



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting *every man* perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume 31
Issue 758

The Fallacy of Post-Mortem “Punishment” in Light of a Successful Savior

by — Mike Owens

CAN THERE BE “PUNISHMENT” AFTER DEATH IF JESUS IS THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD?

Several logical, philosophical and biblical explanations exist to demonstrate that the notion of “punishment” after death is a flawed concept. Before we explore these, it’s important to recognize that Paul teaches with clarity in Acts 24:15 that the resurrection is for all, not just a mere few.

... *There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.*

Paul made this so simple and straightforward that religious leaders sought to stone him.

This truth is also apparent in Romans 11:32,¹ 5:18-19;² I John 2:2;³ I Corinthians 15:22;⁴ I Timothy 4:10;⁵

1. “For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.”
2. “Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of One the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous.”
3. “And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”
4. “But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at His coming.”
5. “For therefore we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe.”



John 3:17,⁶ and many other passages. We can rest assured of a restored, physical and conscious existence *after death* – in resurrection.

It is quite important to understand that passages of Scripture that *seem* to indicate some form of “punishment” after our death can – and should be – investigated quite thoroughly and satisfactorily.⁷

The following might help us to understand why “punishment”⁸ after death is problematic, based on biblical study and simple logic.⁹

- 1 -

POST-MORTEM “PUNISHMENT” VOIDS THE WORK OF CHRIST

We know that Christ came *as the perfect Lamb* to take away the sin of the world.

6. “For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved.”
7. Cf., Tentmaker.org, TheHellVerses.com, or TheBVBS.com. Many great books relating to the success of our Savior and His unconditional mercy can also be found at :
<http://www.studysshelf.com/hell.htm>
8. Whether it be under the guise of punitive “vengeance,” “retribution,” “chastisement,” “penance,” “casting out,” “getting one’s just deserts,” “correction” or “judgment.”
9. Yes, “logic” — as in reason, judgment, logical thought, rationality, wisdom, good sense, common sense, etc. “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD” (Isaiah 1:18).



Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

-3-

If sin is removed by our penance or punishment, then the Lamb of God's death could easily be interpreted as having been tragically unnecessary. If we assume that our Savior's work was a great start, but incomplete without us doing our part, then we might also assume that human punishment after death could possibly be the crowning completion of His unfinished effort. However, this is absurd; our Savior was, and is, entirely successful and sufficient.

-2-

“RETRIBUTION” AFTER RESURRECTION ASSUMES THAT SIN WILL BE PRESENT

Could it be that our Creator would resurrect us into sin – with a sinful nature? We have only a few Scriptures to tell us the details about our resurrection, but it certainly seems inconceivable that we will awaken to find ourselves with rebellious hearts and minds.

BELIEF IN POST-MORTEM “PUNISHMENT” IS INCONSISTENT WITH CHRIST’S PATTERN OF FORGIVENESS – SEVENTY TIMES SEVEN!

In Matthew 18:22¹⁰ Jesus tells Peter to forgive others seventy times seven. If Jesus taught others to forgive like this, why should we assume that God is not going to *forgive* all? Jesus did not tell Peter to forgive them “if” they ask for forgiveness or “if” they do something to deserve it. This forgiveness is unconditional.

Forgiveness wins hearts, not punishment.

-4-

POST-MORTEM “PUNISHMENT” TRIVIALIZES THE POWER OF LOVE – IN PARTICULAR, GOD’S LOVE

10. Jesus saith unto him, “I say not to you, ‘Until seven times:’ but, ‘Until seventy times seven.’”

Bible Student’s Notebook™

Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

ISSN: 1936-9360

Volume 31, No. 758 – February 18, 2019

Scripture education in a weekly format!

This free electronic publication is dedicated to:

- the absolute sovereignty and deity of God (Romans 11:36);
- the proclamation of the riches of God’s abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation that God will save all through the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the “preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret in ages past” (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the Body of Christ (Ephesians 3:1-3);
- the Secret Administration, being the operational revelation for today (Ephesians 3:9);
- the unprophesied, Celestial hope and calling of the Body of Christ (Colossians 3:4);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Ephesians 3:1-3);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);

- union in His death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6);
- adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

This publication is the product of humble efforts of ordinary men intended to stimulate the earnest study of Scripture. We do not claim infallibility for the contents of this publication, thus they are not meant to imply finality on any subject discussed, or that further research would not add further light from the Word of God. God’s storehouse of truth is inexhaustible, so draw on its wealth by prayerful study. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

This publication is not connected with any “church,” “denomination,” “movement,” “organization,” “mission,” “creed,” “meeting,” “school,” “conference” or “fellowship.”

Bible Student’s Notebook™

PO Box 265, Windber, PA 15963

Office: (800) 784-6010 – Local: (814) 701-0063

bsn@studyshef.com

Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr. – Editor
André Sneidar – Managing Editor
Keith Martin – Associate Editor

Managers and Assistants

Clyde L. Pilkington, III, Nathan H. Pilkington, Janet L. Maher, Stephen Hill, Cindy Pilkington, Nadine Sneidar

For definitions of abbreviations/acronyms, see index after the order form.

Copyright © 1989-2019 Bible Student’s Press™

Such “punishment” assumes that God’s presence will not be the source of transformation, and gives credit to pain and suffering – or even some degree of “discipline” – as the means of changing hearts. Physical or mental pain might modify behavior, but the presence and understanding of love transforms hearts. Our Lord wants our hearts, not our altered behavior. True behavior modification comes from transformed hearts – not chastisement.

-5-

POST-MORTEM “PUNISHMENT” MEANS THAT GOD AND HIS SON MUST BE A FAILURE OR CRUEL

Belief in post-mortem “punishment” necessarily implies that the Savior of the world either *can’t* save us, or He’s *not willing* to do so. The idea of post-mortem “punishment” suggests that Jesus is either unkind, or His venture to save the world – not to condemn it, as we read in John 3:17 – just didn’t pan out.

The sovereign Creator – omnipotent and omniscient – has the power to save. To assume that He doesn’t simply makes Him unaware, unable or unwilling.

-6-

PAUL DECLARES THAT THE RESULT OF SIN IS DEATH, NOT POST-MORTEM “PUNISHMENT”

Paul shows us, in his letter to the Romans, that the

result of sin is death.¹¹ Nowhere does the apostle to the Gentiles indicate that any form of “punishment” after death awaits those who pass from this life as non-believers.

Paul was the first to make it clear that we are *universally* sinners as a consequence of our birth – by means of the lineage of Adam. He also proclaims that those in Adam have been brought into the lineage of the Last Adam.¹² We did nothing to acquire our position as a descendant of Adam, nor can we do anything to be given our status as adopted children of the Last Adam – Christ Jesus. *Belief* does not bring about this adoption from Adam to the Last Adam. Our new position within the lineage of Christ is the result of our loving and merciful creator. While belief is important, it simply brings us into a place of appreciation. Our attitude, as believers, is the result of what He has done – not the trigger that releases His mercy.

-7-

VENGEANCE BY GOD ON HIS CREATURES PRESUMES THAT MEN ARE SOMEHOW THE MASTERS OF THEIR OWN DESTINY

Simply stated, God created us and He created our environment. Every aspect of our lives is within His sight and power. He knew us before we were born and orchestrated thousands of events that enabled each of our births to occur. He has *never* been surprised by the heart, mind or actions of a single indi-

11. “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is age-biding life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

12. “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive ... The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit” (1 Corinthians 15:22, 45).



48 pp., PB

See order form.

The Fallacy of Post Mortem Punishment in Light of a Successful Savior

by — Mike Owens

This is a summary of the biblical, logical and philosophical reasons by which the author has abandoned the notion of hell or punishment after death. God is an all-powerful God of love Who knows how to win hearts and minds. To assume that He needs to use physical or psychological pain in order to gain the admiration, love or loyalty of His creatures is an insult to His sovereignty and wisdom. Like Thomas and Paul – who came to believe by something they saw and experienced, not by faith – everyone, even the Hitlers and Stalins of this world, will experience PRA – Post Resurrection Amazement.

vidual. He is sovereign; we are not.

Everyone who has died “without Christ” has done so as no surprise to our Creator and Sustainer. To assume that anyone who “goes to hell” gets there by their own free will is absurd. We are not the One Who is in charge.

While we may be beguiled by the idea of “free will,” and it certainly *seems* to be a reality, one hundred percent of our “free will” decisions are perfectly in line with God’s will. Our experience of “free will” is similar to a three-year-old sitting on his daddy’s lap while driving around in a parking lot; the child thinks he’s driving, but daddy really has control of the car.

To say that God is going to “punish” His creatures after resurrecting them would imply the following about Him:

- A. He is not really in control of His creation;
- B. He is a brute.

Some may recoil *at this point*, but this is not an argument to assert that our God is a brute. This is simply stating that a “god” who would create people with feelings, consciousness and sensitivities, and then place them into an environment which he designed which ends in a place of endless torment, is *not* God. That kind of “god” would fall into the category of a monster.

-8-

IT’S CONJECTURE THAT “PUNISHMENT” WILL LEAD US TO CHRIST

To assume that pain, misery and suffering will some-

The Personal Study Journal



With 1,200 lined pages, this Bible-looking journal is great for taking study notes. It is 8.75×6×1

and is bound in a stylish black leather cover with silver gilding. *See order form.*

how win our hearts is absurd. Jesus won the loyalty and love of His followers during His earthly ministry with kindness, understanding and unconditional love.¹³

Physical or mental torment is not our Savior’s approach. Behavior modification is not our Creator’s purpose here. He wins hearts, and any changes in conduct are a result of His love. When we see our humble Savior and His magnificent sacrifice and we recognize His teaching that not one sheep will be lost, our hearts are truly changed. Love wins!

It’s a sad assumption that the idea of post-mortem punishment leads to one, or perhaps both, of these:

- A. A wearing down of the “lost” individual until they finally resign from their rebellion. In some way they are brought to the point of giving in or “crying uncle” – and finally become repentant.
- B. That this punishment or discipline after the resurrection is a form of justice – a means of providing the worst individuals a chastisement that is more severe or longer, depending on their level or degree of sin.

Neither one of these ideas work in light of our loving Savior. The resurrection, for each of us individually, will be such an exhilarating and mind-blowing experience that our hearts will be transformed by His forgiveness and mercy – just as quickly as the Roman soldier who crucified Jesus. When this centurion looked up at Jesus, his eyes were suddenly opened and he said, “*Surely, this is the Son of God!*”

Neither of these two views is reflective of our Creator’s characteristics of love and sovereignty. They both imply that God is vindictive and/or in need of man’s willingness in order to accomplish His plan to bring all to Himself.

¹³. He does warn the religious elite of impending doom in their lifetime, which did occur from 67-70 A.D.; but nowhere in His ministry do we see coercion.

-9-

POST-MORTEM “PUNISHMENT” DIMINISHES CHRIST’S FINISHED WORK AND HIS GLORY

The assumption that a certain degree of “punishment” or “discipline” is needed in order for some folks finally to be saved implies that Christ’s work is not sufficient. If something more is needed or required from *us*, then our praise for Him will be diminished. If it is *our* wisdom, *our* willingness to accept or *our* decision to repent and trust in Him that saves us, then this is a semblance of us doing OUR PART.

If something is required from *us* for Jesus to save us, then it’s a partnership and the accomplishment of our salvation is *not* all His. The notion that our salvation is a form of “decisional regeneration” (*i.e.*, the moment of salvation occurs when one makes the *choice* to *accept* Christ) promotes the misunderstanding that God needs our help – or at least our acceptance.

Christ’s work on the cross *was* finished! We have a *successful* Savior.

-10-

ADAM IS THE SOURCE OF DEATH; CHRIST IS THE SOURCE OF LIFE!

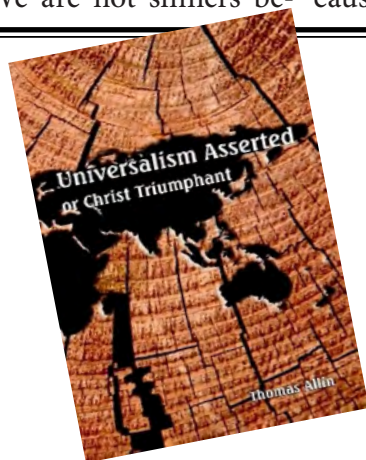
We are not sinners because of our own sin. We

are sinners due to our lineage. All of mankind has inherited death from Adam. This is the primary and basic teaching of the Apostle Paul in the 3rd, 4th and 5th chapters of his letter to the Romans.

Paul explains this in Romans 5:12-19.

When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam’s sin brought death so death spread to everyone – and yes we sinned. People sinned even before the law was given. But it was not counted as sin because there was not yet any law to break. Still, everyone died – from the time of Adam to the time of Moses – even those who did not disobey an explicit commandment of God.

Adam is a symbol, a representation of Christ, who was yet to come. But there is a great difference between Adam’s sin and God’s gracious gift. For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many. But even greater is God’s wonderful grace and His gift of forgiveness to many through this other man Jesus Christ. And the result of God’s gracious gift is very different from the result of that one man’s sin. For Adam’s sin led to condemnation, but God’s free gift leads to our being made right with God, even though we are guilty of many sins. For the sin of this one man Adam caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God’s wonderful grace and His gift of righteousness.



336 pp., PB

See order form.

Universalism Asserted (or Christ Triumphant)

by — Thomas Allin (1838–1909)

Allin was a Church of Ireland clergyman, graduate of Trinity College, Dublin and botanical naturalist. He was influenced by the work of Hosea Ballou. He originally published *Universalism Asserted* in 1890; which answers the question of questions: Can evil triumph finally over Good? If we answer affirmatively with the popular creed, we are practically falling into Dualism; but if we reply in the negative, we are teaching the universal salvation of all. Men strive to save the popular creed by various modifications: by diminishing the number of the lost, by softening their torments or by asserting their annihilation. What are all these but so many tacit confessions that men everywhere feel it impossible to maintain the creed still generally professed? This early work on universal reconciliation deals with these things, and more, including much interesting church history.

Yes, Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but the Last Adam – Christ Jesus' one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone. "Because one person disobeyed God, many became sinners. But because ONE obeyed God, the many will be made righteous" (New Living Translation).

No one made the choice to be born. We didn't choose our parents, and we certainly did not decide to be "in Adam." So, what makes us think that we could possibly be responsible for the miraculous eventual transfer: having our lineage switched from Adam to the Last Adam, Jesus Christ?

Our transfer is the loving and merciful work of our mighty Creator Who fully planned Adam's fall in the garden and sent His Son as the Savior of the world.

God's law was given so that all people could see how sinful they were. But as people sinned more and more, God's wonderful grace became more abundant. So just as sin ruled over all people and brought them to death, now God's wonderful grace rules instead, giving us right standing with God and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 5:20-21).

A Few Additional Thoughts:

SO, WHAT ABOUT SIN AND ITS RESULTS?

We see the results of sin all around, especially on the news. Even though "hell" is not an accurate biblical term in the original texts, perhaps there is a small degree of truth to the notion of "hell," but it's what is experienced in this life. We can think of it with this acronym:

D.U.E. — DIFFICULT UNPLEASANT EXPERIENCES

This is what we experience in this life: difficult and unpleasant experiences. Even though we have many troubles and pain in this life, it still seems unfair. Shouldn't Hitler get more than a self-inflicted bullet to the head? If that's the end of his "punishment," then how can we say God is just?

That's a good question. But we should also ask our-

selves (assuming a belief in eternal torment), why should a sweet grandmother who loved her family and helped everyone around her, who never knew Christ, burn in hell or be cast into outer darkness?

It's important to remember that the word *judgment* means to make or set right, rectify or put back on course. It is a straightening out.

Also, the greatest expression of *justice* is mercy.¹⁴

IF GRACE IS CONDITIONAL, CAN IT BE CALLED "GRACE"?

What is grace? It is *the free and unmerited favor of God*. It is simply an expression of God's love with no conditions or prerequisites on our part. None!

Man's definition of unconditional is: *Not subject to any conditions*. Its synonyms are: *unqualified, unre-served, unlimited, unrestricted, unmitigated, unquestioning; complete, total, entire, full, absolute, out-and-out, unequivocal*.

Religion's definition of "grace" assumes that we must *do* something. However, even if it's as simple as "acceptance" – then it is no longer *unconditional*.

Paul talks about "grace" over 140 times in his letters, yet nowhere do we read of *conditional* grace.

Some confuse *faith* as if it is a condition of grace. This is due to some English translations that say we are "justified by our faith." However, the Greek texts make it clear that we are "*justified by the faith of Christ*," not *our* faith. The faith that God gives to us enables us to appreciate and understand His grace, but it does *not* trigger or impute His *unconditional* mercy.

SHOULD PAUL, THE CHIEF OF SINNERS, BE "PUNISHED"?

Assuming that post-resurrection "punishment" *exists*, any pain or suffering that might be experienced would be the result of a person's attitude and deeds in this life. Whether this "punishment" was inflicted

¹⁴. "Justice and judgment are the habitation of Your throne: mercy and truth shall go before Your face" (Psalm 89:14).

for the purpose of retribution, restitution or reformation, it then seems to follow that the worst of sinners should suffer the most severe misery.

This would mean that the self-declared *chief of sinners*¹⁵ should certainly be “punished.” However, if one reasons that Paul should not be “punished” – given that he was a believer – then that reasoning leads us to the conclusion that he was able to escape this assumed “punishment.”

If one reasons that Paul, as well as all of those who are *believers* in Christ, will be shown mercy – not “punishment” – after death, then according to *that* reasoning, given that “punishment” is assumed, God “punishes” His creatures for their unbelief and He withholds His mercy from those whom *He* did not bring to *Himself* in this life. Keep in mind, *God* is the one opening hearts and minds to believe.

Remember, too, that Paul was on His way to arrest and kill Christians when He was stopped by a miraculous event. Perhaps this miraculous event was a precursor to the event everyone – even Hitler – will experience when resurrected!

TO ASSUME THAT OTHERS DESERVE “PUNISHMENT” IS AN ATTITUDE OF ARROGANCE AND CONTEMPT

One of the most common complaints against the church by skeptics and atheists is the self-righteous attitude seen among so many. Unfortunately, it’s true that many see themselves as better than others, whether it’s because they have been living a “godly” life or because they see themselves as being among the “elect.” This can be unconscious and subtle. This self-induced perspective certainly carries a view of the “afterlife” with the idea that the lost deserve to be “punished,” and perhaps their “punishment” is deserved simply for “not accepting Christ.”

These contemptuous Christians seem to have the exact attitude of the older brother in Jesus’ parable of the Prodigal Son: the older brother believed his brother didn’t deserve the feast and honor he re-

ceived from their father. Nothing, however, will be more indicative of our Father’s *love* and *mercy* than the presence of people like Hitler and Stalin at a banquet feast in the restored world that’s coming.

The most shocking aspect of some Christians is the degree to which they seem to treasure their view of hell and eternal torment for the “lost.” When given the opportunity to explore the possibility that their view of hell might be wrong, they often resist and rush to their position of loathing.

I know, because I was just such a Christian for many decades.

“PUNISHMENT” AFTER DEATH IS INCONSISTENT WITH OUR UNDERSTANDING OF HOW INDIVIDUALS BECOME BELIEVERS

Serious philosophical or logical lines of reasoning exist for those who believe in “purgatory” or some form of “second-chance” salvation.

While some (Calvinists) believe that God is the one who opens the eyes and hearts of a select group, and others (among them, Arminians) teach that the lost are given limited opportunities to “come to faith” – while these opportunities are granted periodically during one’s lifetime – *both* promote the idea that it is the work of *God* that enables people to become believers. Therefore, it is normally agreed that it is a work of the *Holy Spirit* that initiates belief.

If this is the case, then, it is God’s hand that directs “unbelievers” in their predicament. Bluntly stated, it’s God’s “fault” that they’re “lost.” However, it is also in His power to reveal Himself, His love, His mercy and kindness to all at the resurrection.

We can think of it with this acronym:

P.R.A. — POST-RESURRECTION AMAZEMENT!

Some come to believe in the risen Savior by faith, others by sight.

For eight days the disciple Thomas stubbornly refused to believe the good news of Jesus’ resurrection.

15. “*This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief*” (1 Timothy 1:15).

His close friends told him that they had seen Jesus alive, yet he *refused* to believe. He had no *faith* even though it was his companions who saw and talked with the risen Jesus. When Jesus appeared to Thomas, Jesus told him to see and touch. Thomas came to believe, *not* by faith – but by sight.

Those who do not know Jesus in this life won't need faith to believe. They will *see* and they'll be invited to touch His wounds.

SOME PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE TO CONSIDER AS YOU CONTEMPLATE THE SUBJECT OF GOD'S RELENTLESS LOVE AND UNCONDITIONAL MERCY

For as in Adam ALL die, even so also in Christ ALL will be made alive (I Corinthians 15:22).

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the WHOLE WORLD (I John 2:2).

You do not stay angry forever, but DELIGHT to show mercy (Micah 7:18).

We have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son to be the SAVIOR OF THE WORLD (I John 4:14).

God has consigned ALL to disobedience - that He may have mercy on ALL (Romans 11:32).

Because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of ALL men, especially those who believe (I Timothy 4:10).

I, if I am lifted up, I will draw ALL men to myself (John 12:32).

God sent His Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but to SAVE THE WORLD (John 3:17).

If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though HE HIMSELF WILL BE SAVED (I Corinthians 3:15).

The Lord's loving kindnesses indeed NEVER CEASE, for His compassions NEVER FAIL (Lamentations 3:22).

Jesus was made a little lower than the angels, but we see Him crowned with glory and honor because He suffered death. Through God's kindness He died on behalf of EVERYONE (Hebrews 2:9).

Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. For HIS LOVINGKINDNESS IS EVERLASTING (Psalm 118:1).

The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the WORLD (John 1:29).

*The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and great in lovingkindness. The Lord is good to ALL. His mercies are over ALL His works (Psalm 145:8-9). **BSN***

TOPICS:

Major: Salvation of All; Hell; Lake of Fire; Punishment; Judgment

Minor: Resurrection



70 pp., PB.

God 101: Back to Basics

by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

Sadly, there are some who would teach of a god who somehow does not know all things, is not all powerful, is not sovereign, and is always changing his mind. This may be a god of religion, but it is not the God of Scripture. This work goes back to the basics, back to a scriptural foundation of the True and Living God.

See order form.