

## **QUESTIONING “HELL”: Jesus Did *NOT* Teach Eternal-Suffering**

Sid Galloway BS, M.DIV. — [SidGalloway.com](http://SidGalloway.com)

JUNE 26, 2025 - Book Recommendations at the end

“... the **traditional view** of **unending conscious torture**, ... sprang from ... [Greek] **Platonic theories** of immortal, indestructible souls .... **nearly all of us** have completely **skirted the relevant material** [evidence] on this subject ...”

Edward Fudge. Part 2 Chapter 2, in the book *RETHINKING HELL: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism*. Kindle 901-904. [bold added]

Please don't misunderstand me. Yes, I do recognize that *justice* is real and important. Therefore, I'm convinced that each of us after death will be held accountable for our thoughts, words, and actions toward others in this life.

Yet, the key questions for all of us are:

- What *kind* of accountability will it be?
- Are we willing to *seek truth* for ourselves?
- Or will we just blindly *defend traditions* handed to us?

### ***Blind-Belief Is Never Good***

During the 20 years I taught counseling-psychology to *adults*, and the next 20 when I taught college-prep biological sciences to *youth*, I always *began* the courses by saying: “*Don't believe anything I ever say!*”. Then, after a few seconds of student shock, I'd clarify with, “*Unless, you see sufficient evidence that makes it worthy of your belief, when fairly compared to all other alternatives.*”

Have you ever been *troubled* or even turned-off by the *traditional* view of “Hell”? I'm talking about the common belief that says something like:

“God is merciful *love*, ... yet people who reject God will consciously *suffer forever* in hell”.

If you detect a *contradiction* in that belief, then you're not alone. I'm right there with you. I'm now *firmly* convinced (*by the evidence*) that this belief is merely tradition, *not* truth. I began *questioning* this traditional belief way back in my 20's, when I was in a *conservative* evangelical seminary working on my Master's degree. (*However, now I don't fit either “conservative” or “liberal” labels.*) A neighbor told me he did *not* accept the traditional “Hell” view of eternal suffering. So, as a young traditionalist, I decided to prove to him that the *traditional* view was true.

### **Three *Different* Christian Views of the “Bad”-Place (“Hell”)**

Throughout the 2,000 years of Christianity, various theologians have held to three very different interpretations regarding the ultimate destiny of those who reject God’s way of unselfish love. There has never been total consensus or agreement on one interpretation.

**U.S.** - One interpretation is Universal-Salvation (US), which basically says that every person will be drawn to and eventually accept God’s Way of Love, even those who rejected it while here on earth. In other words, after death, the opportunity to see and understand God’s way of love will always be open and available. So, eventually, everyone will embrace it.

**E.C.T.** - This interpretation is often called Eternal Conscious Torment. This view says that there will be some people who will so totally reject God’s way of love that they will suffer consciously forever with no hope of it ever ending.

**E.E.** - I call this view EE, meaning Existence-Ends. This interpretation is sometimes called “Annihilation”, or “Conditional Immortality”. It basically says that God will honor the choice of those who fully reject the way of love, *mercifully* totally *let go* of and separate from those who make this choice. God alone is Self-existent, inherently immortal, and holds (sustains) all created things into existence. Those who are totally separated from God at a point of final judgment will therefore cease to exist. In contrast, those who *accept* God’s way of love will be given the gift of immortality (eternal life). In other words, humans are not inherently, independently immortal, but must choose to receive the gift of immortality.

### ***Rational*-Belief Is Based On Evidence**

Ever since my neighbor challenged me, I’ve spent 40 years of research studying the writings of top scholars from all sides of the issue. And for those of you who are fellow Christians, yes, most of all, I’ve exhaustively studied what the Bible itself says, including the original Hebrew and Greek behind terms, word pictures, and stories. Most of all, I’ve focused on the actual words of Jesus regarding *merciful* love. Also, for any who are wondering, I additionally researched the philosophical and science evidence on the subject of life *after* death.

It didn’t take long into my research before I began discovering a lot of evidence in the Bible, and from scholars, that no one had ever told me about. Things like, the Hebrew Old Testament (OT) had *very little* to say about the *afterlife*, and definitely did *not* teach eternal suffering. Also, that belief in a place of *eternal suffering* , plus the belief that human consciousness is a self-existent, *inherently* immortal

soul, were originally part of Greek pagan philosophical mythology, which predated Christianity. Then, I read evidence from scholars showing how this Greek concept was *absorbed* into Christianity by some of the first and second century *dominant* Christian theologians who were Greek. Keep in mind however that many *other* theologians back then did *not* agree with eternal suffering nor an *inherently* immortal human soul. In addition, evidence indicated that passages in the New Testament (NT) about the afterlife were often *misinterpreted* because of the influence from these dominant theologians.

### **Interpretive Lenses Are Perceptual-Conceptual Filters**

All of our *interpretations* are colored by and sometimes distorted by our individual perceptual-conceptual filters, the *lenses* through which we see and seek to understand. For me now, I always try to use the agape-love teachings and life of Jesus as my *primary* interpretive lens. Not only for reading and interpreting Scripture, but for all of life, relationships, and reality. Agape, by the way, is the NT Greek term used for the highest form of love — unselfish, humble, even for enemies. I'll discuss more about agape in the later, most important section of this essay. The section showing how and why agape-love must be our light and lens for interpreting the Bible.

Our interpretive lenses naturally, and often unconsciously, *blind* us to evidence that does not fit our long held traditions. This mind blinding effect is called “confirmation bias”, which is one of many common biases.

.... The best known is the **confirmation bias**, which **makes us believe** in that which **reinforces** our **convictions** and **doubt whatever contradicts them.**”

[bold added] <https://lab.cccb.org/en/cognitive-short-sightedness-biases-and-survival/>

### **While Counseling Hurting Hearts**

After four decades teaching counseling-psychology, and as an individual and family counselor, it's also become clear that this man-made belief in “eternal suffering” has been one of the most *damaging* doctrinal *traditions* in the personal lives and relationships of many people who accepted it. It not only *undermined* their ability to trust in a *loving* God, but also was a significant stumbling block in their ability to fully trust any love even in their *human* relationships. Think about it. If the *traditional* ECT interpretation of “hell” is *wrong*, then what an unnecessary *tragedy* it is when people who believe it envision their deceased loved ones enduring agonizing suffering with no hope of it ever ending.

Dr. John Stott, who's *quoted below*, was one of the most respected *conservative* evangelical leaders of the 20th century. He was recognized as a towering intellectual, but mostly as a *humble* man of *love*. Near the end of his life, he "came out" as a person who rejected the traditional belief in "eternal suffering". Dr. Stott eventually came to the conclusion that the final *destiny* would be the compassionate, *merciful* end of existence (*annihilation*) for those who chose total *separation* from God and God's way of unselfish agape-love.

Yes, Dr. Stott highlighted the *emotional* intolerability of ECT. Yet, his reason for eventually rejecting it was *not* emotion, but rather the biblical *evidence* itself.

**"Emotionally**, I find the concept [*of eternal conscious torment*] **intolerable** and do not understand how people can live with it, without either **cauterizing their feelings** or cracking under the strain. But our emotions are a fluctuating, unreliable guide to truth and must not be exalted to the place of supreme authority in determining it . . . my question must be—and is—**not what does my heart** tell me, but **what does God's word say?** [bold added]

**Dr. John Stott.** <https://www.patheos.com/resources/additional-resources/2011/08/john-stott-hell-and-the-future-of-evangelical-theology-kyle-roberts-08-10-2011>

### **No View of "Hell" Is Necessary For Christian Fellowship (Friendship)**

A few hardened traditionalists *falsely* labeled Dr. Stott as a heretic, and then tried to  *censor* and *shun* him. However, many others, like his friend and fellow leading evangelical theologian, Dr. J.I. Packer, *defended* Dr. Stott. Even though Dr. Packer *disagreed* with him about ECT, Dr. Packer defended the *legitimacy* of Dr. Stott's *concerns* about the traditional belief of eternal conscious torment. And, Dr. Packer acknowledged that *differences* in belief about "hell" are *not* reasons for breaking fellowship with one another as Christians.

"In the end [*J.I. Packer*] calls [*John Stott*] and **other** evangelical **annihilationists** "**honored fellow-evangelicals**," and says "it would be **wrong for differences** of opinion on this matter to **lead to breaches of fellowship**." [bold added]

Quote is from Christ Date on the **RethinkingHell.com** resource website.  
<https://rethinkinghell.com/2015/10/23/why-j-i-packer-is-still-wrong-a-response-to-tgc-part-1/>

Elsewhere, Dr. Stott noted that the internationally respected *evangelical* NT scholar, Dr. F. F. Bruce agreed that the compassionate *merciful* end of existence, "annihilation", is an *acceptable* biblical interpretation instead of ECT. Even further, Dr. Bruce wrote that ECT was *contradictory* to the character of a loving, merciful, compassionate God.

“F. F. Bruce wrote, ‘**annihilation** [*the merciful end of existence*] is certainly an **acceptable interpretation** of the relevant New Testament passages ... [ECT] is incompatible with the revealed character of God.’” **[bold added]**  
[Letter from F. F. Bruce to John Stott in 1989, as quoted in "John Stott: A Global Ministry", 354.]. <https://en-academic.com/dic.nsf/enwiki/287166>

Since then, hundreds of evangelical pastors, theologians, and regular Christians have re-examined the evidence *against* ECT, and like Dr. Stott and myself, they have *rejected* that man-made tradition. So, please realize that if you disagree with *my* rejection of ECT, that is OK. Yet I stand in the company of a growing number of respected scholars, many of whom are actually conservative evangelicals.

So, if you’re a traditionalist Christian who believes in ECT, please remember that this entire subject is *not* an *essential* tenet of Christianity. There *never* has been total consensus on these matters. Many sincere Christian theologians have disagreed with one another about aspects of life after death. The *only* thing considered *essential* is how to become *connected* to God, who is love (*First John 4:8*), and *how* to grow in that love relationship so that the image and character of Christ’s agape-love is increasingly reflected in our lives to others.

For Christianity, the term used for being *connected* to God, the transcendent Consciousness behind the Cosmos, is called “salvation”. The NT Greek term for “saved” is “sozo”, which simply means to be *healed* or to be made *whole*. In other words, no longer *falling-apart*. Jesus taught that the “Way” to be connected to God is *not* by self-righteous efforts to prove how good we are. The profoundly simple way to be connected and grow in *personal* love is simply by free *grace* through humble *dependence* (faith) on the God as the Source of pure love, and *not* on self as the source, and *not* on some generic energy “Force”. The way to connect and grow in God’s love is not by prideful, self-righteous efforts to be good enough.

[For more on the divine transcendence of love, see my free online essay/book, **QUANTUM SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY CANNOT MATURE WITHOUT COMPASSIONATE LOVE**, at [SidGalloway.com](http://SidGalloway.com) ]

This brief essay is not the place for a comprehensive, certainly not exhaustive, examination of the evidence *challenging* the traditional view of “Hell”. At the end, I’ll list a number of other resources for those of you who are serious about seeking truth and not merely defending human tradition. So, in this later part of the essay, I’ll simply focus on three core considerations:

**1. Greek Origins. 2. Logical-Biblical Inconsistencies. 3. Jesus’s Lens of Love**

## 1. GREEK ORIGINS OF ECT & INHERENTLY IMMORTAL SOULS

The *first* consideration is that the ancient history of *Greek* belief about the nature and character of *Hell* is inseparably *connected* to the Greek philosophical assumption that all individual human *consciousnesses* are *self-existent* and therefore *independently* immortal. For now, consider the Bible verse below THAT clearly states *only* God has self-existent, *independent* immortality.

“[God] **alone** has immortality.” [bold added]

Written by the Apostle Paul in his letter, *First Timothy* 6:16

The quotes below by respected theologians represent a long growing list of scholars past and present who recognize that the concept of ECT-Hell has its origin in Greek philosophy and mythology, not the Judeo-Christian scriptures.

“For the history of Western thought, the **Platonic** [Plato’s] teaching of the immortality of the soul became of special significance. It **penetrated so deeply** into the **thought of Western** man because, although with certain modifications, it was **assimilated by Christian** theology and **church** teaching, ...” [bold added]

Dr. Emil Brunner, Professor of Theology at University of Switzerland, visiting professor at Princeton, and the International Christian University at Tokyo, Japan, in his book, ETERNAL HOPE.

.... the **traditional view of unending conscious torture, ... sprang from ...** [Greek] **Platonic theories** of immortal, indestructible souls .... **nearly all of us** have completely **skirted the relevant material** [evidence] on this subject ...”

Edward Fudge. Part 2 Chapter 2, in the book *RETHINKING HELL: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism*. Kindle 901-904. [bold added]

“When **Paul** made the **statement** that **only God has immortality**, he used the Greek language but **did not share the Greek concept** of the nature of God and man. For the **Greeks**, man possessed an **immortal soul**. It was *inherently* a part of him but only a part. When man **died** the body perished but the **soul did not** —it could not, they believed.

.... **But this is not the Biblical concept** of the nature of man [humans].” [bold added]

Dr. Steven P. Vitrano, chairman of Biblical languages Andrews University.

*BELIEVE THAT GOD ALONE IS IMMORTAL*. <https://>

[digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4843&context=pubs](https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4843&context=pubs)

## 2. LOGICAL-BIBLICAL INCONSISTENCIES

The *second* consideration is that the *logic* of the tradition assumptions are *flawed*. For example, traditionalists often say or imply that God's *justice* is distinct from God's love, as if the two are opposites. But, justice and love are not two separate things. God's justice is the application of God's love. Please consider the following. God exists as unselfish love (First John 4:8), therefore the law of God is unselfish love (Matthew 22:36-40).

So, the breaking of God's *love-law* means to violate God's way of love. Justice simply means to apply the law of God, which again is the law of love. Violating or breaking the law of *unselfish* love is *selfishness*. That's what the old term "sin" basically means. Sin is the heart attitude and motive of "*anti-love*". I'll discuss more about this later. For now, keep this question in mind to be answered as the essay unfolds. If *justice* is the application of *love* toward those who have violated the way of love, then

**- How will the justice of love be applied?**

Traditionalists often say that because God is both *eternal and conscious*, then therefore people who reject God and God's way of love deserve consequences that are both eternal and conscious. But, that reasoning is *not* the *only* way to logically understand what kind of consequence would result from rejecting God's way of love. It's far more logical to reason that a *temporally finite* human *cannot* commit eternal, infinite selfish "sins". Therefore, the consequences of *justice* for human selfish sin should be *temporal* and *finite*, not eternal.

Another error of *assumption* is made by traditionalists when they interpret the biblical term "punishment". Traditionalists seem to miss the fact that the biblical term used is "punish - **ment**", *not* ongoing "punish-**ing**". The term *punishment* conveys a *finished* act, not an ongoing experience. So, what is actually "finished" in the application of punishment? An eternal **punishment** (not punishing) results in that person's existence *ceasing - forever*. When God honors their free choice and totally lets-go, their existence is then *finished*. The "punishment" is separation from God and thus the end of existence. That would be an eternally *finished* consequence. And it would last forever, eternally. The point here is that the traditional belief of eternal *conscious* "punish-**ing**" is a misinterpretation based on a wrong assumption about the term punishment.

In addition, many traditionalists seem to miss a logical contradiction in their own theological statements. Notice in the following quotes, traditionalists *unwittingly*

acknowledge the *mortality* (the inevitable *extinction*) of any created thing that becomes totally separated (let-go) from God the Source of all existence. These quotes from traditionalists acknowledge that if a normal human were fully separated from the only Self-existent Being, who created and *holds* all things into a existence, then that person or thing would *cease to exist*.

While reading these quotes, keep in mind, that most traditionalists also believe that those who reject God's law and way of love will be *totally separated* from God. So, in essence, their *dual* beliefs are logically *inconsistent* and *contradictory* #1. The consequence is *total* separation from God who holds all things together. #2. Yet, those separated human souls somehow continue existing forever.

"If all that is not God came into being at the word of God, then it follows that every second of our existence is owing to the word of God. The biblical teaching is that no creature has a principle of ongoing existence in itself apart from God's perpetual preservation. .... If God should ever cease to address your body and soul with the command, "Be!" you would cease to be. The only barrier between you and nothingness is the word of God." **[bold added]**

Dr. John Piper

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/he-commanded-and-they-were-created>

"[Jesus] didn't empty of His deity, or He would have ceased to exist."

Dr. John MacArthur

<https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/81-60/the-unparalleled-humility-of-jesus>

"If God withdrew all of His sustaining power, the creation would cease to exist."

Ken Ham <https://assets.answersingenesis.org/doc/articles/radio/death-and-suffering.pdf>

"[God] still **sustains** the universe (Col. 1:17) otherwise it **would cease to exist**."

Jonathan Sarfati <https://creation.com/the-second-law-of-thermodynamics-answers-to-critics>

Interestingly, some traditionalists recognize this contradiction. So, to deal with it, they say the consequence for rejecting God's way of love is *only partial* separation from God. They say that God does not let-go and totally separate. Instead, according to them, God *actively holds* people in a state of continual conscious suffering existence forever. A few even go even further, saying that God (*and supposedly the "saints" in Heaven*) enjoy that the "sinners" are suffering forever.

Please stop and think about that carefully. If a court in America tried to institute such a torture as the consequence for a criminal here on earth, we would all *reject* it as "cruel and unusual punishment". In fact, such a torturous punishment

actually is *illegal* in America. Obviously, it is *not* the application of merciful, compassionate love. Instead, such a punishment would be a graphic example of vicious *sadism*.

That traditionalist belief in *active* eternal torture by God, reminds me of another common misinterpretation involving two particular words used in both the OT and NT. Those two words are “weeping” and “gnashing” of teeth. The words are often *assumed* to mean tears and grimaces of pain. However, weeping and gnashing of teeth can *alternatively* mean tears of selfish *self*-pity, and angry grinding of teeth in *self*-centered *bitterness*. More, importantly, when Jesus referred to these word-pictures in the NT, he was paraphrasing OT passages in order to oppose, expose, and condemn self-righteous religious leaders. Those religious leaders were abusing their privileged position of power through fear and terror tactics to oppress and control the masses of regular people who were under their authority. Remember, those same religious leaders are the ones who terrorized, tortured, and killed Jesus.

### **3. JESUS’S LENS OF MERCIFUL, COMPASSIONATE LOVE**

The *third* and most important consideration has to do with the light and lens through which the Bible is *most clearly* interpreted. If a “Christian” claims to follow Jesus, who was called the “Christ” (*Greek means unique anointed one*), then *Christ’s* direct words and life-examples should be the central key for reading, interpreting, and applying the rest of the Bible. Given this fact, we need to ask, “*What was the heart, the central core, of Jesus’ message?*”

The heart and soul of Jesus’ teaching and life example was self-sacrificing, merciful, compassionate *love* for all others, especially the vulnerable, poor, and oppressed. Keep in mind, I’m definitely *not* talking about our culturally confused uses of the English term *love* — such as “I love cookies” or “I love hiking”. Those are just forms of “*like*” and “*want*”. Those merely mean, “I *want*” to *get from* things and from others to benefit *me*, to pleasure *myself*.

In contrast, the kind of love that Jesus *taught*, and that everyone at least *talks* about, as the *highest* valued human virtue, is a love that *chooses* to unselfishly give *to others* for their benefit, *without* demand or expectation of *getting* something in return. It’s not a fuzzy feeling. It’s a active chosen way of life.

“We tend to think love is a **feeling, but it is not. Love is an action;** love is something we **do for others.**” *[bold added]*

Desmond Tutu, black South African, Anglican theologian and activist.

“**AGAPE**” is the New Testament (NT) Greek term translated as “love” in the NT, especially when Jesus speaks of God’s character, God’s law, and God’s way. God exists as pure Agape. The term “agape” means a humble, *selfless*, self-giving, other-centered type of love. Agape-love is compassionate, altruistic, and self-sacrificing for family and friends.

Yet, Jesus and the NT (New Testament) writers *pushed* the concept of agape even further than the Greek meaning. They used it to include a self-sacrificing love — *even* for enemies. Remember that Jesus taught his followers to love and actively do good to their enemies. He lived it even when he was tortured, and while hanging on the intentionally cruel Roman cross of crucifixion. On the cross, Jesus compassionately *forgave* his enemies, the very ones who had done all of that to him. He said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not understand what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

So, in light of this, it helps me to picture this kind of pinnacle love as a “cross-type” or “cross-shaped” kind of compassion. Agape loves with arms wide open to *embrace* even our enemies. No, I did not say trust enemies, nor “like” what they do. Agape love is wise, and not naive. It’s brilliantly empathetic and strong. And, it is the only way that has the power to *transform* an enemy into a *friend*.

Sadly, it’s an attitude and character that’s tragically *missing*, yet desperately *needed* in the world today. It’s even missing in much of cultural Christianity, and missing from the lives of so many politicized, commercialized, apparently self-centered “Christians”. Christ’s self-giving, other-forgiving, enemy-loving, *cross-shaped* love should be the *soul* of Christianity, and of those who genuinely follow his “Way”.

Now, for any of you who doubt the foundational, overarching role that agape-love *should* have in Christianity, in the lives of Christians, and in every effort to *interpret* the Bible, please take a look at the following sample of key NT passages. You’ll see how important and central love was to Jesus and to his followers who wrote the New Testament.

You have **heard** that it was said, ‘**Love your neighbor**’ and ‘**Hate your enemy**.’ But I **tell you, love your enemies** and pray for those who persecute you, ....  
Therefore, **you must be perfect** *[in love]*  
as *[God the Source of Love]* is perfect.

**JESUS in Matthew 5:43-48**

“Teacher, which commandment is the **greatest** in the Law?” Jesus declared, “**Love** the Lord your **God** with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the **first and greatest** commandment. And the **second** is like it: **‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’** All the **Law** and the Prophets **hang** on these **two** commandments.”

**Jesus in Matthew 22:36-40**

A **new** commandment I give you: **Love one another. As I have loved you**, so you also must love one another. **By this** everyone will **know** that you are **My** disciples, **if you** love one another.”

**John 13:34-35**

This is My **commandment**, that you **love** one another  
**as I have loved** you.  
And I appointed you to go and **bear fruit** *[of love]*....

**John 15**

“The **goal** of our teaching is **love** from  
a pure heart and a clear conscience”.

**1 Timothy 1:15**

“**For this reason** I bow my knees before the Father, from whom **every family** in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he **may grant you** to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell **in your hearts** through faith— that you, **being rooted and grounded in love**, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and **to know the love** of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be **filled** with all the **fullness** of God. ... Amen.”

**Ephesians 3:14-21**

The **Ten Commandments** are **all about love**.  
The first four on how to **God** and the last six on how to love **others**. **Exodus 20**

**John 3:16** - God so **loved the world** (Greek = Cosmos/Creation)

Owe no one anything, **except to love** each other,  
**for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.**

**Romans 13:8**

**Romans 8** - is all about **God’s love**

**See 1 Corinthians 12:31 on thru ALL of 1 Corinthians 13 for**  
“the most excellent way”

[The famous description of love vs anti-love]

Ending with “faith, hope, love, and the greatest of these is love”

**1 Cor 14:1** “Pursue love”

For the **whole law** is fulfilled in **ONE word**:

“You shall **LOVE** your neighbor as yourself.” **Galatians 5:14**

*(The Greek in Gal. 5:14 says “one word”, even though the command has seven words in it. NOTE in the further verses **Gal 5:22-23**, “The **fruit** of the Spirit is **love**, joy, peace ....”, the GREEK term for fruit is absolute singular even though nine words are listed. The first word in the list of 9, **LOVE**, is **THE** single fruit of the Spirit.*

*The other 8 words are like the flavors or experiences produced by living agape love.)*

**James 1** = character of love

**James 2:8-13** Law of Love = Law of Liberty

**Above all, love** each other deeply, **because love covers** over a multitude of **sins**.

1 Peter 4:8

**First & Second John** - Both letters are ALL about love vs. anti-love

Let us **love** one another, for **love is from God**,

whoever **loves** has been **born of God** and **knows God**.

Anyone who does **not love** does **not know God**, because **God is love**.

*(John the best friend of Jesus in) First John 4:7-8*

Since pure *unselfish* agape-love is the “law” of God, then what is the *breaking* or violating of God’s love-law? As already mentioned, it’s simply the *selfish* attitude (sin) and actions (sins) of anti-love. The Hebrew and Greek terms behind the English word “sin” can best be understood and conveyed in our modern English by the word “selfishness”. Selfish sin is the opposite of *unselfish* love. Remember, “God is (*exists as*) *pure love*” (First John 4:8). And, the whole *law* of God can be summed up as the *law* of merciful love. (Matthew 22:36-40; John 13:34-35; Romans 13:8; Galatians 5:14-22)

“Basically **sin** is preferring to go **one’s own way** rather than God’s way; to choose one’s ... self-centered, **selfish**, corrupting world ...” [bold added]

Dr. John Wenham, a conservative theologian, professor at numerous universities in the UK, and a defender of inerrancy. *THE GOODNESS OF GOD: An Honest Look at the Moral Problems Raised by the Bible, such as the Destruction of the Heathen, the Existence of Evil and Jesus’ Teaching About Hell.*

“... love does not seek its own, for to seek one’s own is **simply self-love**, ... **selfishness**, ....” [bold added]

Soren Kierkegaard. *WORKS OF LOVE*. p. 247

## **JESUS GLASSES - What's Love Got To Do With It?**

Because *merciful* compassionate love is *the* central, simple truth of Jesus's life and message, this truth should therefore be *the* light and lens through which we are to see, interpret, and understand every part of the Bible. This interpretive lens should rule over all other human traditions, concepts, and truths.

Someone once said, "We become like the one we worship". It's the psychological process of "modeling" or "mirroring". If a person's *distorted* image of God is a tyrannical, dictatorial Being who rules by power, force, fear, and violence, then that person gradually adopts those same characteristics in their own attitudes and actions. There's a *reverse* process which is also true. That reverse process is the common psychological phenomenon called "projection". We *project* our own flawed characteristics onto our images of God.

In contrast, however, Jesus did *not* model or teach power *over* others through fear and violence to get people to believe in God and God's way of love. Not even during the event, when Jesus drove the corrupt money changers out of the temple. That event was a carefully orchestrated, calm, controlled act to publicly demonstrate his opposition against oppressors who were abusing poor people and dishonoring God. Proof that his actions were strong, yet calm, is seen by the fact that when he finished driving them out of the temple, all the little children came running toward him, not away from him. The children were not afraid of him, but rather drawn to him, and *felt safest* when close by his side!

Instead of the world's way of power over others, Jesus lived and taught *meekness*, not weakness. *Meekness* is the use of power under the control of love, for the uplifting, empowering of others (*see Matthew 20:20-28*). Dr. Jonathan Walton, President of Princeton Theological Seminary, helps put my point into focus. As you read Dr. Walton's insight, remember that people *naturally* become like the one they idolize. For example, think about music idols and their *groupie* followers. Remember that distorted, idolized (*idolatrous*) images fail to reveal full truth.

**"Rather than using a lens of love, too many read the Bible through a lens of power. A lens of power interprets Scripture in such a way that it justifies abusive authority ....**

**.... A lens of love recalibrates our focus back to the teachings of the gospel. Jesus' ministry was one of love and compassion. Jesus' ministry, like that of the Hebrew prophets who informed him, subverted authority and questioned the status quo. It would only be appropriate, then, for us to interpret the Christian**

**faith** in this **light**. It would only be fitting to interpret Scripture with a **lens of love.**”

Jonathan L. Walton PhD. President of Princeton Theological Seminary.  
*A LENS OF LOVE: Reading the Bible in Its World for Our World.*  
(p. 208-209). [bold added]

The Old Testament (OT) consists of 39 books written by numerous authors over a long span of time. None of the OT authors write much at all about the afterlife. And what *little* is written about it is *ambiguous*. This fact is acknowledged by both traditional scholars and by non-traditional scholars alike. The OT is a portrayal of unfolding history — showing a gradual, unfolding process of God increasingly revealing more and more about the way of agape-love. The flip side of history is our fallible human struggle to understand God’s revelation about the way of love. All along the way, our human tendencies have “projected” our own moral *flaws* onto our distorted image of God, until it clouds-over and chokes-out the pure revelation of the real Creator — who exists as pure, compassionate, merciful agape-love.

As a counselor and former educator of counseling-psychology for 40 years, and supported by rigorous research by others, it’s clear that psychosocial formation of beliefs, including interpretations of the Bible, are *never* straightforward. Everything that any of us *believes* about anything is *inseparable* from our human, personally-biased, perceptual-conceptual *filters*. And our filters inescapably involve various degrees of human modeling, projection, fallible reasoning, emotions, and especially cultural *conditioning* (tradition). Cultural conditioning is like the unconscious *contagious YAWNING* effect. We contagiously absorb beliefs and attitudes from the people around us, without realizing it’s happening to us.

In addition, we too often rely on the opinions of others, especially past and present people we *assume* are experts. Yet, even experts are fallible and vulnerable to the same human factors as the rest of us. And when we gather into isolated sub-cultures (denominations, etc.), our cloistered groups can become self-imposed blinders — deprived of the iron sharpening challenge from alternative perspectives. The best way to evaluate whether our interpretation of the Bible is accurate is to carefully, sincerely, and comprehensively compare it to the interpretations from sincere scholars who disagree with us.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For those traditionalists who are sincere about seeking full *truth* about the afterlife, and not just blindly *defending* handed-down traditions, I humbly challenge you to personally do your own independent research. Here are a number of areas of research that I recommend and encourage you to examine thoroughly.

**FIRST**, I strongly encourage you to do a deep dive into Jesus' actual words, stories, parables, and metaphors found in the four NT Gospels. Also, carefully look at the compassionate, merciful "way" he modeled *merciful* love toward "sinners". Be sure to notice how he confronted, opposed, and exposed the religious leaders of his day. Those leaders who claimed they *alone* interpreted God's truth accurately, and who persecuted anyone who disagreed with them. Those leaders did not teach or live God's law of love.

**SECOND**, it's important to sincerely read and study the writings of scholars who *reject* ECT. That is, those who have presented volumes of *evidence* and conclusions which *challenge* the traditional view of eternal conscious torture. You'll find that many of them comprehensively examine the full biblical data in context. They carefully cover all of the passages used by traditionalists to promote and defend ECT. In fact, I *guarantee* you'll discover *new* and compelling biblical and logical evidence to stimulate your thinking and to help you prayerfully rethink and reexamine — as you continue to humbly seek to know the fullness of God's way of love.

**THIRD**, take what you've learned from those scholars and others who reject or question the ECT tradition, and then go back to *reexamine* what the New Testament writers actually said about the afterlife. Re-read the four NT Gospels in the light of what you've learned. Directly check out the NT passages in the Epistles and the Revelation that are often used to claim ECT. Consider the many NT metaphors and word-pictures used for the final consequence that often portray opposite images: "fire", "darkness", "second death", "destroy", etc.

**FOURTH**, do it all in a humble attitude of prayer. By that, I simply mean a heart motive that's *open* to God to help you come to comprehend and enjoy what Paul prayed for everyone in Ephesians 3:18-21.

**"For this reason** I bow my knees before the Father, from whom **every family** in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he **may grant you** to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell **in your hearts**

through faith— that you, **being rooted and grounded in love**, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and **to know the love** of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be **filled** with all the **fullness** of God. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

**Ephesians 3:14-21**

### **A FEW RESOURCES TO START YOUR RE-EXAMINATION OF THE EVIDENCE**

Below is a list of a few resources I recommend, as a good start. In our technological, social media age, sadly reading and studying are becoming a fading skill. Remember, it is called “iron-sharpening”, and it’s the only way to dialog with scholars and others who are out of your isolated sphere of influence.

***RETHINKING HELL: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism.*** Edited by Christopher M. Date, Gregory G. Stump, and Joshua W. Anderson

***A CONSUMING PASSION: Essays on Hell and Immortality in Honor of Edward Fudge.*** Edited by Christopher M. Date and Ron Highfield

***THE FIRE THAT CONSUMES: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment.*** 3rd edition. Foreword by FF Bruce.

***HELL A FINAL WORD: THE SURPRISING TRUTHS I FOUND IN THE BIBLE.***  
Edward Fudge

***THAT ALL SHALL BE SAVED: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation.***

**David Bentley Hart PhD. *Univ. of Cambridge (MPhil); Univ. of Virginia (PhD)***

“[A] stunningly strong attack on the idea of eternal torment. . . . Bracing in the extreme - a sturdy assault on an unappealing doctrine using vivid language and wide learning.”  
Quoted praise by Dwight A. Moody, The Meetinghouse

***DESTINED FOR JOY: The Gospel of Universal Salvation.*** Alvin Kimel.

“Al Kimel puts brilliantly the argument for full Christianity that has too rarely been made in the past.”

Quoted praise by John Milbank, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Nottingham

***THE GOODNESS OF GOD.*** John Wenham. <https://www.amazon.com/goodness-God-John-William-Wenham/dp/0851113133> <https://www.truthaccordingtoscripture.com/documents/death/hell-wenham>

***THE CASE FOR ANNIHILATIONISM.*** Greg Boyd. <https://reknew.org/2008/01/the-case-for-annihilationism/>