to the doctrine of eternal torture is ponder the dark reality of this doctrine. If eternal torture is true then countless modern day and historical heroes of mankind are now being consciously tortured for all eternity. If eternal torture is true then great historical figures that did much for humanity such as Thomas Jefferson, Helen Keller, Gandhi, Einstein, Anne Frank<sup>4</sup>, and many others are now being eternally tortured in the pits of Hell.

Think for a moment about the thousands of young unbelieving soldiers throughout our nation’s history who have freely given their life to defend the freedoms that we now enjoy, including our freedom of religion. Should endless torture be true, thousands of brave soldiers who suffered a selfless and painful death on the battlefield were immediately condemned to a sentence of eternal torture that is carried out by the God of the universe. Spend some time reflecting on a recent event in our nation’s history, the heinous terrorist acts on 9/11. If God’s plan does include eternal torture then sadly the unbelieving fire and policemen who gave their lives to save those who could not save themselves were then greeted upon their brave and courageous death with an eternity of punishment far worse than any human terrorist could devise.

I recognize that many will easily dismiss my last few arguments because of the orthodoxy of everlasting torment and the fact that most people who become Christians accept this doctrine as being an integral part of their faith at the time of their conversion. When faced with tough examples like the ones above many Christians will ask their spiritual leaders

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<sup>4</sup> At 16 years of age Anne Frank died from Typhus in a Nazi Concentration Camp. The diary she wrote has been an inspiration to millions throughout the entire world. How can otherwise reasonable people believe that any good can come from having Anne Frank spend all of eternity being consciously tortured in Hell? Does the torturing of Anne Frank bring Glory to God? If Hitler is evil for what he did to Anne Frank, what then of a God who inflicts infinitely more pain on His enemies?

for answers in an effort to make sense of a dark doctrine that the rational heart and mind naturally rejects. The Christians who are asking their leaders about the morality of this doctrine will then rely on the explanations of complicated theological theories of how God can still be a loving and just God while implementing everlasting torture on the majority of mankind. Complicated theories as to how God's justice would demand eternal torture, or ideas of how God's holiness would require eternal damnation only serve to reassure those who feel obligated to hold onto a belief in eternal torture. Theological theories do not help to console the mother and father of a fallen soldier, or the relatives who are left when a loved one is the victim of a terrible crime. I will end this section with some quotes from the most prominent adherents of the doctrine of everlasting torture. For those who believe in the Godliness of this doctrine these are your companions in this belief, and I will leave it up to all readers to decide if these quotes bring reassurance and hope of a loving and merciful God.<sup>5</sup>

#### TERTULLIAN

*What a spectacle, when the world and its many products, shall be consumed in one great flame! How vast a spectacle then bursts upon the eye! What there excites my admiration? What my derision? Which sight gives me joy?... as I see... illustrious monarchs... groaning in the lowest darkness, Philosophers as fire consumes them! Poets trembling before the judgment-seat of Christ! I shall hear the tragedians, louder-voiced in their own calamity; view play-actors in the dissolving flame; behold wrestlers, not in their gymnasia, but tossing in the fiery billows... What inquisitor or priest in his munificence will bestow on you the favor of seeing and exulting in such things as these? Yet even now we in a measure have them by faith in the picturings of imagination. [De Spectaculis, Chapter XXX]*

#### THOMAS AQUINAS

*In order that the happiness of the saints may be more delightful to them and that they may render more copious thanks to God for it, they are allowed to see perfectly the sufferings of the damned. So that they may be urged the more to praise God. The saints in heaven know distinctly all that happens to the damned. [Summa Theologica,]*

#### ST. ANTHONY MARY CLARET

*Once [a soul] is condemned by God, then God's friends agree in God's judgment and condemnation. For all eternity they will not have a kind thought for this wretch. Rather they will be satisfied to see him in the flames as a victim of God's justice... They will abhor him. A mother will look from paradise upon her own condemned son without being moved, as though she had never known him. ["The Pains of Hell," Ignatian Spiritual Exercises,]*

#### JONATHAN EDWARDS

*The sight of hell torments will exalt the happiness of the saints forever. Can the believing father in Heaven be happy with his unbelieving children in Hell? I tell you, yea! Such will be his sense of justice that it will increase rather than diminish his bliss. ["The Eternity of Hell Torments" (Sermon), April 1739 & Discourses on Various Important Subjects, 1738]*

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<sup>5</sup> An interesting exercise is to try and square the true implications of eternal torture with many of the songs that are sung throughout the Christian Church. Here is one to start with, "**Joy to the world the Lord has come, let all creation sing.**" How can these words have meaning if eternal torture for most of the world is true?

## Is the Punishment of Eternal Torture Just?

*“When all has been considered, it seems to me to be the irresistible intuition that infinite punishment for finite sin would be unjust, and therefore wrong. We feel that even weak and erring Man would shrink from such an act. And we cannot conceive of God as acting on a lower standard of right and wrong.”*  
- Lewis Carroll (author of *Alice in Wonderland*), *"Eternal Punishment," Diversions and Digressions of Lewis Carroll*

In the United States a person who commits a crime is usually given little or no jail time if the court finds that the guilty party did not realize what he did was wrong. For example, if a severely mentally challenged person commits a crime, and the court determines that the accused did not know that he was doing anything wrong then a sentence to a hospital would be more likely than jail time. Reasonable people understand that to punish with severity those who do not know that they did something wrong is unjust. When we look to Jesus, he says of those who nailed Him to the Cross, **“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”** It only takes a glance at the world as a whole to realize that most people who are not Christians **“do not know what they are doing.”** For most of the world it would be a luxury to have the time, health, education, and resources to even think about theological issues, and those who believe in eternal torture would do well to remember this fact.

It is said that the just punishment for a crime should be sufficient with the damage that the offender causes the victim. For example, when a police officer’s life is being threatened he can use deadly force to protect himself and will not be charged with a crime. The police officer’s action when his life is threatened is called justifiable force. However, if a police officer were to shoot and kill an innocent and defenseless infant because the baby spit up on him, then the officer would be charged with murder as his action was not justifiable due to the fact that the baby did not pose any threat nor cause any tangible harm to the officer. If the police officer is convicted of the murder charge he will face a long jail sentence or death due to the damage he caused to a human life, and also for the risk that he poses to society.

Reasonable people will agree with these examples of the police officer, he certainly *was* justified in the first example, but in the second example the infant did not represent any threat or cause any tangible harm and thus the police officer *was not* justified in killing the baby. How can it be then that so many otherwise reasonable people would think that a mere human could cause damage to an all powerful God that would then require the all powerful God to institute an eternity of torture as a just punishment? Is God so vulnerable that a starving child who has never heard of Him needs to be tortured for all eternity upon his young death? Is God’s glory affected by the Native American who has never heard of a person named Jesus that after his death he needs to be tortured forever? Is God’s holiness truly lessened by the millions of people who simply do not find credible or understandable evidence for His specific identity that he would then need to

torture these people endlessly? If eternal conscious torment is true, it would appear that the answer to each of these questions is a “yes”, and this does more damage to God’s power, glory, and holiness than anything a mere human could ever do.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Possibly due to human pride in wanting to believe we are more powerful than we are, many elevate the offensiveness of unbelief to a level of causing tangible damage to God’s character. However, there is a big difference between being offensive and actually causing tangible harm. In a civilized society it is justifiable to punish a person who has caused specific damage to someone, not for merely being offensive. Since God cannot be damaged by any human, then we must conclude that humans can only be offensive towards him, which then brings into question the morality of eternal torture being a just punishment.

## Church History and the Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment

*“There are in fact so many strong Biblical, doctrinal, and logical arguments against the existence of a literal hell that this question naturally arises: Why do the churches teach it and why do people often believe it?... The churches tend to believe that fear, rather than love conquers all.”*

- Robert Short, Methodist clergyman, U.S. Catholic, April 1980

It must be said that if eternal torture was taught by Jesus and his disciples then it is curious that it took over 500 years from Jesus’ resurrection, and over 200 years from the first Church councils for this to be a part of Christian orthodoxy.<sup>7</sup> The questions become: did Jesus’ or the disciples’ teaching somehow change in this long time period, or did the make-up of the New Testament change? Moreover, were there influences from other religions that affected the eventual teaching with regard to the doctrine of everlasting torment? History actually answers these questions for us, as we know Jesus did not change but his teachings went from the written Greek to Latin which had a dramatic effect on the words in the New Testament. What then should we make of the idea that other religions had an affect on the formation of Christian doctrine?

To substantiate the idea of outside influences affecting Christian doctrine it will be worth taking some time to explore the early Church more closely, and the questions we will ask are: Were the early Church fathers still steeped in prior beliefs from their past involvement in Pagan religions, how did the Church fathers who believed in eternal conscious torment interpret the scriptures, and lastly were the leaders of the Church well versed in the Greek language that the New Testament was written in? To condense our research into these questions we will explore how the Church father St. Augustine answers these inquiries. By examining the beliefs of Augustine no one can claim that a weak thinker of the Christian faith has been propped up only to be easily put down. In fact, of Augustine the Catholic Church says he is a **“Saint, Doctor of the Church; a philosophical and theological genius of the first order, dominating, like a pyramid, antiquity and the succeeding ages.....Compared with the great philosophers of past centuries and modern times, he is the equal of them all; among theologians he is undoubtedly the first.”**

St. Augustine (354-430) was raised by a Catholic mother and a Pagan father and he himself was a devout Pagan in the Manicheans persuasion until his early thirties when he then converted to Christianity. As to our first question of whether or not Augustine continued to hold to some Pagan beliefs while a Christian the answer from Augustine’s own writings is a resounding yes. For reference, unless otherwise noted all quotes from

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<sup>7</sup> It is also worth pointing out that not only did it take over 500 years from Christ’s death to make everlasting torment an orthodox teaching but it also took the threats of Emperor Justinian to finally make this doctrine a central part of the Church. Additionally, Emperor Justinian is regarded as one of the most treacherous on record, which makes it all the more unfortunate that in early Church history the Emperor had final say on Church doctrine.

Augustine can be found in his famous book the City of God. To start off our examination of Augustine's beliefs, and to quench any notion that some might have that there were not numerous Pagan religions before Christianity which taught erroneously and sometimes deceitfully about an eternal torture, we will turn to Augustine for guidance on this topic. In commenting on the belief of eternal torture in religions that predate Christianity, and some of the reasons they put forth the idea of an eternal torment Augustine says, **"This seems to have been done on no other account, but as it was the business of princes, out of their wisdom and civil prudence, to deceive the people in their religion; princes, under the name of religion, persuaded the people to believe those things true, which they themselves knew to be idle fables; by this means, for their own ease in government, tying them the more closely to civil society."** It is clear from Augustine's own words that other religions before Christianity indoctrinated their followers with the idea of an eternal torment as punishment from God, and it seems that Augustine found there to be good practical reasons for the leaders of these religions to propagate a false idea of eternal torture.

Augustine was a staunch believer in the Pagan ideas of magic and magicians, although he attributed the magical powers of men to devils working inside of them. When Augustine speaks of an inextinguishable lamp he tells us how those who have magical powers come to possess them, **"For to this (inextinguishable lamp) we add a host of marvels wrought by man, or magic, that is, by man under the influence of devils, or by the devils directly, for such marvels we cannot deny without impugning the truth of the sacred Scriptures we believe....The devils cunningly seduce men and make a few of them their disciples, who then instruct others....Hence the origin of magic and magicians."** Obviously Augustine believed in witchcraft and that devils are the cause of it, so I suppose it should not surprise us that throughout Church history Catholics and Protestants alike have taken Augustine's teaching to heart and killed hundreds of thousands of supposed witches.

Augustine also believed that all diseases that afflict Christians are the work of demons. He says, **"All diseases of Christians are to be ascribed to these demons; chiefly do they torment fresh-baptized Christians, yea, even the guiltless new-born infant."** How seriously would reasonable people take a person today if he proclaimed that demons are the cause of all diseases for Christians?

The following is a long list of marvels that Augustine tells his Pagan opponents that exist in this world, and therefore they should not question the ability for human bodies to be tortured in flames for all eternity without perishing. **"The following are some of the marvels men tell us: -- The salt of Agrigentum in Sicily, when thrown into the fire, becomes fluid as if it were in water, but in the water it crackles as if it were in the fire. The Garamantae have a fountain so cold by day that no one can drink it, so hot by night no one can touch it. In Epirus, too, there is a fountain which, like all others, quenches lighted torches, but, unlike all others, lights quenched torches. There is a stone found in Arcadia, and called asbestos, because once lit it cannot be put out. The wood of a certain kind of Egyptian fig-tree sinks in water, and does not float like other wood; and, stranger still, when it has been sunk to the bottom for some**

time, it rises again to the surface, though nature requires that when soaked in water it should be heavier than ever. Then there are the apples of Sodom which grow indeed to an appearance of ripeness, but, when you touch them with hand or tooth, the peel cracks, and they crumble into dust and ashes. The Persian stone pyrites burns the hand when it is tightly held in it and so gets its name from fire. In Persia too, there is found another stone called selenite, because its interior brilliancy waxes and wanes with the moon. Then in Cappadocia the mares are impregnated by the wind, and their foals live only three years. Tilon, an Indian island, has this advantage over all other lands, that no tree which grows in it ever loses its foliage.”<sup>8</sup>

Lastly, on our question of Pagan influence over Augustine, we can look to him in settling the age old question of **“Whether angels, inasmuch as they are spirits, could have bodily intercourse with women?”** Augustine concludes that angels can and do have intercourse with women, **“many proven instances, that Sylvans and Fauns, who are commonly called ‘Incubi’ had often made wicked assaults upon women, and satisfied their lusts upon them: and that certain devils, called Duses by the Gauls, are constantly attempting and effecting this impurity.”**

So what is the point of going through all these different ideas and quotes from St. Augustine? The point of going through Augustine’s own words is to show that while a committed Christian he still held to many of his Pagan thoughts, and I would propose that it would not be a stretch for him to have adopted and brought to Christianity a belief in the eternal punishment of the wicked which was at this time prevalent in many Pagan religions. Even Augustine himself as I showed earlier said that prior religious leaders demonstrated wisdom and civil prudence in proclaiming a false doctrine of eternal torment. Additionally, based on the burden of proof that Augustine required to believe in things such as demon induced magic, demons being the source of Christian diseases, mares being impregnated by the wind, and angles having sex with women, it would appear to me that Augustine’s belief in eternal torment was quite plausible in comparison to his other convictions. At the very least, because of Augustine’s continued beliefs of Pagan myths it does not give one much confidence in his abilities to discern the true message of God as it pertains to the eventual destination of mankind.

Moving on to our second question lets take a quick snapshot of how Augustine has interpreted Scripture and applied it to his life. Augustine believed that the Bible teaches Christians to compel by force if necessary those who do not believe as Christians do. Augustine interprets the story of Paul’s conversion as being an example from Jesus that sometimes it takes physical coercion to bring someone into the fold. Augustine says, **“But we have shown that Paul was compelled by Christ; therefore the Church, in trying to compel the Donatists, is following the example of her Lord....Wherefore, if the power (of the sword) which the Church has received by divine appointment in its due season, through the religious character and faith of Kings, be the instrument by which those who are found in the highways and hedges-that is, in heresies and**

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<sup>8</sup> Not surprising is the fact that fables like the ones Augustine and many others in this time period believed in suddenly stop occurring at the same time that the ability for others to verify these stories begin. Somehow I do not think this to be a coincidence.

**schisms-are compelled to come in, then let them not find fault because they are compelled...” Augustine asks rhetorically, “What then is the function of brotherly love? Does it, because it fears the short-lived fires of the furnace for a few, therefore abandon all to the eternal fires of hell?” “Why, therefore, should not the Church use force in compelling her lost sons to return, if the lost sons compelled others to their destruction (eternal death)?”**

With the mindset of Augustine who believed that he had the backing and example from the Almighty and moving on to Popes and Protestant leaders it is not surprising that history is littered with vast numbers of atrocities that were brought on by Christians who believed it was their duty to physically compel others to conform. With Augustine’s continued beliefs of Pagan myths, and his distortion of Jesus’ example to others, it is becoming obvious that one would be wise to approach Augustine’s teachings with extreme caution.

One of the points that I have made is that the belief in eternal conscious torment did not become prevalent until the translation of the original Greek New Testament writings into Latin. When one examines the Greek of the New Testament it is evident that many of the words in the Latin and later English translations do not denote an endless duration in the original Greek writings. This is especially true of the all important word “eternal” that is found in today’s English Bibles in which the original Greek word in many cases did not denote our word for eternal. Certainly all should agree that no matter what language a given writing is translated into, once it is translated it loses some of the purity from the original writings. Additionally, the times of the early Church were very unlike today, Bibles were scarce, it was illegal for a non Church official to own one, 90% of the population could not read or write, and as such the masses of Christians relied exclusively on their leaders to properly interpret the Scriptures for them. Therefore, we would hope that powerful Church fathers like Augustine took the time to studiously learn the Greek language so that the teachers of the Scriptures could give people the most accurate readings possible.

Continuing to use Augustine as our proxy, what did he think of the Greek language and was he well versed in it? Augustine says plainly that he, **“hates Greek”**, and the **“grammar learning of the Greeks.”** For centuries many Christian scholars have relied on the interpretations of Augustine when it comes to the Greek passages that he says denote eternal punishment despite the fact that many of the first Christians whose native tongue was Greek disagreed with him. It might be a surprise to those who have relied on Augustine’s interpretations that he admits he had, **“learned almost nothing of Greek”** and furthermore that he was, **“not competent to read and understand”**. (The Greek) In addition, Augustine in all his writings quotes the New Testament from the old Latin version, the Itala, from which the Vulgate was formed, and not the original Geek.

It is sad to observe that with the eternal consequences and infinite interests of all involved that Augustine did not take the time to not just know the Greek language but to master it to the best of his ability. If the Almighty had inspired the New Testament writers to dictate the message of His plan in the Greek language then why wouldn’t Augustine and

many other Church fathers feel compelled to immerse themselves in the Greek language? What does it say about Augustine that he “**hates Greek**”; the very language that he believes God dictated His message to the world with?

If it is not clear to everyone at this point that the Christian Church was influenced by converts from Pagan religions and that this could have impacted the making of eternal torment as orthodox long after Christ died, then I simply ask these unconvinced people to ponder where exactly new converts to Christianity were coming from, and then ask yourself why it is Christians worship God on “SUN” day, why do Christians celebrate Jesus’ birth on December 25<sup>th</sup>, and why do Christians celebrate Jesus’ resurrection on the particular Spring dates that they do? Once again, history answers these questions for us: all of the above dates for the major Christian celebrations are rooted in Pagan traditions that pre-date Christianity, and these Pagan traditions still influence Christianity today.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Despite my critiques of Augustine, I want to say that I do have enormous respect for him and the amount of time and thought that he put into his faith. One cannot go through Augustine’s momentous work such as the City of God and not appreciate the time and effort that he put into it, not to mention the depth of knowledge that he had for other people’s beliefs. People would do well in this regard to follow Augustine’s lead in knowing what others believe and taking the time and effort to disagree with them on fair grounds.

## Objective Truth

***"As soon as we lose the moral basis, we cease to be religious. There is no such thing as religion over-riding morality. Man, for instance, cannot be untruthful, cruel or incontinent and claim to have God on his side." Mahatma Gandhi***

Most Christians believe in a moral code that puts forth the idea of there being objective truth in the world. However, in my opinion Christians who believe in eternal conscious torment do not have a genuine claim to objective truth. If people want to believe in and hold to a notion that objective truth exists and can be found in God, then I do not believe that these people can simply rely on the words and interpretations of men that have been passed down from the beginning of the Church and are echoed today. Words get translated from one language to another and lose part of their original meaning. Words that mean one thing today can mean another thing tomorrow, and people's interpretations are undoubtedly affected by their environment and their finite minds. However, objective truth never changes, what is truly morally right today will be right for all times. Subjective truth says that some are above the law, and depending on who commits an act it could be right or wrong. Objective truth says that might does not make right, and every act is right or wrong because of the act itself, not who does it.

The Scriptures did not enable slavery to be abolished, rather it was a belief in objective truth and the lives of over 600,000 Americans both slaves and soldiers alike that finally was able to rid our nation of the horrid institution of slavery.<sup>10</sup> The Scriptures and the traditions of the Church did not lead society to a place where women's rights and their status in society were elevated. Rather, these positive changes for women came about because of objective truth and the leadership of many from outside of the Church. Most strikingly is the fact that objective truth and not the Scriptures is what enabled Jesus to stand up to the Pharisees and declare that the adulterous woman should not be stoned. If Jesus only relied on the Scriptures and the traditions of the Jewish religion then he would have advocated for the adulterous woman to be killed.

To sum up the argument in the area of objective truth it can be said with certainty that the human race has learned much since the times of Augustine and the other fathers of eternal conscious torment. We know the earth is not flat, we know that the sick are better off going to a medical doctor as opposed to an exorcist, we know that subjecting human beings to slavery is immoral, and we know that punishing a person with cruel and unusual torture is repulsive and should never be allowed in a civilized society. When we apply our increased understanding of the world in comparison to Augustine's time we

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<sup>10</sup> The majority of Christians in the South believed the institution of slavery to be a doctrine blessed by God. Many passages from the Bible can and were used to support slavery. A sad historical fact is that the largest Protestant denomination in the United States the Southern Baptist Convention was founded on a desire to hold onto the sound Biblical basis for slavery. Disappointingly, it took 150 years before the Southern Baptist Convention issued an apology for its stance on Slavery. What Scriptures one wonders are the Southern Baptists now using to say slavery is wrong, or would they admit that it is objective truth and not the Scriptures that proclaims slavery to be immoral?

can conclude that a timeless God should be defined by objective truth as we understand it today, not how people 1,500 years ago did. Following up on our previous examples, and looking at objective truth as a guide, it must be true that if it is morally wrong for a country like the United States to punish the worst criminals with cruel torture, then it would be wrong for anyone to punish with cruel torture, even God.

Those who hold onto the doctrine of eternal conscious torture can try to claim that they have the proper interpretation of Scripture on their side. They can claim that they have tradition and the strength in numbers in their camp. However, the one thing that cannot be claimed by those who believe in eternal conscious torment in the notion of objective truth, because for these people God is an entity that exercises His judgment in a manner that no civilized society would recognize as being moral, and as such their vision of God is one that is shrouded in subjective truth. I would argue that all the words, interpretations, and traditions of mere men are nothing if objective truth needs to be sacrificed, and this is yet another reason to reject the Godliness of eternal conscious torment.

## CLOSING ARGUMENT

*“Do I not destroy my enemies when I make friends of them?” Abraham Lincoln*

After finishing this paper and contemplating some of the facts that have been put forth some will simply reduce the subject of eternal torment to a matter of “faith” and therefore just accept whatever conclusion they have been taught to believe. However, I believe this would be a mistake as this is a subject that can be studied by objectively looking at the large body of evidence that is readily available. It is important to recognize that almost all aspects of one’s “faith” derive from another person’s opinion. As such, if all we do is accept doctrines like eternal conscious torment on “faith”, then we are simply accepting blindly the work of others that might be incomplete at best, or spurious at worst. It takes faith to believe in things that can never be seen, but it is ignorance combined with laziness when we believe in things that can be studied but instead are put aside and labeled as “faith”.

I am ending this paper by asking you, the reader, to throw away for a moment all that you might have been taught about eternal punishment in Hell including the words and traditions of men, and take the time to carefully read the following verses from the Gospel of Luke as if you had never read them before.

*From Luke 6:27-36 Jesus says, “But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.....Do to others as you would have them do to you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those that are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that.....But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great and you will be sons of the Most High, because He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”*

With a clear mind ask yourself if it is reasonable that God would implore you to love your enemies, but then He would not follow his own teaching and instead harshly punish His enemies by torturing them for all eternity? Jesus says “**He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked**”. Does any reasonable definition of being “kind” to someone entail eternally torturing that person? In addition to being kind to the ungrateful and wicked, Jesus says, “**Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.**” If God is truly timeless and unchangeable, then how would mercy entail eternally torturing someone upon his death? If God is merciful and kind to the ungrateful and wicked today, and He is unchangeable, then how will God not exhibit kindness and mercy to the ungrateful and the wicked for all of eternity? Lastly, Jesus says, “**If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them.**” Is it reasonable to believe in a doctrine such as eternal torture in Hell that if true would by God’s own definition have Him acting in a manner that is similar to a sinner?

Objective truth tells me that it would not be reasonable for God to not practice what he preaches, and if God calls us to love our enemies then objective truth tells me that He will

not torture His enemies for all eternity. Therefore, despite the traditions and words of men, I can look first to objective truth, and then to all the evidence that is available on the subject of eternal torment and state with confidence that I do not believe the case for eternal punishment in Hell can be proven beyond a reasonable doubt, and as such I do not believe this doctrine to be from God.

## Arguments Christians Use to Support the Idea of an Eternal Punishment in Hell

*“The further the spiritual evolution of mankind advances, the more certain it seems to me that the path to genuine religiosity does not lie through the fear of life, and the fear of death, and blind faith, but through striving after rational knowledge.”*  
*Albert Einstein*

For many of you the evidence that I laid out in the main body of this paper will be enough for you to agree with my idea that there is reasonable proof to doubt the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. However, some of you will have additional objections concerning the idea that eternal torment does not exist and for these readers I have addressed some additional issues below.

### ***1. God is completely sovereign and is the creator of the universe and sustainer of all things, and therefore He has the divine right to do anything he wants.***

Aside from the fact that a person who does not believe in eternal torture could make this very same argument and use it against those who believe in eternal torment, there are additional problems with this idea. This argument is the “might makes right” theory, and while a supreme ruler of the universe certainly can do whatever He wants, He is however, limited in His actions if he also wants to be known as a perfect and sinless God. For example, God could strike down all two year old babies tomorrow because He does not like it when they cry. God has the power and ability to do this, but if He took this kind of action then He would be guilty of committing murder under the common definition of this crime.

Those who hold to eternal conscious torment might believe in the Sovereignty of God, but it would appear that their vision of God does not operate under the guidance of objective truth, because in their view whatever God does even if it is murder would still be a good act. So, it comes down to either believing in a God that is completely Sovereign but does not operate with objective truth, or believing in a God that is completely Sovereign but operates in a manner that lines up with objective rights and wrongs.

### ***2. We humans have no way of knowing the extent of how offensive our sin is to God, therefore who are we to question the severity of His punishment?***

This is a common point made by those who believe in eternal conscious torment. The ironic thing is that those who believe in eternal torment will admit that nobody can know the severity of the offense we commit towards God, but then these same people will say that the only just punishment for human sin is eternal conscious torment. How can it be that if we do not know the severity of the crime that we then could profess to know

precisely what the severity of the punishment needs to be? If we do not know the severity of the crime then why can't the punishment just as easily be less severe than eternal conscious torment?

***3. If people are not consciously tortured for all eternity and are only annihilated, have they really been punished if they are not consciously aware of what they are missing?***

This is one of the most disturbing arguments that I have heard from proponents of eternal torture. With this argument we are to believe that people who after death are obliterated and cease to exist somehow do not suffer much pain or loss by being completely annihilated and then for all of eternity never able to enjoy the pleasures of Heaven. Whether a person is aware that they are missing out on an activity or whether they are blind to this knowledge, the fact remains that they are still missing out. If I go to the "party of the century" and do not tell my wife about it and she stays home and cleans the house, did she not miss out greatly on the wonderful party that I enjoyed despite not having any idea of what she missed?

Would not the joys of Heaven be so great that it would be infinitely horrible to miss out on them, regardless of whether or not someone did not make it to Heaven because they were annihilated versus being tortured forever? Is the orthodox doctrine of eternal conscious torment making people so numb to the severity of punishment that the idea of being obliterated and missing out on Heaven inexplicably does not seem like a very severe penalty? Besides, do Christians who believe in eternal torment not also believe that an unbeliever misses out on the pleasures of being a Christian in this lifetime, or do Christians who believe in eternal torment believe that they are suffering during this time for the reward of eternal bliss? Do those who believe in eternal torment worry that their joy in Heaven will not be as great if unbelievers are not being tortured forever?

***4. If there is not an eternal conscious punishment then what is the point of evangelizing, and why would people bother converting to Christianity?***

For those of you who are married, I would like to ask if you married your spouse because there was a threat of death if you did not marry him/her? Do you choose to stay married to your spouse because of a threat to your physical well being? What do we think of marriages that are arranged, or when there is the threat of physical harm if one of the spouses leaves the marriage? Do we look to these marriages as examples of tremendous and endearing love that we would like to emulate?

With this backdrop, I find it sad that those who believe in eternal conscious torture would question the reason to evangelize, or the desire for unbelievers to convert if there was not eternal torture for unbelief. How much more of a powerful witness would it be for someone to commit his life to a belief in which the fear of negative consequences is not involved? How much more pure is the commitment to loving someone when there is not a threat of eternal torture for noncompliance? As it stands today, those who believe in eternal conscious torment do not represent a witness that makes people take a step back and question why people would dedicate their life to the Christian belief. Whether it is

always true or not, the faith of those Christians who believe in eternal torture is easy for unbelievers to explain as being a calculated decision based not first on love, but rather on wanting to avoid eternal torture for oneself. This is why I believe Christians admire those of similar faith who die for their beliefs. In the face of possible negative consequences the revered Christian martyrs do not flinch. What then would God make of those people whom simply accept him because they are afraid of something bad happening to themselves? Besides, how can a person who accepts Christianity under the guise of eternal torture ever have complete confidence that their faith is based on love and not fear?

***5. God's holiness makes it impossible for him to be in the presence of sinners, therefore eternal conscious torment must be true.***

There are a couple facts that cripple the validity of this argument. The first is the idea that most Christians believe in the Trinity which says God is three yet one all at the same time. For example, Jesus was fully God and fully human when he was on earth. Well, if Jesus was still fully God on earth and he spent an inordinate amount of time with sinners, then how can it be true that God's holiness makes Him unable to be in the presence of sinners? Most Christians believe God to be timeless and unchangeable, so if He could be around sinners for over 30 years on earth, why wouldn't the timeless God be able to be around sinners at a different time?

Additionally, it is the common teaching of orthodox Christianity that God is omnipresent, which means God is everywhere at every time. If God is truly omnipresent, then it would stand to reason that He would be present in everyplace including Hell. How can Hell be the separation from God, if indeed God is omnipresent and cannot be separated from anything?

Even if we throw out the example from above which undoubtedly many will do, and if we were to accept the notion that God's holiness makes it impossible for him to be in the presence of sinners, the default position does not have to be eternal conscious torment. The reason for this is simple; if people are annihilated upon death and perish for all of eternity then these individuals will never be in the presence of God.

***6. Sure, eternal conscious torment is a very tough punishment; however that is what makes Jesus' work on the Cross all the more amazing. Jesus paid the price for sin, so that those who believe in Him will not have to pay the cost demanded by God.***

The traditional Christian belief and message in regards to salvation is this: ***God created man without sin, man sinned by disobeying God and brought sin into the world. Every human since the first man is born with a sinful nature and the price to be paid for this sinful nature as required by God is eternal punishment in Hell. However, God so loved the world that he sent His son to pay the price for sin, and those who believe in Jesus are in essence accepting the payment for their sin from Jesus and these believers get to avoid an eternity in Hell.***

Using an analogy to further illustrate what the traditional Christian message is, we can use an example of a criminal who is about to be punished with a lethal injection for the crimes that he committed. Let's say that a person who had nothing to do with the guilty person's crimes asks to take the place of the criminal. The innocent man wants to pay the debt to society on behalf of the guilty one. In this example the Governor agrees to let the innocent man take the place of the criminal. The Governor insists that the innocent man must pay the same debt to society that the guilty man owes; nothing short of death by lethal injection will suffice. The innocent man agrees to the terms and proceeds to take on the punishment that was owed by the guilty man.

Most reasonable people will agree with the terms of the above example that if someone is going to pay the price for a debt on behalf of another then only a full payment will be sufficient. The problem for the traditional Christian doctrine of eternal punishment in Hell is this: If, when man first sinned God decreed that eternal punishment in Hell is the cost for man's sinful nature, and then Jesus paid the price for sin, then Jesus should be paying the price set by God which would mean that he should be in Hell being eternally tormented. Of course Christians do not believe Jesus is in Hell, they believe that he is in Heaven. How can it be then that the price for man's sin is eternal punishment in Hell and Jesus paid the price for sin, but he is not in Hell?

If those who want to hold to eternal punishment in Hell as being the penalty for sin and at the same time want to have a credible message to the rest of the world, then they need to make a decision and update their teaching. Either the penalty for sin is eternal punishment in Hell and Jesus paid the price and is now being tormented in Hell, or the penalty for sin is not eternal punishment in Hell and Jesus resides in Heaven. For those who believe in eternal conscious torture and want to be seen as credible, what is your message going to be?

***7. God in his infinite wisdom predestined some to heaven and some to eternal torment, how wonderful is it that God saves anyone when all deserve eternal torture.***

The people that make this argument will also say with certainty that there is nothing someone can do to warrant salvation, it is all about God's grace. If this is true, and there is nothing someone can do to earn salvation, how can it also be true that someone can do anything to warrant eternal torture? It is either all about God or it is not all about God, it seems that some want to have it both ways. If it truly is all about God, then it needs to be all about God's desires for both salvation and eternal torture. The problem with this idea is that it questions the goodness of a Deity that would create humans simply for the purpose of torturing them forever.

To protect the goodness of God, those who believe in the pre-destination of humans to eternal torment will point to the sin of Adam and Eve as the condemnation for all mankind. The problem of course is the fact that nobody reading this paper, and in fact nobody who has ever lived including almost seven billion individuals today ever made a choice to be born. Even by accepting the notion of Adam and Eve bringing sin into the world and every human there after being guilty by association does not get around the

fact that nobody can ever choose to be born, thus making it difficult to find the goodness in instantly condemning people to eternal torture who never had a say in the matter.

In regards to the infinite glory of God for only eternally torturing the majority of mankind as opposed to every human, this in my opinion is an illogical argument. For example, let's say that a group of ten friends go to the beach and the lifeguards on duty tell them that it is too dangerous to go swimming for the next few hours. The lifeguards then talk amongst themselves and decide that if the group of ten do go swimming and have trouble with the rough water that they are only going to save the half of the group that goes in the water last. The group of ten proceed to disobey the lifeguards and sure enough all ten start to drown. Even though the lifeguards have the means and the ability to save all ten they only save the five that were picked out earlier and the other five drown and die in the water.

How much praise from reasonable people would this group of lifeguards receive? Would these lifeguards get to keep their job? The only possible people that might praise the lifeguards are the five that were saved, but even they will wonder why the lifeguards did not rescue their friends when they had every opportunity to do so. I wonder if those who believe in the idea of pre-destination would praise these lifeguards. If they do not, then I question why they would praise a God that operates in a manner that trumps even the lifeguards actions, as God with a pre-destination view would have decided to not save the swimmers long before they even entered into existence. The usual argument to this type of example says that God is perfect and lifeguards are not, so we should not compare God's actions to that of a group of lifeguards. If God is perfect, and lifeguards are not, why would reasonable people hold a perfect God to a lower standard than mere lifeguards?

Do those who believe in the glory and love of pre-destination ever stop and realize that the only people who see the glory and love of this theory are people who believe that they are one of the elect? If the glory of God rests in the fact that he has the power and authority to condemn all people who never had a choice of being born to an eternity of torture but decides to save a few, then this does not in my estimation equal infinite greatness.

***8. God does not want anyone to suffer eternal torment, this tough reality is the free choice of those who reject God.***

Before getting into the fallacies of this argument, if just for one minute take a step back and think about how it sounds when a Christian who believes in eternal torture shares his beliefs with others. The Christian if open about his theology would say, **“God loves you so much and He wants you to love Him, however if you do not love Him you will be tortured forever. All you have to do is accept this ‘free’ gift.”** Under what reasonable definition would torture for noncompliance equate to perfect love and a truly “free” choice?

There are over 30,000 different Christian denominations in the world with millions of Christians sharing their beliefs in millions of different ways. There is no barrier or qualifications for who can share the Christian message to the world, nor is there a set criteria for what it means to be a Christian, or what it takes to be saved. Some Christians will share their message in a very sincere loving manner, yet others might present Christianity with an aggressive, attacking, and condemning attitude. Some who present the Christian message would be considered model citizens, many however would not. The problem with all of this is the fact that many times the manner in which evidence is presented is just as important as the evidence itself. With this in mind, it is easy to understand why it is true that in the most important and significant trials in our country both sides want the best representation in delivering a particular message in the best possible manner.

It seems unreasonable to believe that if the consequences for unbelief is eternal conscious torture that an all knowing and all loving God would not have put into place a more organized, systematic, and consistent approach in delivering His message to the world. Obviously an all powerful God does not lack the resources or the abilities to have the best possible representation for His message, yet this is not the reality of the situation. If God were to demand a specific belief in exchange for avoiding eternal torture then in order to still be an all powerful and loving God it seems reasonable to expect that all individuals should be given God's message in a similar manner, both in the content and in the quality of the delivery. How would it be loving for one unbeliever to receive God's message from a caring parent and accept it, and another to hear about God from an abusive parent and reject it and then suffer an eternal torture for not believing? Is it really fair to say the abused child "freely" rejected God?

How many people in this world are truly "free" to choose Jesus? The biggest factor in determining which religion one believes in is where someone is born and raised; this is clearly shown by the extreme segregation of religious beliefs inherent to each country. How many reading this paper "freely" chose where to be born and grow up? Is the starving family in Africa that is just trying to survive really "free" to choose Jesus, someone that they might not have ever heard of? Is the person who lives in a Middle Eastern country in which Christianity is illegal ultimately "free" to choose Jesus? What about the young murder victim who never "freely" chose Jesus? Are we to believe in the justice of God when the murder victim is tortured forever and murderer makes the "free" choice of Jesus and avoids the eternal torture that his victim is suffering?

Finally, what do we say about the millions of people throughout history who never heard of Jesus and the millions that never will, have all these people been given the "free" choice to choose Jesus? Some will argue that there are exceptions to the "free" choice and that God has a plan for those who do not hear about Him. If this is the case, then the worst thing that a person could do is tell someone about Jesus if this person has no idea of Christianity. Why tell someone about Jesus if you are going to take the chance that they will "freely" make the wrong choice? It does not seem reasonable to believe that God would put an eternal plan in place that would make a person's eternal destination more secure if he never hears about God's message to the world.

If God truly is a just and loving God, then justice and love would demand equal opportunity if every person who makes the wrong choice is to receive the equally harsh punishment of eternal torture.

***9. God in his infinite love wants all people to love him. Since God is loving he is not going to force Himself onto anyone. Those who suffer in Hell for all eternity ultimately get what they want.***

Many will read the previous examples and still conclude that ultimately God gives people what they want, and this is an act of love on His part. What people are saying is that since God is infinitely loving He will not force someone to be with Him forever that does not want to be. There are some substantial problems with this idea. For example, let's say a parent is having a difficult time getting through to his teenage son who is going through a prolonged period of depression. It gets so bad for the son that he concludes it would be better to not be alive than have to deal with the pain he goes through each day. The son decides to hang himself in his bedroom, but before he is able to complete the job his father walks into the room. At this point the father has the ability to forcibly stop his son from killing himself, which of course would be going against the desires of his son. The father though, wants to be the most loving parent possible and so he believes based on his view of God that the best thing to do is let his child get what he wants. The son then proceeds to hang himself which tragically ends his life.

What would a reasonable person say about the actions of the father? What would the mother say when she got home and the husband explained his "loving" act? If this story ran in the newspaper would the general population praise this father as being "loving" by not stopping the son and letting him get what he wants even if it is death? Reasonable people would not accept this story as being a loving act by this father, yet many of these otherwise reasonable people will ascribe the same acts to God as being a glorious example of love worthy of our highest praise. A loving father would only let his child's free will go so far, once the free will of a child endangers his life then it is the father's responsibility to exert his will over the child, anything less from a father would not be an act of love.

***10. If there is not eternal conscious torment then what are we to make of the passages in the New Testament that seem to be teaching about the reality of this doctrine?***

The problem with this question is the fact that there are many passages in the Bible that can be used to try and prove multiple positions on the eventual outcome for unbelievers, and I demonstrated earlier in this paper that many of the proof texts for eternal torment do not stand up to scrutiny. There are Scriptures that on the surface can be used to support eternal conscious torment, annihilation, and eventual reconciliation of all. Of these three, I believe the Scriptural basis for eternal conscious torment seems to be the most lacking, and the most difficult of the three positions to reconcile when one comes across the verses that point to the other two options. Take John 3:16 for example, **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."** Under what reasonable definition of the word perish

would we have a meaning denoting eternal torture? Perish in every common usage means to cease to exist, that something is no more. The proponents of eternal conscious torment cannot accept this though, so they will come up with complicated explanations of how perish does not really mean perish.

Take a look at I Timothy 4:9-10 which reads, **“This is a trustworthy saying that deserves FULL acceptance (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of ALL men, and especially of those who believe.”** What is it that needs to be fully accepted in these two verses? Is it that Jesus is the Savior of a few elect? Is it that Jesus is the Savior of only those who believe in Him? Looking at these verses with an open mind it is clear that Paul is saying that his listeners need to fully accept that Jesus is the Savior of all men, for Paul does not allow us to marginalize the meaning of all in this verse because he adds the line, **“and especially of those who believe.”**

To avoid any confusion and unwarranted criticism of my argument against eternal conscious torment, it is not my aim in this work to prove which of the three outcomes for unbelievers is the most probable; rather it is to show the many reasons to doubt the idea of eternal torment and that problem verses abound for those who hold to this doctrine. Lastly, it does seem odd that if eternal torment is true that an all powerful God would leave us with so many Scriptures that when accepted at their face value would not lead us to a rational belief in this doctrine.

***11. After going through this entire piece of work showing evidence against the doctrine of eternal torment, many will reduce this debate to this mistaken belief: People who do not believe in eternal conscious torment simply do not like the hard truth of it, and these people will always find something wrong with the doctrine because of their emotional rejection of it, not because of the facts. There is no way God could have been more explicit in the Bible concerning the eternal torment of unbelievers, and those who let their emotions get the best of them cannot see the truth.***

One thing that I think everyone who is reading this paper would agree with me on is the fact that I am not God, nor am I all powerful, or all knowing. In comparison to an all knowing God, I simply do not match up. However, even with all of my deficiencies if I was the author of a doctrine such as eternal torture I could make this truth much more explicit than what we have in the Bible.

Genesis 2:17 has God saying to Adam, **“You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”** To start with, this is a confusing statement from God because in the first half of the sentence he says **“You may freely eat of every tree of the garden”**. From the first part of the sentence it sounds like Adam has permission to eat from every tree in the garden, but apparently based on the next part of the sentence he could not eat from every tree. At this point Adam is probably a bit confused, but moving on, it appears that God is simply saying that if Adam eats from the tree of knowledge of good and evil then he will die that same day. We do not find any warning about eternal conscious

torment for Adam or his descendents, and as hard as proponents of eternal torture try this theory is not found in this passage. It is no wonder then that Moses did not talk about an eternal torture from God, he was not aware of any such doctrine. In my present effort to help avoid any confusion on Adam's part, and to make clear the eternal consequences for Adam and all his descendents here is how a self admitted fallible author like myself could have written Genesis 2:17:

***“You may not eat from every tree in the garden, you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for if you do eat from it you will suffer a spiritual death that day. Furthermore, if you eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall bring into this previously perfect world the evilness of sin, and you and your descendents will be spiritually dead and upon your physical death both you and your descendents will then be punished by being consciously tormented for all of eternity unless you repent of your sins and believe. I ask you now Adam, do you understand my commandments and do you grasp the eternal consequences of disobeying me?” Adam then replied to God, “Yes Lord, I understand that if I eat from the knowledge of good and evil that I will die a spiritual death, and I will bring into the world the horrors of sin, and myself and my descendents will need to repent and have faith if we are to avoid the perils of eternal conscious torment.”***

Now we move on to Adam and Eve's transgression where they did eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and surely if eternal conscious torment is true we will find God detailing this punishment for Adam and his descendents. Unfortunately for those who believe in eternal torture this is not what we find, rather the Lord says in Genesis 3:16-19, ***To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” And to the man he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”***

The powerful fact with the above verses is the total absence of the idea of eternal conscious torment as being a part of the punishment for both Adam and Eve and their descendents. For Eve the punishment is going to be pains in child bearing along with being ruled by her husband. As far as Adam is concerned it sounds like his punishment is a return to the dust from which he was formed, and of course this is not an eternal torture. God said, ***“you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”*** How can any reasonable person conclude that God is putting in place an eternal torture when He clearly says that the punishment is a return to dust? If a return to the dust is denoting an eternal torture in Hell, then that would mean Adam was in Hell before God brought him forth from the dust. The questions for those who believe in eternal torment in Hell are beginning to mount. Where does God make clear to them the eternal consequences of their sin? Where is the mention of Adam and Eve's descendents being faced with a possible

sentence of eternal conscious torment for not repenting of their sinful nature and believing? As I did earlier, I will use my finite mind to make things more clear than what we have been given in Genesis. I will add just one sentence to this account that would have made it very obvious as to the eternal punishment that now would await Adam and Eve along with all of their descendants. Here is my addition to verse 19:

***“In addition to all of the above punishments, you will also be sent to a place of eternal conscious torment upon your physical death if you do not repent of your sins and believe, and furthermore from this day forth your descendants will also be at risk for the punishment of eternal conscious torment if they do not repent and believe before they die.”***

If the Bible represents exactly what God wanted to say to His people, and if eternal conscious torment for the majority of mankind is true, then how is it possible that I have made this reality so much more understandable than God did? If eternal torture is true and if the number of words in the Bible today is the exact number of words that God wanted written, why were so many words used to document things that have absolutely no eternal consequences? For one of many examples, take out a Bible and compare 2 Kings 19 with Isaiah 37-38:7. These two passages from the Old Testament are a virtual word for word account of some activities of King Hezekiah that in no way have any bearing on a Christian’s life today, and certainly these passages do nothing to help anyone understand God’s ultimate plan of judgment. How are reasonable people to conclude that such a fallible person like myself could add a mere 212 words to the Book of Genesis that articulates the doctrines of original sin and eternal torment in much better detail, and yet an all knowing and all powerful God would not use precious words in Genesis on such an infinitely important topic but would repeat 1,260 words to copy verbatim some actions of a long forgotten King?

I encourage everyone to go through the Bible and when you come to places where one would expect to find warnings of eternal torment, it is nowhere to be found. The point is, if an all knowing God was going to institute a punishment as shocking as eternal conscious torment, I find it unreasonable to believe that he would also be a loving God if he were to spend so many of his valuable words to mankind on repeating word for word events that have no bearing on the world today as opposed to being explicit over and over again about the doctrine of eternal torture.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The same people who say that Adam and Eve’s sin caused God to create Hell as an eternal punishment also tell us that Jesus is the only way that man can reconcile himself to God and avoid an eternity of torment in Hell. If this is true, then why after Adam and Eve’s sin was God so worried about Adam eating from the Tree of Life and in doing so obtaining eternal life on earth? God was so worried about this that He had to banish Adam from the Garden and put up a sword to block access to the Tree of Life. God says in Genesis 3:22-23, **“See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”** Again, if eternal torment is true, and Jesus is the only way for a person to avoid this fate, why was God worried about Adam eating from the Tree of Life and living forever? This worried behavior ascribed to God is another reason why nothing in the Old Testament confirms that the events in the Garden of Eden led God to institute eternal torment as the punishment for sin. How can something be confirmed that we have no evidence for occurring? The inconsistencies in the orthodox view of the Adam and Eve story seems to be a case of a doctrine trying to dictate what a text in the Bible says, as opposed to letting the text speak for itself.

## **Additional Thoughts on the Godliness of Eternal Hell**

***“But there are not a few who would be indignant at having their belief in God questioned, who yet seem greatly to fear imagining Him better than He is.”***

***George McDonald***

***The idea of an eternal torture was a prevalent belief in many religions that pre-date Christianity by hundreds of years.***

I wonder if those who believe in eternal conscious torment ever think about the fact that their vision of God’s ultimate judgment is one that they share with many other religions that pre-date Christianity by hundreds of years. This to me would be a very sad reality; to believe in a God whom is purported to be all knowing, all powerful, and perfect in every way and yet His ultimate judgment is no different than so many other “Gods” who were worshiped well before Christianity came about. Additionally, it would be disconcerting to me if I had a belief in eternal torture that many historians from the past have documented how religions that existed well before Christianity deceptively used the fear of eternal torment to keep the society in line.

I will finish this section with some quotes from historians long ago that tell us how the false belief in eternal punishment was used by religious leaders before Christianity in an effort to exert control over the masses. As shown earlier in this paper Augustine echoes these historians, and those who continue to hold to a belief in eternal torture will have to reconcile the fact that their view of God’s judgment is no different than so many religions prior to Christianity. Lastly, as shown by the historians below, the contention that current believers of eternal torture are mistaken is nothing new, and if history is any guide it is likely that those who dispute the reality of an eternal torture will be proven correct in the end.

***Polybius, the historian, says:***

***“Since the multitude is ever fickle, full of lawless desires, irrational passions and violence, there is no other way to keep them in order but by the fear and terror of the invisible world; on which account our ancestors seem to me to have acted judiciously, when they contrived to bring into the popular belief these notions of the gods, and of the infernal regions.”*** B. vi 56.

***Strabo, the geographer, says:***

***“The multitude are restrained from vice by the punishments the gods are said to inflict upon offenders, and by those terrors and threatenings which certain dreadful words and monstrous forms imprint upon their minds...For it is impossible to govern the crowd of women, and all the common rabble, by philosophical reasoning, and lead them to piety, holiness and virtue - but this must be done by superstition, or the fear of the gods, by means of fables and wonders; for the thunder, the aegis, the trident, the torches (of the Furies), the dragons, &c., are all fables, as is also all the ancient***

*theology. These things the legislators used as scarecrows to terrify the childish multitude." Geog., B. I*

*Seneca says:*

*"Those things which make the infernal regions terrible, the darkness, the prison, the river of flaming fire, the judgment seat, &c., are all a fable, with which the poets amuse themselves, and by them agitate us with vain terrors." Sextus Empiricus calls them "poetic fables of hell;" and Cicero speaks of them as "silly absurdities and fables" (ineptiis ac fabulis).*

***The joy and happiness of most people is greatly tied to the well being of their loved ones.***

An often asked question by both Christians and non-Christians concerns how those in Heaven will feel about the people who are being tortured in Hell. Even the most staunch believers in eternal torture ask themselves this difficult question. How then, do the proponents of eternal torture answer this question? We can look to a well known Christian theologian for some insight into this issue. J.I. Packer was asked in a 2002 interview conducted by Christianity Today how those in Heaven will feel about the people in Hell. Packer replied that those in Heaven will be caught up in the glory of God and their time and attention will be spent praising Him. Christianity Today pressed forward a bit and wanted more clarity in regards to how those in Heaven will feel about their loved ones (Dads, Moms, Brothers, Sisters, ect) being tortured in Hell. When Packer finally gave a specific response to this question he uttered these eleven cold words, ***"Love and pity for hell's occupants will not enter our hearts."***

The problem with Packer's explanation of how Heaven's occupants will feel about those in Hell is the fact that for most people their own happiness is directly affected by the well being of their loved one's. If my wife is hurting either physically or mentally I also hurt. For those with kids I am sure it is gut wrenching if they become seriously ill. When a person suffers the loss of a loved one there is a definite time of mourning that takes place and during this period a person has a difficult time enjoying any of life's previously enjoyable activities.

The proponents of eternal torture are somehow able to believe that they will have no feelings for those who are being tortured forever while they enjoy eternal bliss in Heaven, even if the tortured people are their spouse, parents, or children. If, when people are in Heaven they no longer have feelings for those who are suffering greatly, then it is a good thing that our society does not operate in the same manner that Heaven does. Imagine a society in which those who are the most fortunate do not care for those who are in great pain. Reasonable people certainly would not want this type of society here on earth, then why do so many yearn for an eternity of this mindset? For myself, I cannot envision, nor would I want to have a heart that does not bleed for those who are in great agony.

Another way in which proponents of eternal torture justify the lack of concern that those in Heaven have for the people in Hell is by saying that a person is in Hell because of

God's perfect justice, and that this person is getting what he ultimately wants and deserves. Those with loving hearts here on earth care deeply for those who might have a disease like AIDS even if it was a behavioral choice that led to a person contracting this disease. Those with loving hearts look after the well being of those who are in poverty despite the fact that many of these people made decisions that contributed greatly to their current circumstances. To me, the greatest examples of love are when love is given freely, regardless of how much a person might "deserve" otherwise. Sadly, for believers in eternal torture this type of love will not exist in Heaven.

***If eternal torture is true then the majority of the almost seven billion people on earth today will be consciously tortured for all of eternity.***

It is worth looking at some statistics to give those who believe in eternal torture some perspective on just how many people if they are correct would be subject to an eternity in Hell. On a global basis about 33% of the world is Christian, although this includes Christians, Catholics, Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, and many other sects of Christianity. Many Christians and Catholics do not believe that all of the denominations within Christianity are truly saved, and therefore the 33% figure for Christians is a much larger number than we would have if we were to ask the various Christian sects to identify who is a "true" Christian.

Even at the 33% figure that would mean that 67% of the world or put another way **4,690,000,000** people living today will be tortured for all of eternity. This statistic is hard to mesh with the idea of Jesus being the Savior of the world, because according to those who believe in eternal torment most of the world will end up in the depths of Hell for all of eternity. Furthermore, another problem arises in that the religious affiliation of individuals differs greatly on a country by country basis. This is not what one would expect if the God of the universe was going to institute eternal torture for nonbelievers, one would think that God would not let cultural influences play the dominant role in how a person decides what faith to believe in. Here are some startling statistics that those who will continue to believe in eternal torture will have to reconcile with a loving God.

The populations of the following countries are almost entirely Muslim (About 99.5% or more of the native populations, and nearly all of the foreign workers, are Muslim.) **Listed alphabetically.**<sup>12</sup>

- Bahrain
- Comoros
- Kuwait
- Maldives
- Mauritania
- Mayotte
- Morocco
- Oman
- Qatar
- Somalia
- Saudi Arabia
- Tunisia
- United Arab Emirates
- Western Sahara
- Yemen

With 99.5% of the population in these countries being Muslim, a person who holds to the idea of eternal torture must question why the Christian God seems to be totally absent from these populations. How much opportunity does a child born in one of these countries really have to make the “free” choice for Jesus? For those who believe in pre-destination it would appear that 99.5% of the population in these countries are not pre-destined for a belief in Jesus. Does it seem reasonable that a loving God would pre-destine on the basis of geography and skip over 99.5% of the population in so many countries?

Reasonable people would expect that if eternal torture was true we would see vastly more even statistics in the makeup of religious beliefs within different countries. It just does not add up that if “free” will or pre-destination were true that almost 100% of the population in so many countries would not “freely” choose the correct God, and almost 100% of many countries would not be pre-destined to believe in Jesus. The statistics clearly show that cultural influences and not a desire to reject Jesus is a better explanation of why there are so many countries that are predominately non-Christian.

We must ask at this point how eternal torture can be a just punishment for a person who grew up in a country that is 99.5% non-Christian. Think of all the natural disasters that strike the many countries in which less than 10% of the country is Christian. It is in these poor non-Christian countries that earthquakes and Tsunami’s cause the greatest loss of life. How can a person who believes in eternal torture offer any comfort to these people by telling them their loved ones including their children, husbands, wives, parents and their friends were greeted after a Tsunami or an Earthquake with an eternity of torture in

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<sup>12</sup> This complete statistic, and all other statistics for the world religions come from the web-site [www.adherents.com](http://www.adherents.com)

Hell? Would any of the survivors care to listen to the orthodox Christian message of “hope” that is being offered?

It is difficult in a country as rich and powerful as the United States to have a perspective on how most of the world lives. Many who are considered to be poverty stricken in the U.S. are wealthy in comparison to the rest of the world. Additionally, things such as starvation, infant mortality, and dying from curable diseases are rare in the U.S. in comparison to much of the world. From an economic and social well being standpoint it is hard for people in the United States to have an understanding of the truly difficult circumstances that grip much of the world. For many, life is about trying to make it to the next day, literally. Also, when it comes to religious beliefs it is hard for those in the United States to have a grasp of how many people in this world are not Christians. In the U.S. anytime religion is promoted it will most likely be the Christian faith. From the religious books available in stores, to the movies shown in our country, to the churches in our local cities, it is safe to say that the United States religious landscape is dominated by the Christian faith.

I am ending this section by showing various statistics that display the quality of life in many different countries throughout the world. For those who believe that eternal torture is the eventual fate for people who do not believe in Jesus, pay close attention to the fact that those people who are most affected by poverty, starvation, and deadly diseases are living in countries in which most of the population belongs to a religion other than Christianity. The reality of the situation is that the majority of the people who are impoverished in this world do not have the time, education, or health to even think about who the one true God is, and yet many Christians believe that these people will be tortured for all eternity by a “loving” God.

Lastly, for those who will continue to hold onto a belief in eternal torture, I wonder if J.I. Packer’s statement that ***“Love and pity for hell's occupants will not enter our hearts”*** offers you any reassurance as to the Godliness of eternally torturing the weak and poor of this world.

### Lowest DNI per Capita (US dollars earned each year on average for each citizen)<sup>13</sup>

Burundi	\$88.82	Eritrea	\$145.39
Ethiopia	\$91.37	Tajikistan	\$153.77
Sierra Leone	\$118.20	Liberia	\$158.32
Malawi	\$134.28	Niger	\$164.90
Guinea-Bissau	\$141.02	Chad	\$187.64
		<b>United States</b>	<b>\$33,070</b>

### Highest Infant Mortality Rate (Number of deaths of babies per 1,000 births)

Angola	191.0	Niger	121.7
Afghanistan	163.1	Mali	116.8
Sierra Leone	143.6	Somalia	116.7
Mozambique	130.8	Tajikistan	110.8
Liberia	128.9	Guinea-Bissau	107.2
		<b>United States</b>	<b>6.4</b>

### Lowest Life Expectancy

Swaziland	35	Angola	40
Bots Wana	36	Ziger	41
Sierra Leone	38	Libera	41
Lesotho	38	Afghanistan	42
Zambia	39	Central African Rep.	42
		<b>United States</b>	<b>77</b>

### Literacy Rates as a Percentage of the Population

Niger	17.6%	Somalia	37.8%
Burkina Faso	26.6%	Gambia	40.1%
Sierra Leone	31.4%	Senegal	40.2%
Guinea	35.9%	Iraq	40.4%
Afghanistan	36.0%	Benin	40.9%
		<b>United States</b>	<b>97.0%</b>

<sup>13</sup> The following statistics can be found at [www.nationmaster.com](http://www.nationmaster.com)

### Drinking Water Availability as a Percentage of the Population

Afghanistan	13%	Mauritania	37%
Ethiopia	24%	Angola	38%
Chad	27%	Oman	39%
Cambodia	30%	Rwanda	41%
Laos	37%	Burkina Faso	42%
		<b>United States</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Access to Sanitation as a Percentage of the Population

Sanegal	8.0%	Guinea	23%
Djibouti	13%	Guinea-Bissau	25%
Vanuatu	17%	Botswana	28%
Mali	20%	Yemen	28%
Chad	21%	Togo	28%
		<b>United States</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Children Living with Aids

Nigeria	270,000	India	170,000
South Africa	250,000	Zambia	150,000
Zimbabwe	240,000	Uganda	110,000
Ethiopia	230,000	Cote d'Ivoire	84,000
Kenya	220,000	Mozambique	80,000
		<b>United States</b>	<b>3,927</b>

## *Concluding Thoughts:*

### *What if you are wrong and eternal torture does exist?*

For those who let themselves constantly live in fear, life can become a long series of “what ifs”. When I get out of bed, what if I slip and hurt myself? What if I cross the street and get hit by a car? What if I go to a sporting event and a terrorist blows up the arena? If a person’s life is focused on the fear of negative consequences for things that have little probability of being true, then I submit that this life of fear will paralyze this person more powerfully than any physical ailment ever could. For myself, I do not want to live a life based in fear, to me that is not a life worth living. Could I be wrong and eternal torture as orthodox Christians believe be true? Sure, this is a possibility. However, so is the possibility that the billion Muslims in our world are correct and all those who do not bow down to Allah will spend an eternity being tortured in Hell. How many Christians reading this are worried about Allah sending them to Hell for all eternity? How many Muslims are worried that the Christian God is going to send them to Hell for all eternity? This is the problem with living a life grounded in fear, you can never truly escape it. No matter what a person believes there will always be others who are telling this person that he is not safe from Hell, and thus the fear of negative consequences will undoubtedly creep back in.

For me, a life of believing in a God that is defined by objective truth as opposed to one that punishes with eternal torture is an infinitely better option. Not only because I believe the evidence for my view of God is more solid, but also because I do not have the heart to commit myself to loving a Deity that tortures for all of eternity those who offend Him.

In the end, whether I am proven right or wrong on the issue of eternal punishment in Hell means less to me than knowing that I am a person that lives my life with a belief in objective rights and wrongs, and that I am willing to hold to these beliefs no matter what negative consequences I might be subjected to. If my disbelieving in eternal torture turns out to be wrong, and if I am not sent directly to Hell, then I will ask to be excused from Heaven so I can spend an eternity doing my best to help others have a more pleasant existence. To spend an eternity only thinking about my own well being and not caring for those who are being tortured would be the worst Hell I can imagine, and if eternal torture is true I will gladly take my objective truth and positive outlook with me to offer comfort to those who are being tortured for all eternity.

