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Victory of the Eons

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version of the Bible

The Ultimate Reconciliation of All Mankind

Introduction

The Apostle Paul wrote, *"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe. These things command and teach"* (1 Timothy 4:9-11). Traditional Christian doctrine interprets this passage by saying that Jesus provided salvation for all men (hence He is the Savior of all men) but that only those who believe upon Him before dying will ever receive salvation and avoid endless suffering in hell during the afterlife.

I agree that it is through faith in Christ that salvation is manifested for an individual. Romans 10:9 says, *"If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."* Acts 16:31 says, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved."* But what about the rest of mankind? What if Jesus really did ensure that all men would be brought to salvation (hence He is the Savior of all men), but those who come to believe during this life receive the gift of salvation now, and as a result, are given a special salvation not given to those who die as unbelievers. This teaching, I believe, best harmonizes the Scriptures of the Bible. I will make my case for what I believe, but I want for you to decide for yourself what you believe to be true based upon what you see in the Scriptures.

J Preston Eby, the writer of Kingdom Bible Studies (www.kingdombiblestudies.org), made the following commentary on 1st Timothy 4:10:

"The Greek word used here is SOTEER. It occurs twenty-four times in the New Testament and is correctly translated 'saviour' every time. Nor does the Scripture say that God is the 'provider' of salvation for all. This would not make Him the Saviour of all. If He does not actually save all, then He is merely a 'would-be' Saviour, a 'potential' Saviour of all. He is not a Saviour 'for' all men, merely provided, to be accepted or rejected according to the whims of human nature or the power of the devil; He is the Saviour 'of' all men, and there is a world of difference between those two views. I find that all the Churches believe that Jesus is a Saviour 'for' all men, but none of them truly believe that He is the Saviour 'of' all men. Let me illustrate. If five men were drowning and a life guard was on duty with instructions to save any who voluntarily called on him, he would be a saviour 'for' the five men. But if he actually jumped into the water, grabbed them by the hair of the head, snatched them out of the water and saved their lives, he would

then be the saviour 'of' the men. Can we not see by this that Jesus can only be the SAVIOUR O-F ALL MEN if all men are actually saved by Him? Such a truth should fill the hardest heart with joy, and cause continual thanksgiving to God for His power, wisdom, love, grace, and righteousness" (quoted from article "The Wages of Sin Is Death").

Adam vs. Christ

1 Peter 2:24 – *"[Christ] Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed."*

1 Corinthians 15:3 – *"Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures"*

Romans 5:12 – *"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned."*

Romans 5:18-19 (NRSV) – *"Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."*

John 12:32 – *"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself."*

Ephesians 1:10 – *"In the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him."*

Colossians 1:19-22 – *"For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight."*

There are two problems with humanity, inflicted by the sin of the first man, Adam. The first issue is that we have a debt of sin which we cannot pay. God, because of his holy justice, cannot accept a person into Heaven unless the debt has been paid. But this problem really isn't a problem anymore, because, as the first two Scriptures quoted above state, Jesus died for our sins. But this does not mean that everybody is automatically saved. And that leads us to the second problem with humanity.

The second issue with humanity is that, unless people are born again, they exist in a state of spiritual corruption. This is why unredeemed people cannot experience life in the realm of Heaven. This condition of spiritual death came upon humanity because of the disobedience of Adam, which led all of humanity into disobedience and rebellion against God. But another man, Jesus Christ, was completely obedient to God, and his obedience in his death and resurrection has the redemptive power to transform all humanity back into harmony with God. This is what I believe the second set of Scriptures above speak of. Adam did not merely give men the choice of becoming sinners if they wanted to; his transgression actually had the power to make all men become sinners and face condemnation (Romans 5:18-19). Paul uses Adam's offence to illustrate Christ's righteousness, so it makes sense to say that

Christ's righteousness actually has the power to transform the hearts of men and cause them to turn back to God.

Even though some people were saved before the atonement of Christ, their condition before receiving God's provision of forgiveness was condemnation under sin, and no one could choose to avoid this consequence of Adam's sin. In other words, Adam's transgression, by itself, could assure an actual, manifested result for all mankind. Likewise, I see no reason why the obedience of Jesus Christ cannot ensure an actual manifestation of freedom from the bondage of sin and death for all mankind.

So, where does this leave free will? Well, we do have a will. We make decisions, and our decisions have consequences. Nobody, not even God, forces us to make certain actions. But this does not mean that our actions are completely driven by self-volition. Our actions are the results of influence. God cannot make us do anything, but he can make us willing to do something! And if ordinary means don't work, He can get really creative (see the book of Jonah for an example)!

Ephesians 1:11 – *"In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will."*

Isaiah 46:9-11 – *"Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,' Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it."*

So, what we see from these Scriptures is that God can and does accomplish all he purposes, which makes this next Scripture really good news:

1 Timothy 2:3-6 (KJV) – *"For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."*

God *"gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did"* (Romans 4:17).

From these Scriptures, we can reason that just because at the present time, things seem to be going contrary to God's plans (such as many people resisting Christ and not receiving salvation) God has assured us that when all is said and done, it is His will that prevails even though not everything He wills is a reality at the present time.

There are a couple of analogies that I often think of that are relevant here. Consider the presidential election process. The next president is determined in November, but he cannot constitutionally be elected until the Electoral College votes in December. However, after election night, everyone knows who will win the Electoral College, and the winner is declared the next president of the United States even though in actuality, he is neither constitutionally elected nor effectively operating as president yet! Nevertheless, the winner gives his victory speech on election night.

In a similar way, God has declared Jesus the Savior of the world in faith. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God can assure us in the Bible that salvation will be true for all even

though in actuality, salvation is not a reality for all at the present time. God has gone ahead and given us the victory speech through the Bible.

But here is another analogy that may fit with Scripture even tighter. Imagine an enormous building. The whole building is dark because the lights are off in every room. However, someone goes down to the basement of the building and turn on a switch. Electricity starts flowing in the building, but the rooms' lights come on in a sequence. At first, only the basement gets light. But very soon afterward, a small group of other rooms light up. In several stages, more groups of rooms light up, and eventually, there is light in every room of the building.

Jesus went down to the basement; he went to the lowest point that human experience can come to. And through His death and resurrection, it's like the light switch on humanity was turned on. So in that way, salvation is a completed work. Nothing else will have to be done with the switch. But not all rooms receive the light at the same time. Likewise, not all receive salvation at once.

As for the restoration of all men, God has called it done. Now, the manifestation of this takes place in several different phases spanning long periods of time, which brings us to the next point of this article.

How long is forever?

We can all agree that God is an endless Being. Hebrews Chapter 1, verse 2 says in the King James Version, *"God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds."*

The Concordant Literal New Testament translates the Scripture this way, *"By many portions and many modes, of old, God, speaking to the fathers in the prophets, in the last of these days speaks to us in a Son, Whom He appoints enjoyer of the allotment of all, through Whom He also makes the eons."*

Young's Literal Translation translates it, *"In many parts, and many ways, God of old having spoken to the fathers in the prophets, in these last days did speak to us in a Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He did make the ages."*

The significant difference between the translations is that the KJV says *"by whom also he made the worlds"* whereas Concordant and Young changed *"worlds"* to *"eons"* and *"ages"* respectively. The underlying Greek word is *"aionas,"* the plural of *"aion."* Multiple biblical scholars in the past two centuries have done intensive research on the use of this Greek word in Biblical and classical literature and have concluded that *"age"* or *"eon"* are the English words with the most correspondence to *"aion."* I suggest reading *An Analytical Study of Words* by Louis Abbott and *All in All* by A.E. Knoch (both can be read for free online) for detailed analysis on the translation of these words.

Now, if God created the eons, then He must exist outside of the eons. And if He exists outside of the eons, then God can be endless without the eons having to be endless.

Now, getting back to the question of how long is forever, when the New Testament uses words such as *"forever," "everlasting," "eternal,"* etc., the underlying Greek word is usually *"aion"* or a grammatical variant of *"aion,"* such as the adjective *"aionios."* The Old Testament (OT) is written in Hebrew and Aramaic, but the Septuagint is an ancient, respected Greek translation of the OT that was

written during Biblical times. The Hebrew word “olam” is often translated “aion” in the Septuagint and “forever” in English. It is extremely important to look at how these words are used in the OT because the OT took place in a previous age of God’s plan for humanity and we can find precedent for the meaning of words.

In the OT, we find many examples of things which were to be eternal conditions or commandments, but do not exist or are no longer commanded in the present age in which we live, such as circumcision (Genesis 17:7-10), the priesthood of Aaron’s family line (Exodus 40:15), animal sacrifices, observance of holy days, and ceremonial cleansing rituals (Leviticus. 16:23-34, 2 Chronicles 2:4, Exodus 31:16-17), the temple in Jerusalem which was built during Solomon’s reign (1 Kings 9:3), among other things. Thus, the view that “aion” means throughout the relevant age, or indefinitely until situations dictate otherwise, appears to have support in Scripture.

I bring up these precedents because Scriptures which speak of “eternal fire,” “eternal punishment,” or “everlasting destruction” are often cited as precluding any future redemption of those who are condemned. However, the OT usage of phrases with the same underlying Greek words did not preclude future redemption. Here is a list of examples quoted from Gary Amirault of Tentmaker Ministries, found at <http://www.tentmaker.org/articles/Matthew-25-46-Commentary-Amirault.html> (specific translations were not cited) .

Sodom's fiery judgment is "eternal" (Jude 7), that is--until--God "will restore the fortunes of Sodom" (Ez.16:53-55);

Israel's "affliction is incurable" (Jer. 30:12), that is--until--the Lord "will restore health" and heal her wounds (Jer. 30:17);

The sin of Samaria "is incurable" (Mic. 1:9) that is--until-- Lord "will restore ... the fortunes of Samaria." (Ez. 16:46-53);

Ammon is to become a "wasteland forever" and "rise no more" (Zeph. 2:9, Jer. 25:27) that is--until--the Lord will "restore the fortunes of the Ammonites" (Jer. 49:6);

From our human perspective, when things to last forever commence, there is no expiration date revealed to us, so “olam/aion/eon” carry the idea of an indefinite duration, which may explain how the “forever” translation came about. Had Israel been able to keep the Old Testament Law, it would have lasted indefinitely. The consummation of the age of Law was contingent on Israel’s failure to obey the Law. But when Moses gave the Law to Israel, there was no date of expiration.

A similar principle is true regarding the coming judgments. Because the lost do not seek God by self-initiative (Romans 3:11-12), the state of the lost is truly hopeless, and eternal, in and of itself. This is why the lost must be born again and made new creations. And for this to happen – for the lost to have the saving faith and receive salvation – God must intervene in their situation, and He is the Savior of all men (1 Timothy 4:10).

And we can also understand why God is the Savior “especially of those who believe” (1 Timothy 4:10). There are coming ages of blessings in the heavens which those who die unredeemed will not experience. So there is no need to get upset thinking that all of your obedience to God is worthless if

everyone will be saved anyway. You will get wonderfully special experiences as a reward for your obedience to the Lord in this life; you can count on it.

Young's Literal Translation often uses the terms "age-during" or "to the age" where the KJV has the words "everlasting," "eternal," or "forever." The Concordant Literal New Testament typically uses the word "eonian" in such places. Similar conventions are applied in Rotherham's Emphasized Bible.

From Death to Life

The next eon revealed in Scripture is the Millennial Kingdom eon promised to Israel. Jesus Christ will return to the earth, and Christ will reign on earth with the saints (both those who live until that time and those who are resurrected) to bring the great majority of the world's population living at that time to salvation. This appears evident from many Old Testament prophecies, especially in the Psalms.

Also, Revelation says that after the Millennial Kingdom, all people who were not believers in their earthly lives (and thus not resurrected at Christ's return before the Millenium) will be raised from the dead and judged (Rev. 20:11-13). The passage says that they will be judged according to their works.

Rev. 21:15 says that those judged unworthy of salvation will experience the Second Death. The redeemed people of all eras will live on the New Earth, described in Rev. 21-22.

Many commentaries say that at this point, time ends and eternity begins. However, I find significant evidence in the Bible that this is not the case.

1 Corinthians 15:22-28 describes:

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For 'He has put all things under His feet.' But when He says 'all things are put under Him,' it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all."

As long as Jesus is reigning, the end of time and the completion of God's redemptive program has not yet come. Looking at the New Earth,

"In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 22:2-5).

The saints are still reigning! And, if the saints are still reigning, then Christ is reigning through them, for they are spiritually of His Body and cannot reign apart from Him. And if He (or anyone) is still

reigning, then the end of time and the completion of God's redemptive plan has not come yet according to 1 Corinthians 15:22-28, for eventually all reigning will cease. While many translations say that the saints will reign "forever and ever," the phrase could be translated "for the eons of the eons" or "for the ages of the ages" as shown by the Concordant Literal New Testament and Young's Literal New Testament.

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive," Paul says. Then Paul outlines three phases in which this occurs. First, Christ was raised from the dead. Then, when He returns, all believers will be raised to immortality. The last group of people to be made alive are vivified at the end of time when death itself is abolished. The deactivation of physical bodies is just one of many ways in which death manifests itself. Jesus is "The Way, The Truth, and The Life" (John 14:6). Anything that is separated from Him, the Life, is in death. So for death to be abolished, the forces of evil that hold men in the bondage of decay, suffering, and alienation from God must be eradicated from the universe.

Also, notice that even on the New Earth, there is mention of healing from the Tree of Life. Death will be suppressed by the Tree of Life, so nobody will actually die or experience disease. I think an analogy would be a patient with an illness that is kept in remission by medication. But if the illness were completely eradicated from existence, then there would be no need for the medicine anymore. The fact that a continual remedy appears to be needed to prevent sickness on the New Earth suggests to me that the absolute abolishment of death has not occurred yet.

While it is true that the dead are raised to life at the Great White Throne in Revelation 20, simply being brought back to life does not fulfill abolishment of death. Prior to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, a few people in the Bible, such as Lazarus, were raised from the dead, but they died again at a later time, so they were not yet altogether freed from death. Death was still operative, to some degree, in these people raised from the dead because their bodies were gradually being afflicted once again by the oppressive forces which eventually resulted in death. There have been miracles which occurred in the present age in which people were raised from the dead, but they eventually died again. Therefore, I do not believe that 1 Corinthians 15:22 must be fulfilled in Revelations 20.

The Concordant Literal New Testament, one of the most literal translations available, translates 1 Corinthians 15:22 as, *"For even as, in Adam, all are dying, thus also, in Christ, shall all be vivified."* People are presently dying even while they are living because the powers of decay and mortality are operating, to some degree, in their bodies. Sometimes they notice it (such as when they feel pain); other times, it is asymptomatic. Paul also wrote that not all would "sleep" but that some would be "changed" to immortality at the return of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:51). Thus, all "are dying" even though not everyone will face the medical definition of death.

Jesus Christ was the first man in history to be completely freed from the power of death; He cannot ever die again nor experience any physical decay or corruption.

I do not believe that the Second Death is the event referenced in 1 Corinthians 15. In the context of 1 Corinthians 15, when death is abolished, life and union with God are produced, not a new kind of death as is described in Revelation 20. When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, God told them that they would die. And Paul tells us that death came upon all their descendants. The message of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5 is that Jesus reverses the work of Adam upon the human race, by bringing life, not a different kind of death. Just as Adam pulled all mankind away from God, Christ draws

all mankind back to God that God may be All in all again. The idea of Christ reversing the curse of Adam's transgression by changing the present form of death into another kind of death just seems out of place in both 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5.

Furthermore, if the Second Death fulfills Paul's prophesy of the abolishment of death (death being the wages of sin – Romans 6:23), and the Second Death only happens to the unsaved, then ultimately, with or without receiving salvation from Christ, everybody would automatically experience freedom from the wages of sin. And if that were the case, the Second Death would be nothing undesirable. But obviously that is not the case.

What Christian fundamentalism often claims is that people will be kept physically alive forever to experience suffering. But I don't believe that simply sustaining physical life (while also under the power of death which causes suffering) is something contingent on Christ's own vivification. Paul states that the vivification of all mankind comes through Christ, because He rose into a kind of life in which there is total freedom from death of all types.

Although I do not believe that the experience of the Second Death by itself represents the abolishment of death prophesied by Paul, it could very well be that the Second Death is part of a process that ultimately leads to reconciliation and genuine life. J Preston Eby, in his article "The Lake of Fire" from his Savior of the World Series, makes a compelling case for this interpretation.

The Bible says that death and hell will be cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20: 14). Some have reasoned that if people are released from the Lake of Fire, then death and hell must also be released. That is indeed a true statement. Nothing is "released" from the Lake of Fire. For people to be saved, they must be born again and made new creations. The old heart corrupted by death must be destroyed and recreated. This is the process that everyone who gets saved in this current life goes through, although for us who believe now, it's instantaneous and painless.

One thing to keep in mind is that the language of Revelation is heavily symbolic. In Revelation, I do not sense the practical, day-to-day nature of writing that characterizes some other books of the Bible. Thus, although there are some obvious themes throughout the book, such as righteousness and evil, death and life, and God's working with humanity, I do not think we are obligated to assume, via Revelation alone, that certain terminology from the book must be a literal description of an event that will happen. Thus, I do not make detailed pronouncements on what the experience of life beyond this world actually involves. The only things I can confidently discern from Scripture are that there is a concept of reward and punishment beyond this life and that believers are assured of living in peace and joy in the presence of God. Unbelievers will have their works evaluated to determine what will happen to them in the coming eons leading up to the grand Consummation.

Some astute readers of Scripture have observed that there is no passage which says that all men will be "saved." But to be saved, there must be something that you are being saved from. I think it is accurate to say that to be saved in a Biblical sense is to be saved from death, both spiritual death and physical death. Salvation from death, whether spiritual or physical (while death is still operative in the universe) is the most common (but not entirely exclusive) Biblical context for salvation. Not everybody is going to experience this, so I suspect that's why the Bible does not say that all men will eventually be "saved." What the Bible does say is that death will be abolished. When death, the curse inflicted upon humanity on the day Adam sinned in Eden, is abolished, there is nothing to save anybody from, but

rather, everybody will experience the deliverance that Jesus secured when he rose from the dead at the climax of the eons.

The Greek words “aion” and “aionios” are used in reference to God on many occasions. Some may ask, “If Scripture does not use these terms to denote absolute endlessness, will God eventually cease to exist?” That is a prudent concern, but I believe the purpose of these words in reference to God is to draw a contrast between Him and humanity during the eons. During the eons (especially the present one), creation goes through the burden of corruption and upheaval, but our Lord is the incorruptible, consistent God. He is the same throughout the eons! But after the eons, if all people are completely freed from the powers of death, there is no need to draw that contrast between God and humanity, for He shall be All in all (1 Corinthians 15:28). “All in all” should not imply that everybody will co-exist as God. I think the Amplified Bible explains it well:

“When everything is subjected to Him, then the Son Himself will also subject Himself to [the Father] Who put all things under Him, so that God may be all in all [be everything to everyone, supreme, the indwelling and controlling factor of life].”

Conclusion

At first glance, all of this probably looks like a complicated theological debate involving distant future events that are irrelevant to our day-to-day lives as believers. I both agree and disagree with that assessment. I agree in the sense that what someone believes about the final state of humanity does not make the person a more or less faithful Christian. What matters is that whatever message a Christian preaches, the message is Christ-centered and Cross-centered.

But, does that mean that this is topic is irrelevant to our present-day lives? I don’t think so. If the restoration of the entire universe is truly a Biblical teaching, then it is in the process of happening today. The process began in the past, is underway now, and will eventually be complete. So, it’s not a question of what will happen eons into the future; it’s a question of what process is underway today.

Thank you for reading this article. Think through what made sense and what didn’t. I look forward to hearing from you.