

Doctrinal Paper on Satan's Fate

By Roger Waite

In the United Church of God booklet "Fundamentals of Beliefs" the following is stated about Satan the Devil:

"Just as Satan's actions are limited by God's will, his time is also limited. He is presently the 'god of this world' (2 Corinthians 4:4; John 12:31). He will be removed and bound throughout the millennial reign of the Messiah, then released for a short while at the end of the 1,000 years (Revelation 20:1-3, 7-8). **Satan will not cease to exist, but will be 'rendered powerless' by the Messiah (Hebrews 2:14, New American Standard Bible). The word translated 'destroy' in this verse most often means 'to render idle' or 'inoperative.'**

The United Church of God's official position on the fate of Satan is that because he is a spirit being he will continue to exist forever but be rendered powerless as opposed to being completely destroyed and cease to exist like those incorrigible humans who are thrown into the lake of fire.

Now this teaching has been accepted based primarily on one verse found in the Book of Revelation. We find that verse in Revelation 20:10 where it plainly says,

"And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be **tormented day and night for ever and ever.**"

Now that verse seems to plainly tell us that Satan will be tormented for all eternity once he is thrown into the lake of fire.

If we go back a few chapters in the same book to Revelation 14:9-11 we read:

"If any man worship the beast and his image....he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb. **And the smoke of their torment ascends up FOREVER AND EVER: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receives the mark of his name.**"

It says here that the smoke of the torment of those men who worship the beast will go up forever and ever. Do these men writhe in agony for all eternity along with the demons?

The UCG booklet "What Happens After Death?" gives us the answer to this question on page 37. As we go through the answer we should realize that the same answer can just as easily apply to Satan and the demons since the identical phrase is used in both passages in the Book of Revelation.

I quote now from page 37 of "What Happens After Death?" :-

“Will the Wicked Be Tormented Forever?”

”He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name’ (Revelation 14:10-11).

“At first glance, this may seem to confirm the traditional idea of a seething, sulfurous hellfire, mercilessly and eternally tormenting helpless immortal souls. But, if we don't already hold to that mental picture of hell, we can see that this passage describes a quite different circumstance.

“First, notice that the smoke of their torment ascends forever; it does not say that their torment continues forever. Smoke is what remains of the burned bodies of those who worshiped ‘the beast and his image’ (verse 9), the political and false religious system Jesus will destroy and replace at His return.

“Other passages clarify that the wicked will be destroyed and become ashes under the feet of the righteous: “For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,” says the LORD of hosts, “that will leave them neither root nor branch. But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves. You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this,” says the LORD of Hosts’ (Malachi 4:1-3).

“The reference in Revelation 14:11 to these who are wicked receiving ‘no rest day or night’ is speaking of those who continue to worship the beast and his image. Once they are thrown into this hellfire, they will be burned up and will no longer be alive to be tormented.

“Notice David's comment that the wicked will not be tormented forever, but will go up ‘into smoke’ and perish.- ‘But the wicked shall perish; and the enemies of the LORD, like the splendor of the meadows, shall vanish. Into smoke they shall vanish away’ (Psalm 37:20).

“The unrepentant wicked, who knowingly refuse to accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and refuse to submit to, obey and worship God the Father, will be destroyed by fire. The smoke of their torment will rise ‘forever,’ meaning that nothing will stop or prevent it. The Greek word translated ‘forever’ does not always mean eternity or infinity. It can simply refer to something that will not be stopped, that will continue as long as conditions permit.”

Why can't this explanation be used for Revelation 20:10 regarding the fate of Satan and the demons? Given that there are millions of angels it will take many days and nights to judge and sentence and cast them into the lake of fire. Since they are spirit beings and fire is a physical burning agent what is the point of even casting them into the lake of fire in the first place if it is not able to affect them?

It certainly appears that "forever" should be rendered age-lasting or while the conditions last, like in Exodus 21:6 which talks about someone who is a slave "forever" - that is, only until he dies. Revelation 19:3 has smoke rising forever, yet it continues only while there are things to burn and finally dissipates, not rising above the atmosphere. It appears that Satan and the demons will be tormented "forever" - until they lose consciousness and die! The Greek word "aeonian" can and often means "age-lasting," or "so long as the conditions exist." This tormenting will go on

for many days and nights as there will be many demons over a period of time who will receive their punishment at this time in the future.

In the September 25, 1997 issue of the Journal there appeared an article by Bruce Lyon who raised some questions about certain points of Mr Armstrong's understanding in his book "The Incredible Human Potential". He touched on the question of Satan's fate by stating:

"As a result of God's lack of foresight (and of course I am speaking here as a fool), one third of all the angels, along with Satan, must writhe in agony for eternity because of God's inability to prepare a proper plan for them."

This quote begs a very important question. "Why did God create angels if He knew they could not be destroyed should they choose the way of sin?" **If angels could not be destroyed then this implies God made a huge mistake of not preparing a merciful way of dealing with them should they choose the way of sin.**

This is one doctrine I believe the church seriously needs to re-evaluate. I believe the Bible does show a clear case for Satan and the demons being destroyed - at least a much stronger case than that of being tormented/rendered powerless for eternity as per the current advertised teaching in the Fundamentals of Belief booklet.

The case for Satan and the demons not being able to be destroyed is built upon three scriptures - Revelation 20:10, Jude 13 and Luke 20:36. We've just covered Revelation 20:10. Let's look at the other two verses.

Jude 13 talks about "wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever." Does this mean that the demons will wander the universe aimlessly for all eternity? That depends on what you mean by the term blackness of darkness. Blackness of darkness is a term that can also mean **unconsciousness – ceasing to exist.**

When Jesus said that of those in the resurrection, that they "cannot die any more: for they are equal unto the angels" (Luke 20:36), does this mean angels cannot 'die' because they are immortal spirit beings? All it says is that angels of God IN HEAVEN (see the parallel passage in Matthew 22:30), who did not rebel against God, who proved themselves to be loyal, cannot 'die' a natural death! This means that since they proved themselves loyal to God, He will ALLOW them to live forever, and they will not die.

Since we know God can die (Rev. 1:18) by being made into flesh and being killed in the person of Jesus Christ, cannot God also convert the demons into physical bodies which will also die?

In Mark 1:23-24 we read, "And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to **DESTROY** us?" The demons asked Jesus if He was going to destroy them. **If they couldn't be destroyed why would they ask this question?** It appears that those demons will be destroyed but not ahead of schedule.

Another passage of scripture that talks about Satan and what will become of him is found in Ezekiel 28 from verse 12 through to verse 19 which I will quote in full below.

“Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty.

Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created.

Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire.

Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee.

By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: **therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I WILL DESTROY THEE, O COVERING CHERUB,** from the midst of the stones of fire.

Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee.

Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffic; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, IT SHALL DEVOUR THEE, AND I WILL BRING THEE TO ASHES UPON THE EARTH IN THE SIGHT OF ALL THEM THAT BEHOLD THEE.

All they that know thee among the people shall be astonished at thee: thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be any more.”

It is somewhat of a reach to believe that in verse 18 that God has shifted from talking about Satan (the King of Tyre) back to the prince of Tyre as some believe. Was the ruler of Tyre in ancient times burned in the sight of all? The context of verse 18 appears to plainly be referring to the King of Tyre, not the human prince of Tyre who the first half of the chapter covered.

Mr Armstrong taught us one of the rules of Bible interpretation was to understand the more difficult, unclear scriptures in the light of the plain, clearer scriptures. Revelation 20:10 can be better understood in the light of this clearer, more detailed passage of scripture in Ezekiel 28.

Ezekiel 28:18-19 strongly implies that Satan will be destroyed by fire. The Book of Enoch, which may be partly historical/inspired(?) also says that the demons will burn and perish (Enoch 10:15-17).

God does not believe in prisons (for long) but capital punishment. I don't believe the God of love will permit torment of any being for eternity and believe there is a strong Biblical case to support that for the angels.

In the Journal article I made reference to earlier by Bruce Lyon he questioned whether we were God's backup plan as Mr Armstrong stated in the Incredible Human Potential.

In the article he stated the following :-

“Mr. Armstrong simply contends that God realized after the one third failed that He did not have a good plan for these beings. But not to worry. Since the first plan with the angels failed....We (God

and the Word) have a better plan on the shelf in case the first plan proved faulty beyond redemption: the reproduction of God Himself through mankind!

“Why would not God undertake this backup plan first? Why even bother with the questionable plan with the angels? We know that the angelic plan was questionable even before God implemented it, because God already had the plan with man prepared in case the angelic plan failed; see pages 61-62.

“Further, since the plan through mankind produces a far-superior product—sons of God in God's very own self-replicated family vs. just proven-righteous angels—why would God favor the angelic plan (had it been able to succeed) as the first plan? According to The Incredible Human Potential, had the angels succeeded then we humans would not have been needed....

“If a backup plan produces a superior result and is an inherently superior plan, would not an all-wise Creator implement such a plan in the first place?

I believe he really hit the nail on the head very well showing that the plan for God to reproduce Himself could not have been the backup plan if the angels failed to choose God's way.

The two points that prove this are:

- 1) The supposed “backup” plan produces a far better product than the first plan if it succeeds and man can be destroyed if we fail.
- 2) Two-thirds of the angels did succeed so there should not have been any need to create mankind in God's image if it was only the backup plan should the angelic plan fail.

Ellis Stewart in an article which appeared alongside (on page 29) the one that Bruce Lyon wrote in the Journal made these interesting comments about Mr Armstrong's changing views on this point:

“An assistant to Mr. Armstrong in the early 1980s had as part of his duties to review all the new correspondence-course lessons before they were published. The original version of one of the lessons included information about angels similar to that that later appeared in Human Potential, that God originally intended the angels to reign over the universe. This assistant felt this teaching was not correct, and he said so. In a meeting to discuss the points, Mr. Armstrong asked him why he felt the information was not right.

“This man gave two reasons:

“First, God says that He declares the end from the beginning and that His counsel will stand (Isaiah 46). But to think that God started with angels then saw belatedly that His first choice of plans wouldn't work and started over with humans, is the same as saying that God did not see the end from the beginning.

“Second, God's Word states in Romans 11 that ‘the gift and the calling of God are irrevocable.’ If God intended angels to be over the universe, sooner or later angels would be over the universe.”

“Mr. Armstrong agreed with these points when his assistant brought them up and directed that the lessons be changed accordingly. The correspondence course from 1981 on did not include

information about angels being placed over the universe.”

Though I am not sure of it, I believe that at the 1989 ministerial refresher program, Dr Hoeh came out and said that we were not the backup plan but that God had meant to reproduce Himself through mankind from the very beginning before Satan and his angels ever turned from obeying God.

This has never been clearly communicated to the membership of the church and something I believe the church should communicate its position on.

The UCG booklet “What is Man’s Destiny?”, as well as the relevant material in the correspondence course, start the story of man’s destiny from the Garden of Eden and do not cover any of the pre-history that led up to the events of the Garden of Eden.

A new member hasn’t got a single booklet that will ground him on the whole of God’s plan much like Mr Armstrong’s books “The Incredible Human Potential” and “Mystery of the Ages” did. I would like to encourage those in the church’s editorial department to rectify this situation by expanding the “What is Man’s Destiny?” booklet to cover the events that led up to the Garden of Eden.

I would like to encourage the Doctrinal Committee to discuss the subject of Satan’s fate and that the committee’s conclusion of it and material relating to God’s pre-existence, the creation of angels and how Lucifer became Satan and turned away a third of the angels from God’s ways be added to our booklet on man’s destiny.

In conclusion I would like to quote as an appendix an internet post that clearly gives some very solid reasons why Satan and the demons will be burned up in the lake of fire and cease to exist from that time forward.

APPENDIX

REASONS THAT SATAN WILL DIE

(An internet post that put was put on the RCG church forum)

1. God is compassionate and will not allow any being to suffer for all eternity. (Eternity is a long time--an understatement.) We have used this in the past declaring no human will go to an ever burning hell which never really burns but tortures.

2. The method of execution has already been accomplished with very God. Jesus died, surely angels can also if they sin. Their character or spirit projected into a physical body and then they are cremated. This is told in 1 Peter 3:18-20: Jesus, as the Word, warned that disobedient angels would suffer the same fate as He would, being made flesh and killed (though because of righteousness, He was brought back to life).

3. Mat. 25:41 Depart into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. The effect is everlasting, but the fire should be rendered age-lasting. No fire is going to

remain after all consumables are burned up. Sinners (angels or men) are slated to go into 'everlasting' punishment. Not punishing forever.

4. Rom. 6:23 The wages of sin is death, not continuous punishing. Same law and punishment for men and angels.

5. Satan will be brought to hell (sheol or the grave, Isa. 14:15; Ez. 28:18 a fire from his midst will burn him to ashes; Mal. 4:1,3).

6. Concerning the resurrection, Mat. 22:29-30 refers to the "angels of God in heaven". The righteous angels and overcoming humans will live forever. Satan's earth angels will not.

7. God would certainly have a means of getting rid of permanent sinners before creating any self-aware being. For their own good (continually in an unhappy state) and those righteous to live on.

8. Mark 1:24 conveys demons inquiring of Jesus if He was going to destroy them. Yes, but not ahead of schedule.

9. Rev. 20:7-10 has blocked understanding of Satan's future. He is to be tormented day and night, but night is to cease in the next world (21:25; 22:5). This happened immediately before Adam's World of Genesis chapter 1 when day ceased, only perpetual night. God had to create light in the atmosphere which was dark. "Forever" should be rendered age-lasting or age-during, while conditions last as Ex. 21:6 a slave 'forever', only until he dies. Rev. 19:3 has smoke rising forever, yet it continues only while there are things to burn and finally dissipates, not rising above the atmosphere.

10. Jude 6 of sinning angels is followed by 7 about Sodom's Fire. Wandering stars of 13 to whom is reserved blackness forever, should refer to angels as Rev. 1:20 'equates' them. Unconsciousness is blackout, outer darkness, sleep and death. No conscious thought.

11. God does not believe in prisons (for long) but capital punishment.

12. God can simply uncreate what He has created. He wants sinning angels (who cannot repent?) and men in the third resurrection to see what they missed out on before cremation. As someone put it, "All are cremated equal."

The God of love will not permit torment of any being for eternity.