

# Language Corrections Recommended for All Christians George F. Howe

This essay is directed to sincere Christians who have heard about the “consummation” (I Corinthians 15:28) wherein God becomes “all in all,” but have rejected the concept of ultimate salvation for all people. They have looked carefully at the other Bible passages discussing ultimate reconciliation for all people, such as Romans 5:18 and 19. For many reasons, however, they interpret these passages differently. So *relax*—this essay is not simply an attempt to convert you away from the idea that dead lost people will experience eternal torment. It is an attempt instead to advise you to avoid

certain misleading English terms when describing the ultimate condition of those who die in an unregenerate condition. These problem words are, for the most part, *mistranslations* of actual Greek and Hebrew words. In some cases, however, they include *derived phrases which appear nowhere in scripture* but are nonetheless widely used, phrases for which viable and more accurate alternatives exist.

## **Remove the Word “Hell” from English Bibles**

The word “hell” should be replaced in every instance by the particular Greek or Hebrew term it was supposed to represent—*hades*, *geenah*, *tartaroo*, or *sheol*. These ancient nouns can speak for themselves in English Bibles. Each

has a consistent meaning, which differs markedly from concepts surrounding our modern word “hell,” a word which has no unique, single counterpart in the original languages.\*. Bible students should simply become familiar with the Greek or Hebrew terms and use them like we do with so many other Greek or Hebrew words. Such a step forward has already been taken by using the word *hades* in the NIV New Testament.

The word “hell” conjures up a host of lurid images from many non-biblical sources including pagan mythology, Roman Catholic theology, unbridled artistic imagination, and undisciplined gospel “pulpiterring.” Substituting one of the four original words would allow English readers to analyze the whole

issue more intelligently. The KJV Bible has used the word “hell” 31 times in the Old Testament to translate the Hebrew term *sheol*. But in all 31 cases the NIV translators used some other term that is closer to the true meaning of *sheol*—such as “death” or “grave”. As a result, “hell” is entirely gone from the NIV Old Testament, as well it should be.

The translators of the NASB also removed the word “hell” from the entire Old Testament. Why did both teams of translators make this significant deletion? They probably realized that *sheol* has nothing to do with our modern word “hell” but refers instead to the imperceptible state of dead people.

The NIV translators went a step further by using the Greek word *hades* in the New Testament on five different occasions where the KJV and the NASB had both used “hell”. Again, why was this important change made? The translators likely did so because the Greek *hades* is the exact equivalent of the Hebrew word *sheol* as is evident in the Septuagint. Having used words other than “hell” for *sheol* in the Old Testament, the only consistent thing to do is to stop using “hell” to translate *hades*. Unfortunately the NIV translators persisted in using the word “hell” for *geenna*—a New Testament word referring to an ancient area for burning garbage and corpses outside of the old city of Jerusalem. Instead they should have simply used *geenna*.

## Change the Translations of *Olam, Aion, and Aionios*

Next, the Hebrew word *olam* and its Greek counterpart *aion* always deal with a definite span of time—an “age” or an “aeon.” It is peculiar that whether they are used in the singular or the plural, alone or in conjunction with other words, as nouns or in their adjectival forms—they are regularly rendered “forever,” “forever and ever,” “eternal,” etc. in English Bibles, definite errors in translation. God deals with people in clear-cut ages or aeons. At least three of these have already elapsed: from Adam to the Flood, from the Flood to Abraham, and from Abraham to Christ. We are now in another eon known as the “Age of Grace” from Christ’s first coming to His second coming. The last

two eons are yet to come: the Millenium (1000 years) and the New Heaven/New Earth Eon of unrevealed duration. The last eon does come to an end, however, and that end is depicted in I Corinthians 15:20-28 (especially verse 28). Hence *olam*, *aion*, *aionios*, and related phrases should be rendered *age*, *ages*, *aeon*, *aeons*, *age (or ages) of the ages*, *aeon (or aeons) of the aeons*, etc.—just as they appear in the original languages. Not once do they designate the many “eternals”, “forevers”, and “forever and evers” used in most English versions. *Young’s Literal Translation* is a worthy example wherein all of these words have been translated in keeping with the original languages—it is available free on-line.

The continued use of these wrong word-translations for centuries has produced a cluster of unfounded, non-biblical catch phrases which believers ought to avoid because they are mere eschatological jargon: “eternal torment,” “banished (or separated) from God forever and ever,” “forever too late,” “spend eternity in a devil’s hell,” “everlasting punishment,” “forever apart from God,” “unending torment in hell,” “spiritual death,” “eternal death,” “a living death,” “eternal burning fire,” etc. These expressions should be banished from Gospel preaching.

Brethren who reject total salvation ought also to stop where scripture stops, concerning the ultimate future of folk who die unsaved. Such lost individuals

are said to face God's indignation, which is going to come to an end (Isaiah 10:24-25). They will also stand at God's great white judgment throne (Revelation 20:11) where they will be judged wisely, according to their works (Revelation 20:12-19.) This judgment, like all other judgments, will lead to righteousness (Isaiah 26:9b.) Lost human beings will be consigned to a lake of divine fire, the exact nature or purpose of which are not discussed to any great length in the Bible except for Revelation 20:14 which says that the lake of fire is the "second death." I Corinthians 15:26 and 54 further state that death (unqualified) will be put down, rendered powerless, or swallowed up in victory. The second death is itself a "death" and not a never-ending living exile or torment, so we

realize that it too will be put down, like any other “death.” Hosea 13:14 adds that people are ransomed from the power of sheol. To go beyond these Bible facts is to indulge in unvarnished speculation. Although you may not accept the ultimate reconciliation of all people, please do not add human myth to scripture, and please control your language when dealing with God’s Word.

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