

# *Will Satan Ever Be Reconciled to God?*

October 2001

Dear Friend,

In this letter, I feel God wants me to return to a topic which I originally addressed several years ago.

As Christians in today's world we are often unaware that we are being subjected to a continuous inaudible bombardment by a philosophy called *humanism*. This presents man as the ultimate arbiter of moral or spiritual truth and promises a final and all-embracing reconciliation between God and all the forces of evil. This reconciliation, it is claimed, will include Satan himself and all the fallen angels and demons as well as any others who are presently at enmity with God. There is no place left for the absolute, unending punishment of any created being.

With its emphasis on reconciliation, this doctrine has a strong appeal for sincere and well-meaning Christians. Yet, it is based on a distortion of Scripture. For instance, one text commonly proposed is Colossians 1:19–20, which reads: "For it pleased the Father that in Him [Christ] 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." The emphasis is placed by this doctrine on the central phrase, "by Him to reconcile all things to Himself." However, we notice that the phrase "all things" is immediately qualified by the next phrase, "whether things on earth or things in heaven." Thus, the reconciliation here spoken of *extends only to those things which are on earth or in heaven*.

## *The lake of fire is outside the boundary of reconciliation*

This qualification becomes significant when we examine the description of the last great judgment of God given in Revelation 20:7–15. In verse 11 we are told that, from God's presence, "the earth and the heaven fled away." Then, in verse 15 we are told: "And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." This indicates that, even after heaven and earth had fled away, the lake of fire continued to exist in its own place. That is to say, the lake of fire is not located in either earth or heaven, and is therefore *not included in the scope of the reconciliation spoken of in Colossians 1:20*. Thus, the statement in Colossians 1:20 gives no reason to claim that those who are consigned to the lake of fire will ever thereafter be reconciled to God.

## **How Long Is "Eternal"?**

Another line of argument designed to disprove any form of final, unending punishment is based on an interpretation of the Greek adjective *aionios*, which is normally translated "eternal" or "everlasting." It is claimed that this Greek adjective is derived from the Greek noun *aion*, meaning an "age" (eon), and that the adjective therefore has the meaning "belonging to, or extending

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throughout, an age." In other words, that which is called *aionios* does not extend through all ages, but only through one age.

For example, this interpretation is applied to the words of Jesus, which reads: "And they [the wicked] will go away into *eternal* punishment, but the righteous into *eternal* life."<sup>1</sup> It is claimed that the phrase "eternal punishment" does not mean absolute, unending punishment, but merely punishment which lasts for an age (and, by implication, is terminated after that). However, intellectual honesty demands that "eternal life" would need to be interpreted in the same way. Does anyone sincerely believe that this is what Jesus meant?

On the contrary, this verse surely supplies proof that the adjective *aionios* does not mean merely "that which endures for an age," but rather "from age to age," or "to all ages." This meaning is the same whether the adjective is applied to *life* or to *punishment*.

This is confirmed by the use of another phrase that occurs in the Greek New Testament, namely: *eis [tous] aionas ton aionon*—that is, "unto [the] ages of ages." This phrase occurs approximately 20 times in the Greek New Testament, and is normally translated "forever and ever." The Greek language cannot produce any phrase that more strongly expresses that which endures for all ages, absolutely without end.

The same phrase is also used in Revelation 20:10, where it is says of the devil, the beast and the false prophet "they will be tormented day and night *forever and ever*." There is no way to express more emphatically that their punishment will be totally and absolutely unending.

### **The Only Basis of Reconciliation**

Those who speak of Satan being reconciled to God do not understand the scriptural basis of reconciliation. In 2 Peter 3:9 Peter tells us: "The Lord . . . is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." Notice that God's longsuffering is towards "us," the human race. Notice also the great, unvarying condition upon which alone God's mercy and reconciliation are offered: repentance. Repentance signifies a humble acknowledgment of wrongdoing, a total turning away from wrongdoing, and a sincere and unreserved submission to God. Where there is no repentance, there can be no reconciliation.

It is possible for the will of a created being to be so set in rebellion, that there is thereafter no possibility of its being changed. In such a case, repentance is no longer possible. In Hebrews 12:17 we are told of Esau that "afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance." More literally, "he found no way to change his mind." So far as the birthright was concerned, Esau had made an irrevocable decision. Therefore there was no way back into the blessing that he had forfeited.

The same stands eternally true of Satan and his angels. In their initial rebellion against God, in the full light and knowledge of eternity, they made an irrevocable, irreversible commitment. Their wills are set forever in eternal, irreconcilable enmity and opposition to Almighty God. Satan is incapable of repentance; therefore there is for him no possibility of reconciliation.

### ***Christ became the substitute for men, not for angels***

The Scripture makes it clear that the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ was made solely on behalf of the human race. Jesus is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"<sup>2</sup> He is "the

propitiation for the sins . . . [of] the whole world.”<sup>3</sup> In each case the English word “world” translates the Greek word *kosmos*. A thorough examination will show that this Greek word *kosmos*, throughout the New Testament, is used solely and exclusively of this earth and of the human race upon it.

Three passages from the New Testament may be cited in confirmation of this. In Romans 5:12 Paul says that “through one man sin entered the world [*kosmos*].” That *one man* was, of course, Adam. Sin had already been committed in heaven by Satan and his angels, but that was *outside the world*. Sin *in the world* began with the human race upon earth.

Again in 2 Peter we are told, concerning the judgment of God upon the human race in the days of Noah, that God “did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah”<sup>4</sup>; and that “the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water.”<sup>5</sup> In both these cases, it is clear that *the world* refers to the human race upon earth. Satan and his fallen angels are not included.

It follows that, when Jesus atoned by His death on the cross for the sins of “the world,” He atoned for the human race upon the earth, but not for Satan and his angels. This is in line with the revelation of Hebrews 2:14, 16 (RSV): “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself [Jesus] likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil. . . . For surely it is not with angels that he is concerned but with the descendants of Abraham.” Jesus became, by His fleshly nature, a descendant of Abraham—and thus also of Adam. He was “the last Adam.”<sup>6</sup> He became on the cross the atoning substitute for the whole Adamic race. But He did not take on angelic nature, and He did not become a substitute for angels. Therefore there is no basis in divine justice for the offer of pardon to angels. In fact, the very purpose of the death of Jesus on the cross was not to save the devil but, on the contrary, to “destroy . . . the devil.”<sup>7</sup> What could be clearer than that?

For this reason, Christ—returned in glory at the close of this age—is revealed as saying to the “goats” on his left hand: “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”<sup>8</sup> This everlasting fire—also called Gehenna, or the lake of fire—was “prepared for the devil and his angels.” This is their sure, inevitable, eternal destination. However, this place of punishment was not prepared for the human race. Human beings do not need to go there. If they will repent and submit to God, God will spare them. For them there is an alternative—if they will accept it. But for Satan and his angels there is no alternative.

### **Satan’s Advocates Are God’s Enemies**

In this spiritual realm there is no neutrality. Jesus said: “He who is not with Me is against Me.”<sup>9</sup> There are only two possible attitudes: submission to God, or opposition to God. Human beings who, through repentance, submit themselves to God, are spared from the lake of fire. All others, who do not thus submit, are in opposition to God. They necessarily associate themselves with the devil and his angels. Because of this association, they are condemned to the same destination—the lake of fire. For all who once enter this lake of fire—whether angels or men—there is no way back. It is “forever and ever.”

Herein lies the subtle danger of this doctrine of “reconciliation” for those who profess to be Christians. In the Scriptures, God clearly states two things. First, God is absolutely just and impartial. Second, God has condemned the devil and his angels to the punishment of everlasting fire. Any person who questions the second of these two statements automatically questions the first also.

If you deny that the devil is condemned to everlasting fire, you automatically repudiate both the truth and the justice of God. By this subtle deception, Satan has tricked you into taking sides with him against God. You cannot at the same time be the advocate of Satan and the friend of God. Without realizing it, you are now ranged alongside the enemies of God. If you persist in this attitude, God's justice demands that He deal with you as with the devil. You will one day hear those fearsome words: "Depart from Me . . . into the everlasting fire."

Recall, before it is too late, that this was never prepared for you. You do not need to go there. Change your mind. Renounce your association with the devil. Lay down your opposition to God. Humble yourself. Submit yourself to the truth and the justice of God. In so doing, you open the way for God to restore to you His grace, mercy and peace. Consider the words of David:

*Do not I hate them, O LORD, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.* *Psalm 139:21-24*

Make this confession of David your confession concerning Satan and his angels. Ask the Lord to search your heart. Renounce every wicked way. Return to the way everlasting.

***The two sides of God's coin: "goodness" and "severity"***

The picture presented in Scripture of God's nature and dealings with man is like a coin. It has two opposite sides, which together make up the complete coin. These two sides are clearly presented by Paul: "Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God."<sup>10</sup> Here are the two sides: *goodness* and *severity*. On the one hand, mercy and grace; on the other hand, wrath and judgment.

To efface one side of a coin renders it incomplete and valueless. So it is with the picture of God presented in the Bible. To speak always of goodness, but never of severity—to speak always of mercy and grace, but never of wrath and judgment—this is to efface one side of the coin, and to render the Bible's picture of God incomplete and valueless. Those who speak like this are unfaithful to God, and unfair to men. In so doing, they misrepresent God and mislead men.

Yours in the Master's service,



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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 25:46 RSV

<sup>2</sup> John 1:29

<sup>3</sup> 1 John 2:2

<sup>4</sup> 2 Peter 2:5

<sup>5</sup> 2 Peter 3:6

<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:45

<sup>7</sup> Hebrews 2:14

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 25:41

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 12:30

<sup>10</sup> Romans 11:22

For further study we recommend the audiocassette, "Restraining and Casting Down Satan."

A contribution to help cover cost will be appreciated, but is not necessary.