

Proof that 1 = 3

(Remember: as long as you perform the same operation on both sides an equation stays equal.)

Assume: $x = 2$
Multiplying by 4: $4x = 8$
Subtracting 6x: $-2x = 8 - 6x$
Adding 1: $-2x + 1 = 9 - 6x$
Adding x^2 : $x^2 - 2x + 1 = x^2 - 6x + 9$
Factorising: $(x - 1)^2 = (x - 3)^2$
Taking square roots: $x - 1 = x - 3$
Subtracting x: $-1 = -3$
Changing signs: $1 = 3$

Q.E.D.

This and other writings available from:

Robert Beecham
Linden Cottage
The Burgage
Prestbury
Cheltenham
GL52 3DJ

or from website
www.GrowthInGod.org.uk

The Teachings of Universal Reconciliation and Endless Torment in the Light of the Attributes of God

Aug 2009

Paul's Summary

The apostle Paul wrote 11 chapters of his letter to the Romans describing God's plan of salvation. Chapters 9, 10 and 11 are mainly about his own people, the Jews, most of whom had rejected him and his message and, more importantly, their Messiah whom he proclaimed. He concluded his thesis with the ecstatic words: "For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all. Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! ... For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." (Rom 11: 32, 33, 36).

Which of our two conflicting views of human destiny fit with these words?

Most of Paul's former Jewish friends and relations did not accept Jesus as their Messiah. According to traditional teaching, most of them were on their way to eternal torment and some had already arrived; and they are there till this day, and will remain there forever. Could Paul seriously have written these words if that was what he believed? Just go back and read those words again. No way can they be reconciled with what the church has taught. They are utterly incompatible with the teaching that the majority of the human race, and especially Paul's own Jewish people were destined to spend eternity in hell. If Paul believed that, could he really have written these words: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" They would sound more like sarcasm or a sick joke than genuine ecstatic praise of God.

How do Paul's words fit with the teaching of universal reconciliation? Perfectly! "God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all." He wrote to the Colossians that it was "God's good pleasure, having made peace through the blood of His cross, to reconcile all things in earth and in heaven to himself" (Col 1: 19, 20). In his young Pharisaic days Paul had only had a limited view of God's purposes, confined to his own Jewish people. Now his vision had broadened into an understanding of God's comprehensive and multi-staged plan for the restoration and reconciliation of the whole human race and beyond that for the restitution of all things. This was utterly beyond anything of which his wildest imagination could previously have dreamt. No wonder he exclaimed, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." These words perfectly accord with Paul's, and the whole New Testament's, and indeed the entire Bible's teaching of universal reconciliation.

Bible quotations are taken from the NIV or retranslated

immediately receive life. In the words of Jesus, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” (John 5: 24).

Multitudes in the last 2000 years have done this, and are now in the presence of their saviour. Multitudes no doubt have rejected Jesus and gone into judgment and punishment. But this punishment is not an endless, merciless torment. Rather it is a loving, beneficial, corrective time of purification. “The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son” (Heb 12: 6). We read of those who receive the mark of the beast that they “will be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb” (Rev 14: 10). This is picture language and both fire and sulphur are cleansing agents. This purging takes place in the loving, caring presence of Jesus. When that work is complete they too will come to repentance and salvation through Jesus Christ and join the great multitude of the redeemed and sing the praises of the saviour of all mankind.

God’s Justice

Until now I have focussed on three of God’s pre-eminent attributes, those of **power**, **wisdom** and **love**. This short study would be incomplete without considering one more, his attribute of **justice**. People who believe in eternal torment often stress that it is part of God’s justice. They may quote 2 Thes 1: 6-9: “God is **just**: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting (αἰώνιος - literally *age-lasting*) destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.”

The first five books of the Bible are collectively known as the *Torah* or Law. They, especially Leviticus and Deuteronomy, are full of just laws. Punishments are always proportional to the offence committed. Probably the best known example is found in Deut 19: 21: “Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot”. Here the punishment was exactly equal to the crime. All justice, human or divine, is based on this principle. Jesus himself said: “And that slave who knew his master’s will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, shall receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few” (Luke 12: 47,48). No slave will receive an infinite number of lashes!

God’s justice, as well as his wisdom, his love and his power, make the idea of infinite punishment or eternal torment a total impossibility. Divine justice requires that a lifetime of sin and disobedience and rejection of God should receive a punishment, and no doubt a severe punishment; but every concept of justice demands that it should be limited and not endless.

The Attributes and Character of God

Our God is a wonderful God! And when I use the word God, I must be more specific and say the God of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the God of the Bible; because this God is very different in all his attributes from the gods of other religions.

The author A. W. Tozer wrote a book describing the various attributes of God in which he included the following: Wisdom, Infinitude, Sovereignty, Holiness, Omniscience, Faithfulness, Omnipotence, Love, Self-existence, Self-sufficiency, Justice, Immutability, Mercy, Eternal, Goodness, Gracious, Omnipresence. Spurgeon and other writers list different attributes with different names and number, but they really only differ in detail.

God is a wonderful God for us, because these attributes are exactly what any creation capable of thought and feeling would wish for in its creator.

Of these attributes I believe there are 3 that stand out pre-eminently from the others. These 3 are

- **Absolute Wisdom,**
- **Absolute Power** and
- **Absolute Love.**

We may compare these 3 principle attributes to the 3 principle colours, red, blue and yellow. All other colours can be derived by mixing these 3 in different proportions, but they are totally independent of each other. Blue mixed with yellow makes green, and red mixed with yellow makes orange, but no amount of mixing blue and yellow would ever make red.

God's mercy, his goodness, his faithfulness and his graciousness are all expressions of his love. His omniscience expresses his wisdom and his power. His infinitude and sovereignty are also expressions of his power. His justice is an expression of his wisdom and his love.

Why should we believe that God is **all-powerful**? Firstly this word is an exact literal translation of the Greek word παντοκράτωρ (panto-krator) which is used 8 times in the New Testament to describe God. The first part of this word (pan) means all. The second part, from kratos (as in democrat, bureaucrat etc) means force, strength, power or dominion. God absolutely has all those things. Also we see displays and descriptions of God’s power from the creation of the universe in Genesis onwards throughout the Bible. We see in Jesus the power necessary to handle every situation that he faced, whether it was death, disease, lack of food, lack of transport or anything else.

Why should we believe that God is **all-wise**? Again throughout scripture we find many references to the wisdom of God. We see his wisdom manifested in the whole of creation. We see wisdom in every word Jesus spoke, and also in the utterances of many of his followers as they spoke under the power of the Spirit of God.

Why should we believe that God is **all-loving**? We have a plain Bible statement that “**God is love**” (1 John 4: 8). Also the Bible’s best known verse states that “**God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life**” (John 3: 16). Jesus said, “**Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends**” (John 15:13); which of course was what he went on to do.

If God were not all-powerful, he might love us deeply and have marvellous plans for us throughout eternity, but he might fail in executing them. He might not be able to control circumstances in our lives, or spiritual powers that were arrayed against us.

If God were not all-loving, he might have the power and the wisdom to do wonderful things, but he would not have our good at heart, or any particular concern for what happened to us.

If God were not all-wise, he might love us and have power to do anything, but, without wisdom, would he really be able to do the best for us?

The wonderful truth is that he has all 3 of these attributes, and what else could any child wish for in its father?

These attributes of God are further illustrated in the story of creation, which also forms a helpful background to this study.

The Story of Creation

At some time in the past, anything between 6000 and 15 billion years ago depending on your interpretation of the book of Genesis and modern science, God began an enormous creative project. He spoke into existence large numbers of massive galaxies, each containing millions of stars. In one of these galaxies he selected one star, the sun, to be the centre of our solar system. He arranged that one planet in this solar system would be suitable for the habitation of the creatures he planned to make. On this planet earth he made every scientific detail right for the existence of life. He ordained the exact values of physics constants, only recently understood by man, for the universe to hold together. He created the massive diversity of all the chemical elements, individually and in all their combinations. From them he made all the solids, liquids and gases required for plant, animal and human existence.

age, and the phrase *eis ton aiwna* (εις τον αιωνα) literally means *to the age*, but most English Bibles translate it *for ever*. Similarly the Greek adjective *aiwnios* (αιωνιος) derived from *aiwn*, literally means *age-lasting*, but is generally translated *eternal* or *everlasting*. Similar things are true in the Old Testament of the Hebrew word *olam*. I have written in detail on this point in two other writings, *The Hidden Aeonian Realm* and *Universal Reconciliation* and will not repeat myself here.

The difference between these two ways of translating is absolutely radical. *Everlasting* and *forever* both imply time with no limit or end. *Age-lasting* and *to the age* are both uncertain in duration, but imply a limited time. Limited punishment is compatible with other teaching in the Bible about the *restitution of all things* (Acts 3: 21) and God *reconciling all things* to himself (Col 1: 20). Unlimited punishment is incompatible with these teachings.

The whole traditional teaching of eternal torment rests on the translation of these words. As they stand in most English (and other language) translations of the Bible they leave no room for any other interpretation of the scriptures. Once they are replaced with their more literal translations the traditional teaching of Eternal Torment collapses.

Alternative View of Human Destiny

We will now consider an alternative view of human destiny.

God made man, but he was not yet satisfied. His work was incomplete. Man had the beautiful innocence of a child, but not the maturity of an adult. Something more was necessary. Man must know both good and evil. He must experience both light and darkness. He must know both love and hate. He must experience both the positive and the negative. Only the knowledge and experience of these opposites could make the complete, mature and perfect beings that God wanted. In his wisdom he planned that the whole human race should fall into sin and darkness and separation from himself, and he planned that the whole human race should be redeemed and restored and brought into a new and greater communion with himself.

So God deliberately placed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden with the full knowledge that Adam and Eve would fall to the tempter’s voice and eat its fruit. From before the foundation of the earth he had a comprehensive plan for the total restoration of the entire human race and beyond it for his whole creation.

God sent his son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross and rise again to redeem all of mankind. He then commissioned his first apostles, and many others after them, to carry this good news to the whole of his creation. Those who receive Jesus

If God were not all-wise and all-knowing, he might not have anticipated this unutterably terrible disaster. With better planning this need never have happened. But God sees the end from the beginning and his plans can never fail.

If God were not all-powerful, we might imagine that Satan or some rival power brought about this terrible end to his plans. But God is omnipotent and there is no other rival power.

God is all-loving, all-powerful and all-wise. Such a God could not be happy even if one member of the human race were left interminably in torment and outer darkness. The good shepherd could not rest while even only one sheep was lost. How much less could he allow the vast majority of those whom he created in his own image to go into irretrievable endless torment, separated for ever from his presence?

An Impossible Conclusion

I once came across a mathematical proof that 1 is equal to 3. Each line followed logically from the previous one with no apparent error. The proof looked infallible. However it did not make me believe that 1 was equal to 3. The logic looked absolutely solid, but the conclusion was impossible. We all know that 1 is not equal to 3. (For anyone who's interested in the proof, I'll put it at the end of this writing.)

I believe it's the same with the subject we are discussing. For many people there is an infallible proof that the majority of the human race will go into eternal torment. The proof is that it is the teaching of the infallible scriptures. The Bible states clearly in more than one place (with some variation in terminology) that the unbelieving will go into eternal torment (see Mat 25:46, Rev 14:10-11, Jude 13, 2 Thes 1: 9). However, the idea that an all-loving, all-powerful and all-wise God created the human race and then allowed the greater part of it to go for ever into unimaginable and unceasing torment is an impossible conclusion. It is no more probable than 1 being equal to 3.

Where is the Fallacy?

In the proof that $1 = 3$ there is a fallacy. There must be, because the conclusion is totally absurd. One of the lines does in fact contain a well-hidden error that most people would not spot.

It is the same with traditional teaching on eternal torment.

The fundamental error in traditional teaching is hidden in inaccurate translation of the original New Testament Greek text. And of course the vast majority of Bible readers cannot see it. The Greek word *aiwn* (αιων) means *an*

God then created vegetable life with its amazing complexity and variety. This prepared the way for animal life, which never ceases to amaze us as science reveals more and more of its wonders. Marvellous though all this was, God was not yet satisfied. His work was not complete. All this had only been a preparation for his central aim of creation. God wanted beings in his own image with which he could have relationship and communion. He wanted beings that could receive and understand and reciprocate his love. So God created man.

Man (of course including woman) was vastly different from everything else God had made. He was a higher order of being than all the animal creation. Only man was in the image of God. Man alone was able to have fellowship with God. Only man could satisfy the desires of God's heart.

With infinite wisdom, power and love God had prepared the perfect environment for man to live. The galaxies, the stars, the sun, the earth and the vegetable and animal kingdoms were all made for him.

But what happened after this? What was to be the destiny of this new race that God had created? We will look at traditional church teaching on this subject, and then consider a very different alternative view.

Traditional Church Teaching

The essence of the majority of traditional church teaching is that after this perfect beginning, our first parents, Adam and Eve, were tempted by Satan and sinned against God. As a consequence, the whole human race has fallen from grace and is now in a state of sin and separation from God. God sent his son Jesus Christ to become man, and give his life on the cross to redeem mankind from sin and restore relationship with God. God freely offers salvation to all who will repent and believe the gospel. Every member of the human race has a free choice of accepting or rejecting this offer. Anyone who repents and accepts this offer will go to heaven when (s)he dies and enjoy eternal happiness. All who reject will go to hell and suffer eternal torment.

I feel it is necessary to expand this last statement because I don't think people who believe these things think sufficiently about what they profess to believe.

Firstly, who are these people who are now suffering or will suffer eternal torment? They are, it appears, the vast majority of the human race. They almost certainly include several members of your family: maybe your mother and father, probably some of your grandparents, maybe your children and maybe your husband or wife. They will include most of the people you meet every day; your neighbours, your colleagues at work, your local shopkeepers. Most of these people probably lead relatively decent lives. They are not Hitlers or Stalins, Saddam Husseins or Robert Mugabes. They are simply people who have not repented of their sins and accepted God's offer of salvation.

Secondly, what is the torment they are suffering or will suffer? If we interpret scripture literally it is the equivalent of being continually burnt alive, and not just for a day or a week or a month or a year, or even a century or a millennium, but for ever and ever without any possibility of escape or end. Perhaps you should think of the worst physical or mental torment you have ever experienced, multiply it by 10 and imagine it going on for ever and ever. The worst episodes in history, the holocaust and the inquisition, would be like holiday camps in comparison. This is what your parents or grandparents are now experiencing if they did not repent, and this is what may happen to your husband or wife or children, or maybe even yourself! How they would love a brief respite from their torments, perhaps a brief return to earth; but no such joy can be theirs. They are doomed to interminable, never-ending, conscious torment.

Almost every day when we read or watch the news we are shocked by the sufferings of children that have been abused or populations that have been brutalised in war or emaciated victims of famine. But if traditional church teaching is correct, all that is nothing to what vast multitudes, including most of our departed relations, are suffering at this very moment without any hope of any relief or end.

How it all Happened

Let us now reconsider the whole sequence of events that has led or will lead to the endless torment of a large part of the human race, in the light of God's wisdom, love and power.

Many questions immediately spring to mind. Did God plan it? How could a loving God plan the eternal torment of most of the human race? Was it his will? Impossible. Did he allow it? Why would he allow it if it was not his will? Could he have prevented it? An all-powerful God can prevent anything! Does he regret it? He need never have let it happen. Did it arise from circumstances beyond his control? Nothing is beyond God's control.

To anyone who has not been indoctrinated with traditional church teaching the whole scenario is a total impossibility.

God created Adam and Eve in his own image, and placed them in the Garden of Eden. (You may or may not believe in a literal Garden of Eden, but for the purpose of this discussion that won't make a significant difference.) God, being infinite in wisdom and power, had an infinite choice in what he created. He could have created robotic machines, without any feelings or ability to suffer joy or pain. He could have simply created animals that ate and drank and slept and enjoyed life and eventually ceased to exist. He could have created all sorts of beings beyond our imagination, and maybe he has done in other galaxies or universes. He could have created man without giving him the ability to fall into sin. What we know he

has done is to create man in his own image, with the abilities to love and to hate, to suffer and to enjoy, to choose between good and evil; and, as many believe, to suffer either endless bliss or endless torment.

Having created man, he placed him in paradise, where he also put the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He commanded him not to touch that tree because it would lead to his death. It appears that God did not tell Adam that eating the forbidden fruit would lead to the endless torment of most of his offspring. We may compare this to a human father who places a loaded gun in his child's play area, and tells him not to touch it. The mother at least would have something to say! Having done that he leaves the entrance to the garden open and allows Satan in the form of a serpent to come in and tempt Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. Later he placed the cherubim with flaming swords to guard the entrance to keep Adam and Eve out! You would have thought they could have been there to keep Satan out in the first place! All normal human parents do everything to protect their children from anything or anyone who might harm them. Could God, the model of all fatherhood, do anything less?

Eve succumbed to Satan's temptation to eat the forbidden fruit and Adam followed. Thus they sinned and incurred the wrath of God, and placed themselves and all their future offspring on the road that leads to eternal torment and destruction (that is if you can go on being tormented after you have been destroyed!).

God loved Adam and Eve and all their race. In his wisdom he knew all the consequences that would come of their eating the forbidden fruit. He had the power to stop it happening, either by creating them strong enough to withstand temptation, or not putting the tree in the garden, or not allowing Satan in, or by warning them totally of the consequences. But he allowed it to happen. He did not stop Adam and Eve from taking the first step on the road that would lead to the eternal torment of most of their offspring.

Did God then have a remedy for this tragic situation? Yes! "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that all who believe in him should not perish but have eternal life." God had a plan to save and restore the whole human race, at immense and unimaginable cost to himself and his Son. "He does not want anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3: 9).

However this wonderful and costly plan of salvation only became effective for a small proportion of mankind. Most of the world's population to-date have never even heard of it. Many of those who have heard of it have failed to understand it or not heard it clearly. Only a few will be saved, while the vast majority pass on their way to eternal torment.

If God were not all-loving, and did not care for the sufferings of mankind, it would make some sense; but then he sent his son to give his life to save them.