

Conditional Immortality or Eternal Misery?

According to a theological doctrine of *Conditional Immortality*, “the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23) and only people who fulfill the Biblically stated conditions — by accepting the grace of God offered through Jesus — will receive the gift of eternal life. Those who reject the grace of God will not receive the gift of immortality, and following their biological death and a temporary resurrection to face a very unpleasant period of Judgment and Hell, their lives will come to a permanent end. This “eternally lasting *death* in hell” differs from the “eternally lasting *misery* in hell” that is the fate of unsaved humans in a doctrine of *Eternal Misery*.

I am an evangelical Christian who is theologically a fundamentalist. Therefore, I think our Christian beliefs should be based on the authority of the Bible, not the authority of tradition. As you read this paper, I encourage you to follow the example of the noble Bereans (Acts 17:11) who “examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” An examination of Biblical teaching begins, in Part 1, with the essentials of Christian faith, with the fundamentals of the Good News. What is our problem, and what is the solution offered by God?

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1. fundamentals of The Gospel: Sin-and-Death and The Atonement

Jesus describes the death-to-life transformation of His salvation: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not *perish* but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16; Bible quotations are from NIV, with *italics* added by me. later I’ll make an HTML version with underlined passages that link to BibleGateway where you can also look at other translations: New American Standard, Amplified, Young’s Literal,...

The Problem: Our need for salvation (so we “shall not *perish*”) is explained in [Genesis 2-3](#) beginning with Genesis 2:17 when God told Adam, “You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely *die*.” After they sinned, when Eve and Adam ate from the forbidden tree of knowledge, three bad things happened. The intrinsic result of disobedience was a decrease in the quality of their **relationship with God**, described in Gen 3:7-11. Then two judicial penalties were decreed by God, in Gen 3:14-24. First, a decrease in **quality of life**, in Gen 3:14-19,23. Second, a death penalty (Gen 3:22,24) when God removed the tree of life, thus causing a loss of **eternal life**: “the Lord God said, ‘The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. *He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.*’ ... After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth *to guard the way to the tree of life.*” For the clearly stated purpose of *preventing disobedient sinners from living forever*, God removed the tree of life so they could not “eat, and live forever.” When the full supernatural protection *provided by God* (symbolized by the “tree of life”) was *removed by God*, Adam and Eve began to perish, with natural processes temporarily allowing life while gradually leading to their eventual death.

The Solution: Sin produced three results, intrinsic (decrease in quality of relationship with God) and judicial (decrease in quality of life, and loss of eternal life). The gift of full life (with relationship, quality, and eternity) was offered to Adam, but was lost by his sinful disobedience. Later, this full gift (with relationship, quality, and eternity) was won back by the sinless obedience of Jesus, and is offered to all who will accept God’s gift of grace. In this way the immortality lost in Genesis returns in Revelation; and then, as in Eden, it will be conditional: “*To him who overcomes*, I will give *the right to eat from the tree of life*, which is in the paradise of God. ... Blessed are *those who wash their robes*, that they **may have the right to the tree of life** and **may go** through the gates into the city. (Rev 2:7, 22:14)” Notice the connecting of “may have” and “may go,” with “*the right to the tree of life*” given to only those who also have

permission to enter heaven “through the gates into the city” because ***immortality is conditional***, because **God gives eternal life** to only those who will live with Him forever in heaven.

Throughout the Bible, the focus of ***justice and salvation*** is the contrast between ***death and life***. In Genesis 3, due to sin we earned the penalty of *death* (decreed and allowed by God) when the tree of *life* was removed by God). In Genesis 22, the son of Abraham is saved from *death* when God provides a substitutionary sacrifice. In Exodus 12, during the first Passover the blood of a sacrificed lamb (symbolizing the Passover sacrifice of Jesus, in a foreshadowing of his death) protects the first-born sons of the Hebrews from *death*. And in Old Testament Law (in Leviticus,...) the penalty for serious sin-crimes is *death*, not long-term imprisonment with suffering.

God’s method of salvation is the sacrificial *death* of Jesus, in a **substitutionary atonement** that lets us pass *from death to life*. Jesus accepted our punishment (He *died* in our place to satisfy the *death sentence* decreed in Eden) and by his own sinless life (always obeying the Father, as commanded in Genesis 2:17) He earned the right to make his own *supernatural eternal life* available, as a gift of grace, to all who will accept. In each key situation – Eden, Isaac, Passover, Law, Substitutionary Atonement – the punishment that is earned (or avoided, or endured) is *death*, not misery that never ends. On the cross, Jesus accepted a penalty of *death* for us; He did not accept a penalty of eternal misery.

Consistent with these fundamentals, New Testament writers often use terms clearly stating that, if there is no salvation by God, the final fate of sinners will be **death**, as in these statements by...

Jesus: “Whoever believes in him shall not **perish** but have everlasting *life*,” and “whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal *life* and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from **death** to *life*.” (John 3:16, 5:24) And in Luke 19:27, “Those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them — bring them here and **kill** them in front of me.”

Paul: “They know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve **death**.” / “All who sin apart from the law will also **perish** apart from the law.” / “The wages of sin is **death**, but the gift of God is eternal *life* in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 1:32, 2:8, 6:23)

James: “Sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to **death**.” “Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from **death** and cover over a multitude of sins.” (James 1:15, 5:20)

John: There is “a sin that leads to **death**.” (1 John 5:16-17)

These statements clearly state that the eventual fate awaiting unsaved sinners is **death**. A doctrine of Eternal Misery requires an unusual defining of **death** as *eternal life in misery* by retaining two outcomes in Genesis 3 (loss of relationship and loss of life-quality) but eliminating the third (loss of eternality). To avoid a conclusion that "death = death", advocates of EM often claim that the death in Genesis 3 (and throughout the Bible) is only Spiritual Death, not Physical Death, even though God's purpose for removing the "tree of life" in Genesis 3:22 was because sinners "must not be allowed to...live forever." The judicial penalty for sin is death.

But a defender of EM might claim that although human sinners cannot live forever without "the tree of life" in *natural biological life*, we have immortal souls that will live forever as a *disembodied soul*, or in a *supernatural resurrected body*. Although this is possible, it is speculative (with no support in the text) and is illogical when we ask

an important question: if God did not want human sinners to live forever in their natural bodies, why would He want sinners to live forever as disembodied souls or in supernatural bodies?

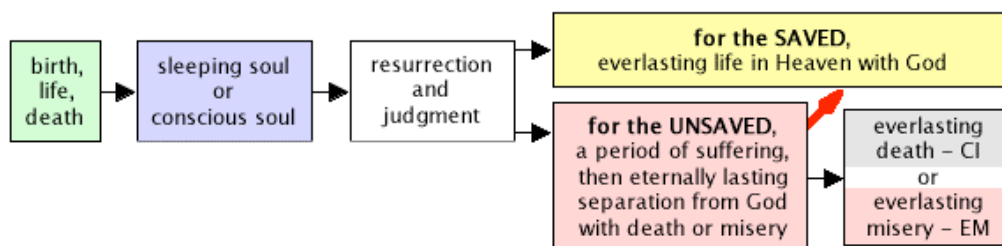
God is sovereign — He created our natural bodies and our souls, and He will create our supernatural bodies, and God controls all life — so if He wants a body or soul to be alive, it will remain alive; and if He wants any life to end, that will happen. Therefore, our question is not "what *can* God do?" (there are no limits) but "what does the Bible say that God *will* do?" When we look at all that is taught in the Bible, the answer seems to be eternally lasting life for the saved, and eternally lasting death for the unsaved.

An examination of these ideas — and others, when we ask if "death due to sin" provides support for a young earth (no) and if flammable materials (weeds, trees,...) can survive hell-fire, and how a fire can burn eternally — continues in Sections 7.1d-7.1e.

2. What is Conditional Immortality?

This section compares Conditional Immortality (CI) and Eternal Misery (EM) so our evaluations can be based on accurate understanding.

Conditional Immortality (CI) and Eternal Misery (EM) are identical in almost every way; they differ only in the final state of unsaved sinners. In the diagram below, 5 boxes are identical for CI and EM. The only difference (indicated by "or") is the final state for *unsaved* people, for those who have not been saved through the grace of God. With **CI**, **everlasting death** is the punishment with an eternally lasting result, and their final state is **non-existence**. With **EM**, **everlasting misery** is the eternally lasting punishment, and their final state is **existence**. In both CI and EM, unsaved sinners suffer in Hell and are separated from God for all of eternity, by either permanent death (in CI) or miserable exile (in EM).



To help you understand the similarities-and-differences between CI and EM, the table below shows 4 theories (2 Christian, and 2 non-Christian) about life experiences from before conception-and-birth through Resurrection-and-Judgment (R-and-J) to the Final State.

birth										death		R-and-J			
CI & EM for <i>saved</i>	non-existence			bio-life		asleep or conscious		joyful everlasting life in Heaven with God							
CI for <i>unsaved</i>	non-existence			bio-life		asleep or conscious		suffering in hell		everlasting non-existence					
EM for <i>unsaved</i>	non-existence			bio-life		asleep or conscious		suffering in hell		everlasting misery in hell					
								in both CI and EM, everlasting punishment →							
reincarnation	etc	bio-life	conscious	bio-life	conscious	bio-life	soul	bio	and so on (but not forever)						
atheistic materialism	non-existence			bio-life		non-existence									

As indicated by "non-existence" before birth, Christians believe that we have one biological life, so we did not exist before our conception-and-birth. By contrast, *reincarnation* proposes that we live many times, in the past and future, with a conscious intermediate state between our biological lives; reincarnation is discussed in Section 5.3.

Christians have two common views about the *intermediate state* between death and resurrection: as a time when the soul is *asleep*, or is *conscious* (which is basically pleasant for the saved, unpleasant for the unsaved) *but without a body*. Either state is compatible with CI or EM.

R-and-J: The resurrection of all people is described in Daniel 12:2, "multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake," and John 5:28, "a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out." For unsaved sinners the divine judgment and life in hell will be unpleasant, with suffering that is psychological (with regrets over a missed opportunity for eternal life) and maybe also physical.

CI and EM **agree** that all humans will be resurrected so they can face divine judgment, and that the *saved* (those who accept the salvation graciously offered by God) will enjoy eternal life in heaven with God, but the *unsaved* (who reject salvation) will endure a period of suffering during judgment and in hell. CI and EM **disagree** about the duration of suffering — with CI it is temporary, with EM it is permanent.

A third Christian view, which is symbolized by a red arrow on the diagram pointing from "a period of suffering" to "in Heaven with God,"

proposes (disagreeing with CI and EM) that after Resurrection and Judgment, unsaved humans will have a chance to repent, and some (perhaps all) will repent, will be saved by the grace of God, and will receive the gift of eternal life in heaven. I call this view *Second Chance Salvation*, and if all repent (which is the usual hope of its advocates) it becomes *Universal Salvation* or *Universalism*. This idea, which I think is inconsistent with what the Bible teaches, is discussed in Section 4.2.

3. Suffering and Everlasting Punishment

Part 2 accurately describes Conditional Immortality and Eternal Misery, so we can evaluate CI and EM based on what they are.

Part 3 also aims for accuracy, by explaining that — in contrast with an "all or nothing" claim that if hell is not eternally lasting misery, there is no hell with suffering — CI is consistent with biblical descriptions of hell.

According to Jesus, two consequences of hell are *suffering* and *everlasting punishment*. We'll look at these two characteristics in Sections 3.1 and 3.2.

3.1 — Suffering in Hell

For unsaved humans, judgment and hell will be unpleasant:

Jesus says, "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 13:40-43); throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matt 25:30)" Similar descriptions are in Matthew 13:49-50 and 24:48-51.

With CI, a response of "weeping and gnashing" is expected if *resurrection* produces a mental-and-physical state that is extremely aware (more than in our biological life) with a knowledge that the current *judgment* will be followed by *temporary suffering* and then

everlasting death. The contrast between this tragic situation (for self) and the glories of joyous eternal life (for others) will lead to a regretful remembering of missed opportunities, in the bio-life that is past, to accept salvation and thus qualify for heaven. This state of mind — being intensely aware and facing the ultimate human fear, the extinction of life — will produce the powerful emotions that are described as sorrowful "weeping and gnashing." But the Bible does not say how long this unpleasantness will endure, whether it will last for awhile (as in CI) or forever (as in EM).

Some suffering would be caused by this psychological response to the judgment-situation and the subsequent life in hell. There also might be some physical pain; maybe this pain is actively caused by God, or (more likely) God just establishes the hell-situation and then takes a passive "hands off" approach and the situation (including life without God) makes it very unpleasant. But all I can say is "might be... maybe" since we don't know much about the details of hell. The Bible doesn't tell us much about hell, so we should be cautious and humble in our speculations.

With either CI or EM, judgment-and-hell will be an unpleasant experience, with suffering that is certainly psychological and maybe also physical. The only difference is between temporary suffering (CI) and eternal suffering (EM), but the Bible never says how long the suffering will last. Therefore, passages that describe suffering in hell do not provide support for EM, relative to CI.

3.2 — Everlasting Punishment

In Matthew 25:46, Jesus explains that some humans "will go away to eternal punishment" where **eternal punishment** comes from the Greek *kolasin aionion*. This statement does not teach EM because *kolasin* is a **noun**, not a **verb**, so it is correctly translated as **punishment** (a **noun**) rather than **punishing** (a **verb**); with CI the eternally lasting death is a **punishment** (the loss of existence) that lasts forever, even though the **punishing** (the suffering in hell, which occurs in both CI and EM, as explained above) does not last forever.

That is the quick answer. The rest of this section looks at "**punishment** that is **everlasting**" in more detail.

We'll begin by looking at three types of **punishment** used by humans, shown in three rows (1, 2, 3) in the top-left part of this table:

		0 to 25	25 to 30 years	from 30 to 70 years		these lives (1 2 3) are analogous to:	and unsaved fates as in:
0	no punishment	freedom	life in freedom (continuing life in freedom)				
1	temporary punishment	freedom	imprisonment	life in freedom		life in Heaven	SCS
2	everlasting punishment	freedom	imprisonment (continuing imprisonment)			misery in Hell	EM
3	everlasting punishment	freedom	imprisonment	death		non-existence	CI
		Here is a possibility if the death-punishment is not everlasting:				Final State	
		death	Judgment, suffering in Hell	death	life in Heaven	life in Heaven	CI-then-SCS

This table has three related parts:

- The top-left part shows three stages of life (from 0 to 25 years, 25 to 30 years, and 30 to 70 years) for four imaginary people: #0 lives his entire life in freedom with no judicial punishment, but #1 is imprisoned for 5 years and is then released until he dies at 70, #2 is imprisoned for his entire life, from 25 until he dies at 70, and #3 is imprisoned for 5 years, then (in a death penalty) is executed. Their punishments, respectively, are none, temporary, everlasting (lasting throughout the person's lifetime), and everlasting. In either #2 or 3 the

punishment is everlasting because there is never a time (after age 25) when the person lives in freedom, by contrast with #1 where the temporary punishment is non-everlasting.

- The table's right side shows that if the final stages of bio-life (30-70 years) are converted to the similar post-resurrection Final States, the human punishments (temporary imprisonment followed by a pardon, permanent unpleasant imprisonment for life, and death penalty) are analogous to final states with Second Chance Salvation (suffering, then life in heaven), Eternal Misery (suffering continues),

Conditional Immortality (suffering, then non-existence). Hopefully, this concrete example (by thinking about the human punishments in 1, 2, and 3) will help you see why the punishment does last forever, as described in Matthew 25:46, with either EM or CI.

• The bottom row shows an imaginary situation where the post-judgment death is not everlasting, in a scenario (that is not seriously proposed by anyone) combining CI and SCS. Why is this relevant? Because Jesus knew that he would soon be showing us, by his own resurrection, that a reversal of death is possible if God wants it to happen and causes it. Therefore, he said “**eternal** punishment” to clarify that he was not describing this scenario: resurrection and judgment, **temporary** death-punishment, then a divine pardon and resurrection to life in Heaven. But in Matt 25:46 the eternality of God’s death sentence is an argument against SCS, not against CI.

In Matt 25:46 there is “parallel wording” for *eternal* punishment (*kolasin aionion*) and *eternal* life (*zoe aionion*); we know that life for the saved will be eternal, so will life for the unsaved also be eternal? This logic is valid, but only if “punishment” means punishing, and if we also ignore other arguments throughout this paper, including two other possible meanings of ‘aionion’ in Section 7.32b.

Does eternal joy depend on eternal misery, because if one does not occur, neither does the other? No. We should not conclude that IF *punishment* (for the “cursed”) is not eternal because there is no Eternal Misery, THEN *life* (for the “righteous”) will also not be eternal. Why?

First, there is a difference between a noun and verb, and between life and death. As explained above, *kolasin* is a noun (not a verb) so it is correctly translated as **punishment** (a noun) instead of **punishing** (a verb); **eternal punishing** is a process that requires a conscious human who suffers forever, but **eternal punishment** can occur with a death that lasts forever. With life and death there is a difference in process (being eternally alive is a process, but being eternally dead is not) and this difference is consistent with the parallel wording, with the reward (life) and punishment (death) both lasting forever; after resurrection and judgment, the saved and unsaved will be alive forever and dead forever, respectively, with both results being eternal.

Second, in addition to Matt 25:46 we see the promise of eternal life in many other places, including Revelation 2:7 & 22:14 (through “the tree of life”) and 21:3-4 (“there will be no more death”), Luke 20:35-36 (we “can no longer die”), 1 Corinthians 15:42-57 (we will then be “imperishable... with immortality” because “death has been swallowed up in...victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”), 1 Timothy 1:16 (we

will “receive eternal life”). But in each of these passages, and all other similar passages in the Bible, the divine gift of immortality is conditional; in these passages it is for “him who overcomes, ... those who wash their robes, ... his people, ... those who are considered worthy, ... [who do] the work of the Lord,... who would believe on him.” And when Jesus declares, in John 10:27-28, that “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish,” this gift of eternality is only for “my sheep” who “listen to my voice” and “follow me,” because “he who believes in me... will never die. (John 11:25-26)” And in John 17:2, Jesus praises the Father who has “granted him [Jesus] authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.” God’s promise of eternal life is affirmed throughout the New Testament, over and over, not just in Matthew 25:46.

The if-then condition — IF you overcome (wash your robes, are my person, are worthy, do my work, believe, listen and follow), THEN you will be given immortality by God — is important. Why? Because when unconditional immortality is assumed, so all humans (including the unsaved, although they have not overcome...) will live forever, everlasting *punishment* cannot occur without an everlasting *punishing* of the unsaved people who cannot die, and this is EM.

But a conclusion of EM is not warranted, because an if-then conditionality *is* taught in the Bible, where we find many verses clearly stating that saved humans will live forever, and no verses clearly stating a corresponding immortality for unsaved humans; instead, the fate of the unsaved is usually described as *death*.

a review: If we don’t assume an unconditional immortality of all humans, and if we acknowledge that *kolasin* is a noun so we should think about everlasting *punishment* (a noun) instead of punishing (a verb), **Matthew 25:46 does not provide logical support for EM** because eternal punishment (stated in the verse) does occur with either CI or EM, even though eternal punishing (not in the verse) occurs only with EM.

A discussion of Matthew 25:46 continues in Section 7.32a, and in 7.1e the scope widens to include “the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” in Matthew 25:41. Section 7.32b has another argument: “In case in case you’re not persuaded by the “noun, not verb” argument for distinguishing between punishment and punishing, the multiple potential meanings of ‘aionios’ may give you another reason to see the lack of support for EM.”

4. Divine Justice and Mercy

In writing Part 4, my goal is to defend the honor of God. Why do I think this is necessary? Because with a doctrine of Eternal Misery, the character of God does not seem to match the God we see in the Bible, who is severe in his judgment but is fair, who loves and forgives. The biblical picture of God —severe yet fair in judgment, loving and forgiving — seems more consistent with CI than with EM. This should not be the deciding factor in deciding between CI and EM — we should focus on what the Bible teaches, as in Parts 1-3 and 6, plus 7.1-7.3 — but it is something to consider.

4.1 — Infinite Punishing for Finite Sins

Based on our human sense of justice, most people (Christian or not) think it isn’t justified to make people suffer for an infinite time, as in EM, to punish them for sins that were committed during a finite time during their life on earth. Is EM consistent with the principles of love and forgiveness taught in the Bible? Jesus compared human *vengeful justice* (“an eye for an eye”) with the *merciful justice* of God, by telling us to “Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ... Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is

perfect. (Matthew 6:44-45,48)” Here, Jesus tells us that God is more merciful than we deserve. But with EM, God seems to be much less merciful than we deserve.

It would be especially surprising if Eternal Misery is the policy adopted by a God who is loving and forgiving, just and wise, if the endless misery has no beneficial function, if there is no educational or rehabilitative value, with no hope for improvement. And there will be no rehabilitation if (as I think the Bible teaches) there is no “second chance” for repentance and salvation, if those who reject God’s grace during their natural lifetime really are lost.

4.2 — Universal Salvation?

The main theme of Section 3.2 is that, with CI, hell is real and it will be unpleasant for the unsaved. This section emphasizes the horror of EM. By contrast with CI, where hell is unpleasant but is not horrendous which (it seems to me) is the situation with EM. Some readers think CI is "too soft" because there is no everlasting misery, but others think it is "too hard" because there is suffering and death, so CI can get criticized from both directions.

The idea of Universal Salvation (US), with God giving everyone a second chance for salvation, is emotionally appealing, and I would join most people in voting "yes" for this, if God asked us to decide. But the Bible tells us what God has decided, and it doesn't seem to be universal salvation.

Here are examples of verses cited as biblical support for US: Jesus says "I will draw *all* men to myself (John 12:32)"; "God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them *all*. (Romans 11:32)"; "in Christ all will be made alive (1 Cor 15:22)"; "God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him [Jesus Christ], and through him to reconcile to himself *all* things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Colossians 1:19)"

With CI, "all" really means **all** because all humans who remain alive have submitted their wills to God, and love God, because all of the rebels (humans who say "my will be done, not yours" and who do not love God and submit to Him) have been eliminated by death. But with EM these rebel-humans still exist, so the "all" is not really all.

The horror of EM-hell is a strong motivation for proposing US. It's also a motivation for proposing CI, but there is a major difference; I think CI is strongly supported by scripture and is clearly taught in the Bible, but US is not consistent with the Bible. Although some verses (saying "all",...) seem to support US, these can be explained in other ways (especially with CI, although it's not as easy with EM) and there are many other verses indicating that US is not the way it will be.

If an omnipotent God "wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4)," nothing could prevent this from happening. But here Paul is describing God's *desire* (what He wants to happen) rather than a *fact* (of what actually will happen); these can differ because God has given us freedom to disobey what He wants us to do, and He respects our choices.

How will God judge those who haven't heard the Gospel, or who are devoted to a religion (with an associated deity) that is popular in their culture, or who are feeble-minded, or who die when they're very young? I don't know, but since God knows everything in our hearts and minds, He will be able to judge fairly, to achieve justice.

We should be humble in our claims about who will and won't be saved, and why, because Jesus told us there will be surprises. Jesus did say that "no one comes to the Father except through me," but we don't know all of God's criteria for judging people. For example, we cannot know (in Romans 2) what "will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ," especially for those "who do not have the law" but "show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them." We don't know what is happening in the hearts-and-minds of people who outwardly seem to have rejected the salvation offered by Christ (or seem to have accepted it) or when it is too late for the vineyard workers in Matthew 20:1-16. And we cannot know with certainty who will be unpleasantly shocked to discover that, as Jesus warns in Matt 7:13-27, "not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

But even though we should be humble, as described above, we should confidently proclaim what IS clearly stated in the Bible, and we should "live by faith" by making decisions throughout each day on the basis of trust in God's character, while obediently letting God's commandments guide our thoughts and actions.

4.3 — The Overall Result (does it seem fair?)

For an individual in a world of CI or EM, what is the overall change from beginning to end?

With CI, a person who accepts salvation goes from nothing, before birth, to a temporary natural lifetime (with mixed pain and pleasure) to a joyous eternal life in heaven. A person who rejects salvation goes from nothing to a temporary natural lifetime (mixed pain and pleasure) to judgment-with-suffering and the "nothing" of non-existence. Thus the overall result, from beginning to end, is either extremely positive (with salvation, the change is nothing-to-joy) or neutral (without salvation, it's nothing-to-nothing).

With EM, a saved person still goes from nothing to extremely positive (in joyous eternal life), but an unsaved person goes from nothing to extremely negative (with eternal misery in hell).

If EM is true, the unsaved are BIG losers. For them the "gift of life" is a heavy burden that, if they had the choice, they would have been wise to refuse. But they had no choice.

By contrast, with CI there are winners but no losers. Those saved by the grace of God are big winners with a wonderful life, as in EM. But for the unsaved, now their treatment by God seems fair. They go *from nothing* to life to judgment-and-consequences *to nothing*. They have experiences (positive and negative) during life and judgment, but their overall change, from nothing to nothing, is neutral with no gain or loss.

A justifiable question, asked by an unsaved person experiencing eternal misery in hell, would be "Why did you make me like this?" (Romans 9:20) A traditional view of EM-hell becomes even more difficult to justify, in terms of a human sense of justice, with a mix (which is the doctrine of some major denominations) that combines *EM* with the *predestination* implied by passages such as Romans 8:28-30 and 9:10-23. In Romans 9:20-23, Paul says, "But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?' Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath — prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory?" But doesn't it seem reasonable — for a person who never asked to be born and is now enduring eternal misery in hell, who never had a chance to choose whether to be born, and then (if the predestination implied in Romans 9 is true) never had a chance for salvation — to ask the God who is keeping him or her alive in pain, "Why did you make me like this?" But with a CI-hell and its "nothing to nothing" change, this why-question is less justified, even with predestination. { Both CI & EM are logically consistent with any view of free will, from full predestination to total freedom, or anything in-between. }

note: Christians who base their views on the Bible have a wide range of views about predestination, from extreme Calvinism (with "double predestination" of both saved and unsaved) through single predestination (with some "elected" for salvation, while others can freely choose what they want), to no predestination so every person is free to choose.

Some advocates of EM say, "Those in hell get what they wanted. If they want to live without God now, later they'll get more of what

they want by living without God in hell." C.S. Lewis proposes this when he says, "the damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; the doors of hell are locked on the inside." Usually I like the way C.S. Lewis thinks and writes, but this idea seems illogical because a rebellious desire for independence — refusing to submit to the will of God, saying "I want my to live my life the way I want, without obeying God" — is not the same as wanting independence from God during a misery-filled eternity in hell. The first "I want" (re: biological life on earth) does not lead to the second "I want" (re: eternal life in hell).

There are two ways to "give people what they want" if they reject a loving relationship with God: by an eternally miserable *existence* without God (as in EM) or an eternally lasting *non-existence* without God (as in CI). And maybe CI-hell will include a temporary existence without God, and an unsaved person will realize how unpleasant this is, between the beginning and ending of resurrection life.

EM also raises questions about what God will do with humans who die in miscarriage or abortion, or who die young or have a very low IQ so their "decisions about salvation" are not made in a mature way. If life begins at conception, and if immortality is unconditional and universal so nobody who has been alive ever dies, are victims of abortion condemned to an EM-hell (this doesn't seem fair) or are they guaranteed eternal life in heaven (so abortion will always produce an extremely good overall result)? But with CI there is a "nothing to nothing" possibility, so these dilemmas seem less troublesome.

4.4 — Different Amounts of Suffering

According to a human sense of justice, differing amounts of sin should lead to punishment with differing amounts of suffering. This human logical intuition is what we also see in Scripture.

Jesus says, "That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. (Luke 12:47-48)" And "it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you [who heard and rejected Jesus]. (Matt 11:24)" Here, the degree of punishment for disobedient sinfulness (for "not doing what his master wants") depends on life-context, on a sinner's knowledge (by "knowing his master's will") plus his abilities-and-opportunities (being "entrusted with much").

For the unsaved, Jesus described unpleasant experiences (mental and maybe also physical) beginning with Resurrection and the Final Judgment. In CI, all who are condemned have the same final result (death) but the *intensity and duration* of unpleasant experience can be varied if God makes individually customized decisions about how much suffering is justified and thus whether to prolong a life or, at a time He decides is appropriate, to end it. But with EM the only variable is *intensity* of unpleasantness, since the duration will be eternal for everyone. Because CI involves two variables, not just one

as in EM, CI allows personally customized adjustments to produce different amounts of punishment.

4.5 — Does God use maximum persuasion?

Consider the most important event in Christian history, the resurrection of Jesus. If God had wanted everyone to be certain, most doubts would have been erased if the risen Jesus had marched through downtown Jerusalem, showing his hands, feet, and side, while doing flashy miracles to clearly demonstrate His power. Why wasn't this done? The available evidence is impressive — we have the testimony of many eyewitnesses whose lives were dramatically changed, a lack of disproof (no dead body could be produced,...), and more — but why is there no proof? There is enough evidence to warrant a logical conclusion that "Jesus was physically resurrected," but the evidence is not overwhelmingly decisive.

And why doesn't God convincingly persuade each of us, like He did with Paul, by giving each of us a Damascus Road Experience (as in Acts 9:1-22) with bright lights and a "voice from nowhere" followed by three days of blindness and a miraculous healing?

I'm not sure, but perhaps a state of uncertainty is intended by God, who seems to prefer a balance of evidence, with enough reason to believe if we want to believe, but not enough to intellectually force a believing against our will. Instead of overpowering us with displays of obviously miraculous power until we grudgingly give up and give in, God wants us to **want** to come to Him. With a balance there is free choice, and the choice is made primarily not by intellect, but by the heart and will.

A balance is also needed for developing the living-by-faith character that is highly valued by God. Even though we live in a world of doubt, God wants a total commitment from us, with true repentance followed by a complete trust in God that is manifested in all thoughts and actions of daily living.

A "balance between certainty and doubt" is good for building, in believers, an ability to live by faith. But it hurts those who choose to not believe, who (if EM is true) will suffer eternal misery, but who might have believed if the balance of evidence had been shifted. With EM it seems that God should do everything possible (by showing the risen Jesus to everyone in Jerusalem, doing daily miracles, providing Damascus Road Experiences for everyone who needs it, and so on) to be sure nobody goes to eternal misery in hell.

But with CI a nonbeliever goes from initial non-existence to final non-existence; in between there are experiences (some good, some bad) but the overall result, from nothing to nothing, is neutral. There is no possibility that a person will go from nothing to eternal misery, so it seems to me (but humility is appropriate) that this allows more freedom for God. In a CI setting, where the worst that can happen is nothing-to-nothing, avoiding eternal misery (for the unsaved) is not a concern, and the focus can be on adjusting the "balance of evidence" so it provides optimal benefits for believers who will spend eternity in fellowship with God and other believers in heaven

5. Extra-Biblical Influences on our ideas about Immortality and Hell

Unfortunately, this part of the paper seems necessary. It is an interlude between Sections 1-4 and 6-7, which ask "what does the Bible teach?" This question is the main focus of my paper, because I think Christian theology should be based on what the Bible teaches, as described in 5.1. But extra-biblical influences do occur so we'll look at them, beginning (in 5.2) with our Christian community, then moving into the effects of non-biblical philosophies (in 5.3) before finishing (in 5.4) with a "recognize and minimize" approach to coping with extra-biblical influences.

5.1 — Our Goal: Searching for Truth in the Bible

Bible-based theology should be our goal. During our search for

truth, there is no observable evidence about the characteristics and consequences of Hell, so as evangelical Christians our main strategy

for judging *plausibility* is to compare each theory with Scripture.

When we study the Bible, here are some useful principles: • look at **individual verses** (including those in Part 6 and elsewhere) in the context of essential **overall principles**; • learn more about CI and EM (Part 2 is a good foundation, but learning requires an investment of time and careful thinking) so you can evaluate each idea based on accurate, thorough knowledge of what it actually is; • approach your evaluation with open-minded humility, acknowledging that there is some Bible-based support for each view.

I admit that the first principle (“learn more about CI and EM”) is self-serving, because I think the more you learn, the more you’ll see the strong biblical support for CI. The apparent support for EM becomes much weaker after a careful examination that includes an accurate understanding of CI and an open-minded consideration of all available information. Therefore, I’m encouraging you to learn more, and evaluate logically.

For example, Part 3 explains why a correct understanding of CI removes the support for EM that apparently is provided when Jesus describes the unpleasantness of hell. As explained in Section 3.1, suffering in hell provides equal support for EM and CI. Therefore, any implication that “anyone who believes what Jesus said about hell must believe EM” is not justified, because everything Jesus said is compatible with CI. On the other hand, some things Jesus said — such as the burning of weeds in Matt 13:40, and killing of rejecters in Luke 19:27 — do not seem compatible with EM.

There is agreement, among evangelical Christians who advocate both EM and CI, that our theology should be based on the Bible. We just disagree about what the Bible teaches. Why should there be disagreement among intelligent people who love God and believe the Bible? First, “there is some Bible-based support for each view.” Second, our theology can be influenced by extra-biblical factors. Part 5 looks at the complex mixture of biblical and extra-biblical influences in the community of Christians.

5.2 — Influences in the Christian Community

5.2a — The Inertia of Tradition

The inertia of tradition and psychology of conformity make it easy to think like the majority, and difficult to think in other ways.

Try to imagine that very few people believe in Eternal Misery, and you have just read a description of EM, plus a summary of the arguments for and against it. Would you believe EM? Would you discard the orthodox belief — that after a period of fearful judgment and suffering, nonbelievers are destroyed in hell and are thus forever excluded from the Kingdom of God — and replace it with a doctrine of Eternal Misery, proposing that God will keep nonbelievers alive so they can endure an endless eternity of misery in hell? Would you be convinced that this new doctrine is more compatible with your fundamental Bible-based beliefs, such as sin and the Fall, and the goodness and grace of God as exemplified in the sacrificial Substitutionary Atonement?

Unfortunately, tradition favors EM, and most evangelicals — especially our leaders who feel a responsibility to teach orthodox theology — assume (usually without much thought) that EM is clearly taught in the Bible, even though (as explained in this paper) there are many reasons to conclude that the Bible teaches CI rather than EM.

John Stott makes a plea for an open-minded consideration of alternatives:

I have great respect for longstanding tradition which claims to be a true interpretation of Scripture, and do not lightly set it aside. The unity of the worldwide evangelical constituency has always meant much to me. But the issue is too important to suppress. I do not dogmatize about the position to which I have come. I hold it tentatively. But I do plead for frank dialogue among evangelicals

on the basis of Scripture. I also believe that the ultimate annihilation of the wicked should at least be accepted as a legitimate, biblically founded alternative to their eternal conscious torment.¹

I agree with Stott that CI (with annihilation of the wicked) should be considered an acceptable alternative. Frankly, I think it should be considered a *better* alternative, that it should be considered the biblically supported view. For those who think CI is clearly taught in the Bible, there are promising signs. In increasing numbers, evangelicals are beginning to examine the scriptural basis for EM, instead of simply assuming it is biblically justified. In 1989 the Evangelical Affirmations Conference refused to declare Conditional Immortality unscriptural, even though they did make this declaration for Universal Salvation. And in 1999, Eternal Misery was not included in a summary of Gospel essentials, *A Call to Evangelical Unity*. I am encouraged by this, but for others it may seem to be a cause for alarm, as discussed in the following section.

5.2b — Defending a Tradition

When defending an established set of religious doctrines, if any part of the set is questioned there is a tendency to view this as a challenge to other parts. This perception is warranted IF (and only if) there are logical links between the parts, if the doctrine that is being questioned forms a logical foundation for other parts of the set, or is a logical outcome of other parts.

When evaluating CI, two principles are vitally important:

First, CI should be evaluated based on an accurate understanding of what it really is. As explained in Part 2, CI differs from EM only in the final state for the unsaved. In all other ways, CI and EM are identical, so CI is compatible with all parts of a set of essential doctrines, such as belief in the reality of sin, atonement, judgment, hell, miracles, and (of course) the authority of the Bible. In fact, the more carefully we study the Bible, the more strongly supported is a conclusion that CI (not EM) is much more compatible with the fundamentals of Christian faith, as explained in Parts 1 and 7.1. Therefore, we should reject any implication that EM is a necessary part of Bible-based evangelical theology. Instead of adopting a debater's mentality in which “defending tradition” is the main focus, a healthier goal is to study the Bible more carefully, to ask whether scripture teaches EM or CI.

Second, we should avoid *ad hominem* arguments based on “guilt by association.” This argument — implying that if we don't like some views of X, and if X believes CI, then CI must be wrong — is not logical. Strangely, however, the argument is used by some Christians who claim to base their beliefs only on the Bible, when they imply that if anyone with unorthodox views (in other parts of their theology) proposes CI, this is a reason to oppose CI.

It can be useful to think about extra-Biblical influences favoring both CI and EM, and look at “who believes what,” but only if this is done by searching for logical connections between views, and cause-effect interactions; some ideas are in Appendix D4. But each view should be evaluated based on everything it is, no more and no less.

5.2c — Improving People and Society

Two Criteria for Evaluation: Any theory, including a theological doctrine about CI or EM, can be evaluated in terms of *plausibility* (how likely it is to be true) and *utility* (how useful it is for achieving desired goals). As explained in the first paragraph of Section 5.1, “our main strategy for judging plausibility is to compare each theory with Scripture.” This section looks at utility.

To evaluate a theory based on its utility, first we define goals.

Then we ask, "How effective is each theory (EM, CI,...) in helping us achieve these goals?" For evangelical Christians, three worthy goals are: *evangelism* (helping others gain salvation by becoming followers of Christ); *discipleship* (helping Christians become better servants of Christ); societal *stewardship* (helping improve society).

Evangelism and Discipleship: These goals can be negatively affected by a doctrine of Eternal Misery. The hearts and minds of many people, both non-Christians and Christians, are sickened by the thought of a God who would cause (or even just allow) eternal torment in hell. These people are less likely to turn their lives over to a God who would do this, and to fulfill the greatest commandment by "loving God with all of their heart, soul, and mind." This lack of trust and respect (for a God who would cause or allow EM) will hinder both salvation and discipleship. Although a threat of EM may encourage some people to seek salvation, this 'fire escape' motivation is less likely to promote the intimate spiritual relationship (of love, trust, and surrender to God) that is the goal of Christian life. With CI the motivation for conversion seems more pure, more likely to be caused by true repentance and a sincere love for God. Yes, many advocates of EM do love and serve God, but I think this is mainly a result of self-selection. Those who are highly motivated to be good Christians may think, due to the weight of tradition, that devotion to God requires belief in EM. But I think these well-intending people, at the deepest level of their being, are saddened by the dark shadow of EM, and they would be able to more truly worship (with more inner honesty, at deeper levels of intellect and emotion) a God with the character implied by CI instead of EM.

Motivations for Evangelism: Advocates of EM often claim that without EM there will be less "felt need" for evangelism, if there is no need to save the unsaved from endless torment in hell. Although a decrease in motivation is possible, I think our evangelism will be more effective — due to the "hearts and minds" reasons described above — if we are motivated by our desire to share the good news by telling others how they can gain the very good things that are graciously offered by God, instead of avoiding the bad things threatened by God.

Fear and Evangelism: With CI do Christians abandon a powerful argument for religious conversion, when we tell a non-Christian that a failure to accept Jesus as savior will cause them to burn forever in hell? If we are convinced that EM is true, of course we should tell everyone about the horrors of EM-hell so they can avoid it. But if EM seems to be false (for the many reasons explained in this paper) a reluctance to lose the persuasive "turn or burn" argument should not be a factor in retaining EM. If CI seems more probable, based on the Bible, we should use it for evangelism. Colorful claims about EM-hell will certainly make nonbelievers stop and think about how much they want to avoid this infinitely horrible outcome, and what they are willing to do so they can avoid it. But this logic encourages a crass "fire escape" motivation for conversion.* Instead, a decision to accept the grace of God should be motivated by better reasons, by a true repentance for sin, wanting a relationship with God, wanting to serve God and fellow humans, working in cooperation with God's plan for your life, and (crass yet positive) wanting to gain eternal life in paradise with God. * Of course, God knows all of our thoughts, including our motivations, so a pseudo-repentance "conversion" (if it's only to escape the horrors of hell) will not result in salvation.

Justice and Evangelism: Another factor is the frequency and vigor with which the justice of God is proclaimed. I think that in their hearts, many Christians are secretly ashamed of EM, so they are less motivated to proudly proclaim the judgment of God and the moral responsibility of humans. Peter Toon, who is an advocate of EM, notes with sadness that "it is difficult to find leading Protestant

churchmen or theologians who actually believe in hell as everlasting punishment [Toon should say 'punishing' not 'punishment'] and who are prepared to state that belief in either sermons or books."² By contrast, Christian can be proud of CI-justice because although it is severe it seems fair. The death penalty of CI is the ultimate fear of humans, the fear of losing our existence. But the overall change, from nothing to nothing, is neutral and fair; God gives life, and God takes away life. Contrast this with the fate of an unsaved human in EM, who never asked to be born, yet ends up in hell with eternal misery. Does this seem fair? John Stott says, "Emotionally, I find the concept [of EM] intolerable and do not understand how people can live with it without either cauterizing their feelings or cracking under the strain." Stott then continues, "But our emotions are a fluctuating guide to truth and must not be exalted to the place of supreme authority in determining it. As a committed evangelical, my question must be — and is — not what does my heart tell me, but what does God's word say?" I agree. This is the most important question we can ask, so it is the focus throughout this paper.

Stewardship: A third goal is to help improve society. When we think about this, one simple approach is to view society as being shaped by the behaviors of Christians and non-Christians. How does EM affect the behavior of each group?

Christians believe they will avoid hell, so EM probably has little effect, except perhaps (as discussed above) if EM is a hindrance to the high-quality discipleship that encourages Christians to "love God with their whole heart, soul, and mind" and "love their neighbors as they love themselves" and thus help produce a better society.

Do non-Christians believe EM? If a threat of future punishment is to serve as an effective deterrent of bad behavior and motivator of good behavior, the *perceived probability* of the punishment may be more important than its *severity*. With EM, "infinite punishing for finite sins" is terrifying (as described in *Fear and Evangelism*) but it seems unfair so it seems less probable. The nothing-to-nothing justice of CI seems more fair, more consistent with the character of God that is revealed in the Old and New Testaments, making CI seem more probable. Therefore, CI might serve as a more effective deterrent to behaviors that are immoral or criminal, and a motivator of good behaviors that are beneficial for individuals and society.

More generally, I think a doctrine of CI would help to promote better relationships between Christians and others, so we could more effectively cooperate in a variety of ways that would help improve society for all of us, as one aspect of loving our neighbors.

5.2d — Personal Influences (external and internal)

When we are thinking about theology, Christians are vulnerable to the same types of psychological influences as non-Christians.

External Influences: Sociological pressures that encourage conformity to the expectations of a group, which can influence us because we have psychological desires to please other people and gain their approval, can favor either EM or CI, depending on the group and the person who is potentially being influenced. In most evangelical churches, people (especially pastors and other leaders) will feel pressures to believe and teach the "traditional view of hell" as Eternal Misery. But outside churches, a person can feel pressures to adopt CI due to its "kinder and gentler" view of God.

Internal Influences: A desire for personal consistency that will reduce unpleasant *cognitive dissonance* can favor either CI or EM. CI is favored by a desire to reduce the dissonance between two ideas: believing that God is forgiving and merciful, and that God will cause eternal misery for many people, including some of our friends and family. EM is favored when people gain more confidence in their major decision with a high commitment demanded by Jesus — "if

anyone would come after me, he must take up his cross and follow me, for whoever wants to save his life will lose it (Mark 8:34-35)” and “anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple... [so before deciding] first sit down and estimate the cost... [because] any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:25-35) — by believing that one of the many benefits of discipleship is avoiding the immensely horrible fate of Eternal Misery. { comparing benefits: Beliefs about "what we get" are the same with EM or CI, but "what we avoid" is larger with EM. }

5.3 — The Influence of Extra-Biblical Philosophies

Soul-Immortality and Reincarnation

An intrinsic unconditional *soul-immortality* is not necessary in Christianity, because we have the promise of a supernatural conditional *body-resurrection* provided by God. But intrinsic soul-immortality appears in many non-Christian worldviews, including Greek philosophy, Hinduism, and spiritualism.

In theories of reincarnation developed by some ancient Greek philosophers (Plato,...) there is a cycle of multiple human lives with intervening periods in which the soul is purified in Hades where the soul can see "the way things really are" more clearly, which helps the soul prepare for its next human incarnation. This repeating cycle (of birth, life, death, purification, birth,...) continues until the soul is pure enough that it is no longer reincarnated.

Similarly, eastern religious philosophies (Hinduism,...) propose an immortal soul plus reincarnation, with a spiritual goal of reducing the desire for body-dependent experiences in the material realm; the ultimate goal is to eventually avoid reincarnations by joining "the whole" in a state of disembodied non-individual serene bliss.

In these concepts of reincarnation, embodiment is an undesirable burden. By contrast, Judaism and Christianity embrace the goodness and importance of life in the body; we see *sin*, not the material realm, as our major problem. The spiritual goal of a Christian is for the whole person (including mind and body) to live in sinless fellowship with God. We view death as an enemy to be overcome (1 Cor 15:26,54) through the power and grace of God, while other worldviews (Greek, Hindu, New Age, Spiritualist) see death as a transition to another level of existence.

Unfortunately, Judeo-Christian theology has been influenced by a concept of soul-immortality imported from non-biblical philosophies.

Hades in the Septuagint — An early influence on theology was the interaction between languages that caused confusion when the Septuagint — a translation of the Hebrew OT into Greek, beginning about 250 BC — translated the Hebrew ‘sheol’ into the Greek ‘hades’. The intention was to maintain the meaning of *sheol* (the grave); but in Greek culture, *Hades* was more than a grave; in Greek philosophy, which included soul immortality and dualistic mind-body distinctions, ‘Hades’ was a place of suffering for conscious departed souls. This word, associated with philosophical dualism, influenced the theology of some readers of the Septuagint but not others. When readers who knew Hebrew (and the meaning of ‘sheol’ in the Hebrew OT) read ‘hades’ they thought “grave” and retained this original meaning. But

readers who were influenced more by Greek language and philosophy could read ‘hades’ and think “conscious suffering”.

The Timing of Influence — Samuele Bacchiocchi explains how this confusing interaction led to 2 schools of intertestamental writing, Palestinian Judaism and Hellenistic Judaism, and why — because NT writers understood and believed concepts from the Hebrew OT — “the dualistic meaning of these important Greek words [Hades,...] is absent in the New Testament. ... The New Testament view of human nature reflects the Hebrew (Old Testament) and not the Greek way of thinking. ... The assimilation of Greek dualism into the Christian tradition occurred after the New Testament was written.”³ The NT writers had a holistic Hebrew view of humans, but some later readers were influenced by dualistic Greek philosophy, and this helped EM become the “traditional” view of hell.

Influence in the Church — How did the extra-biblical influence occur? First, throughout much of church history, Greek philosophy was an important part of the dominant intellectual culture in society, which included the church. Second, claims for immortality seem to be rhetorically useful as a weapon against anti-supernaturalists, because if a listener/reader can be persuaded that humans are immortal (which many people want to believe anyway, for psychological reasons that are described in Appendix C6) this shows that Christian claims for after-death resurrections (of Jesus in the past, and all humans in the future) are not unreasonable. But I think it’s better to simply say “the Bible tells us that God has supernatural power so He can do things we don’t understand” and avoid claiming things (like an intrinsically immortal soul) that are not claimed in the Bible.

5.4 — Coping With Extra-Biblical Influences

Recognize and Minimize: The previous two sections (about the Christian Community and non-Biblical Philosophies) describe non-Biblical influences that can affect our interpretations of what the Bible teaches about the Final State. I think we should *recognize* that theology can be influenced by extra-biblical factors; then, in our effort to make our search for Bible-based theology more effective in finding the truth, we should try to *minimize* the biasing influence of these factors. We should want our theology to be based on what the Bible teaches, carefully analyzed with thinking that is logical and unbiased, using generally accepted principles for interpreting the Bible. We should pursue this noble goal by using it as an aiming point and taking actions that will move us closer to it, while humbly recognizing that we haven’t yet achieved it and never will.

Bias and Falsity: Even if a person (or group) is motivated to be biased, this does not mean their evaluation process will be biased, or their conclusion will be wrong. Why? Because with discipline they can overcome their tendency toward bias; or maybe the evidence really does point to the desired conclusion, and “the way they hope the world is” corresponds to “the way the world really is,” so their bias does not lead to a wrong conclusion. But even though a biased conclusion is not necessarily false, if we want to find truth our “best way to bet” is to base our conclusions only on evidence-and-logic, in a process of unbiased evaluation. Because our goal is Bible-based theology, we should try to minimize all extra-Biblical influences.

6. Four Bible Passages often claimed as support for Eternal Misery

As evangelical Christians, we should evaluate every theological doctrine by asking “what does the Bible teach?” Four passages claimed as biblical support for Eternal Misery are: Matthew 25:31-46, Luke 16:19-31, Revelation 14:9-11, Revelation 20:10. This section examines these passages to show that they do not support EM. For other passages about EM-vs-CI, see Section 7.6. a useful principle: In addition to carefully examining individual passages, we should broaden our perspective by also looking at the “big picture” of major themes in the Bible, as in Part 1.

6.1 — Matthew 25:31-46

In the final judgment, Jesus will say to some, “depart from me, you who are cursed, into the *eternal fire* prepared for the devil and his angels ... [and] they will go away to *eternal punishment*, but the righteous to *eternal life*. (Matthew 25:41,46)”

Section 3.2 explains why “eternal punishment” does not support a conclusion of EM in hell, unless: A) we think everlasting punishment (a result) requires everlasting punishing (a process) by treating *aionios* as if it was a verb instead of the noun that it is, or B) if we assume that every resurrected human will be immortal.

Eternal fire and eternal worms are discussed in Section 7.1e.

6.2 — Luke 16:19-31

In this parable of Jesus, we hear about a rich man (who during his life on earth showed no compassion for Lazarus the beggar) “in hell, where he was in torment,... in agony in this fire.” All of the characters have bodies; the rich man and Abraham have tongues (they can speak and hear) and eyes (they can see each other), and Lazarus has fingers.

Maybe this passage should not be included here. Why not? The “torment” and “agony” are consistent with either CI or EM because both views propose suffering in hell; their only difference is the duration of suffering — is it temporary as in CI, or permanent as in EM — but the duration is never described in Luke 16:19-31.

When we interpret this passage and the “life after death” it seems to describe, instead of thinking about a vague generic “afterlife” we should think logically, with precision. We should ask “what stage in the afterlife (if any) is being described?” and we should consider the fact that, as stated in Part 2 and discussed in Appendix B, Christians have two common views about the *intermediate state* between our individual deaths and the universal Resurrection of all humans: we will sleep, or we will be a conscious soul *without a body*. Christians who study the Bible carefully rarely propose life *with a body* during the intermediate state, because the Bible so clearly teaches (in many places) that we receive bodies at The Resurrection, not before then.

A Parable of Life-after-Death? In Luke 16:19-31, are the characters (Lazarus, the rich man, and Abraham) conscious souls in the **intermediate state**? If so, there is logical inconsistency because these “souls without bodies” have bodies (with eyes and ears, fingers and tongues) before The Resurrection when God gives bodies to the dead! But it also cannot be the **Final State**, after The Resurrection, because the rich man’s brothers are still alive.

This story does not accurately describe any commonly proposed state of existence after death, in either the intermediate state or final state. Therefore, it probably was never intended to provide details about *post-death life* except to state that it will be unpleasant for the wicked. Instead, its main purposes were to teach a valuable lesson about how to live in our *pre-death life*, and to predict (regarding his own death and resurrection) that if people really want to not-believe they “will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”

If we ignore the details of the story, and just say “Jesus tells us that people who don’t behave with compassion now will suffer in the afterlife,” this provides support both CI and EM, relative to a view proposing *no afterlife*, or *no suffering for the wicked*. But it does not support EM relative to CI because, as explained in Section 3.1, suffering occurs in both CI and EM. When comparing CI with EM, instead of asking an irrelevant question (“will suffering occur?”) we should ask “how long will the suffering last?”

To more effectively communicate with his listeners and teach them, Jesus often used parables in which a lesson was clothed in a story. In the first parable of Luke 16, Jesus teaches a lesson (“use

worldly wealth to gain [long-term] friends for yourself”) by praising the cleverness of a dishonest steward. In the second parable of Luke 16, Jesus teaches a lesson (about short-term and long-term priorities) in a story about the long-term consequences of our actions. In these stories, Jesus probably did not intend to also teach unethical business practices (in the first parable) or (in the second) a detailed view of hell that does not appear anywhere else in the Bible.

If our theology could be derived primarily from parables — and this is questionable — the afterlife for the unsaved could be viewed in many ways: as agony (in Luke 16:19-31) and death (re: minas, Luke 19:11-27, where the punishment is to “kill them”) and outer darkness (re: talents, Matthew 25:14-30) and “weeds...burned in the fire” (Matt 13:24-30, 36-43) like fishermen who “threw the bad [fish] away” and kept the good fish. In these parables, only in Matthew 13 does Jesus declare that “this is how it will be at the end of the age.”

The Timing of Judgment: Usually, those who propose “life as a disembodied soul in the intermediate state” think it will be pleasant for some, and not for others. But if Luke 16 shows this life, it would require a *preliminary judgment* because the difference in *treatment by God*, with joy for some and anguish for others, occurs before the post-resurrection *judgment by God*. This is another reason to think that Luke 16 does not show an afterlife, because we are told, over and over (in Daniel 12:2, Matt 13:37-43 & 25:31-32, Mark 8:38, John 5:28-29, 2 Cor 5:10... and Rev 20:12 & 22:12) that judgment and rewards will occur after our resurrection. Perhaps at the time of death there is a *partial preliminary judgment* prior to the *full Final Judgment* after resurrection, but nowhere else does the Bible clearly describe this type of pre-resurrection judgment.

6.3 — Revelation 14:9-11

In this passage, the unfaithful “will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.”

When interpreting this passage, we should use the principle that the Old and New Testaments are connected: as Edward Fudge says, “John’s Apocalypse came from the Spirit of the living Lord, the same Spirit who inspired the Old Testament prophets. And those Old Testament writings are still our best guide to understanding this final book of Scripture.”⁴

The judgment in Rev 14:11 (of people) is similar, in many ways, to the judgment in Isaiah 34:8-10 (of land): “Edom’s streams will be turned into pitch, her dust into burning sulfur; her land will become blazing pitch! *It will not be quenched night and day; its smoke will rise forever.*” There is no claim that the blazing pitch and sulfur will last forever, and in fact the burning fire did not last forever. Instead, the claim in Isaiah 34 is that the *smoke* will rise forever. Similarly, in Revelation 14 it is the *smoke* that will rise forever, with no claim that the tormenting of humans will last forever.

To explain how “the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever,” even after the condemned humans have been annihilated, John Stott says: “The ‘torment’ of Revelation 14:10, because it will be experienced ‘in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb,’ seems to refer to the moment of judgment, not to the eternal state. It is not the torment itself but its ‘smoke’ (symbol of the completed burning) which will be ‘for ever and ever.’”⁵ If these people were being tormented forever, it would occur in the presence of angels and Jesus. Doesn’t this seem like a strange way for Jesus to spend eternity? It seems more likely that, as suggested by Stott, the smoke symbolizes divine justice that has been successfully completed.

In Rev 14:11, “no rest day and night” declares the impossibility of a judicial pardon, stating that as long as these unsaved humans exist, they will be tormented with no relief. There will be no divine pardon that would allow them to exist without torment. This is analogous to the fire that “will not be quenched night and day” in Isaiah 34.

6.4 — Revelation 20:10

In Revelation 19:19 to 20:15, Christ returns and conquers his tribulation-period enemies. The beast and false prophet are thrown into “the fiery lake of burning sulfur,” Satan is shackled, and saints serve in a 1000-year reign of Christ. Satan is released and is allowed to lead a temporary rebellion, is defeated, and is thrown into the lake of fire. Then at the “great white throne” judgment, “if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” to experience “the second death.”

As far as I know, Revelation 20:10 is the only place in the Bible stating (in most English translations) that any creature will be tortured forever. In Rev 20:10, “The devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.” It might seem that two humans (the beast and false prophet) already have been in the lake for 1000 years, and that now “they” (all three) will be tormented forever. Thus, it seems logical that all others (both devils and humans) who are thrown into this lake will also survive forever in eternal torment.

Does this one verse prove EM? With a simple interpretation, it provides some support. But with simple interpretation, *many* verses provide strong support for CI, with a defense of EM requiring a very unusual definition of death, and ignoring the tough question of how it can be sufficient that Jesus *died* for our sins in Substitutionary Atonement, if eternal torment (not temporary suffering followed by death, which is what Jesus voluntarily experienced as our substitute) is the punishment for sin. So let’s look at several possibilities for the meaning of this verse.

6.4-A — Eternal Misery

Maybe everyone who will not be in heaven — the two beasts, Satan, all other fallen angels, and all unsaved humans — will exist forever in tormented misery. This is the doctrine of EM.

6.4-B — Three Special Cases

Maybe the creatures of Rev 20:10 — the devil (leader of a rebellion against God by fallen angels) and the two incarnations of evil (leaders of a rebellion against God by humans) — are unique. Perhaps this unholy trinity (contrasting with the Holy Trinity?) receives punishing that, in accord with the principle of ‘differing degrees of punishing’, is more tormenting and more enduring than for creatures who are less evil. Thus, the Evil Three (Satan, Beast, False Prophet) might be tormented eternally while those who are less evil receive punishing that, because God feels they deserve more mercy, does not last forever. { Even if only three creatures are punished forever, this violates our human expectations about “no infinite punishing for finite sins” discussed in Section 4.1. But it does not violate the principle of CI explained in Part 1 — which is based on what the Bible says about *ordinary humans* (this doesn’t include the beast and false prophet) — that *for humans* immortality is conditional because it will be provided for only those who meet God’s conditions by believing God accepting his grace. }

Rev 20:10 describes the torment of only these three creatures, so if they are unique there is no statement that ordinary humans will be tormented forever. And there is evidence of uniqueness: the Abyss where Satan is cast (Rev 20:1-3) is where the “beast” comes from (Rev 11:7 & 17:8), and Rev 13:11 describes the false prophet as

“another beast, coming out of the earth.” The beast and false prophet seem to be unique as Human Incarnations of Evil. If their essential nature is demonic rather than human, their fate may also be unique, different than for ordinary humans. And we should expect the punishing of Satan (and other fallen angels) to differ from the punishing of humans, due to their differing natures and their differing roles in “the drama of good and evil” throughout the ages.

And there is a precedent for differing treatments. In Rev 19:20-21, everyone is killed except the beast and false prophet, who are thrown alive into the lake of fire. Also, only the three creatures of Rev 20:10 are thrown into the lake of fire *before* the Final Judgment in Rev 20:11-15, when all normal humans will be judged.

6.4-C — Different Lifetimes for Angels and Humans

Rev 20:10 says the Evil Trio’s torment will continue for ‘*aionas ton aionon*’ (in Greek) which is translated as “for ever and ever.” But maybe in this verse ‘*aionas ton aionon*’ means *an entire lifetime* (for as long as the creatures exist) which is not necessarily forever, as implied by the English translation. In this context, the phrase could be used to emphasize the impossibility of a judicial pardon, to state very strongly that as long as these three creatures exist, they will be tormented; there will be no pardon that would allow them to exist without torment. This makes Rev 20:10 a statement against a ‘second chance’ forgiving of the devil and the two beasts.

The Greek word *aionas* (one of several variations of *aion* from which we get the English word *eon*) literally means “lasting for an age” but it is often translated (in a way that sometimes involves linguistically unwarranted theological interpretation) as ‘eternal’, ‘everlasting’, or ‘forever’. Fudge and Bacchiocchi explain:

Petavel [a Biblical scholar] insists that at least 70 times in the Bible, this word [aionios] qualifies ‘objects of a temporary and limited nature’, so that it signifies only ‘an indeterminate duration of which the maximum is fixed by the intrinsic nature of the persons or things’. The word means ‘for ever’, but within the limits of the possibility inherent in the person or thing itself. ... [For example] ‘everlasting’ mountains last only for a very long time — as long as they *can* last. Petavel points out that Scripture frequently uses *aion*, *aionios* and their Hebrew counterpart (*olam* in various forms) of things which have come to an end.⁶ {Fudge} / Ancient Greek papyri contain numerous examples of Roman emperors being described as *aionios*. What is meant is that they held their office for life.⁷ {Bacchiocchi}

Thus, ‘aionios’ can describe a situation that lasts for an entire lifetime, that lasts “forever” within the context of the person’s biological lifetime, but this does not mean the lifetime will last forever. Even though humans and fallen angels both experience the same hell (Matt 25:41, Rev 20:10-15), their ultimate fates will be different if they have different lifetimes. To get information about the post-resurrection lifetime of different creatures, we must look at other parts of the Bible.

Luke 20:35-36 says “those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age... can no longer die; for they are like the angels,” so angels (probably including fallen angels) and post-resurrection saved humans will be immortal, but unsaved humans will not be “considered worthy” which implies that they will not be made immortal. There is no statement here, or anywhere else in the Bible, that unsaved humans will be immortal. As explained in Section 1 — and illustrated at the end of Section 3.2 with examples (from Rev 2:7 & 22:14 & 21:3-4, and 1 Cor 15:42-57, plus Luke 20:35-36) — there is strong biblical evidence that human immortality is conditional and selective, not unconditional and universal, because God’s gift of immortality will be given only to those humans who fulfill the conditions set by God.

Based on everything the Bible says about lifetimes — and the fact that Rev 20:10 does not mention ordinary humans, anyway — we

should conclude that normal humans will not be tormented forever to produce eternal misery; instead their suffering will be temporary, and their ultimate fate will be a death that produces non-existence, as in CI. In this way the term “second death” can have the usual meaning of death, with their First Death occurring as biological humans, and their Second Death as resurrected humans.

If the beast and false prophet are *normal humans*, and if their torment lasts their entire lifetime (with no possibility of a “second chance” pardon), their torment will be temporary. But if they are *demonic humans* (as described in 6.4-B) who in essence are similar to fallen angels, their torment will be permanent, lasting forever; a claim that this may happen is supported by their pairing with Satan (a rebellious angel who is immortal) in the Evil Trio of Rev 20:10. Satan and the other fallen angels will be tormented forever with eternal misery, because they are immortal with eternal lifetimes.

But the life of every creature depends on God, and God can terminate any life (even for angels who “can no longer die”) if He wants. In making decisions about who will exist and for how long, God may choose to make distinctions between *saved humans* and *unsaved humans* (there is strong evidence in the Bible indicating that He will do this, as proposed in Conditional Immortality) and maybe (although there is no indication of this in scripture) between *loyal angels* and *fallen angels*.

6.4-D — other possibilities

Maybe the tormenting is symbolic. This is implied by a “torture” or “torment” of Babylon the Great (a *system* of evil, not a person) in Revelation 18:7,10,15. This would also explain the uniqueness of the beast and false prophet (coming from the abyss, not killed in Rev 19, not judged in Rev 20)* if they are not like ordinary humans because in Rev 20:10 they are not humans. (* described in 6.4-B)

Or maybe there are other explanations that I don't know about, involving apocalyptic imagery or the nuances of Greek language.

a review: In A the final state will be eternal misery for all creatures thrown into the “lake of fire,” and “the second death” is not a real death for anyone. In B, three creatures are tormented forever, but their fates are unique. In C the tormenting lasts for the entire lifetime of the creatures (with no chance for a pardon that allows life without torment) but the lifetimes may not be eternal and probably will be different for immortal fallen angels and non-immortal humans.

Which interpretation is correct? I think it probably is B or C or some combination of them, and D is also possible. But we should be humble in our claims about knowing the meaning of apocalyptic symbolism. The book of Revelation uses words to describe a vision. This requires the visual-to-verbal translation of a vision (the complex symbolic imagery experienced by John) into Greek words, and then English words. In some parts of Revelation the meaning seems clear, but in other parts (including Rev 20:10) it is difficult to be confident about the intended meaning, and humility is justified.

Rev 20:14 explains that “the lake of fire is **the second death**.” This supports C, with “the second death” really being the second death, the everlasting death after which there will be no future resurrection, in contrast with the first death that was followed by resurrection. It is also possible to interpret “the second death” as eternal life in torment, and then use this meaning to redefine the *death penalty for sin* throughout the Bible. But doesn't it seem wiser to use the whole Bible to help us interpret one verse in an apocalyptic vision, instead of using this one verse to redefine the meaning of a very important word, redefining it in a way that is not consistent with the way this word was used in the culture, and is not consistent with the way it is used throughout the Bible?

7. Additional Ideas (to supplement Parts 1-6)

Sections 7.1-7.6 examines topics in Parts 1-6, respectively, by looking at some of the Bible-based support for CI, plus responses (by defenders of EM) and counter-responses.

7.1 — Conditional Immortality in the Bible

Part 1 summarizes the gospel fundamentals — a *problem* (our sin and the death penalty) and its *solution* (the substitutionary atonement offered by Jesus) — in the Old Testament and New Testament, and describes these essential ideas:

- we were created not *with* immortality, but *for* immortality that will be supplied by God; this **immortality is conditional** because it depends on the if-then conditions (believing and accepting the grace offered by God through Christ, and living obediently by faith) that have been set by God;
- the penalty for sin is death, as part of a 3-part “package deal” resulting in our loss of relationship, quality, and eternity; a **death penalty** is clearly stated in Gen 3:22 (sinners “must not be allowed to...live forever”) and in many places throughout the Bible, in the Old and New Testaments, by Jesus, Paul, James, John, and others;
- **Substitutionary Atonement** is an essential theological principle that works with CI (because Jesus died for our sins) but not with EM (because Jesus did not endure eternal misery for us).

Sections 7.1a-7.1g examine these Bible-based principles and others, plus responses by advocates of EM.

7.1a — Bible-Information about Human Immortality

What does the Bible teach about human immortality? are all of us intrinsically immortal? or, if God will make us immortal by using his supernatural power, will this gift be unconditional and universal, or conditional and selective? Bible-believing proponents of CI and EM agree that God is sovereign over life and death, so God **can** do either CI or EM. And we agree on the key question: When we carefully examine the Bible, what does scripture tell us that God **will** do?

Created for Conditional Immortality: Genesis 3 teaches that instead of being created *with* immortality, humans were created *for* an immortality that would be supplied by God, and the supplying was symbolized by a *supernatural tree of life*. But this immortality was *conditional*, not intrinsic and automatic. After the sin of Adam, which violate God's condition for immortality, God removed “the tree of life” (the divine protection that was preventing death) because sinners “must not be allowed to... live forever,” and God enforced his decision (to remove immortality) by using angels and a sword “to guard the way to the tree of life. (Gen 3:24)” This protection, with God supernaturally sustaining *dependent* human immortality, is *conditional* because it is available only for those who accept the grace of God (*) earned by the sacrificial death of Jesus on his cross, for those “who overcome... who wash their robes. (Rev 2:7,22:14)” (* “accepting the grace of God” is the *new condition* offered by God, which is useful because none of us can meet God's *original condition* by living without sin)

Spiritual Death: What do advocates of Eternal Misery do with Genesis 3:22? Usually they just ignore it, pretending it doesn't exist. With this approach, in Genesis 3 the consequence of sin was only *Spiritual Death*. This concept is usually defended by claiming that even though God said, “in the day [yom] that you eat from it [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] you will surely die” (Gen 2:17, NASB), Adam did not die on that day. But ‘yom’ can mean either a 24-hour day or a longer period of time; after God removed his supernatural protection, Adam continued to live through natural processes, but these processes eventually led to his death, and God did

not prevent this. When we look at what happened in Genesis 3, we see the loss of three things: spiritual relationship, quality of life, and eternity of life. But this "package deal" is ripped apart if the resulting death was only spiritual, instead of spiritual-plus-physical, because we would lose only two of these (relationship and quality) but retain one (eternity) despite the clear teaching of Genesis 3:22. Notice the timing: the "spiritual death" had already occurred in Gen 3:17-19 (especially Gen 3:7-10) so if this was the entire sin-penalty there was no need to remove "the tree of life" in Gen 3:22 but it was removed so sinners would not "live forever."

The Death Penalty in Genesis 3:22 — I've never seen a plausible Bible-based explanation for why sinners are immortal, as required in EM, even though "the tree of life" was removed (in Gen 3:22) for a clearly stated purpose: "he [after he sinned] must not be allowed to...live forever." God did not want sinners to live forever, but this is required in EM. After the resurrection, God will provide immortality that is conditional, for those who "overcome" by "washing their robes," as explained in Revelation 2:7 and 22:14.

I can imagine a possible response, claiming that the "tree of life" death penalty applies only to our natural life, and all humans (even the unsaved) will live forever as disembodied souls or in post-resurrection supernatural bodies that God will provide. But this doesn't seem likely because "if God did not want human sinners to live forever in their natural bodies, why would He want sinners to live forever as disembodied souls or in supernatural bodies?"

Also, with EM there is no adequate explanation for why in OT history — as in the offering of Isaac, the Passover, Mosaic Law, and the system of ceremonial sacrifices — we always see death (as in CI) but not (as in EM) long-term imprisonment with painful punishing.

And there is no explanation for Substitutionary Atonement, to explain how Jesus could pay the debt for our sins without suffering eternally in misery, if eternal misery (rather than literal death as in Genesis 3:22) is the penalty for sin, as discussed below in 7.1b.

7.1b — Substitutionary Atonement with CI and EM

Substitutionary Atonement — We sin, so we earn the penalty of death, but our Savior died in our place to pay our debt. God removed the "tree of life" because we sin; but Jesus never sinned so (due to the holiness of the sinless life He led while living with us) He earned the right to avoid the death penalty (judicially decreed by God in Genesis 3:22) without violating the justice of God that requires a penalty of death for sin. Instead, the sinless Christ willingly died in our place, and in doing this He conquered death for us, and (by grace) made the fruits of his own victory available to us through faith.

The atoning death of Jesus is a common theme throughout the NT, in many explanations by many authors: "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor 15:3; similar statements are in 1 Peter 3:18, 1 John 3:16, and Heb 2:9) after Jesus predicted His own death and resurrection (Matt 16:21, 20:28,...). Jesus became "the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 2:2) when He "bore our sins in his body on the tree" (1 Pet 2:24). Similar explanations — about the death of Jesus serving as a sacrifice, with His blood cleansing us from sin and allowing our reconciliation with God — are in Gal 3:13-14, Col 1:13-23, Rom 3:21-26, and Heb 9:13-15, 9:24-28, 10:10 & 10:15-24). It seems impossible to understand how these descriptions of Substitutionary Atonement (accomplished through the *literal death* and *symbolic blood* of Jesus) are consistent with the redefinitions of 'death' required by EM, as discussed in 7.1g.

The death of Jesus Christ has a central place in Christian theology. For example, *A Call to Evangelical Unity* was written by evangelical scholars and leaders in 1999, coordinated by Christianity Today, to

"state what is primary and essential in the Gospel as evangelicals understand it." The essentials included many statements, strong and clear, about substitutionary atonement. While you're reading the excerpts below (with *italics* added), think about the penalty paid by Jesus Christ serving as our substitute — He died for us, but He did not undergo eternal misery for us — and why this fact provides strong support for Conditional Immortality, and is strong biblical evidence against Eternal Misery:

"The only way to know God in peace, love, and joy is through the reconciling *death* of Jesus Christ. ... [Those who trust God have passed] from a state of condemnation and wrath because of their sins to one of acceptance and favor by virtue of Jesus' flawless obedience culminating in his voluntary *sin-bearing death*. ... The atonement of Christ by which, in his obedience, he offered a perfect sacrifice, propitiating the Father *by paying for our sins and satisfying divine justice on our behalf* according to God's eternal plan, is an essential element of the Gospel. ... the Atonement [is] *the substitutionary satisfaction of divine justice, accomplished vicariously for believers*. ... Christ's saving work included both his life and his *death* on our behalf. (Gal. 3:13) *Jesus paid our penalty* in our place on his cross, *satisfying the retributive demands of divine justice* by shedding his blood in sacrifice and so making possible justification for all who trust in him (Rom. 3:25-26). The Bible describes this mighty *substitutionary transaction* as the achieving of ransom, reconciliation, redemption, propitiation, and conquest of evil powers (Matt. 20:28; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Rom. 3:23-25; John 12:31; Col. 2:15)." You can read [the statement](#) and its [background](#) plus a list of [Drafters & Endorsers](#).

Jesus was not tormented for eternity, as proposed by EM. Instead, Jesus *died* for our sins, as proposed by CI.

During the trials and crucifixion of Jesus, He experienced temporary suffering followed by death. These two consequences — temporary suffering followed by death — were the judicial penalties decreed by God in Eden, and these are the penalties in CI.

7.1c — Are humans created with an immortal soul?

The Image of God: What does it mean for us to be created "in the image of God" in Genesis 1:26-28? Does it refer to our *abilities* (physical, mental, moral, emotional, social), the personal *spiritual relationship* established with us by God, and/or the *stewardship responsibilities* given to us by God? What is included in *the image* and what is not? We can all agree that some characteristics of God (omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence) are not included, but what about eternity? God has always existed, from the beginning, and He will exist until the end. Humans are created, so we have not existed since the beginning, but will all of us exist until the end? We should not assume this is part of "the image of God" provided for us by God. Instead, we should ask "what is taught in the Bible?"

Are we intrinsically immortal, or made immortal? Writing to Timothy (in 1 Tim 6:16, 2 Tim 1:10), Paul says that God is the one "who alone is immortal," but believers can receive immortality as a gift because Christ Jesus "has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality." In 1 Cor 15:42-57, Paul says that in heaven we will be "imperishable... with immortality" because "death has been swallowed up in...victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." This will occur when the "tree of life" — symbolizing the supernatural power of God that is required for human immortality — is returned to us in Revelation.

Victory over Death: Our resurrection is consistent with CI but not EM: "When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' ... Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 15:54,57)" Notice the condition: since *victory over death* depends on

victory through Christ, this conferred immortality will be conditional, not universal, so those who have rejected Christ and His victory will not live forever. Paul declares that *believers* will overcome death through a mind-and-body immortality that will be provided by God.

Living Soul: An old translation of Genesis 2:7 says “man became a living soul (KJV)” but modern translations (NKJV, NIV, NASB,...) say “man became a living being” because the Hebrew phrase *nephesh hayyah* (*living soul* in King James) is also used to describe non-human animals as *living beings* in Gen 1:20,21,24,30. Throughout the Old Testament, *nephesh* describes *the life of a whole being*, so a *nephesh* can die, and this occurs many times in the OT. Although the Bible, in the OT and NT, sometimes mention various aspects of humans (heart, soul, strength, mind, spirit, body,...) these are not self-existing parts into which we can be divided. Instead, the Bible treats each human as an indivisible whole entity; in Gen 2:7 we “*became a living soul*,” we were not *supplied with a soul*. As described by Samuele Bacchiocchi, “from a Biblical perspective, the body and soul are not two different substances (one mortal and the other immortal) abiding together within one human being, but two characteristics of the same person.”⁸

Soul and Body in Hell: In Matthew 10:28-29, Jesus says that people can kill only the body, not the soul, but God “can destroy both soul and body in hell.” Here, *soul* is *our potential for eternal life*, and our potential immortality can be actualized or eliminated by God, as described above in Victory over Death.

7.1d — What is the ultimate result of hell-fire?

In hell, does the fire punish-and-kill, or (as required for Eternal Misery) does it punish-and-preserve?

In the final chapter of the Old Testament, Malachi reports what “the Lord Almighty” says about the ultimate fate of sinners: “Surely the day is coming; it will *burn like a furnace*. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be **stubble**, and that day that is coming will set them on *fire*. ... Not a **root** or **branch** will be left to them.” The New Testament continues this theme of destruction by fire. At the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, John the Baptist warns, “Every **tree** that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the *fire*. ... [Jesus will] clear his threshing floor, gathering wheat into his barn and burning up the **chaff** with unquenchable *fire*.” (Matt 3:10,12)

The parable in Matthew 13:24-29 concludes, “First collect the **weeds** and tie them in bundles *to be burned*, then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.” Jesus explains, in Matt 13:40, “As the **weeds** are pulled up and burned in the *fire*, so it will be at the end of the age.” Or, in John 15:6, “If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such **branches** are picked up, thrown into the *fire* and burned.” In Hebrews 10:27, there is “a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging *fire* that will consume the enemies of God.”

What happens when a **flammable object** (tree, chaff, weeds, or branch) is thrown into a *fire*? After a temporary process-of-burning, the existence of the tree or branch (as a tree or branch) is ended.

Here is another argument sometimes claimed as support for EM: if devils and humans both experience the same fire (Matt 25:41, Rev 20:10-15), and if devils are tormented forever (Rev 20:10), then humans will be tormented forever. Is this good logic? No, because devils and humans are different — Luke 20:36 says angels, probably including rebellious fallen angels, do not die (this can be logically inferred from Luke 20:35-36) but the Bible never says that normal humans will not die — so devils and unsaved humans should be affected differently by the fires of hell. Based on what we learn from the Bible, it seems probable that humans will be consumed (as stated

repeatedly in the Bible) while devils will survive forever. { Or perhaps no creatures, or only three creatures, are tormented for eternity, as in one variation described in Section 6.4c. }

7.1e — Eternal Fire and Eternal Worms

What about the “eternal fire” of Matthew 25:41? When natural combustible material (trees, branches, wheat, chaff) is thrown into a fire, we expect burning for awhile and then the material is gone, having been destroyed. For example, this is the clear meaning in Matt 13:40, where Jesus uses the analogy that “as the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age.”

But an advocate of EM will ask, “How can a fire continue to burn eternally if there are no weeds (i.e., no people) to be burned for fuel?” A naturally burning eternal fire would require eternal fuel, which is not available with CI. But it also could not occur naturally with EM, since this would require an infinite supply of chemical potential energy (i.e., an infinite number of calories) in the material being burned, which is impossible. { Similarly, the feeding of “eternal worms” in Mark 9:48 would require infinite calories. }

According to current scientific principles, an eternal fire fueled by natural materials is impossible. With either CI or EM, there are two possibilities.

One possibility, discussed in Section 7.32b, is that the “eternal fire” will not continue to burn eternally, if the Greek word ‘aionion’ (translated as “eternal”) means a fire of ‘the age to come’.

Another possibility is that an eternally lasting fire will be maintained, not by the natural burning of material containing an infinite amount of chemical energy (which is impossible) but by the supernatural power of God. Because this fire does not depend on natural fuel, what is thrown into it can be consumed.

In order to fulfill the function of “burning up the chaff with **unquenchable** fire” (Matthew 3:12), nothing can stop the burning until the destruction has been completed. The fire is described as being **unquenchable** because its function (“burning up the chaff”) cannot be stopped by the creatures being burned up.* But what is thrown into the fire can be destroyed; it does not have to continue burning forever. (* un-quenchable means un-stoppable)

What is the purpose of hell? Does hell preserve (as in EM) or destroy (as in CI)? In Mark 9:48, Jesus describes hell in terms of worms that don't die and fire that isn't quenched, by quoting from the final verse of Isaiah, where — instead of worms and fire that feed on living people forever — we see slain *corpses* (these are dead bodies, not live people) that are being consumed by worms and fire.

Another argument occasionally used against CI is that a person could never be ‘annihilated’ because even after a thorough burning the atoms of the person would still remain within the universe. But burning could certainly end *the life* of a person as a living person. This argument ignores the fact that, based on probabilities, your body contains some of the same oxygen atoms that were once in the bodies of Peter and Paul, but this does not make you Peter or Paul because it's “the combination of everything you are” that makes you “who you are,” and this combination would be destroyed by the fires of hell. The argument also ignores the supernatural creative and destructive powers of God, who in making our universe “created from nothing” (Hebrews 11:3) and can also “destroy into nothing.”

7.1f — Life and Death on an Old Earth

Advocates of a young earth usually claim that an old earth is impossible because before the sin of Adam there was no death of any kind on earth. But this claim is not justified by the Bible, which says very little about animal death. Instead, the biblical focus is on our problem (human sin leading to human death) and God's solution — for

converting sin and death into salvation and life — that works whether the earth is young or old. As explained in 7.1a, “Genesis 3 teaches that instead of being created *with* immortality, humans were created *for* an immortality that would be supplied by God, and the supplying was symbolized by a *supernatural tree of life*.” Humans were never naturally immortal, and neither were other animals.

God offered the gift of full life (with relationship, quality, and immortality) to Adam and Eve, not to all other animals. After the sin of humans the full supernatural protection being *provided* by God (symbolized by the “tree of life”) was *removed* by God, so Adam and Eve began to perish, with natural processes temporarily allowing life but gradually (during the ‘yom’ of Gen 2:17 that, as in Genesis 1, can indicate an indefinite period of time instead of a 24-hour day) leading to their death, which was not prevented by God.

7.1g — Does ‘death’ really mean death?

In an effort to defend EM, its advocates must propose extremely creative interpretations of the many verses that contain words such as *death*, *perish*, and *destruction*. Defending EM requires explaining, for each of the many times the Bible states that the penalty of sin is death, why ‘death’ does not mean death.

Appendix A5 examines the biblical words used to describe death; this section will summarize basic principles from the Bible.

When defenders of EM describe what happens without salvation, they take the three main attributes of salvation — God’s gift of *eternal existence with high quality and with God* — and maintain one while reversing the other two, to produce a hell of “*eternal existence with low quality and without God*” that is *eternal misery*.

But this combination is not logically consistent with the results of our sin. In Genesis 3 the immediate result of disobedience (which apparently was intrinsic, since it occurred without a judicial decree by God) was a loss of relationship with God, in Gen 3:14-19. Then God decreed, in Gen 3:15-19, that there would be a decrease in the quality of life. It is only *after* these two results, in Gen 3:22, that God makes the final decree, to remove the possibility of eternal existence because sinful humans “must not be allowed to... live forever.”

If the loss of life was only a loss of relationship with God (which already had occurred in Gen 3:7-11) without a loss of existence, it would not have been necessary to remove the Tree of Life in Gen 3:22. God did think this was necessary, so it seems clear that our sin resulted in *misery* (due to a loss of trusting intimacy with God, and a life that would be filled with suffering and challenges) and also an *eventual loss of existence*. This contrasts with EM, in which there is *misery* but not *eventual loss of existence*. EM ignores the Tree of Life, which is the main theme of Genesis 3 and is the main consequence of our sin. The “tree of life” is also an important benefit of our salvation, as we see in Revelation 2:7 and 22:14.

7.2 — Biblical Theology with CI and EM

As emphasized in Part 2, CI and EM are similar, differing only in the final state of the unsaved. Therefore, as explained in 5.2b (Defending a Tradition), “CI is compatible with all parts of a set of fundamental doctrines, such as belief in the reality of sin, judgment, hell, atonement, miracles, and (of course) the authority of the Bible. In fact, the more carefully we study the Bible, the more strongly supported is a conclusion that CI (not EM) is much more compatible with the fundamentals of Christian faith, as explained in Parts 1 and 7.1. Therefore, we should reject any implication that EM is a necessary part of Bible-based evangelical theology.”

7.3 — Suffering and Everlasting Punishment

The main theme of Part 3 is that with CI there will be suffering in hell and everlasting punishment. Therefore, biblical descriptions of suffering do not provide biblical support for EM.

7.31 — Suffering in Hell

Section 3.1 concludes that “in CI or EM, judgment-and-hell will be a bad experience” so “passages describing suffering in hell do not provide support for EM, relative to CI.”

Many places in the NT describe suffering in hell. In addition to what Jesus says in the gospels, Paul warns that “there will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil (Romans 2:5-11)” but there is no mention of eternal duration, here or anywhere else in the writings of Paul. But within this passage (in Romans 2:7), Paul describes the gift of post-resurrection immortality that is conditional — “to those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life” — thus agreeing with this important principle that is taught throughout the Bible.

7.32a — Everlasting Punishment by Everlasting Death

Section 3.2 concludes, regarding the “everlasting punishment” in Matthew 25:46, “if we don’t assume an **unconditional immortality** of all humans [that God cannot or will not change], and if we acknowledge that *kolasin* is a noun so we should think about everlasting **punishment** (a noun) instead of everlasting punishing (a verb), Matt 25:46 does not provide logical support for EM.”

Throughout this paper you’ll find many Bible-based reasons to avoid assuming **unconditional immortality**. This section looks at the difference between **punishment** and punishing.

The main theme of 3.2 is that a *result* of eternal punishment does not require a *process* of eternal punishing. With EM the everlasting punishment is produced by everlasting punishing. CI also has an everlasting punishment, but it’s caused by a permanent death with no possibility of a divine pardon leading to resurrection in the future so the death-punishment lasts forever; this interpretation is supported by the basic meaning of *kolazo* (verb that is the root of *kolasin*) as the act of pruning, as in cutting a branch from a living tree; and maybe, as in CI, cutting sinful people away from the community of living people?

life and death, process and result: An important concept is the process-and-result difference between life and death. An everlasting life is *being alive forever*, and the everlasting result (of being alive forever) is *an everlasting process*. An everlasting death is *being dead forever*, but the everlasting result (of being dead forever) is *not an everlasting process*. In Matthew 25:46 the focus is on **result** instead of process, because ‘*kolasin*’ is a **noun** (a result, punishment) instead of a verb (a process, punishing); therefore, it does not matter whether a process (verb) of eternally lasting punishing is present (with EM) or absent (with CI), because both EM and CI have a result (noun) that produces eternally lasting punishing. After resurrection and judgment, the saved will be alive forever, and the unsaved will be dead forever, and both results are “everlasting” due to the asymmetry between life and death.

In Matt 25:46 the Greek word *aionion* is translated as “eternal”. According to Edward Fudge, *aionion* is used five times in the NT to qualify nouns derived from verbs: eternal salvation (Hebrews 5:9), eternal redemption (Heb 9:12), eternal judgment (Heb 6:2), eternal punishment (Matt 25:46), and eternal destruction (2 Thess 1:9).

Two **permanent results** that will last forever — eternal *salvation* and eternal *redemption* — were produced by a **temporary process** when Jesus died on the cross to *save* and *redeem* us. Similarly, the

results of God's eternal *judgment* will endure forever, long after the **process** of judging is finished. { And "eternal sin" (Mark 3:29) has results lasting forever, but the process of committing sin does not. }

Each of these *eternal nouns* (salvation, redemption, judgment) refers to a **result** that endures eternally, even though there is not a corresponding **process** (of saving, redeeming, judging) that continues forever. Fudge argues that, by analogy, it seems logical that two other "eternal nouns" (punishment, destruction) also refer to eternal **results** that occur without an eternal **process**. Therefore, eternal *punishment* (which is also eternal *destruction*) can produce **results** that are eternal, that never change and therefore remain the same forever, even though there is no **process** of eternal destroying with eternal punishing.

Similarly, *A Call to Evangelical Unity* (featured in 7.1b) says "all have sinned, so all who do not receive Christ will be judged according to their just deserts as measured by God's holy law, and face **eternal retributive punishment**." They say "punishment" (it can be eternal death or eternal misery) instead of "punishing" (requiring eternal misery). And they describe the retribution (death) that was needed in the "*substitutionary* transaction" that allows our salvation: "Jesus paid our penalty in our place [as our *substitute*] on his cross [where he died], satisfying the retributive demands of divine justice by shedding his blood in sacrifice and so making possible justification for all who trust in him."

For similar reasons, Paul does not support EM in 2 Thess 1:9, "They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power." To see EM here requires a claim that everlasting destruction (with *destruction* re-defined as "existence without God") is caused by immortal nonbelievers being "shut out from the presence of the Lord." But this sentence makes sense with CI if the cause-effect relationship is for nonbelievers to be "shut out from the presence of the Lord" due to their "everlasting destruction" where *destruction* is defined, in the usual way, as *death* in which *their existence ceases*.

EM is also not supported by Daniel 12:2 — "multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt" — because although the unsaved will feel "shame" in themselves, the "contempt" will be felt by onlookers, by God and maybe also loyal angels and saved humans, and their contempt (not the unsaved humans) will be everlasting.

angels and eternal fire: The apparent significance of Matt 25:41 (with "eternal fire" for both humans and fallen angels) is greatly reduced when we look at the many potential meanings of "eternal" (in 7.32b) and understand (7.1e) that an eternally lasting fire fueled by the burning of live humans is impossible with either CI or EM, and we examine (7.1d) the biblical evidence for a difference in mortality between humans and angels.

avoid circular logic: It's illogical to assume a conclusion and then use this assumption to logically justify the conclusion. It's bad logic, because it's circular, if you think "everlasting punishment (= punishing with suffering as in "weeping and gnashing of teeth") requires conscious humans so they must be immortal, and if they're immortal then they will be punished forever, thus Eternal Misery." Yes, unconditional immortality and eternal punishing do form a mutually supportive, logically consistent combination with EM, but conditional immortality plus eternal punishment with CI (instead of EM) is also logically consistent. If you think about only one of these combinations and decide "this is logically consistent so it's probably true" you will be fooled into thinking this combination is therefore logically supported. Don't allow your own logic to be circular, and don't let others use illogical circular arguments.

a summary: Both EM and CI are *everlasting punishment* (noun) with an eternally lasting *result* that is never reversed, although only EM involves a process of *everlasting punishing* (verb) that is not described in Matthew 25:26 because 'kolasin' is a noun.

7.32b — What does 'aionion' mean?

This section is a bonus. It is not needed, to explain why EM is not supported by Matthew 25:46, because the logic in Sections 3.2 and 7.32a is sufficient to show that "eternal punishment" can occur with CI. But in case in case you're not persuaded by the "noun, not verb" argument distinguishing between punishment and punishing, the multiple potential meanings of 'aionios' may give you another reason to see the lack of support for EM.

And the meaning of the Greek word 'aionion' is important for other reasons. Sections 7.32a and 7.32b each examine one of the two words in "eternal punishment"; in 7.32a the focus is *punishment*, while in 7.32b we'll look at *eternal*.

This section is based on a general principle for interpreting the Bible: whenever we see a subject where a key word has several potential meanings, this is a good reason (along with many other reasons) to look at everything the Bible says about the subject, instead of building an important doctrine on a single verse.

Also, remember that in each verse the Bible translators make a decision about how to describe 'aionion' in English, about which of the possible meanings (described below) they should choose to use.

In Greek, as in English, a word can have more than one possible meaning: 'aionios' (and variation-words, such as 'aionion', derived from the same root word) literally means lasting "for an age (eon)" but it can also mean "for a lifetime" or "forever" (eternal, eternally lasting, everlasting), or it can refer to The Age to Come (in contrast with The Present Age, and it is used (in Luke 1:70 & Acts 3:21) to describe promises made a long time ago (but not an eternally long time ago) through Old Testament prophets.

If in Matt 25:41,46 'aionion' means "for a lifetime" the lifetimes, and thus the durations, will be different for angels (loyal or fallen) and unsaved humans who (as stated in Luke 20:36) are immortal, and non-immortal unsaved humans. These differences in mortality are examined in Sections 6.4c & 7.1a-7.1g (especially 7.1d) showing that the Bible does not teach the immortality of unsaved humans. But in the Bible we see many statements (some are in Section 3.2) declaring the immortality of saved humans.

If in Matt 25:46 'aionion' punishment & life means punishment & life that is "lasting for an age" or is "in the age to come," the duration of punishment & life is not specified by 'aionion'; but we can get this information from elsewhere in the Bible by "looking at everything the Bible says about the subject," as explained in the paragraph above.

With any of these meanings (lasting for a lifetime or for an age; of the age to come) when we look at everything the Bible teaches, we see Conditional Immortality.

God never threatens immortality (with eternal life in misery) for unsaved humans; but God promises immortality for saved humans in many verses, with themes such as the elimination of death (Isaiah 25:8, II Tim 1:10, Rev 21:4) due to the post-resurrection immortality given by God to the redeemed (Luke 20:35-36, I Cor 15:42-57, Rev 2:7 & 22:14): "Those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age... can no longer die. (Luke 20:35-36)" Our hope of eternal life does not depend on one verse (Matt 25:46) because the Bible states, again and again, that we will have eternal life. Therefore, interpreting *aionios* as either 'for a lifetime' or 'eternal' would be consistent with eternal life in Matt 25:46, since saved people will be immortal (I Cor

15:54) and there will be no more death (Rev 21:4) so our post-resurrection 'lifetime' will be eternal. Of course, for a fulfillment of this promise we have no choice but to trust God by faith, and for me this is sufficient.

And remember that, as explained in the first paragraph of 7.32b, "this section is a bonus; it is not needed, to explain why EM is not supported by Matthew 25:46."

These two paragraphs are an extension of Section 7.1e:

There is linguistic evidence that 'aionios' can be used to describe things connected with The Age to Come, in contrast with The Present Age. Thus, another possibility (in addition to those in Section 7.1e) is for the "eternal fire" of Matt 25:41 could be a fire "in the age to come" that plays a role in accomplishing the Justice of God and establishing the Kingdom of God. In this way a fire could be 'aionios' whether or not it lasted for an eternally long time.

Supporting this possibility is Jude 1:7, which states that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah "serves as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire." In these cities the fire played a role in accomplishing the timeless Justice of God, but the fire did not last forever, and the people died (they were not punished eternally) which is consistent with CI rather than EM.

7.4 — *re: Divine Justice and Mercy*

The introduction for Part 4 says "my goal is to defend the honor of God... because the biblical picture of God (severe yet fair in judgment, loving and forgiving) seems more consistent with CI than with EM." But to evaluate CI, "we should focus on what the Bible teaches."

7.41 — Infinite Punishing for Finite Sins

Eternal Misery and Amnesty International: If a human government adopted a policy of continuous endless torture for prisoners, this would be severely criticized. Should we be more pleased with endless misery that is administered by God? With CI we don't need to ask this troubling question.

Eternal Misery (EM) could also be called Eternal Torment (ET) based on the "eternal torment" of Rev 20:10. The term "eternal misery" acknowledges that the environment of hell could lead to suffering even if God plays no active role in producing the suffering. But regardless of the balance between active and passive, the misery in EM would be allowed by God.

7.42 — Eternal Joy with knowledge of Eternal Misery?

If you ask people, "would you want your friends and family to be tortured endlessly in hell (as with EM), or be killed in hell (with CI), or be converted so they can enter a joyful heaven (with US)," every one of us should choose US. Unfortunately, universal salvation is not taught in the Bible. But CI is taught in the Bible, so CI (in which there is a merciful end to the suffering in hell) seems highly probable based on the Bible, and it would be the choice of most people, including me.

With EM, would people in heaven know about unsaved humans (including family and friends) who are being tormented in hell, and will exist in misery forever? If yes, can they be joyful anyway?

Here is a defense of EM by Roger Nicole:

"But doesn't the existence of a dark spot in the universe spoil the bliss of the redeemed in heaven and of the triune God himself? How can we be happy in heaven knowing that many are suffering in hell? This objection does not sufficiently consider the heinousness of sin and of the importance of God's honor whose majesty has been violated by our disobedience. From the vantage point of heaven and of divine holiness, the sheer ugliness of sin will be fully apparent and will undoubtedly erase remnants of natural affection

that were appropriate on the earthly scene."

Yes, things will look different from a heavenly perspective, but it would take an extremely big change (in our emotional makeup and spiritual knowledge) if a heaven-dweller would not be bothered by knowing that God will cause other humans, including former family and friends, to exist forever in hell in a state of horrible misery.

Of course, Universal Salvation seems even better, if God gives everyone a second chance to say "yes" and if everyone eventually receives eternal life with joy in heaven, but this view does not seem to be taught in the Bible. By contrast, Conditional Immortality (with everlasting death rather than everlasting misery) does seem to be taught in the Bible.

Is a noble sacrifice necessary? (and who made it?)

Sections 3.2 and 7.32a explain the faulty logic of a claim that if the "eternal punishment" in Matt 25:46 is not punishing that lasts forever, then our "eternal life" will not last forever. But even if this argument was logical, an appropriate "loving your neighbor" attitude is that of F.W. Farrar, an advocate of CI who offered a noble sacrifice: "I call God to witness that so far from regretting the possible loss of some billions of aeons of bliss... I would here, and now, and kneeling on my knees, ask Him that I might die as the beasts that perish, and forever cease to be, rather than that my worst enemy should, for one single year, endure the hell described by Tertullian... or Jonathan Edwards." ⁹

In the Bible we see God's justice matching the judicial intuitions of Farrar. God's plan for preventing eternal misery was to make all humans mortal by removing "the tree of life" because sinners "must not be allowed to... live forever." Instead, without the "tree of life" they would die. So his noble sacrifice was not necessary. Of course, Farrar knew this; he just wanted to focus attention on how terrible it would be for a fellow human to suffer in eternal misery. Farrar also knew that the noble sacrifice already had been made by Jesus, when He willingly died on the cross so some people (those accepting the salvation he offers) can avoid the death penalty we earn by our sin.

7.43 — The Overall Result with CI and EM

With EM, an unsaved person goes from nothing (before birth) to extremely negative (eternal misery in hell). Does this seem fair? For these people, the "gift of life from God" is a burden that, if they had the choice, they would have been wise to refuse.

But with CI there are winners but no losers. The saved are big winners, as with EM. The unsaved go from nothing (before birth) to nothing (after their death in hell) and this seems fair; God gives life, and God takes away life.

As explained in Section 4.5 — which asks "why doesn't God use maximum persuasion?" — the current "balance of evidence" seems more likely with CI than EM, since with CI "there is no possibility that a person will go from nothing to eternal misery, so it seems to me (but humility is appropriate) that this allows more freedom for God,... and the focus can be on adjusting the 'balance of evidence' so it provides optimal benefits for believers who will spend eternity in fellowship with God and other believers in heaven" rather than persuading the maximum number of people to accept salvation so they can avoid eternal misery in hell.

Based on everything you know about God, do you think CI or EM is more consistent with the character of God?

7.44 — Is maximum punishing required for justice?

A criticism sometimes made by advocates of EM is that with CI there cannot be maximum punishment because the punishing does not last forever. Yes, this is true. But why should achieving justice (the goal of God) requires punishing sinners for the longest possible time?

Or consider our attitude toward humanly administered capital punishment. We don't say "it isn't much of a punishment because it's finished in a short time." Instead, we consider what was lost, which is about 40 years of life. But an eternity of life is lost with CI, because instead of eternal life an unsaved person gets no life.

Can the results of sin be "worse than death" if there is no EM?

In Mark 9:42, Jesus says, "If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the seas with a large millstone tied around his neck." And in Matthew 26:24, "The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born."

With CI a person's overall experience would be worse than merely dying (Mark 9:42) if the person's resurrection is followed by an unpleasant judgment and suffering, even if the suffering is only temporary. And life could be worse than never being born (Matt 26:24) if during the entire process (life, judgment, suffering) the negatives outweigh the positives, and this could occur either with or without eternal misery.

The Bible states that hell will be unpleasant. One of the worst aspects of hell will be the sorrow and terror of realizing that "the wages of sin is death." With CI, while awaiting judgment and while in hell an unsaved sinner will understand why Jesus (in Matt 10:26-33) warns that we should fear the God who "can destroy both soul and body in hell" with an everlasting permanent death.

Also see Appendices D6 (Does sin-against-God justify infinite punishing?) and D7 (Is maximum punishing necessary for justice?).

7.5 — *Extra-Biblical Influences on Our Views*

Part 5 begins by observing that "unfortunately, this part of the paper seems necessary." It's important to recognize how our views can be influenced by extra-biblical factors, and why this should not happen, so here is a quoted summary of the main ideas:

"Bible-based theology should be our goal" so I'm encouraging you to "learn more about CI and EM... so you can evaluate each idea based on accurate, thorough knowledge of what it actually is" and the Bible-based arguments for and against it.

"Try to imagine that very few people believe in Eternal Misery, and you have just read a description of EM, plus a summary of the arguments for and against it. Would you believe EM? Would you discard the orthodox belief [in CI] and replace it with a doctrine of Eternal Misery, proposing that God will keep nonbelievers alive so they can endure an endless eternity of misery in hell?"

"When defending an established set of religious doctrines, if any part of the set is questioned there is a tendency to view this as a challenge to other parts. This perception is warranted IF (and only if) there are logical links between the parts, if the doctrine being questioned forms a logical foundation for other parts of the set, or is a logical outcome of other parts." But this isn't an important factor because "CI differs from EM only in the final state for the unsaved. In all other ways, CI and EM are identical, so CI is compatible with all parts of a set of essential doctrines."

"The hearts and minds of many people, both non-Christians and Christians, are sickened by the thought of a God who would cause (or even allow) eternal torment in hell. These people are less likely to

turn their lives over to a God who would do this, and to fulfill the greatest commandment by "loving God with all of their heart, soul, and mind." This lack of trust and respect (for a God who would cause or allow EM) will hinder both salvation and discipleship."

"When we are thinking about theology, Christians are vulnerable to the same types of psychological influences as non-Christians." These include "sociological pressures that encourage conformity to the expectations of a group, which can influence us because we have psychological desires to please other people and gain their approval" and "a desire for personal consistency that will reduce unpleasant cognitive dissonance."

Even though "an intrinsic unconditional *soul-immortality* is not necessary in Christianity, because we have the promise of a supernatural conditional *body-resurrection* provided by God, ... Judeo-Christian theology has been influenced by the concept of soul-immortality that was imported from non-biblical philosophies. ... The NT *writers* had a holistic Hebrew view of humans, but some later *readers* were influenced by dualistic Greek philosophy, and unfortunately this helped EM become the 'traditional' view of hell."

"We should *recognize* that theology can be influenced by extra-biblical factors; then, in our effort to make our search for Bible-based theology more effective in finding the truth, we should try to *minimize* the biasing influence of these factors ... because our goal is Bible-based theology."

7.6 — *Important Verses and the Big Picture*

In addition to the passages in Section 6 — "eternal punishment" (Matthew 25:46), "in hell... in torment... in agony in this fire" (Luke 16:19-31), "the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever; there is no rest day or night" (Revelation 14:9-11), creatures who "will be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Revelation 20:10) — in Sections 7.1d/e we see weeds "burned in the fire" (Matthew 13:40) with "unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:12), "eternal fire" (Matthew 25:41), and eternal worms (Mark 9:48); and you'll find others (the "shame and everlasting contempt" of Daniel 12:2, and more) scattered throughout this paper.

These verses are important when we're evaluating EM and CI, but we also "should broaden our perspective by also looking at the 'big picture' of major themes in the Bible" as summarized in Part 1; God removes "the tree of life" because sinners "must not be allowed to... live forever" (Genesis 3:22) until God will give "the right to the tree of life... in the paradise of God" to "him who overcomes" and "those who wash their robes" (Revelation 2:7 and 22:14). How did we get from Genesis to Revelation? "God's method of salvation is the sacrificial *death* of Jesus, in a **substitutionary atonement** that lets us pass *from death to life*. Jesus accepted our punishment (He *died* in our place to satisfy the *death sentence* decreed in Eden) and by his own sinless life (by always obeying the Father, as commanded in Genesis 2:17) He earned the right to make his own supernatural eternal life available, as a gift of grace, to all who will accept. ... On the cross, Jesus accepted a penalty of *death* for us; He did not accept a penalty of eternal misery."

Why should we conclude that CI, not EM, is taught in the Bible? a 1-page summary: mywebspace.wisc.edu/crusbult/web/ci/c.pdf

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APPENDIX

background reading: When a section in this appendix cites the main body of the paper, it assumes you have read that part of the main body because this appendix is supplementary, not intended to stand alone.

You can read sections in the appendix in any order you want:

A. Soul Immortality and Eternal Misery

- A1 — Extra-Biblical Influences for Bible Readers
- A2 — How did EM become a traditional doctrine?
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B. Old and New Testaments, and Other Writings

- B1 — Connections: Old Testament and New Testament
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C. The Intermediate State: Asleep or Awake?

- History of Salvation and History of a Human
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D. miscellaneous topics

- D1 — Writing This Paper (a personal history)
- D2 — Universal Salvation (is it desirable? biblical?)
- D3 — How will Christians be judged?
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- D5 — The Logic of Betting on Heaven and Hell
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- D8 — Edifying Attitudes by Advocates of CI and EM
- D9 — What does God’s word say?

A. Soul Immortality and Eternal Misery

A1 — Extra-Biblical Influences for Bible Readers

Section 5.3 explains how Judeo-Christian theology has been influenced by the concept of *soul immortality* imported from non-biblical philosophies: “the NT *writers* had a holistic Hebrew view of humans, but some later *readers* were influenced by dualistic Greek philosophy, and unfortunately this helped Eternal Misery become the ‘traditional’ view of hell.” One example from 5.3 is the Septuagint, in which the Hebrew word ‘sheol’ (grave for the dead) was translated into the Greek ‘Hades’ (abode of the dead where they have experiences) which influenced the theology of many readers during church history.

During the centuries when EM was becoming established as the “traditional” theology, people who were constructing the theology were reading a Bible that was biased by translators of the King James Version. Samuele Bacchiocchi explains: “The translators of the KJV believed that at death the righteous go to Heaven and the wicked go to hell. Consequently, they translated *sheol* ‘grave’ when referring to the righteous, whose bodies rested in the grave, and ‘hell’ when referring to the wicked whose souls were supposedly tormented in hell.”¹⁰ In

modern translations, to avoid this misleading bias the RSV and NASB transliterate the Hebrew word into English letters as 'sheol', and the NIV usually translates it 'grave', which "accurately reflects the basic meaning of *sheol* as...the collective realm of the dead."

Christian theology has been influenced by a concept (the immortality of human souls) imported from non-Biblical Greek philosophy. Why has this influence occurred, and why has it been unrecognized or even welcomed? First, Greek philosophy has been a major part of the intellectual culture in which the church has operated and formed its theology. Second, the concept of human immortality has seemed to be rhetorically useful, as explained by Edward Fudge:

Christian writers have used the concept [of soul-immortality] as an illustration of their apologetics and as a weapon against anti-supernaturalists who denied the resurrection. Only by a kind of reflex action have they used it as the basis for argument concerning final punishment. Then, like some hidden footlight, the doctrine has tinted exegesis, its own scriptural legitimacy frequently a matter of doubt. ... Today the traditional dualistic dogma of soul-immortality is under increasing suspicion as an interloper. Orthodox writers are concluding that the church will not suffer by its expulsion but, rather, that this would eliminate an unnecessary inconsistency from the rationale of orthodoxy.¹¹

If every soul lives forever, the traditional view of hell as unending conscious torment seems to follow. This presupposition has wielded tremendous influence on biblical interpretation in intertestamental Judaism and through most of the Christian centuries. ... It has generally been thought that the immortality of the soul was a necessary tool for Christian theology. Today, however, the doctrine is increasingly regarded as a post-apostolic invention, not only unnecessary but positively harmful to proper biblical interpretation and understanding.¹²

A2 — How did EM become a traditional doctrine?

This paper explains why Conditional Immortality (CI) seems to be clearly taught in the Bible. So... how did Eternal Misery (EM) become the 'traditional' doctrine of the modern church?

In the second century, in the early 100s the church fathers didn't say much about the final fate of the unsaved. There wasn't much to discuss, because a straightforward reading of the OT and the main body of the new writings, in the Gospels and the letters of Paul (and of James, Peter and John), led to a simple conclusion that the unsaved will die in hell, in the fires of judgment. There was no reason to elaborate on the subject. Instead, they just let Scripture speak for itself:

When they spoke of the wicked's end, the apostolic fathers of the second century had contented themselves with biblical words and phrases. They did not elaborate them or eliminate them. Conditionalists interpret the fathers and the Bible quite literally, taking both at what seems to be face value. ...

They agree with Scripture and with each other that the wicked will be raised to face God in judgment. They nowhere indicate that the wicked will be immortal, and they strongly suggest in a number of places that they will not. ... Nowhere do the apostolic fathers indicate that [the fire of judgment] will preserve the wicked alive or that they will endure it in conscious agony forever. They affirm, on the other hand, that the wicked will 'perish', be 'destroyed' and 'die'.¹³ { Most of the idea-content in A2, and all quotations, are from the research and writings of Edward Fudge. }

Soon, however, a doctrine of EM developed, and "as the second century drew to a close, [there was] a mixed view on final punishment." Influenced by Greek ideas about the intrinsic immortality of all souls, the first clear statements of EM come from Athenagoras and Tertullian in the late 100s and early 200s: "If the souls of even wicked men are immortal and destined to live forever, and if earthly sin will be punished by what the Bible calls 'eternal fire,' the only conclusion Tertullian

could reach was that the wicked would endure conscious unending torment. ... What began in Scripture as a consuming, devouring, irreversible fire...became a tormenting fire that never consumed or devoured but...miraculously reconstituted what it burnt so as to extend its painful torture forever."¹⁴

In response to this new doctrine of Eternal Misery, Origen (in the early-to-mid 200s, building on the views of his teacher, Clement of Alexandria) proposed Universal Restoration, with all unsaved humans being purged and saved: "Although souls are immortal and cannot be destroyed by the fires of hell, they may by that same fire be eventually purged of evil and finally enter heaven."¹⁵

Augustine (at around 400 AD) "presupposed the immortality of the soul, then read the biblical passages on the assumption that no sinner can ever truly die, perish or be destroyed in a literal sense. Since Scripture ruled out universal restoration, he had to teach conscious eternal torment." By this time EM was a common view, and "supported by Augustine's endorsement, the common view quickly moved from the status of popular opinion to become unquestioned orthodoxy."¹⁶

A doctrine of EM became clearly defined and generally accepted between 200-400 AD. Has it survived mainly due to *the concept of immortality and the inertia of tradition*? During the early days of the Reformation, a theological shift from tradition to *sola scriptura* (only scripture) should have led to a rejection of EM, but instead...

immortality of the soul undergirded the structure of ecclesiastical thought. ... The Platonic frame of mind it represented had been officially unquestioned and popularly hallowed most of that time. On this point, Calvin bridged the gap between the tradition of Rome and the fresh planting of the Reformation. Tyndale and Luther were not of his mind, but for personal and historical reasons their influence was not determinative. Calvin, more than any one man, put the Protestant stamp of approval on the traditional understanding of souls and hell. The power of his influence may be seen in the history of theology since.¹⁷

A3 — Would soul-immortality lead logically to EM?

Here are two important questions, and {my answers}:

- 1) is human soul-immortality taught in the Bible? {no}
- 2) if we assume soul-immortality is true, would it be logical to conclude that Eternal Misery is true? {no, but...}

This section looks at the second question in this section. If human souls were immortal, would we have to conclude "Eternal Misery"?

The answer might seem to be "yes" because IF the punishment of unsaved humans is everlasting (as stated by Jesus in Matthew 25:46) and IF unsaved humans will remain alive forever because *there is no way for them to die*, THEN the logical conclusion is Eternal Misery. But there is always a "way for them to die" because...

Even if humans were intrinsically immortal (but this "if" seems false, according to the Bible) we should recognize that God is sovereign over life, so God can decide to terminate (or prolong) the existence of any creature at any time, under any circumstances. "God controls all life so if He wants a body or soul to be alive, it will remain alive; and if He wants any life to end, that will happen. So the question is not 'what *can* God do?' [because there are no limits] but 'what does the Bible say that God *will* do?' [Will he preserve or terminate the existence of saved and unsaved humans in their final state?] When we look at all that is taught in the Bible, the answers seems to be eternally lasting life for the saved, and eternally lasting death for the unsaved." (adapted from Part 1)

When we consider the sovereignty of God, we should say "no" to Question 2. But in reality the answer is often "no, but..." because many people, especially those who have not thought much about EM-versus-CI, conclude that "there is universal unconditional soul-immortality and therefore Eternal Misery" because either they don't seriously consider

the sovereignty of God when thinking about EM, or they assume that God wants all humans (both saved and unsaved) to be alive forever. More thoughts about this question are in C8, and its last 4 paragraphs summarize some reasons for the “but” in “no, but...”

A4 — Is soul-immortality taught in the Old Testament?

A more general question, “Is soul-immortality taught in the Bible, in the OT or NT?” is discussed in 7.1c and elsewhere. This section looks at three concepts from the OT: *nephesh*, *rephaim*, and spiritualism.

Nephesh (its meaning): The meaning of ‘*nephesh*’ is explained in Section 7.1c, and it is among the many topics carefully examined in a comprehensive study by Samuele Bacchiocchi (1997), *Immortality or Resurrection: A Biblical Study on Human Nature and Destiny*. This book is an excellent discussion of immortality. Also very good is *The Fire that Consumes: The Biblical Case for Conditional Immortality*, by Edward Fudge (1982, 1994), which is a detailed defense of CI. Sam Bacchiocchi (SB) also has a chapter on CI — it is good, is shorter than Fudge, and (along with three other chapters) is available for free at www.biblicalperspectives.com/books/immortality_resurrection/6.htm — in which he explains that in the OT, “the soul is not an immaterial, immortal part of human nature standing over against the body, but designates the vitality or life principle in human nature. ... References to the departure (Gen 35:18) and return (I King 17:21-22) of the soul... [mean that] what returns to God is not an immortal soul, but simply the animating principle of life imparted by God to both human beings and animals for the duration of this earthly existence.”¹⁸

Rephaim (its meaning): The Hebrew *rephaim*, often translated (in KJV, NIV, NASB) as “the dead” but also “departed spirits” or “spirits of the dead”, is sometimes claimed to support the dead being conscious. After a study of linguistic contexts, SB concludes that “the translation of *rephaim*...as ‘the departed’ or ‘the dead’ fits well with the usage of the term in the eight texts where the word occurs.”¹⁹ / In Isaiah 14, the King of Babylon is taunted by the inhabitants of sheol and by talking trees. SB thinks this story “serves not to reveal the conscious existence of souls in sheol, but to forecast in striking pictorial language God’s judgment upon Israel’s oppressor, and his final ignominious destiny in a dusty grave, to be eaten by worms.”²⁰ Ezekiel 31-32 is a similar parable, a dirge over the Pharaoh of Egypt. SB says this is “a figurative representation of the humiliation of the grave that awaits those who abuse their power in this life. ... ‘The pictures of the king of Babylon with maggots and worms covering him (Is 14:11) and of Pharaoh lying among the fallen warriors with their swords placed under their heads (Ez 32:27) speak not of hell but of the humiliation of the grave.’”²¹

The Spirit of Samuel: In 1 Samuel 28, after “the Lord did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets” Saul consulted a medium at Endor. She apparently summoned the spirit of Samuel, who rebuked Saul and predicted his defeat. This type of event is unique in the Bible (it happens nowhere else) and is mysterious. Maybe the “spirit” was a special one-of-a-kind vision sent by God to rebuke Saul; or maybe it actually was the spirit of Samuel, or an evil spirit impersonating him. As in Luke 16, there is logical inconsistency: if conscious souls in the intermediate state do not have bodies because they have not yet been resurrected into physical bodies, why was this spirit wearing a robe, and why was it visible coming up from the ground? And why would God use a practice forbidden by the Mosaic Law (Lev 19:31, 1 Sam 28:9) after refusing to communicate with Saul in other ways? I don’t know what happened here, but — as with other passages that are mysterious and controversial — I’m confident that we should adopt a whole-Bible approach by using principles taught clearly elsewhere, such as those summarized in C6: spiritualism is condemned in the Bible, which “commands us to avoid contact with [evil] spirits.”

A5 — What do death and destruction mean in the Bible?

Advocates of EM must propose unusual interpretations of the many verses that contain words such as *death*, *perish*, and *destruction*. They must explain, for each of the many times the Bible clearly states that the penalty of sin is death, why ‘death’ does not mean death.

For example, Peter Toon²² defends EM by writing (re: Romans 6:23), that “death is contrasted with eternal life and obviously means more than mere physical death, fearful even as that is.” And (re: 1 Cor 7:10), “death is more than the end of physical life: It is the opposite of salvation.” But “opposite” should not mean choosing 2-of-3 in the package deal of what we lost in sin (and will regain in salvation) by limiting *death* to *spiritual death*. (This is discussed in Parts 1 and 7.1a.) Toon also says, re: James 5:20, “Death is more than physical dying: It is also the penalty of sin and final exclusion from the society of the kingdom of God of the age to come.” I agree, but the “final exclusion” can come through death because with CI the death of unsaved sinners does exclude them from the kingdom of God and the presence of God. In addition, all unsaved sinners will have — first in their biological life, and then during judgment and in hell before their eternally lasting death in the “second death” of Rev 20:14 — a decreased quality of life and a decreased quality (and maybe eventually a total absence) of relationship with God, as the other two parts of what we lost in Genesis 3 due to sin.

Roger Nicole²³ explains how ‘destruction’ can be interpreted so it does not mean death:

“But these expressions [death, destruction, perishing] do not so much imply annihilation as the complete deprivation of something essential to normal existence. Physical death does not mean that body or soul vanishes away, but rather that an abnormal separation takes place that severs their natural relationship until God’s appointed time. Spiritual death, or the ‘second death’, does not mean that the soul or personality lapses into non-existence, but that it is ultimately and finally bereft of that presence of God and fellowship with him that is the chief end of humanity and the essential condition of worthwhile existence. To be deprived of it is to perish, to sink into abysmal futility. Likewise, an automobile is said to be wrecked, ruined, demolished, ‘totaled’, not only when its constituent parts have been melted or scattered away, but also when they have been so damaged and twisted that the car has become totally unserviceable.”

I agree that this is **one result** of *destruction*, but this doesn’t mean it’s the **only result**. As outlined in Part 1, the Fall (in Genesis 3) produced three results: losing intimate relationship with God (in Gen 3:7-11), losing quality of life (in 3:14-19,23), and then losing eternal existence (in 3:22,24). The result of our sin is a package deal, losing all three. In **salvation** all three are regained, with either CI or EM. But if there is **damnation** (the absence of salvation) with CI all three remain lost, but with EM a sinner loses only two (relationship with God, and quality of life) while retaining one (eternal existence).

Another example of EM removing the most common meaning of *life* is Romans 6:23, where EM requires that in “the gift of eternal life” the word “life” must be reinterpreted. Why? Because if at the Resurrection everyone is made immortal (contrary to Gen 3:22), then being eternally alive is not the gift. Instead, God’s gift is limited to the *quality* of eternal life; the gift is “eternal life in *high quality with God*” instead of “eternal life in *low quality without God*.”

And when Jesus warns us, in Mark 8:35, that “whoever wants to save his life will lose it,” the most obvious meaning is that the eventual *loss of life* will involve a loss of life, which means to be no longer alive, to be no longer in existence as a living being. A loss of life may also mean *more* than this (due to a lower quality of life on earth, and losing an opportunity for eternal life in heaven) but it should not mean *less*.

When reading the Bible it’s important to remember the “package deal” in Genesis 3. For example, Paul’s use of ‘death’ in Romans 5-8 is best understood when death involves the loss of *both* quality and

existence. There is no need to force an either-or choice between a loss of life-quality and loss of life-existence, as advocates of EM insist. In Romans 5:12-21, Paul explains how *all that was lost* by Adam's sin has been (and is being, and will be) fully regained for us by Christ, as described more fully at the end of this section. In order to understand Romans 5-8 where Paul describes what is *gained* through *life* in Christ, we must understand what was *lost* in the *death* that came through the sin of Adam. A loss of immortality is an essential part of what we lost through sin; *understanding* this should be easy because it is explained clearly in Genesis 3:22, so *acknowledging* it is the only difficulty.

The Meaning of Important Terms

Advocates of EM correctly state that the Greek words often translated as "destruction" can have several meanings. Peter Toon²⁴ explains: "In the Septuagint [the earliest Greek translation of the Old Testament] *apollumi* usually means destruction in the sense of earthly death and extinction. However,..." Toon then describes other meanings it can have, including those in the New Testament where, again, the most common meaning (in its 92 uses in the NT) is 'destruction' as in "death that causes an extinction of biological life" although this is not the *only* meaning. Two other translations are 'perish' (as in John 3:16) and 'lose' (used for "losing life" in Mark 8:35, and in Luke 15:4-6 & 8-9 with a lost sheep & coin serving as analogies for a lost, perishing sinner). It is also used, in atypical ways, to describe ruined wineskins (Matt 9:17) and spoiled food (John 6:12).

One verse, 1 Cor 1:18, describes "those who are perishing," using *apollumi* in the continuing present tense. Does this tense indicate that perishing is an ongoing process that eventually becomes eternal torment? No. This is possible but isn't necessary because "currently perishing" accurately describes the biological state of every person. All living humans, both saved and unsaved, are in the process of dying, and eventually this process will result in our *biological* death as the end of our biological life. Similarly, if the unsaved are involved in a process (of living in sin without God) that will end in the *total* final death that is the everlasting end of their existence with no resurrection in the future, it is accurate to describe them as "currently perishing."

Another key word, *thanatos*, almost always means 'death'. In the NT 'thanatos' is the most common word used to describe the end of biological existence. And this word, *thanatos*, is used by John (in John 5:24), Paul (in Rom 1:32, 6:21 & 6:23; 2 Cor 2:16), and James (5:20) for the ultimate fate of the unsaved. To describe this same punishment, the fate avoided by believers, *apollumi* is used by John (in John 3:16), Paul (in 1 Cor 1:18; 2 Cor 2:15 & 4:3), and James (4:12). Since these two words are used, by John and Paul and James, to describe the same situation (the final state of unsaved humans), it makes sense to use the word that has one main meaning (*thanatos*) to help us determine the intended meaning for a word (*apollumi*) with several possible meanings, especially when the most common meaning of *apollumi* is also (as with *thanatos*) physical death. This seems to be strong evidence that, when the purpose is to clearly communicate a very important concept, both words are intended to mean death (the loss of existence) rather than the eternally continuing ruination of a still-existing person, which would require *apollumi* to have a very rare meaning, and *thanatos* to have an extremely rare meaning.

A doctrine of EM requires that many important words (*apollumi*, *thanatos*,...) must have unusual meanings. But in CI these words have their usual meanings. There are many advantages to interpreting words in the same way that they would have been interpreted by the original readers, especially when the concepts being described are extremely important. Edward Fudge explains the principle of *judicial clarity*:

"Few things are stated more often throughout the whole Bible than that the wicked will 'die', 'perish', 'be destroyed', pass away, be no more, and be forgotten for ever. The fact that we deal with the

language of divine law and justice only strengthens the case for giving the words their most essential and ordinary meanings. Constable stresses this point: 'The accepted principle of interpretation among mankind is this: that all language relative to law and jurisprudence...is to be accepted in its primary sense and no other. ... Thus when death is announced as a penalty for crime, no controversy would for an instant be admitted as to its meaning. ... A secondary sense may be more usual and more proper elsewhere, but not here.' / The terms we have been discussing are the terms of the Divine Law: ... The Great Governor is laying before his subjects the penalties which attach to each sin. He speaks to them in the only language they can understand — their own language. He puts no new rules of interpretation upon it when He addresses them. He accepts, adopts, and uses the language of those to whom He speaks. We can then only interpret the divine penalty for sin in the sense which man has put upon all such penalties, namely in the primary sense."²⁵

Fudge also describes a similar argument for CI, developed in the 1800s by Henry Constable and Edward White:

The subject of immortality was a topic of lively discussion in Paul's day both by philosophers and also among the common people. Paul's terms for the fate of the wicked — 'corrupt', 'die', 'destroy' — were all stock words in this discussion. ... Both Plato [who had been influential in defining and defending the concept of an immortal soul] and Paul use the terms 'death' (*thanatos*), 'destruction' (*apoleia*), 'corruption' (*phthora*), 'perish' (*olethros*) and 'die' (*apothnesko*) — but with this difference: Plato says none of these things will ever befall the soul, for it possesses immortality; Paul says these words define the destiny of those who resist God and refuse to believe in Jesus. ... Others in Paul's day taught universal annihilation, believing that when people died they perished completely and forever, both body and soul, and there was no future life of any kind for any person. The Epicureans represented such a view among the Greeks, and the Sadducees did among the Jews. 'Now' asks Constable, 'in what terms and by what language did such men set forth their views? Simply and entirely by their application to all men alike of the very terms which the New Testament applies to the future punishment of the wicked.'²⁶

With immortality that is conditional, that is given to only those who satisfy the conditions set by God, there can be a simple, straightforward, unforced interpretation of important words in the Bible. From beginning to end two important words, *life* and *death*, can be interpreted with their usual meanings. And with CI the central theme of the Gospel can be clarified, because there is no need to construct an elaborate scheme (as with EM) that requires the use of common terms in uncommon ways, in order to explain — when on the cross Jesus accepted the penalty for our sins, in an act of substitutionary atonement — how the justice of God could be carried out on the cross where Jesus died (as in CI) instead of enduring misery forever (as in EM).

In Romans 5-8, death is "everything we lost due to sin."

When Paul says, in Romans 6:23, that "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord," what does he mean by "death" and "life"?

Beginning with Romans 4:24-25, the main theme of Romans 5-8 is loss and recovery: All that Adam lost for us, Jesus gained back when he died on the cross for us and arose from the dead. The judgment in Genesis 3 is emphasized in Rom 5:15-17, where Paul reminds us that death came through judgment (in Gen 3:14-24) when after decreeing a loss of quality (in Gen 3:13-22) we also (when God removed the tree of life that was protecting us from death) lost our potential immortality. In this judgment, death has its usual meaning, and the purpose of the resulting penalty is explained in Genesis 3:22, which clearly states that sinners "must not be allowed to... live forever."

All that Paul says about death-and-life in Romans 5-8 is compatible with the 3-part package deal resulting from the Fall, and everything we lost (relationship, life quality, and immortality) is included in what he

calls 'death', and all of this has been won back for us in the 'life' we are given through Christ. Physical death came when we lost immortality through a judgment (in Gen 3:22), life is tough due to a loss of quality in another judgment (Gen 3:14-19), and now it is impossible to avoid sin until our proper relationship with God (lost during Gen 2:25-3:13) is restored so God can provide us with the spiritual power we need to stop living in sin. For Paul, 'death' is losing everything in the "package deal" of Genesis 3, and 'life' is regaining everything through Christ.

Yes, in Romans 5-8 'death' is used to mean MORE than just a loss of existence (*) but this doesn't show that it means LESS than a loss of existence. Paul sees 'life' as the entire package deal, which includes quality of living where this is defined as living the way God wants us to live; 'death' includes an inability to live this way, but this also leads to eventual loss of existence because the same decision (to reject what is offered by Christ) leads to both consequences of sin.

* For example, in Romans 6:1-7 the death of Jesus symbolizes the death of our old sinful self when we are born again so that "we too may live a new life." This meaning continues in 6:11, with an exhortation to "count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus." And in 7:4, we "died to the law through the body of Christ." The richness of what Paul says cannot be summarized here, but a simplified version is that he defines 'death' as "everything we lost through sin," and 'life' as "everything we gain through Christ."

B. Old and New Testaments, and Other Writings

B1 — Connections: Old Testament and New Testament

There is a close relationship between Old and New Testaments. In fact, the OT ending in Malachi 4 — "Surely the day is coming... [to] set them [arrogant evildoers] on fire. ... Not a root or branch will be left to them." — merges with the beginning of NT action in Matthew 3, with John the Baptist declaring that Jesus "will clear his threshing floor, gathering the wheat into his barn and burning up the chaff [those not producing "good fruit"] with unquenchable fire."

When interpreting the NT it is important to remember that the central NT figures (John the Baptist, Jesus, the disciples, Paul,...) accepted the OT as the foundation for their beliefs, including beliefs about the afterlife. References to the OT are frequent throughout the NT. Here is an important principle for interpreting the NT:

As we become familiar with the symbolism used by Old Testament prophets, we learn to grasp the meaning of the same language when it is used in the New Testament, by Jesus and the men he chose, to warn us of the great 'day of the Lord'. To that same extent we will be freed from the temptation to attach to biblical expressions other meanings of modern derivation, meanings which have no basis in Scripture and which sometimes contradict its consistent normal usage."²⁷ (Edward Fudge)

Two of the many difficulties that result from disregarding this principle are when defenders of EM ignore the final verse of Isaiah (with its undying worms and unquenchable fire acting on dead corpses, not live people) when interpreting Mark 9:48, or ignore Isaiah 34 (about smoke rising forever) when interpreting Revelation 14.

What did the Hebrew Testament (Christians usually call it the Old Testament) teach about the afterlife? A detailed examination of OT views on the afterlife, by Edward Fudge, concludes with this summary:

The Old Testament has much to say about the end of the wicked. ... However proud their boasts today, [they] will one day not be found. ... Not only does God declare what he will do to the wicked; he has shown his justice in action. ... Cities and nations have tasted God's wrath. ... The Spirit of God describes these divine visitations in terms of fire and darkness, anguish and trouble. Unquenchable fire consumed entirely

until nothing was left. ... The inspired declarations of the prophets combine moral principle with historical fate. The details of actual destructions wrought on earth become symbols for another divine visitation. While they speak of their own times, the prophets also view the distant future. A day is coming when...the righteous and wicked will be gathered alike to see the justice of the Lord they have served or spurned. Again there will be fire and storm, tempest and darkness. The slain of God will be many. ... Nothing will remain of the wicked but ashes. ... Such is the Old Testament picture of the end of the wicked.²⁸

B2 — The Purpose of Sacrifices in the OT and NT

An important feature of the OT is its history of sacrifices. First, God orders Abraham to sacrifice his son, but God provides a substitute so Isaac can live. In the first Passover, more sons were saved by God, and his protection was symbolized by the blood of a sacrificial lamb. Later, a sacrificial system symbolically cleansed people from their sins. These events & ceremonies foreshadowed the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who died in our place for our sins, who accepted the death penalty of Genesis 3. As explained in Parts 1 and 7.1b, the essential doctrine of substitutionary atonement, with our savior accepting the penalty we deserve, is logical with CI, but with EM it is illogical (and untrue) because Jesus did not experience eternal misery.

And in the OT system of justice, the penalty for serious sin crimes is death (as in CI) instead of prolonged imprisonment under conditions that cause intense suffering (as in EM).

The purpose of OT sacrifices is described by James Dunn:

Paul saw the death of the sacrificial animal as the death of the sinner, ...the destruction of his sins. ... The sacrificial animal, identified with the offerer in his sin, had to be destroyed in order to destroy the sin which it embodied. The... pouring away of the sacrificial blood in the sight of God indicated that the life was wholly destroyed, and with it the sin of the sinner.

In Jesus on the cross was focused not only man's sin, but the wrath which follows upon that sin. ... [On the cross] the wrath of God destroys the sin by letting the full destructive consequences of sin work themselves out and exhaust themselves in Jesus. ... If we have understood Paul's theology of sacrifice aright the primary thought is the *destruction* of the malignant, poisonous organism of sin. Any thought of *punishment* is secondary.²⁹

This function of death — as a way to symbolically eliminate the sin, not to punish the sin — is more consistent with CI than with EM, since with CI the sinners are eliminated.

Gehenna and the Cross — Edward Fudge explains how the sacrificial substitutionary death of Christ affected the NT view of punishment for sin: "The cross has replaced the Valley of Hinnom as the best picture of God's wrath. In advance of the cross, Jesus spoke of his death in guarded terms and used the intertestamental term 'Gehenna' of the fate of the wicked. After the cross and Pentecost, however, no New Testament writer ever again uses that phrase of final punishment. Paul, who says more on the subject [punishment for sin] than any of the others, points continually to Jesus' death as its clearest revelation."³⁰

B3 — A 'no denial' Argument for Eternal Misery

EM is sometimes defended by claiming that EM was the common belief among first-century Jews, so unless Jesus (or Paul,...) explicitly repudiated this view, they were endorsing it by their silence.

First, let's compare the logical structure of two arguments. A5 says that "both Plato [who had been influential in defining and defending the concept of an immortal soul] and Paul use the terms 'death' (thanatos), 'destruction' (apoleia), — but with this difference: Plato says none of these things will ever befall the soul, for it possesses immortality; Paul says these words define the destiny of those who resist God and

refuse to believe in Jesus.” This argument, based on the ideas-and-language ideas of Paul’s culture, depends on what *was said* by Paul. By contrast, a no-denial argument depends on what *was not said*. This is an important difference, because the arguments depend on evidence that is positive (present) or negative (absent), respectively.

Second, another weakness in a “no denial” argument for EM is that the Old Testament — which was the dominant authority for religious Jews, including Jesus and Paul — is solidly CI, but the non-testamental literature contained both CI and EM views. In determining the views that existed in the time of Jesus, it is useful to study Jewish literature during the period between the OT and NT, especially in the *Apocrypha* books (which are included in the canon by Roman Catholics but not most Protestants, and were in the Septuagint but not the final Hebrew canon) and the *Pseudepigrapha* books written by various authors. The ideas in this literature are reviewed in detail by Fudge, who summarizes his conclusions:

On the fate of the wicked this literature [the Apocrypha books] overwhelmingly reflects the teaching of the OT. The wicked will not escape God’s judgment. They will surely die.³¹

The Pseudepigrapha offer a variety of expectations regarding the final end of sinners. It is clear that there is no such thing as ‘the Jewish view’ on the matter. ... An expectation [of eternal torment] appears quite clearly in a handful of passages. It is a possible interpretation in several other cases. ... It is also clear that this literature thoroughly documents the older view of the sinner’s total extinction as one Jewish option during the period 200 BC-AD 100. This doom is frequently accomplished by fire and is usually preceded by a period of conscious anguish and suffering. In expecting a time when sinners will perish from the face of the earth and never again be found these writers repeat the frequent testimony of the Old Testament. With the exception of one clear passage in Judith and one ambiguous text in Sirach [both discussed earlier by Fudge], this is also the view in the Apocrypha.

Because of this unquestionable range of opinion, which can be so thoroughly documented, we cannot presume a single attitude among Jews at the time of Christ. ... We must deny categorically the common assumption that Jesus’ hearers all held to everlasting torment. We must not assume that Jesus endorsed such a view simply because he nowhere explicitly denied it. *We are free to examine the teaching of the New Testament at face value and to determine the meaning of its terms according to the ordinary methods of proper biblical exegesis.*³² [italics added by me]

As explained in the final sentence, we should interpret the NT based on what it actually says. And if we do want to make assumptions, we should assume that the *default* afterlife-belief was based on *the inspired Old Testament* that writers (Jesus, Paul, and others) often cited, and that was considered (by Jesus, Paul,...) to be the authority in all matters of faith, instead of assuming that they believed extra-Biblical writings that are never cited in the New Testament.

Here are some additional ideas about cultural ideas and writings:

The Second Death in The Targum — Samuel Bacchiocchi says, “The meaning of the phrase ‘second death’ is clarified by its usage in the Targum, which is the Aramaic translation and interpretation of the Old Testament, ... [where in several places] the phrase ‘second death’ is used to describe the ultimate, irreversible death.”³³

Luke 16:19-31 — An unusual use of the cultural ideas in his time was when Jesus, in order to communicate a moral lesson in a powerful way, used a popular cultural concept. Bacchiocchi says, “While *sheol* in the Old Testament is the realm of the dead, where, as we have seen, the deceased are in an unconscious state, *hades* in Greek mythology is the underworld, where the conscious souls of the dead are divided in two major regions, one a place of torment and the other of blessedness. ... This Greek conception of *hades* influenced Hellenistic Jews, during

the intertestamental period, to adopt the belief [in Hellenistic Judaism, but not Palestinian Judaism] in the immortality of the soul and the idea of a spatial separation in the underworld between the righteous and the godless. ... The popular acceptance of this scenario is reflected in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. ... This view of *hades* as a place of torment for the wicked eventually entered into the Christian Church... [but] with the exception of Luke 16:23, the term [‘hades’] refers [in its 10 other NT occurrences] to the grave or the realm of the dead, not to a place of punishment.”³⁴ We see this parable only in the writings of Luke, whose main audience was non-Jewish readers; and Fudge warns us that “we should not build a whole doctrine, therefore, on a single use of a word, even if it were elsewhere than in a parable on a different subject!”³⁵ More important, as explained in Section 6.2, the apparent “afterlife” in this story cannot be an intermediate state or final state, so it seems that the parable was not intended to describe any afterlife-state.

C. The Intermediate State: Asleep or Awake?

These histories provide background information for Appendix C:

history of salvation: The Fall (human sin) brought a Death Penalty (for all) but our penalty was paid by our savior (Jesus on the cross) in a Substitutionary Atonement; in the future, Resurrection Life (for all) with Judgment (of all), and Eternal Life (for some).

history of each human: Biological Life-and-Death, *Intermediate State*, Resurrection Life, Judgment, and a *Final State* that is (for some) Eternal Life in heaven, and (for others) suffering in hell that lasts for awhile (with CI) or forever (with EM).

CI — Does it matter if we are asleep or awake?

Does the main question in Appendix C, re: **the intermediate state**, make any difference when we are thinking about **the final state** for the unsaved, as proposed in *Conditional Immortality* or *Eternal Misery*?

No. As explained in Part 2, “Christians have two common views about the *intermediate state* between death and resurrection: as a time when the soul is *asleep*, or is *conscious* (which is basically pleasant for the saved, unpleasant for the unsaved) *but without a body*. Either state is compatible with CI or EM.” Therefore, the intermediate state is not an essential issue when evaluating CI-versus-EM, so this topic is being discussed in an appendix, not in the main body of the paper.

The question of CI-or-EM is essential theology, but questions about the intermediate state are not essential theology.

But if this topic doesn’t matter, why is it not just omitted? First, because I think that although “a conscious soul” is a popular belief among Christians, the Bible teaches us that our soul *sleeps* between death and resurrection, and we should believe what the Bible teaches. But **I’m humble in my views**, because the Bible is less clear about the intermediate state (compared with what it clearly states about the final state for the saved and unsaved) and questions about the final state for the unsaved (is it CI or EM) are much more important. Second, there is a connection between ideas about *a conscious soul in the intermediate state* and *an immortal soul in the final state*, and even though soul-immortality should not logically lead to a doctrine of Eternal Misery, there is a statistical correlation (i.e. belief in soul-immortality and EM tend to occur together) and a logical correlation. Why?

Logically, the question of CI-versus-EM should not be affected by soul-immortality because God is sovereign, as explained in A3. But believing *intermediate soul-consciousness* can make it easier to also believe *final human-immortality* and then *Eternal Misery*, for reasons that are explained in A3 and C8.

C2 — Two Views of the Intermediate State

Unconscious Sleep or Disembodied Soul? What will happen in the *intermediate state* after death? Bible-believing Christians have two common views: 1) a *sleeping* soul, and 2) *conscious* soul. 1) In a view that I think is taught in the Bible*, we "sleep" until the general resurrection when God gives us a special new body. 2) Another view is that after death we continue to live but it's life in a new mode, as a conscious disembodied soul (a soul without a body, because biological death caused a separation of the soul from its previous body) until the resurrection when this soul (which is an immaterial-yet-conscious mind, living in joy with God or in lonely despair without God) is reunited with a special new body. * *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, in its article on Death, (p 802, Vol 1 of 4) says, "No biblical text authorizes the statement that the 'soul' is separated from the body at the moment of death."

C3 — Asleep or Awake: What does the Bible say?

The Hope described by Jesus: Jesus comforts his disciples, in John 14:1-3, by explaining that He will "go and prepare a place" in his "Father's house" so He can "come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." Notice that Jesus doesn't say anything about disembodied souls being "with him" before he will "come back and take you to be with [him]" in his Father's house. Instead, Jesus describes rooms in a house, implying a "space" to be occupied by the physical bodies that his disciples will have after the resurrection.

The Hope described by Paul: Similarly, the hope of Paul, in I Corinthians 15:12-58 and I Thessalonians 4:13-18, is only *life in a resurrection body*, not *life as a disembodied soul*. If Paul believed that after death the immortal soul of believers would be conscious in joyful spiritual relationship with God, this is never described in his writings. Instead he describes only our bodily resurrection.

Death and Sleep — Throughout the Bible, "sleep" is the most common way to describe death. In Luke 8:52, for example, Jesus says that a dead girl is "asleep." The most obvious and clear meaning of *sleep* is that we pass from a state of consciousness (in biological life) into unconsciousness (in the intermediate state) until we awake for our bodily resurrection. Consistent with this straightforward definition of the 'sleep experience' that is familiar for everyone who reads 'sleep' in the Bible, from its first readers until now, death is always described as a simple sleep, with no details implying that it is a sleep with dreams. Over and over, in the OT and NT, death is described as sleep. For example, in the general resurrection of all humans, "multitudes who *sleep in the dust of the earth* will awake... [when] all who *are in their graves* will hear his voice and come out." (Daniel 12:2, John 5:28-29) And our confident expectation of *awakening* from the sleep has been strengthened by the resurrection of Jesus.

Does it only appear to be sleep, from our viewpoint? — How do those who advocate an intermediate conscious soul respond to "sleep" references? They claim that *sleep* describes only the way a dead body appears to those of us who are still alive; since we cannot observe the mental/spiritual activity of a conscious soul, it appears that the person is inactive, as in sleep. / I think this response is reasonable, and it's one of the reasons for my humility about the intermediate state. But my main reason for humility is the lack of biblical information about the intermediate state, and the rational arguments that can be made (based on what the Bible does say) for various views.

Sleep and Time: After Paul is asleep (as he describes death in 1 Cor 15:6,18,20, 51 and 1 Thess 4:13,14,15) thousands of years will pass until he awakes at the resurrection, but the passing of time will not be noticed; because no thoughts have passed through his mind during the unconscious sleep, the final thought of his Biological Life will be

followed immediately by the first thought of his Resurrection Life, and it will feel exactly as if he had departed and was *immediately* (in our earth-time) with Christ. But if Paul's death was a separating of his conscious soul from his body, he has been experiencing an extremely long time of waiting (for thousands of years) in a state of disembodied consciousness that is less fulfilled than his final state in heaven.

What is better? — Given a choice, I would prefer sleep, with a mentally-instantaneous transition from full biological life to full resurrection life. But many people have a different preference, as explained later in *The Blind Can See* and *The Deaf Can Hear*.

Instantly with Christ? When Paul said "I desire to depart and be with Christ" and "would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (Philippians 1:23, 2 Corinthians 5:8) he meant what he said, but he never said *when* he would be with Christ, so a conclusion of "*instantly* with Christ" is speculation that goes beyond the text. And being "*instantly* with Christ" would occur with either of the two most common proposals for the intermediate state, with a conscious soul or (as explained above in *Sleep and Time*) a sleeping soul.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: In Luke 20:27-39, Jesus argued for The Resurrection by quoting Moses and saying, "the Lord... is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for *to him* all are alive." Here, Jesus never says the OT saints (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) are alive now; instead he says they are alive *to God*. This is because God will convert their *potential immortality* into *actual immortality* as explained in Luke 20:35-36 ("they can no longer die") that is not unconditional for all, but is *conditional for some*, for "those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead."

Moses and Elijah in the Transfiguration of Jesus — This event is in Matthew 17:1-8, Mark 9:2-8, Luke 9:28-36. Moses and Elijah have bodies and they speak with Jesus, so there is a logical inconsistency of "disembodied souls that have bodies." Here are three explanations for this event: at this time between their death and resurrection, Moses and Elijah were conscious with bodies, contrary to the typical doctrine of conscious disembodied souls; or, in explanations that I think are more plausible, they were given miraculous temporary bodies for this special event, as a change from either being disembodied or being asleep, in a preview of the resurrection. Since a miraculous temporary body could be given to them during either of two states, consciousness or sleep, this event doesn't provide support for either of the two most common views, relative to the other view.

Resuscitation by return of the Soul? — During the resuscitation of a widow's son by Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-24) "the soul of the child came into him, and he revived." But this is the old KJV, and modern translations say "the boy's life returned to him (NIV)" or "the life of the child returned to him (NAS)" so this seems to be the question of what 'nephesh' means, as described in 7.1c & A4, and modern scholars have decided that a *life-animating force* is the intended meaning. Later, Jesus revives the daughter of Jairus (Luke 8:49-56) when "her spirit returned (NIV)" but this description is compatible with her after-death state being either conscious or asleep, and with her "spirit" having an independent existence or being preserved by God. It does give some credence to a view claiming that death causes a separation of the soul (spirit?) from its body, although the best conclusion about this claim is that "the Bible doesn't say much about it one way or the other." But a return of the soul — to produce a *resuscitation* in this present age, or a *resurrection* in the age to come — could occur after an after-death experience in which the soul is either conscious or asleep, so this wouldn't help us distinguish between the two views.

Souls Under the Altar: In Rev 6:9-11, in a vision John "saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of

God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, ‘How long, Sovereign Lord, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?’ Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer.” / Why are the souls located where they are? Bacchiocchi says: “The blood of animals was poured out at the base of the altar of burnt offerings (Lev 4:7,18,25,30). ... Thus, the souls of martyrs are seen under the altar to signify that symbolically they had been sacrificed upon the altar and their blood has been poured at the base.”³⁶ The basic message is clear: their noble sacrifices have been recognized, and will be rewarded. / Regarding details, we should remember that since apocalyptic imagery describes a personal vision, it does not necessarily provide a literally accurate “photograph” of a physical reality. We should ask, “Can the details be an accurate picture of reality? Can disembodied souls be seen? Can they speak, wear robes, and hear? Are they physically located at the base of an altar?” No. These details cannot be accurate, so we should not take these descriptions literally. Maybe the details (being seen, speaking and hearing, wearing robes) are non-literal analogies for the spiritual state of actually existing disembodied souls, but this seems unlikely when we seriously consider the many Biblical references to ‘sleep’ between death and resurrection.

Instant Paradise? During their crucifixions, a man on the cross next to Jesus (Luke 23:32-43) made a request: “Remember me when you come in your kingdom.” How did Jesus respond? There is no comma in the Greek, which literally says “truly to-you I-say *today* with-me you-will-be in the paradise,” and based on Greek linguistic logic the comma can be placed either before or after *today*, so interpreters decide where to place the comma; theological bias (for immediate intermediate consciousness) favors choosing “truly I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise” as in NIV; but it can also be “truly I say to you today, you will be with Me in paradise” which is logical if Jesus was clarifying that instead of waiting and responding later (when he “comes into his kingdom” as in the request) Jesus is saying YES now (“today”) thus giving immediate assurance to the dying man, even though being together “in paradise” would occur later, after The Resurrection. / We should also ask whether Jesus *could be* with the thief in paradise “today” because Jesus, after 3 days in the grave awaiting his own resurrection, had “not yet returned to the Father. (John 20:17)”

C4 — The Intermediate State in Church History

Protestants and Catholics — In the early days of the Reformation there were advocates for differing views of the intermediate state. Luther (and other reformers) believed in an ‘unconscious sleeping soul’ between death and judgment, but Calvin (and other reformers, plus Catholic tradition) opposed this doctrine. Eventually the most popular position was a *conscious immaterial soul* in the intermediate state, until this body-less soul will be reunited with a body at the resurrection.

And in Catholic theology, *purgatory* is where some saved people (those who need it due to the quantity and quality of their sins during life) are made suitable for heaven by suffering, during the first part of their intermediate state, while their sins are purged from them.

A Confusing Phrase — In the Apostle's Creed, the phrase about ‘descending’ is confusing and controversial, leading to a wide range of speculations based on minimal biblical data. The phrase has a complex history (with many versions at various times in different languages, etc) but one rational scenario proposes that when this phrase first appeared in 359 AD, saying “[Christ] descended into hades [the grave]” was intended to replace the “dead and buried” part of saying “[Christ] was crucified, dead, and buried [in the grave].” But later it became common for both entire phrases to be included, with ‘hades’ translated as ‘hell’, and this duplication-and-translation causes confusion because it could imply that there were two separate experiences, not one, and that Jesus

was doing something (preaching? suffering? ...) in hell.

some questions: Does ‘hades’ (Greek) just mean ‘sheol’ (Hebrew) which is ‘the grave’, as in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament? or should we let ‘hades’ imply the Hades of Greek mythology, with its worldview of conscious existence between reincarnations? or is it the modern meaning of hell, as in Eternal Misery? / Or was the phrase inspired by combining the Greek concept of Hades (a common abode for everyone who has died) with 1 Peter 3:18-20 which says that Christ “was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, *through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison* who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built”? The italicized phrase, about Christ (or the Holy Spirit?) preaching to “spirits in prison,” is found nowhere else in the Bible; its meaning is mysterious, and there are diverse theories about what it means. / One web-page says that in one version (there were many, in different languages at different times) the word translated as “hell” is ‘katotata’ (meaning ‘down, under, below’) which could mean simply that Christ was buried in a grave under the surface of the earth. / Of course, for any interpretation we should be cautious when taking statements about the post-death experiences of Jesus — who was God in human flesh — and applying these to the rest of us, who are merely humans in human flesh.

Earlier I mentioned the “complex history” of the Apostles Creed, which was developed during a period when the church was influenced by non-biblical philosophies (described in Section 5.3) that may have led to the inclusion of this phrase because it supported “ideas about the afterlife” that were popular at the time. As stated at the beginning of this section, the phrase is “confusing and controversial, leading to a wide range of speculations based on minimal biblical data,” so instead of basing theology on a confusing phrase in a human creed, we should base our theology on what is clearly taught in the Bible.

C5 — How will God re-create us in The Resurrection?

In the Bible, the promise of life-after-death is Resurrection by God. For example, Paul says: “When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then... [through Christ] death has been swallowed up in victory. (1 Cor 15:54)” Paul never says anything, here or elsewhere, about an intrinsically immortal soul being clothed with a similarly immortal body. Our hope is a whole-person resurrection of mind-and-body by God, but...

How do we get from here to there?

What is the connection between our *current biological life* and our *future resurrection life*? In Matthew 10:28-29, Jesus says that people can kill the body but not the soul, while God “can destroy both soul and body in hell.” Here, *soul* refers to a *potential for eternal life*. In the Resurrection of all humans (John 5:21-29), it seems to me that there are two types of possibilities. When we die, either:

- all information about “who we are” (in our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual characteristics, plus memories and more) is perfectly preserved by God, and at the Resurrection who we are (in all ways) is totally re-created by God; or
- information about “who we are” survives physical death (preserved by some unknown natural and/or supernatural mechanism) and at the Resurrection this information is used (with supplementation by God, as necessary) when who we are (in all ways) is re-created by God.

In either case, each soul (each person's potential for eternal life) is preserved, and resurrection depends on the supernatural power of the omnipotent God who created humans, and who will perfectly re-create everything important about “who we are” in the future.

I am defining *soul* as a “potential for eternal life” but some people think a soul is also a type of “thing” that has an independent existence apart from our bodies. Although I don't see this concept in the Bible,

for purposes of the resurrection I don't think it matters whether my soul has independent existence, or if my soul exists only in the mind of God. And in the long run it doesn't make any difference if my soul is asleep or conscious during the intermediate state, because a *sleeping soul* is still a *soul*.

Is a re-created person real? Some advocates of a "conscious soul" claim that if our souls are not continuously alive between biological death and resurrection life, the re-created persons will not really be *us*, but just *copies of us*. This seems like a trivial worry, because we must depend on God for our resurrection, trusting that He has the ability and wisdom required to re-create "who we are" in all ways; if the "new me" has my characteristics and personal memories, and if God says "this is really you, Craig," that will be sufficient for me.

How will God re-create us? I don't know, and neither do you. In our modern world of computers, we might imagine that all necessary information about us is on a giant no-error "cosmic hard disk" in The Mind of God. Or maybe God reaches back in time (or sideways in time, or however God sees it) and He "collects information throughout our lives, and combines it together" to re-create us in some sort of time-accumulated way? (how old will I be after resurrection? an embryo in the womb? a newborn baby? a young adult at 25? a middle-aged adult at 50? at the age when I die? or will I be a "hybrid" of my whole life?) Of course, all of this is extra-biblical speculation. The only thing we can say with confidence, based on the Bible, is that we need faith; we "must depend on God... trusting that He has the ability and wisdom required to re-create 'who we are' in all ways."

C6 — Emotional Appeal of Continuing Consciousness

Many believers find comfort in their belief that they (and others) will be with God immediately after death. This will occur if the final thought of Biological Life seems to be followed instantly — because no thoughts have intervened during an unconscious sleep — by the first thought of Resurrection Life. But some believers want a different experience. Instead of a new life after resurrection, they want a new life now. They want a soul-life that is an extension of what they were doing before death. Often there is a hope that after death they will be able to observe what is still happening on earth, in a smooth continuation of their current life. Here are three examples:

The Blind Can See — A popular song from 1975 tells the story of a football game. During the halftime break, a benchwarmer learned that his father had died, and in the second half he becomes the unexpected hero who leads his team to a come-from-behind victory: "The coach asked him to tell, what was it he was thinkin' of that made him play so well. 'You knew my dad was blind,' he said, 'Tonight he passed away, it's the first time that my father's seen me play.'" (David Geddes, *Last Game Of The Season: A Blind Man In The Bleachers*)

The Deaf Can Hear — In a story with a similar theme, a music teacher is surprised by the skill of a student in his recital: "Overcome and in tears I ran up on stage and put my arms around Robby in joy. 'I've never heard you play like that Robby! How'd you do it?' Through the microphone Robby explained, 'Well Miss Hondorf, remember I told you my Mom was sick? Well, actually she had cancer and passed away this morning... and well, she was born deaf, so tonight was the first time she ever heard me play, and I wanted to make it special.'" "

The Dead Can Watch — In a real-life example from 2003, Brett Favre played a great game (399 yards and 4 touchdowns) one day after his father's unexpected death, saying "I knew that my dad would have wanted me to play" and "I know he was watching tonight." (I agree with his first claim, but not the second.) This type of belief — that the dead are still alive, with an ability to observe current events on earth — seems common, and I've heard similar statements from other people who include both Christians and non-Christians.

Humans have a natural fear of death, and a desire to continue living, to be "in on the action" so we won't miss anything that is happening, in the future, with friends-and-family and events of this world. Of course, we want joyous life in heaven, but we also want a continuation of our experiences in THIS life. The Bible promises a resurrection life-experience in the distant future, but we also want an immediate life-experience in the near future, in the intermediate state between death and resurrection.

For many people, the desire for a minimally interrupted continuation of life exerts an influence on their interpretation of the Bible. For many people, one view of after-death existence (a soul that is "conscious with experiences" until the resurrection) is more emotionally appealing than another view of existence (sleep followed by resurrection) and this produces interpretive bias when they study the Bible, with a tendency to *believe what they want to believe* about what the Bible teaches, instead of just believing what it actually does teach. This can lead to a *wrong belief* (if the Bible teaches a "sleeping soul") or (if the intermediate state is not clearly defined in the Bible) a *lack of appropriate humility* by claiming their view has stronger biblical support than it really has.

After-Death Experiences? — In the Bible, eight people returned from the dead, but none described their after-death experience. They never told us whether it was wonderful, horrible, or boring, whether they could see and hear the activities of those who were still alive, and if they were with God or with others who had died, or alone. Probably their silence is because they had nothing to report, because they were just "sleeping" so they had no conscious experience between their death and awakening.

Near-Death Experiences — In modern times we hear reports of near-death experiences (NDEs) when people who were temporarily "dead" return with vivid stories about what they seemed to see and hear, plus their emotional responses during and after their NDEs, which are often inspirational and life-changing in beneficial ways. But they were never truly dead, and their experiences were probably the imaginative hallucinations of a brain under severe physiological stress (including oxygen deprivation and other biochemical deviations from normality) and the psychological stress of near-death emotions. / In many NDEs, "what happens" is not consistent with Christian theology. But this is not surprising if NDEs are just imaginative byproducts of near-death brain physiology, if the near-death experiences are not authentic representations of after-death reality. And in some cases, NDEs (or their later interpretation) may involve supernatural spirits who are not spiritually edifying. / Therefore, we have two good reasons — because *near-death* experiences are not *after-death* experiences (*) and because NDEs often involve faulty theology — for Christians to avoid promoting the credibility of NDEs as an accurate picture of life after death. * If we sleep after actual death (which is different than just being near death), then "nothing to report" is accurate, and this would explain the lack of post-resurrection descriptions in the Bible.

Spiritualism — If those who die are active mentally and spiritually (but this "if" is doubtful because the Bible says we *sleep* after death), it seems logical that we may be able to communicate with the dead. This logic, plus intellectual curiosity and a desire to continue relationships with loved ones (family or friends), form the basis for spiritualistic beliefs and practices. But these beliefs and practices are forbidden in the Bible: "Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. (Leviticus 19:31)" A defiling effect could occur if the mediums are charlatans who use illusion-tricks similar to those of stage magicians. Or maybe the communications are with actual departed spirits, but God doesn't want us to communicate with them. Or maybe the communications are with evil spirits who are pretending to be the spirits of dead people; the Bible affirms the reality of evil spirits (for

example, the fortune teller in Acts 16:16-21) and commands us to avoid contact with these spirits; instead we should live by the Holy Spirit. {also see “The Spirit of Samuel” in A4}

C7 — Paul’s Views of the Intermediate State

Paul clearly described the bodily resurrection of believers, and this hope (not life as a conscious disembodied soul) is what he emphasized. Writing to believers in a doctrinally confused church — “how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead”, 1 Cor 15:12 — Paul says, “if the dead are not raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. (1 Cor 15:17-19)” But if after death the souls of Christians are in conscious joyful communion with God, even without a resurrection, “lost” and “to be pitied more than all men” are strange ways to describe this bliss. As in all writings of Paul, there is a clear description of only two states: this life, and the post-resurrection life.

In another passage devoted to the afterlife (1 Thess 4:13-17) Paul again ignores the intermediate state, except to characterize it as *sleep*. “We do not want you to be ignorant about those who have fallen asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. (1 Thess 4:13)” After describing the resurrection, Paul closes by saying “therefore encourage each other with these words.” Why didn’t Paul encourage them by explaining that departed Christians were in conscious joyful communion with God? Was it because he didn’t believe this? Because, as he clearly states, the departed are now “asleep”? Paul ends this description of the afterlife by explaining that “The dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.” If Paul believed in conscious non-material immortal souls, being “with the Lord forever” would begin at the instant of death and would continue forever. But Paul never mentions this possibility, here or anywhere else; his only description of the intermediate state is ‘sleep’, and his only hope for the afterlife is our resurrection.

The context of Philippians 1:19-26, makes it clear that when Paul says “I desire to depart and be with Christ” he is comparing future glories with present service, and saying “both are wonderful in different ways.” This comparison, not the timing or characteristics of post-death experience, is the focus. But in other places, Paul describes his hope for future life, and the only hope he ever expresses is the resurrection.

Sleep and Time, Part 2 — As explained in C3, after Paul “falls asleep” (as he describes death in 1 Cor 15:6,18,20 and 1 Thess 4:13,14,15) thousands of years will pass in our time frame, but not in his own time frame. The passing of natural biological time will not be noticed by Paul; instead, from his death to his resurrection will seem like an instant because no thoughts have passed through his mind during the intervening time, so it will truly be as if he had departed and was *immediately* “with Christ.”

When Paul says (2 Cor 5:8) that he “would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord,” a careful reading of the context (4:7-5:10) shows that Paul’s focus is on the resurrection. He is looking forward to trading his current body (and difficult life; see 2 Cor 11:23-12:10) for an improved new body (and heavenly life). His theme seems to be a continuation of 1 Cor 15 where he describes a change: The body “is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.” In 2 Corinthians, Paul doesn’t say *when* he will be “at home with the Lord.” But in other places (like 1 Cor 15 and 1 Thess 4, as discussed above) he strongly implies that this won’t occur until the resurrection, after Christ returns for us.

As usual, it is wise to use clear statements (as in most of 4:7-5:10) to help clarify mysterious phrases (“unclothed” in 5:3-4 and “away from

it” in 5:9) and to remain humble about our interpretation of the unclear phrases, as in the following paragraph.

In 2 Cor 5:2-4, what is the meaning of being “naked” and “unclothed” instead of “clothed with our heavenly dwelling”? These might refer to being “asleep” (as in 1 Cor 15:18 and 1 Thess 4:13) without a functioning body during the period between having one body (in this life) and another body (in resurrection life). Or, say supporters of soul immortality, it might refer to a naked soul without a body. But both of these possible interpretations seem less likely when we think about what Paul means when he says “we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling.” Neither state (deep unconscious sleep, or a disembodied soul in a good relationship with God) seems to be something Paul would “not wish to be,” except that a disembodied soul is much less desirable compared with the full glory of life in a resurrection body. Or, considering the whole passage (4:7-5:10), another possible meaning is that Paul wants to be “clothed” with the salvation of Christ (Gal 3:27), living an earthly life devoted to serving Christ, so he “will not be found naked [without the salvation of Christ]” (5:3) at the resurrection. This interpretation is supported by Paul’s lack of clear emphasis (here and elsewhere) on the intermediate state, other than to simply describe it as sleep. It is also supported by the conclusion of the passage (5:10) where Paul says, “for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ [after the intermediate state is over], that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”

C8 — Four Views of the Intermediate-and-Final States

Each of the two common views for the intermediate state (in C2) can be combined with each of two common views about the final state (CI and EM) to produce four combinations.

Christians have two main views about experience during the *intermediate state* between Biological Death and Resurrection Life: u) unconscious “sleep” for every human; or c) conscious existence as a non-material “soul without a body” which is basically-pleasant for the saved, but is basically-unpleasant for the unsaved.

Christians should all agree that, after Resurrection and Judgment, the *final state* for **saved humans** (who accepted the salvation offered by God) will be joyous Eternal Life in Heaven; but Bible-believing Christians have two main views about the eventual *final state* for **unsaved humans** who have rejected the salvation offered by God: U) Unconscious Everlasting Non-Existence as proposed in CI, or C) Conscious Everlasting Existence that is Eternal Misery, EM.

note: a non-existing person should be described as Non-conscious because *unconscious* implies a sleeping state for an existing person, but I’ll use Unconscious to make the uUcC-terminology consistent.

As emphasized in Part 1, all Christians should believe that God is sovereign, so “if He wants a body or soul to be alive it will remain alive, and if He wants any life to end that will happen” in either the intermediate or final state. In the following discussion (after the table below) I’ll refer to *intrinsic characteristics* (are we inherently asleep or conscious in the intermediate state, and are we inherently mortal or immortal in the final state) and whether, in a particular combination view, God decides to change the intrinsic characteristic by “over-riding” it in either state for saved and/or unsaved people, or just leave it as-is.

Notice that we can ask two questions about intrinsic characteristics: in the intermediate state, will our disembodied souls be conscious (with a continuing consciousness after biological death) or asleep? and in the final state, will all post-resurrection bodies, for both the saved and unsaved, be immortal? These characteristics are not necessarily related, since one can occur without the other.

a summary: There are 2 common views of the *intermediate state*, as

an unconscious sleeping soul (u) or conscious disembodied soul (c), and 2 common views of the *final state* for an unsaved person: non-existing and Unconscious (U) with CI, or existing and Conscious (C) with EM.

This table shows four possible combinations for **unsaved people**: *intermediate state* is a sleeping soul (u) or conscious soul (c), and the *final state* is everlasting death (U) or alive in everlasting misery (C):

intermediate and final states: unconscious (uU) or conscious (cC)?			
	biological	intermediate	FINAL
uU	birth-life-death	sleeping soul	everlasting death = CI
uC	birth-life-death	sleeping soul	everlasting misery = EM
cU	birth-life-death	conscious soul	everlasting death = CI
cC	birth-life-death	conscious soul	everlasting misery = EM

With uU (u-then-U) an unsaved person is unconscious (asleep and non-existing) during both states, intermediate and final. This could occur if we are not intrinsically soul-conscious or immortal, and if God over-rides these only for the saved in their final state, as in CI.

With cC (c-then-C) unsaved people are conscious (as disembodied souls, then miserable people) during their intermediate and final states. This could occur if all humans are intrinsically soul-conscious and immortal, and if God doesn't over-ride these for anyone in either state, as proposed in the most common form of EM.

Many people think this *matching* (either conscious in both states, or unconscious in both) is more 'elegant' and logically consistent, so I think these two matched views are more common among Christians.* A "matching" will occur if people think carefully about their views and conclude that God over-rides intrinsic characteristics in only a limited way (as in CI) or not at all (as in EM). Matching also occurs for EM, with c-then-C, if people haven't thought deeply about their views, and (because they think it's taught in the Bible, or for other reasons) they believe all humans are soul-conscious and immortal, and they haven't considered the possibility of God over-riding these characteristics. Or for those who have thought more deeply, a philosophical preference for 'elegance' might convince them that God would create us the way He wanted us to be, either with soul-consciousness and immortality or without it, and He would then let us be the way He created us to be, with no subsequent over-riding.

* It's "I think" because I don't have data about how many Christians believe each of the 4 combinations, so I'm just describing my estimates for how many Christians believe each combination.

I think the matched views are more common, but mismatched views (especially c-then-U) can also be logically explained and defended:

uC (u-then-C) could occur if continual soul-consciousness is not an intrinsic characteristic of our souls, but all post-resurrection bodies will be immortal, and God does not over-ride these intrinsic characteristics. But continuing consciousness has emotional appeal, as described in C6, so rejecting soul-consciousness while accepting human immortality (as in u-then-C) is not a popular combination.

cU (c-then-U) could occur if all souls are created with an intrinsic continual consciousness, but God wants to end the existence of unsaved persons (by *annihilating* them) instead of keeping them alive forever in eternal misery. If intrinsic characteristics are matched, with intrinsic soul-consciousness (intermediate) plus immortality (final), this view is called **Annihilationism**; it is similar to **Conditional Immortality**; both views propose the same final state for the unsaved; they differ only in whether the intrinsic characteristic is *immortality* (but God over-rides this to stop life for the unsaved) or *mortality* (and God over-rides this only to provide life for the saved because they have met the condition for immortality). In annihilationism, God does not over-ride intrinsic continuing soul-consciousness in the intermediate state, but does over-ride intrinsic immortality in the final state.

A3 asks, "if we assume soul-immortality is true, would it be logical to conclude that Eternal Misery is true?", and I answer "no, but..." because even though it's possible to accept intrinsic human immortality and reject Eternal Misery, as in Annihilationism, it seems to be difficult.

Many people seem to believe EM due to the logic of "immortality plus eternal punishment (Matt 25:46)" and if part of this combination is removed (if we are not immortal) the argument loses its logical appeal.

Or the idea of God over-riding an intrinsic characteristic that he created seems inelegant, when they ask "can't God make up his mind whether he does or doesn't want immortality, and stick to his decision?"

Or, as explained in 3.2, people may think unsaved humans *must* be immortal because — if we ignore the fact that punishment is a noun, and a result can last forever with either death (in CI) or misery (in EM) — humans must be alive forever if their "eternal punishing" is to last forever, because God cannot continue punishing a dead person who feels no pain.

D. miscellaneous topics

D1 — Writing This Paper (a personal history)

I began researching this paper in the late-1980s, began writing it in the mid-1990s, and did several revisions before a version in 2000 that remained as-it-was for a decade; the current version is the result of a major revision in early 2010. I've thought about these ideas for a long time, doing library research in WA (at UW), WI (UW), NC (Duke) and CA (Biola and Vanguard), reading books by Edward Fudge, Samuele Bacchiocchi, and others, plus (recently) internet research. I've invested lots of time in this because I think it is very important, and we should carefully examine these ideas. I hope you agree.

D2 — Universal Salvation (is it desirable? is it biblical?)

This section is a supplement to Sections 4.2 and 7.42 so it assumes you have read them, and it will build on their foundation.

Hell as an Educational Experience: According to advocates of Universal Salvation, the purpose of hell is education and the goal is to change the rebellious attitudes of sinners. God interacts with unsaved people lovingly and patiently, in a personally customized mixture of purposeful punishing and gentle wooing, in a way that will gradually move each person in the direction of repentance and worship, thereby drawing them to Himself and to salvation. And it will work, because nobody can forever resist the infinitely patient love of God.

This is a wonderfully gracious idea, and I've intentionally expressed it in a way that makes it emotionally appealing, in the way it would be described by its advocates. I wish this doctrine was true, but it doesn't seem consistent with what we read in the Bible.

Here are the main similarities and differences between Universal Salvation, Conditional Immortality, and Eternal Misery:

in US and CI there is an absence of eternal misery, but for different reasons; eternity is absent in CI, and misery is absent in US.

in US and CI, eventually all people will be in heaven and will love God; with EM some people will always be in hell and will hate God.

in US and EM there is eternal existence for the unsaved; in US this eventually becomes Eternal Joy, but in EM it remains Eternal Misery; all three views propose Eternal Joy for saved people.

all views differ in their proposal for the final state of the unsaved: non-existence for CI, Eternal Misery for EM, and Eternal Joy for US.

D3 — How will Christians be judged?

Using our Gifts and Opportunities: In addition to describing the differing amounts of punishing for sinners (as in Luke 12:47-48), Jesus also told parables about differing rewards for servants who used their resources differently, as in Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 19:11-27. These parables are similar — in both, God takes away resources from the servant who did not use his resources effectively — but there is a major difference in who receives the ultimate punishment: in Matthew this servant is cast into hell (outer darkness, “weeping and gnashing”) but in Luke it is others (“those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them”) who receive the punishment of being killed.

There are many unanswered questions about judgment-and-rewards for Christians and others, based on these passages and others.

Works being Judged: In 1 Cor 3:12-15, Paul discusses the life and works of a believer: “If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escapes through the flames.” The statement that “he will suffer loss...as one escapes through the flames” probably does not describe physical punishing (because it is the “works” that are tested by fire, not the person) but it does sound psychologically unpleasant due to the sorrow of thinking about how much more glorious the reward (and the life) might have been if the life had been lived in full obedience, focused on doing the works of God to promote the glory of God.

Parable of the Unforgiving Debtor: Matthew 18:21-35 describes a punishment, for an unmerciful servant, of imprisonment until a debt is paid. But it is not clear whether this punishment is for only the saved, only the unsaved, or everyone. (This parable responded to a question by Peter. But aren't the sins of the saved, including unforgiveness, forgiven by God?) And it is not clear whether the debtor is imprisoned temporarily, or permanently (for an endless eternity), or will die in prison. But the main theme of this parable, the lesson it was intended to teach, is clear; we should forgive others. This is also emphasized in Matthew 6:14-15, following the Lord's Prayer.

Purgatory: Catholic theology proposes a *purgatory* “where some saved people (those who need it...)... are made suitable for heaven by suffering...while their sins are purged from them.” (quoted from C4)

D4 — Is "guilt by association" a logical argument?

This section supplements Section 5.2b and assumes you have read it. Here is a brief summary of the main ideas from 5.2b:

A concern that changing one part of a theological system will lead to changes in other parts is justified only if there are logical links between the parts, if the doctrine being changed forms a foundation for other parts of the system. But CI and EM are almost identical, differing only in the final state for the unsaved, so CI is compatible with all principles of essential Christian theology. Therefore, “we should reject any implication that EM is a necessary part of Bible-based evangelical theology.”

Accusations of *guilt by association* imply that “if we don't like some views of X, and if X believes CI, then CI must be wrong.” We should avoid this type of argument. Instead, “each view should be evaluated based on everything it is, no more and no less.”

Usually this argument is not explicit; it is made implicitly. How? Instead of describing the CI-views of Christians whose theology is orthodox in all other ways, a writer implying “guilt by association” might describe the CI-views of the Jehovah's Witness cult. Why? Because this makes CI seem “dirty” and implies that CI is a JW view, that CI = JW, so if you accept CI you are aligning yourself with JWs

in everything else they believe.

This is wrong, because there is no logical link leading to CI from the parts of JW that are theologically unacceptable; these parts are not a logical foundation for CI, so there is no JW-to-CI connection. There is also no CI-to-JW link in the other direction; we should not worry about a “domino effect” because CI does not logically lead to changes in other parts of essential theology for evangelical Christians. Because there are no logical links in either direction (JW-to-CI or CI-to-JW), writers should not imply that there is a link between CI and JW. You are not evaluating a “package deal” of CI+JW, it's just CI by itself. There should be no transfer of associated guilt from JW to CI, or from any other CI-believing cults to CI.

In 5.2b, I encourage “searching for logical connections between views, and cause-effect interactions.” Let's do this for CI and EM, to ask whether *potential* influences seem to be *actual* influences, and in what ways the influences may (or may not) be happening.

As stated above, there are no JW-to-CI or CI-to-JW logical links between CI and JW. Also, evangelicals don't respect the theology of JW, so JW does not serve as an “authority” that makes it easier for evangelicals to accept CI; in fact, this influence works against CI.

By contrast, there is a logical link from the idea of intrinsic soul-immortality (from Greek philosophy) to EM, as described in 5.3 and A1-A3, especially in A3, because belief in soul-immortality makes it easier to accept EM. And the inertia of tradition (5.2a) is a very strong reason for evangelical leaders to accept EM, and for EM to be accepted by Christians who respect their leaders (for a variety of good reasons) and who feel the pressure of external conformity (5.4) to believe what their group believes. Both of these are **causal influences**, with an idea (soul immortality) or a pressure (due to tradition and group pressure) tending to cause acceptance of EM for extra-biblical reasons.

Above, I claim there is no causal *logical* link from CI to JW. But there could be a *psychological* or *sociological* link. If potential cult leaders (like Charles Russell for JW, Herbert Armstrong,...) read the Bible carefully, just looking at what it says without feeling limited by the inertia of tradition, and they conclude that it teaches CI (not EM), and if due to their personal psychology (pride, etc) they want to be a special leader who is “different,” this could encourage them to form their own cult. Then they can use CI as a reason for followers to join their cult, by claiming “traditional theology is wrong about CI (I agree) and they are also wrong in other beliefs (but I disagree) where we are correct.” Imagine that a potential follower studies the Bible and sees that it teaches CI, but in their own evangelical church they feel a strong pressure to reject CI and accept Eternal Misery; this could be a reason to join the cult. But this sociological pressure is not necessary. If the evangelical community says “let's study the Bible, and if it teaches CI then we should accept CI, or at least treat it as an acceptable option,” and CI-versus-EM would not be a reason to join a CI-accepting cult.

Are there overlaps between CI or EM and other views? Yes. Those that agree with CI's essential component — the ultimate non-existence of those who have rejected Christ — include some Christian cults, and atheists who think there is non-existence for everyone at the time we die. EM is strongly influenced by an idea — the intrinsic unconditional immortality of all humans, including those who have rejected Christ — that is proposed by some Christian cults, liberal theology (in universal salvation), Greek philosophy, Hinduism, New Agers, spiritualism, and (in Genesis 3:4) a serpent. But although there is a partial overlapping of these views with CI or EM, each differs from CI or EM in important ways. Therefore, “each view [CI and EM] should be evaluated based on everything it is, no more and no less.”

D5 — The Logic of Betting on Heaven and Hell

Pascal's Wager

Here is the logic: if a person thinks that an infinitely horrible outcome has a probability larger than zero, it is wise to do whatever is necessary to avoid this outcome. Therefore, it is wise to accept Jesus as savior, to avoid the infinitely horrible possibility of miserable eternal life in hell. { Or it would be wise to do whatever is necessary to attain the infinitely wonderful outcome of joyous eternal life in heaven. }

Although this logic makes sense mathematically, I think it should be avoided because it encourages a crass "fire escape" motivation for religious conversion. As discussed in 5.2c, a conversion decision "should be motivated by better reasons, by a true repentance for sin, wanting a relationship with God, wanting to serve God and fellow humans, working in cooperation with God's plan for your life, and (crass yet positive) wanting to gain eternal life in paradise with God."

But "high commitment is demanded by Jesus — 'if anyone would come after me, he must take up his cross and follow me, for whoever wants to save his life will lose it (Mark 8:34-35)' and '... any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple' " — so just "saying yes to Jesus" is not sufficient for "conversion". A high level of commitment, with associated changes in lifestyle, changes the logic of Pascal's Wager because a conversion decision will affect the quality of life on earth in a major way, and the "new life in Christ" will have some perceived advantages and some disadvantages, with this perception depending on the values and goals of a person.

We should think about the effects of Pascal's Wager in motivating the formulation and widespread acceptance of EM. The logic of Pascal requires an infinitely horrible outcome to be avoided, and EM is indeed horrible. In addition to its obvious evangelistic appeal, Pascal's logic can provide comfort for converts by giving them more confidence that their conversion was logically rational, thereby reducing the cognitive dissonance resulting from their big decision. In my opinion, this effect is a non-biblical influence that, if "our goal is Bible-based theology, we should try to minimize," as argued in 5.4.

The Logic of Expected Outcomes

In formal logic an *expected outcome* is an 'average value' that is calculated by considering all possible outcomes and the probability of each outcome. For example, if you pay \$5 for one of 50 raffle tickets for a \$100 prize, the probabilities are .02 (= 1/50) that you receive \$100, and .98 that you get nothing, so your expected outcome is " (.02)(\$100) + (.98)(0) = \$2". This means that, on average, each buyer receives \$2 but pays \$5, and that is why raffle tickets are sold.

To estimate an expected outcome for the afterlife, we need rough estimates for results and probabilities. It's difficult to do this accurately because "we don't know all of God's criteria for judging people" so "we should be humble in our claims about who will and won't be saved, and why," as explained in 4.2. But there are reasons to avoid optimism if our estimate is based on Matthew 7:13-14, which indicates a low probability for salvation: "wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." In the calculations below, the probabilities for "few" and "many" will be represented by (low probability) and (high probability), respectively.

We also need estimates for the desirability of outcomes. I think we can agree that the two outcomes in EM are (huge-) and (huge+) for eternal misery and eternal joy, for the unsaved and saved.* With CI the overall result for the unsaved is "nothing (before birth) to nothing (after everlasting death in hell)"; I'll assign this a desirability of (zero) since even though the balance-of-experiences overall (during biological life plus judgment-and-hell) might be negative or positive, this is very small compared with the infinitely horrible and infinitely wonderful outcomes of eternal misery or eternal joy.

* I think we can agree that eternity in heaven (in joy and fellowship with God) will be wonderful, and that eternity in hell would be horrible because, even for those who sinned less (and thus have a lesser intensity of torment), living for eternity in an environment with "weeping and gnashing of teeth" would be extremely unpleasant.

The expected outcome for EM is a huge (maybe infinite?) negative: (high probability)(huge-) + (low probability)(huge+), which is > 0.

The expected outcome for CI is a huge (maybe infinite?) positive: (high probability)(zero) + (high probability)(huge+) = 0 + (huge+).

The expected outcome for Universal Salvation, with its certainty that nobody will have eternal misery (so probability = 0) and everyone will have eternal joy (so probability = 1) will be a huge positive that is even larger than with CI: (0)(huge-) + (1)(huge+) = 0 + (huge+).

Comparing these expected outcomes, we see that EM is worst, and US is best, with CI in the middle. I wish that US was true (for obvious reasons, some of which are explained in 4.2, 7.42, and D2) but US "doesn't seem consistent with what we read in the Bible."

The fate of individuals is ignored when we calculate an expected outcome, which implies that "the greatest good for the greatest number" is a worthy goal. But humanity is made of individual humans. Looking at the overall result of life for individuals, we see that with EM there are some big winners (who go from nothing to eternal joy) and some big losers (from nothing to eternal misery). But with CI there are only big winners (from nothing to eternal joy) since a big loser (who loses the opportunity for heaven) still goes from nothing to nothing, with a neutral overall result.

D6 — Does sin-against-God justify infinite punishing?

In response to the questions about divine justice such as those in Part 4, EM is sometimes defended by claiming that any sin against God is infinite in seriousness, so an infinite amount of punishing is morally justifiable. For example, Alan Gomes (in his paper, *Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell*) says:

Annihilationists [and other advocates of CI] frequently complain that it would be immoral for God to inflict everlasting torture on His creatures [because] ... endless torment represents a punishment far in excess of the offense committed... [quoting John Stott] in 'a serious disproportion between sins consciously committed in time and the torment consciously experienced throughout eternity.' and [quoting Clark Pinnock] 'it would go far beyond an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' Such vindictiveness, we are told, is totally incompatible with the character of God ... and it would serve no purpose.

Stott and Pinnock's argument... assumes that the heinousness of a crime is directly related to the time it takes to commit it. But such a connection is nonexistent. ...

Second, the nature of the *object* against which the sin is committed, as well as the nature of the sin itself, must be taken into account when determining the degree of heinousness... [because, quoting Charles Shedd] 'the different worth and dignity of the objects upon whom his action terminates [in Shedd's example of torturing an animal versus a human] makes the difference in the gravity of the two offenses.' How much more serious, then, is even the slightest offense against an absolutely holy God, who is worthy of our complete and perpetual allegiance? Indeed, sin against an absolutely holy God is absolutely serious. For this reason, the unredeemed suffer absolute, unending alienation from God; this alienation is the essence of hell. It is the annihilationist's theory that is morally flawed. Their God is not truly holy, for he does not demand that sin receive its due. ... If they [who propose CI] truly saw sin as God does (recognizing that no sinner can do so perfectly), they would not have the slightest problem with the doctrine. Indeed, they would find themselves distraught if God *did not* punish sin for all eternity.

I agree with Gomes about the seriousness of sins against God, but he doesn't acknowledge the two ways of dealing with sin: by punishing it endlessly, or by eliminating it. If the most serious sin against God is a rebellious attitude that produces a defiant refusal to worship and obey, this attitude probably will not be changed by torment inflicted by God in hell, so sinners will continue in their attitude of rebellious pride, and this will last forever; they will grudgingly admit that God has the power needed to make them suffer in misery, but they will continue in their attitude of rebellious pride. By contrast, with CI these sins will be gone because the sinners are gone, and the only people remaining are those who (with the help of God in the environment of heaven) are free from the sin of rebellious pride, who can therefore love God with their whole heart, mind, and soul. In this way, God solves the problem of sin by eliminating sin.

Gomes says that, with CI, God "does not demand that sin receive its due" but the ultimate penalty for sin is clearly stated: sinners "must not be allowed to... live forever. (Genesis 3:22)" And when Jesus paid the penalty for our sins, he died. Jesus *died* for our sins (Romans 5:8, 1 Cor 15:3, 1 Thess 5:10, 1 Pet 3:18, plus 1 John 4:10 and elsewhere) as in CI; Jesus did not *endure eternal misery*, as in EM, so if God will "demand that sin receive its due" he will demand death, as in CI.

D7 — Is maximum punishing necessary for justice?

CI is sometimes criticized for being "soft on sinners." According to Alan Gomes in his paper, *Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell*:

A desire for a kinder, gentler theology appears to be the dynamic that is driving this movement [CI]. ... The final state of the wicked is described [in Matt 25:46] as one of everlasting punishment. From this it follows that the wicked are not annihilated. / [William Shedd says] 'If suffering is lacking, so is punishment; punishment entails suffering.' [[punishing requires suffering, punishment does not]] / For those who are experiencing severe punishment, extinction of consciousness is actually a state to be desired. ... They clearly prefer unconsciousness to their continuing torment. ... One could argue that annihilation might be the *result* of punishment. But the Scriptures say that it is the punishment itself which is eternal, not merely its result. ... [[Is a death penalty not a punishment because there is no permanent suffering?]] / A punishment that is not felt is not a punishment. / If heaven represents unutterable joy, then hell [to be maximally unlike heaven, as proposed by John Stott whose ideas are being criticized] should be unutterable sorrow. Yet, the whole point of the annihilationist's argument is to *mitigate* the horror of eternal suffering for the lost, not to *increase* it.³⁷

comments: As with most defenders of EM, notice the refusal to distinguish between punishment (a noun) and punishing (a verb), which is necessary to allow a claim that eternal punishment requires eternal punishing that causes suffering; but punishment, not punishing, is the word in Matt 25:46. / Another logical deficiency is the comparison of heaven with hell. First, Gomes should criticize Stott by asking, "why should we think that hell should be maximally unlike heaven?" Then, Gomes should acknowledge that there are two ways to make hell and heaven maximally unlike: by making the quality of life different (as in the misery of hell versus the joy of heaven) while keeping the duration the same, because everyone has the same eternality of life with EM; or the duration can be different (temporary life in hell, permanent life in heaven) as with CI. As explained in many places throughout this paper, beginning in Part 1, EM retains 2-of-3 in the package deal of what we lost due to sin (relationship with God, quality of life, and eternality of life), while CI retains all three. If this essential theology is ignored, we can make rational arguments for each of the two scenarios (with misery versus joy, or temporary versus permanent) if the goal of God is to achieve maximal difference, but...

Why should we assume that maximal difference, with maximum

punishing in hell, should be (and is) the goal of God? This assumption is highly questionable because it is not taught in the Bible, so a relevant question is "Why should the idea of eternal misery (when it's happening to others) be so appealing?" I think this does not describe the attitude of Gomes, because I'm sure he is merely trying to state the truth (as he sees it) as a warning to those who have not yet accepted the salvation offered by God. But it's useful to compare what he says with Farrar (see 7.42) who would prefer that he himself would "forever cease to be, rather than that my worst enemy should, for one single year, endure the hell described by Tertullian... or Jonathan Edwards."

D8 — Edifying Attitudes by Advocates of CI and EM

This appendix closes with attitudes that seem edifying and honoring to God, from advocates of CI and EM, John Stott and Roger Nicole. God wants us to have good *doctrines*, and — more important — He wants us to have good *hearts*.

John Stott: "I want to repudiate with all the vehemence of which I am capable the glibness, what almost appears to be glee, with which some evangelicals speak about hell. It is a horrible sickness of mind and spirit. ... I long that we in some small way stand in the tearful tradition of Jeremiah, Jesus and Paul. I want to see more tears among us. I think we need to repent of our nonchalance, our hardheartedness."³⁸

Roger Nicole agrees: "Those who truly believe in hell [either CI or EM] ought to refrain from any levity on this subject. The destiny of human beings created in the image of God, and who are to be confined to ultimate separation from him, is a topic of such tragic nature that our major concern ought to be showing others how to avoid this awful destiny. The thought of hell should bring tears to our eyes, and a compassionate desire to point out the only way to sure salvation. The lost will perish indeed. But Christ died to save the lost."³⁹

D9 — What does God's word say?

Every evangelical Christian should agree with John Stott when he says, "as a committed evangelical, my question must be... **What does God's word say?**" When we study the Bible, in addition to looking at individual verses we should broaden our perspective by studying the "big picture" of important Biblical themes such as the spiritual problem (our sin and its results, in Genesis 3) and God's solution (our salvation by substitutionary atonement). When you do this study carefully and thoroughly, I think you will conclude that there is strong evidence to support a doctrine of Conditional Immortality.

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- ¹⁴. Fudge (1982), pp 339-340, 342.
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