

Response to CURE Objections

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INTRODUCTION

This essay is an edited compilation of several of the posts on my BLOG and articles on my website ^a, and therefore may contain some repetition.

As regular readers of my BLOG and WEBSITE would know, I usually write posts and articles promoting and explaining God's plan to eventually reconcile all His people, as clearly expressed by the Apostle Paul:

Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself. God made peace through his Son's blood on the cross and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven.

[Colossians 1 : 20 GNB]

However, there is much opposition to this view.

Statements of Faith of many mainline churches and the writings of pastors, Bible commentators and theological academics who don't believe God will be that successful pop up all the time, so you may have seen my reaction to those opinions in some of my UR posts and articles.

Naturally those responses will attempt to expose the weaknesses in the arguments being offered by these opponents of God's plan, and may sound quite critical of them.

However, I trust my responses will not convey any criticism of the author whose writings I am critiquing: I definitely have no intention of attacking him or her personally.

Indeed, I hope I never fall for the trap of criticising or belittling a fellow believer just because I hold a different point of view on some Biblical subject. And this is particularly true in this response.

Rather than address the wide variety of views opposing UR, I have chosen to challenge one clearly enunciated statement of this opposition.

It is a paper written by a highly regarded theologian, Dr Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum (Dr Arnold), who is a brilliant Messianic Jewish theologian living in USA. Dr Arnold is someone I greatly respect and whose expertise in the Scriptures, particularly regarding Israel's past, present and future, is outstanding. You can access his teaching directly at www.ariel.org.

Although I have learned so much from Dr Arnold's written and video publications, I do not agree with his opposition to God's plan to eventually reconcile all His creation, a position I find promised over and over in a correctly translated Bible and discussed in my book "The Really Good News About God" published in 2015 ^a.

Dr ARNOLD'S INTERMEDIATE PAPER

Dr Arnold presents his criticism in a paper titled *The Intermediate State Between Death and Resurrection (MBS104)* available for download on the Ariel Ministries website www.ariel.org.

Although Dr Arnold's opposition to God's plan of universal reconciliation fills only 2 pages of this 18 page study, my response has become quite extensive because his opposition piece contains a large number of (briefly-stated) opinions.

I felt each of these opinions needed a fairly comprehensive response containing Biblical and/or logical and philosophical arguments to demonstrate why I hold a different view to a theologian of such standing.

Hopefully you will find this response to be positive, advocating and showing Biblical support for God's plan to reconcile and save the world, although parts of it will be negative and will critique the writings of Dr Arnold (and many others) who believe God will not achieve His planned outcome. I trust you can enjoy and appreciate both aspects of this response.

In his paper, Dr Arnold sees three different versions of what he calls *Unlimited Second Probation*.

1. Universalism, which he defines as *all are eventually saved without the necessity of after life repentance.*
2. Restorationism, which he defines as *all are saved because of a second chance to hear the gospel after death and a subsequent repentance after death.*
3. Universal Reconciliation (UR), which he defines as *after a long period of existence in the Lake of Fire, all are going to be reconciled back to God; all are going to be saved, including Satan.*

This response will focus on Dr Arnold's third version as it is a little closer to what the Bible seems to teach than the other two.

His arguments against UR are offered under five headings:

- a. *The Scriptures Used (to demonstrate UR)*
- b. *The Fixed State of the Unbelieving Dead*
- c. *The Basis of the Final Judgment^b*
- d. *The Final Decision Made in this Life*
- e. *The Contradiction to Scripture.*

In this response, I will address each of these arguments and demonstrate from Scripture why I think they are insufficient to dismiss God's plan to eventually reconcile all creation to Himself, and thus save everyone.

After all, the Bible does say ...

Adam brought death to all of us, and Christ will bring life to all of us.
[1 Cor 15 : 22 CEV]

which encourages us to

... put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe.
[1 Timothy 4 : 10 NIV]

confirming Jesus' words cited by John.

And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

[John 12 : 32 NIV]

PS. You will have noticed I am using a *lighter italic font* to help identify Dr Arnold's actual words, and that I quote very frequently from the Scriptures (rather than other theological sources) to support the points I am making using indented *blue italic font*.

a. The Scriptures Used (to demonstrate UR)

Under this heading Dr Arnold quotes five (carefully chosen) texts that he claims *teachers use to prove the truth of a second probation*, as Dr Arnold calls it, even though there are many more [and more emphatic] passages that demonstrate God's intention to save all His creation, as a quick scan through my BLOG site and Book will reveal. ^a

He says, *Basically they point to five passages of Scripture.*

The first is Acts 3 : 21, which speaks of the times of restoration of all things.

Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. [Acts 3 : 21 NIV]

Dr Arnold's objection is that *the all things is limited to that which was spoken by the prophets, and that did not include any kind of universalism, limited or unlimited.*

Well, I wonder what Isaiah and Malachi, for example, might say about that.

Although the Old Testament prophets were usually focused on extant Israel for their near-future insights and the Messianic Kingdom Age for their far-future insights, their writings did occasionally give a strong hint of God's bigger picture.

Isaiah prophesies that all people will worship God ...

*"Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.
By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked:
Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear.
They will say of me, 'In the Lord alone are deliverance and strength.'"
All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame.
[Isaiah 45 : 22 - 24 NIV]*

and that all nations will feast at the table of the Lord.

*In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it.
[Isaiah 2 : 2 NIV]*

*On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines.
On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever.*

The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken.

[Isaiah 25 : 6 - 8 NIV]

Malachi also mentions that all nations will worship, and bring offerings to the Lord.

"My name will be great among the nations, from where the sun rises to where it sets. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to me, because my name will be great among the nations," says the Lord Almighty.

[Malachi 1 : 11 NIV]

King David's description of God's character would back these hints from the prophets.

The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow in anger and rich in love.

The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.

[Psalm 145 : 8 - 9 NIV]

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.

[Psalm 107 : 1 NIV]

Although Acts 3 : 21 is not a verse that I personally use to "prove" the truth of UR, it cannot be dismissed as being antagonistic to the Biblical theme of UR, as Dr Arnold suggests. But it certainly fits within the Biblical overview:

For all things were created by him, and all things exist through him and for him. To God be the glory forever! Amen.

[Romans 11 : 36 GNB]

The second passage is 1 Corinthians 15 : 27 - 28, which states that all things, will be subjected to the Son.

For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

[1 Corinthians 15 : 27 - 28 NIV]

Dr Arnold's objection is that the all things "being subject to the Son" does not mean the salvation of all, but only that the unsaved will be in subjection to Him.

I agree that, as King, Jesus will have all things in subjection to him by the end of the Kingdom Age. But that's not all!

What also happens when the Kingdom Age is completed?

Previous verses, which provide the context for the two Corinthians verses Dr Arnold quotes, indicate that this subjection to Christ is in a setting of all (people) being made alive in Christ

Adam brought death to all of us, and Christ will bring life to all of us.

[1 Cor 15 : 22 CEV]

and Jesus having destroyed death as the final enemy.

Christ will rule until he puts all his enemies under his power, and the last enemy he destroys will be death.

[1 Cor 15 : 25 - 26 CEV]

It seems obvious to me, that if all are alive because of what Christ has done (just as all die because of what Adam has done), and death itself is now destroyed, then life is now the only condition possible.

And since these events happen at the end when Christ hands His kingdom over to God the Father,

Then after Christ has destroyed all powers and forces, the end will come, and he will give the kingdom to God the Father.

[1 Cor 15 : 24 CEV]

and God becomes everything to everyone,

After everything is under the power of God's Son, he will put himself under the power of God, who put everything under his Son's power. Then God will mean everything to everyone.

[1 Cor 15 : 28 CEV]

then the life we will all experience together must be eternal life.

So all are indeed saved, given eternal life, even though the verses quoted by Dr Arnold, isolated from their context, tell only part of the story.

Because eventually ...

Everything comes from the Lord. All things were made because of him and will return to him.

Praise the Lord forever! Amen.

[Romans 11 : 36 CEV]

The third passage is Colossians 1 : 20, which states that God will reconcile all things unto himself, both in the earth and in the heavens.

and through him (Christ) to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

[Colossians 1 : 20 NIV]

Dr Arnold's objection is that in this verse reconciliation does not mean all are saved. In fact, the very term "reconciliation" only means that all are savable. They still must believe and if they die without believing there is no further opportunity.

There are three parts to this objection - (i) the meaning of reconciliation, (ii) the need to believe and (iii) no after-death opportunities.

(i) The meaning of reconciliation.

I can't find any dictionary that offers a definition of reconciliation as making people savable.

My Oxford dictionary offers five meanings for the verb "reconcile":

1. Make friendly after estrangement (between people)
2. Purify (a consecrated place after desecration)
3. Make acquiescent or contentedly submissive
4. Heal, settle (a quarrel)
5. Harmonize, make compatible

To me, people who have been reconciled to God have had their relationship to God saved (to get the word "saved" into the discussion), even if they aren't aware of it during their lifetime on this planet in their earth-suit.

*God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them.
[2 Cor 5 : 19 NIV]*

because

*(God) desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
For there is one God;
there is also one mediator between God and humankind,
Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all.
[1 Timothy 2 : 4 - 6 NIV]*

Why would God bother to reconcile the world to Himself, inflicting such humiliation and suffering on His Son, if He didn't plan to save us all?

Making a distinction between reconciliation and salvation seems quite a stretch for me.

And it seems so to Paul as well. He speaks specifically of the joint ministry of Jesus' death and resurrection in his letter to the Romans - we are reconciled to God by Jesus' death **and** saved through his life.

*For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life.
[Romans 5 : 10 NIV]*

(ii) The need to believe.

God is surely the Saviour of the whole world, including current unbelievers.

*That is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe.
[1 Timothy 4: 10 NIV]*

*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.
[Titus 2 : 11 ESV]*

*And Christ himself is the means by which our sins are forgiven, and not our sins only, but also the sins of everyone.
[1 John 2 : 2 GNB]*

So do people need to believe in order to be saved?

No, not at all.

God has already taken care of our salvation 2000 years ago – without any input from us.

(The only qualification that you can bring to the table is that you're a sinner!)

So what's this thing about believing?

Authentic, dependable belief is only possible when the object of your belief is already known to exist. So If you can reliably believe in salvation, it must have previously existed.

God chooses to give faith to some so they can appreciate, experience and enjoy the salvation that Jesus has already won for them, and have an exciting message to share as His messengers of reconciliation. These are the "especially" people mentioned in 1 Timothy 4 : 10 above.

Those not given faith while in their earth-suits, but whose salvation has also been won, will need to wait until the final Great White Throne judgement to learn the truth – the truth about themselves and their position before God and the truth about Jesus and what He has previously done for them, as happened to us. Jesus is both our Judge **and** our Saviour!

Salvation **is** our joy right now as God gives faith to those He has chosen to be the advance party (the Body of Christ), and **will be** the joy of those not in the Book of Life who will see Jesus and come to the knowledge of the truth at the final Great White Throne judgement.

So 'yes' we do need to believe, but not so that we will be saved, but to appreciate the salvation already granted to us.

For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation.
[2 Cor 5 : 19 NLT]

(iii) No further (after-death) opportunities.

I can't find a text to support or refute Dr Arnold's opinion that people have no after-death opportunities.

However God does have a plan for His creation.

With all wisdom and understanding, he (God) made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.
[Ephesians 1 : 8 - 10 NIV]

This plan, motivated by God's love for His creation, **must** be implemented, since God is in sovereign control.

So my logic tells me that ...

- if God's plan is to bring unity to all things, and
- if God has already reconciled the world to Himself, and
- if God is the Saviour of the world
- then people who do not believe in the Saviour Jesus before they die will do so after they die.

Otherwise

- God doesn't achieve His unity plan, and
- God has not reconciled the world to Himself, and
- God is not the Saviour of the world, and
- Jesus was not successful on the cross, and
- God is not the God of love and sovereignty I serve.

Again, consistent with:

Everything comes from him; Everything happens through him; Everything ends up in him. Always glory! Always praise! Yes. Yes. Yes.
[Romans 11 : 36 MSG]

The fourth passage is Philippians 2 : 9 - 10 which teaches that every knee [shall] bow.

*Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*
[Philippians 2 : 9 - 10 NIV]

Dr Arnold's objection is that *but again this passage only shows the subjection of all to God; it does not mean the salvation of all. Even unbelievers will some day be in subjection to Him.*

Dr Arnold again cites verses isolated from their context, effectively constructing a straw man argument. He has so carefully selected these two verses that he ignores the following verse 11, which just happens to torpedo his criticism.

*and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*
[Philippians 2 : 11 NIV]

Dr Arnold pleads that the subjection of all to God does not infer salvation of those all, and I agree, in isolation, that might be so.

The possibility of forced subjection, which Dr Arnold infers, with participants compliant on the outside but rebellious on the inside, is unlikely in a situation that is deemed to bring glory to God. More likely this subjection is the result of God's work in the hearts of all who are to bow the knee and acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus, as it has been with us.

In support of this, it is worth remembering that the Bible teaches that it is not possible to acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus without the personal ministry of the Holy Spirit.

no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.
[1 Corinthians 12 : 3 NIV]

This great worship event, which was also foreseen by Isaiah (chapter 45), alludes to God being "all in all" or "everything to everyone" as previously mentioned.

It is important to keep God's big picture in view when considering small text snippets to ensure our small-scale thinking remains consistent with it.

And because God is the source and sustainer of everything, everything finds fulfillment in him. May all praise and honor be given to him forever! Amen!
[Romans 11 : 36 TPT]

The fifth passage is a combination of 1 Peter 3 : 19 with 4 : 6, which speaks about the gospel being preached ... to the dead. Since it is preached ... to the dead, then it must mean a second probation.

Christ then preached to the spirits that were being kept in prison.

[1 Peter 3 : 19 CEV]

The good news has even been preached to the dead, so that after they have been judged for what they have done in this life, their spirits will live with God.

[1 Peter 4 : 6 CEV]

Dr Arnold's objection is extensive, so I will break it into several parts and address each separately. First, let me confess I am not a Greek scholar. My understanding of the Greek New Testament relies on the writings of reputable Greek scholars, with my starting point being the literal English translations of the New Testament they have published. ^c

Dr Arnold begins:

as to their comparison of 1 Peter 3:19 with 4:6, they are ignoring the fact that these are two different contexts.

Mmmm. Let's see.

Paul is using the particular (described in 1 Peter 3 : 20 as the lost in Noah's day) as an example of the general, so they clearly have a genuine connection.

Dr Arnold continues:

In 3:19, the Greek word for "preaching" here is not the word that means, "to preach the gospel", "to evangelize" or "to get people saved". It is a different word keirusso that simply means "to proclaim".

Since **keirusso** simply means to herald or proclaim or preach, it could be used to **proclaim** anything, including the gospel. In fact the epistles use this same Greek work (or its derivatives) to describe Paul's ministry of doing just this.

*Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the **proclamation** of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that had been kept secret for long ages,*
[Romans 16 : 25 NET]

*... the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time. And for this purpose I was appointed a herald (a **proclaimer**) and an apostle ...*
[1 Timothy 2 : 5 - 7 NIV]

So proclaiming the good news is not precluded by the use of this Greek word, but indeed is used that way by Paul.

and then:

A proclamation not to save them, but a proclamation to condemn them.

My goodness!

An assertion not based on Biblical or even philosophical support, but based solely on the previously-determined theological position of Dr Arnold.

Based on Paul's use of the word above, the proclamation is more likely a continuation of Jesus' earthly ministry when

*... Jesus began to **proclaim**, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."*

*Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and **proclaiming** the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.*

[Matthew 4 : 17, 23 NRSV]

*As for yourselves, beware; for they will hand you over to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them. And the good news must first be **proclaimed** to all nations.*

[Mark 13 : 9 - 10 NRSV]

... the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him (Jesus). Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to **proclaim** good news to the poor.*

*He has sent me to **proclaim** freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to **proclaim** the year of the Lord's favor."*

[Luke 4 : 17 - 19 NIV]

Clearly, this Greek word is used frequently throughout the Scriptures to proclaim or to preach or to herald God's good news.

and then:

Furthermore, it was made to one group of spirits, those who were disobedient in Noah's day.

These two verses are open to several interpretations so I would not place great weight on them, in isolation, to be evidence of God's plan to save all creation.

However, the story of the spirits that are specifically mentioned in 1 Peter 3 : 19 - 20 is linked to the verses in 1 Peter 4 with "therefore", indicating that the wider application in chapter 4 is using Noah's "disobedients" as an illustration of what might happen to all other "disobedients".

and finally:

In 4:6, the Greek wording means, that the Gospel had been preached to those while they were still alive but had now passed away.

Dr Arnold's interpretation cannot be supported by any correct translation (like CEV above), and especially literal ones (like DBH here).

Because it was for this that the good tidings were proclaimed to the dead, that though judged in the flesh according to human beings they might live in spirit according to God.

[1 Peter 4 : 6 DBH]

Dr Arnold's insertion of "now" before "passed away" is very naughty and designed to grossly change the meaning of the verse: and it is also inserted in some modern versions of the New Testament by translators who hold the same position as Dr Arnold.

In any case it was described as "the good news" or "the good tidings" or "the gospel" - depending on which translation you are using.

You could hardly construe the good news to be *A proclamation not to save them, but a proclamation to condemn them*, especially since the proclamation was so that "their spirits will live with God".

What a shocking description of the gospel Dr Arnold claims was being preached!

We always need to keep

All things come from God, through God, and return to God. Praise him for ever! Yes, it is so!
[Romans 11 : 36 WE]

in mind to alert us to verses of Scripture misquoted or misinterpreted by those endeavouring to deny God's wonderful plan for His creation.

In summary, under this heading, Dr Arnold quotes five (carefully chosen) texts that he claims *teachers use to prove the truth of a second probation*, as Dr Arnold calls it. He concludes, *So none of these five passages that are used actually teach the doctrine of a second probation*.

Clearly, Dr Arnold's assertions are easily corrected or contradicted.

b. The Fixed State of the Unbelieving Dead.

Under this heading Dr Arnold claims that *the unbelieving dead are seen in a fixed state that cannot be altered* and then quotes numerous texts from the New Testament hoping to illustrate his assertion.

I will address these cited texts in five groups:

- (i) Four texts from Matthew's gospel describing Jewish unbelievers weeping and gnashing their teeth;
- (ii) The Rich Man and Lazarus parable from Luke's gospel which is presumed to show the fixed state of "hell";
- (iii) Two texts from John's gospel which announce that Jews not believing in the Messiah will die in their sins;
- (iv) Two texts from 2 Peter declaring that the unrighteous will need to face judgement; and
- (v) Two texts from Jude describing so-called "eternal" dark outcomes for sinners.

(i) The Matthew Texts describing Jewish unbelievers weeping and gnashing their teeth.

These texts are used by Dr Arnold to argue that the unbelieving dead are in an unalterable fixed state of punishment.

They are part of the conclusions to parables Jesus was using to teach his Jewish audience.

Matthew 13 : 41 - 42

The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.
They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
[NIV]

Matthew 22 : 13

Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' [NIV]

Matthew 24 : 51

He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. [NIV]

Matthew 25 : 30

'And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' [NIV]

I certainly agree that the places and experiences described in these parables are extremely unpleasant.

In each case, Jesus has used strong hyperbolic images for severe penalty and regret to communicate to the Jews the serious cost of rejecting their long-expected Messiah and the kingdom He came to establish for them.

However, none of these texts gives even a hint that the situation is an unalterable fixed state, as Dr Arnold claims.

The punishment experienced, suffering disappointment and agonising grief, is for missing out on the anticipated Messianic Kingdom.

But that's not the end of the story - for them (or for anyone else for that matter).

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved.

As it is written:

"The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.

And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

[Romans 11 : 25 - 27 NIV]

So there is nothing permanent in the cited Matthew texts, nor is permanent torture or destruction or agonising grief consistent with God's plan for national Israel found in other texts.

Here's an example from one of their prophets, Jeremiah.

"The days are coming," declares the Lord,

"when I will make a new covenant

with the people of Israel

and with the people of Judah.

It will not be like the covenant

I made with their ancestors

when I took them by the hand

to lead them out of Egypt,

*because they broke my covenant,
though I was a husband to them,"
declares the Lord.*

*"This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel
after that time," declares the Lord.*

*"I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts.
I will be their God,
and they will be my people.*

*No longer will they teach their neighbor,
or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,'
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,"
declares the Lord.*

*"For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more."
[Jeremiah 31 : 31 - 34 NIV]*

(ii) The Rich Man and Lazarus parable from Luke's gospel which is presumed to show the fixed state of "hell".

Dr Arnold uses this story to point out *that the rich man could not pass from his place in Hell to Lazarus in Abraham's bosom; there was no crossing the line, and no future opportunity to do so, thus demonstrating a fixed state that cannot be altered.*

I won't list the lengthy parable here, so please read it in your Bible - Luke 16 : 19 - 31.

First of all, let me note that a correct Greek to English translation would use Hades instead of Hell to describe the rich man's position. In any case, apart from being a poor translation, the word "hell" has some grisly connotations derived from centuries of fear-mongering and church teaching, and is best avoided in serious Bible study.

Hades is the unseen realm of departed spirits - nothing more; nothing less. (Sheol is the Hebrew equivalent.) Before the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, this was the resting place for all who died.

Second, Hades could hardly be describing a fixed state as there are at least **two** subsequent resurrections to occur, making Hades only a temporary place of residence.

*Do not be amazed at this, for an hour is coming in which all those in the tombs will hear his voice,
and those who have done good things will come forth into a resurrection of life, and those who have
done evil things into a resurrection of judgment.
[John 5 : 28 - 29 DBH]*

Although the gulf between the rich man and Lazarus is not able to be crossed at the time of the telling of this parable (before Jesus provided the means to bridge the gulf), it will be irrelevant at the time of the resurrections.

Third, some people conflate the Hades of this parable with the Lake of Fire described in Revelation 20, assuming that both are a description of the "hell of eternal torment" that has been taught relentlessly as the future for unbelievers.

However, even conceding the conflation is correct, the Lake of Fire is called the Second Death in the Bible and, since death is to be abolished at the end of the ages, the Lake of Fire can't be permanent either.

Christ will rule until he puts all his enemies under his power, and the last enemy he destroys will be death.

[1 Cor 15 : 25 - 26 CEV]

So the conflation is not helpful to the permanence argument (as well as being ill-conceived).

Fourth, using this parable to produce an eternal doctrine is also inappropriate.

Let's remember that parables are stories that use familiar earthly ingredients to illustrate spiritual principles or realities.

Let's also remember that Jesus was only sent to Israel for his earthly ministry,

"I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel"

[Matthew 15 : 24 NIV]

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel."

[Matthew 10 : 5 - 6 NIV]

and the only two ages that Israel was concerned with were their current age and the Messianic Kingdom Age, which some Christians call the Millennium.

"As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'"

[Matthew 10 : 7 NIV]

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you.

[Matthew 6 : 33 HCSB]

Israel didn't conceive of an eternity at all, and Jesus never addressed eternity with them, even though many English Bible translators put the word "eternal" in Jesus' mouth. (If you're not sure about that, check out a literal translation of the New Testament like Young's or Hart's or Rotherham's or the Concordant Version. You'll find that Jesus did not use the word "eternal" or "eternity" or "everlasting" or "forever" at all.)^c

So Jesus' parables were designed to convey spiritual meanings about the kingdom of God, the Messianic Age promised by Israel's prophets.

They had nothing to do with the eternal realm on which many Christians are focused.

Dr Arnold's opposition dissolves in the face of the kingdom circumstances of this parable - there is nothing in it that even hints of a permanence that extends into eternity.^{de}

(iii) Two texts from John's gospel which announce that Jews not believing in the Messiah will die in their sins.

Dr Arnold says these verses state *that unless one believes, he will die in his sins and there is no possibility of belief after dying in sin.*

Then Jesus said to them again, "I am going away, and you will look for me but will die in your sin. Where I am going you cannot come."

"Thus I told you that you will die in your sins. For unless you believe that I am he, you will die in your sins."

[John 8 : 21 and 24 NET]

As usual, Jesus was talking with the Jews about the Messianic Kingdom and their need to believe He was the Messiah for them to join Him in it.

And, of course, this conversation occurred before Jesus had died for the sins of the world.

So instead of being able to come with Him, they would remain and die in their sins.

I agree with Dr Arnold's *that unless one believes, he will die in his sins, but where does he get and there is no possibility of belief after dying in sin from?*

Because of Dr Arnold's prior belief, he reads into these texts the impossibility of belief any time after death.

An unbeliever who dies in their sin will certainly not see the Messianic Kingdom Age, agreed, but there is much more of God's plan to follow that Age for the unbelieving remainder of His creation, including the removal of death.

For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

[1 Cor 15 : 25 - 26 ESV]

We have discussed this eventuality previously, so I'll try not to repeat too much here.

However, let's look at what Jesus said to the crowds about "counting the cost of completing the course".

Is there anyone here who, planning to build a new house, doesn't first sit down and figure the cost so you'll know if you can complete it?

If you only get the foundation laid and then run out of money, you're going to look pretty foolish.

Everyone passing by will poke fun at you: 'He started something he couldn't finish.'

[Luke 14 : 28 - 30 MSG]

This was Jesus' advice to those who might be considering discipleship.

Surely it is the same advice that God would follow Himself.

Whatever God is planning, surely He would have previously counted its cost, and would be "well-advised" to complete (so passers-by would not poke fun at Him) - wouldn't He?

*Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, his blood poured out on the altar of the Cross, we're a free people—free of penalties and punishments chalked up by all our misdeeds.
And not just barely free, either. Abundantly free!
He thought of everything, provided for everything we could possibly need, letting us in on the plans
He took such delight in making.
He set it all out before us in Christ, a long-range plan in which everything would be brought together
and summed up in him, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth.
[Ephesians 1 : 7 - 10 MSG]*

Clearly, unlike those in the Advance Party^f serving Christ in the Messianic Kingdom, others don't have to believe anything during **this** age to benefit from God's eventual plan of salvation when it is completed at the end of the ages!

So, yes, unbelievers (Jews and Gentiles) will die in their sin (not knowing or believing their sin has been taken care of) and miss the Kingdom Age.

But God has provided for everyone (Jew and Gentile alike) beyond that age through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ.

If salvation is such a done deal for all, where does faith/belief fit in?

This has been discussed previously (page 6).

(iv) Two texts from 2 Peter declaring that the unrighteous will need to face judgement.

Dr Arnold states that these texts demonstrate *that the unbelievers are committed to pits of darkness to be reserved unto judgment of the Great White Throne and the unrighteous are kept under judgment until the day of judgment.*

*For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell [Tartarus] and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; ...
then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment,
[2 Peter 2 : 4, 9 NASB]*

I totally agree with Dr Arnold. That's definitely what these verses say.

But Dr Arnold's inference is that judgement is inherently a bad result and therefore the end of the road for those angels and the unrighteous.

However, judgement is a decision or a verdict - **not** a sentence or a punishment - which may have a favourable or an unfavourable outcome.

Even in our human courts, we should expect verdicts to be reached fairly and penalties applied appropriately.

If a favourable decision is reached, the accused is not guilty as charged, so goes free.

If an unfavourable decision is reached - the accused is guilty as charged - and expects to be penalised in some appropriate way.

That penalty should be designed to produce a change in behaviour, and when served, and the change in behaviour achieved, the accused is then as free as if he/she was not guilty in the first place.

Indeed, going to court, being found guilty and serving the relevant penalty is the **only** way an offender can be finally free.

So surely, the God of love, mercy and compassion would do at least as well as our human courts.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

[John 3 : 17 NIV]

And, if God claims to be the Saviour of the world, then freedom for all can be confidently expected eventually.

For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.

[1 Timothy 4 : 10 NASB]

The believers are special because they become aware of, and are given the faith to believe in, their salvation early - they are the firstfruits, using Hebrew harvest terminology.

They will live and be co-rulers with Christ in the Kingdom Age; the remainder serve the penalty of not living and enjoying life in that Kingdom Age before facing their subsequent judgement and rehabilitation.

I have been extremely brief in my comments here, but "The Really Good News About God" has a whole chapter dealing with judgement and might be worth a re-read at this point.

I have just said sufficient here to demonstrate that God's judgements are designed to produce good outcomes and are stepping stones on the way to universal salvation and reconciliation as revealed by Luke and Paul.

And all people will see God's salvation.

[Luke 3 : 6 NIV]

With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

[Ephesians 1 : 8 - 10 NIV]

Let me finish this section by quoting a favourite author of mine, Professor Thomas Talbot, from his book "The Inescapable Love of God".

While discussing God's judgements as being remedial - a means of correction - he says,

"It is eternal both in the sense that its causal source lies in the eternal God himself and in the sense that its corrective effects last forever".

Isn't it so exciting to know that God loves us all, Jesus died and rose for us all, and God has life in store for us all?

I find this a much more positive gospel (good news) to share than the one I grew up with.

(v) Two texts from Jude describing so-called "eternal" dark outcomes for sinners.

Jude 7 states that they are suffering the punishment of eternal fire.

In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal (Gk. eonian = age-during) fire.

[Jude 7 NIV]

And Jude 13 states that the blackness of darkness has been reserved for ever.

They are like the waves of a wild sea. Their sins are like the dirty water along the shore. They look like stars moving here and there. But the darkest place has been kept for them forever (Gk. for an eon = for an age).

[Jude 13 NIV]

Once again, the correct, literal translation of the Greek destroys the "traditional" doctrine of eternal punishment and darkness.

I have written about this, and similar, mischievous translations (eonian=eternal) on several occasions; about how they have been used to induce the fear of eternal torment by a loving God for all those who have not been given the faith to become members of the Body of Christ during their lifetime on this planet.

Clearly, the correctly translated punishment and darkness verses do **not** over-ride God's promise of restoring all things and bringing unity and harmony to the universe as the Bible records, but instead show that any loss or correction will be limited to the ages, to the realm of time.

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

[Revelation 21 : 5 NIV]

Heaven must receive him (Messiah) until the time comes for God to restore everything.

[Acts 3 : 21 NIV]

With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

[Ephesians 1 : 8 - 10 NIV]

Correct translations make all God's plans clear and unchallenged.

Those not called into Christian service in the Body of Christ in this age will miss out on the Kingdom Age (only). They **cannot** miss out on eternity if God holds true to his promises - which He always does.

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[Romans 8 : 38 - 39 NIV]

My discussion above demonstrates that the punishment and judgement verses Dr Arnold quotes, correctly translated, say **nothing** about fixed states.

And how could they?

If God's plan is to save His creation and bring unity to all under the headship of Christ, these punishment states cannot possibly be "fixed".

(God) intends all human beings to be saved and to come to a full knowledge of truth.

[1 Timothy 2 : 4 DBH]

Indeed the Bible says that God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in His holiness,

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

[Hebrews 12 : 11 NIV],

confirming the purifying purpose of the Lake of Fire for those whose names are not in the Book of Life at the Great White Throne.

Logic alone tells us that these punishments must just be temporary "stopping-off" places on the journey to God's final result, as all correctly-motivated punishments should be.

Also, how could they be more than temporary when

... the Son of God appeared to destroy the devil's work?

The one who practices sin is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. For this reason the Son of God was revealed: in order to destroy the works of the devil.

[1 John 3 : 8 LEB]

... Christ appeared at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself?

But as it is, He has been revealed once and for all at the close of the ages—to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

[Hebrews 9 : 26 TLV]

... and Christ must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet, with death being the last enemy to be destroyed?

For He must continue King until He shall have put all His enemies under His feet.

The last enemy that is to be overthrown is Death;

[1 Corinthians 15 : 25 – 26 Weymouth]

The only fixed state I can see in Scripture is represented by God becoming everything to everyone.

But when the whole universe has been made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also become subject to Him who has made the universe subject to Him, in order that GOD may be all in all.

[1 Corinthians 15 : 28 Weymouth]

Under this heading Dr Arnold states that *the third argument is to point out that the final judgment is based on deeds done in the flesh and not on what happens in the intermediate state* and then lists several texts from the New Testament he hopes will illustrate this assertion.

The texts are Matthew 7 : 22 - 23; Matthew 10 : 32 - 33; Matthew 25 : 31 - 46; Luke 12 : 46 - 48; 2 Corinthians 5 : 9 - 10; Galatians 6 : 7 - 8; 2 Thessalonians 1 : 7 - 10.

There are three major judgements mentioned in the New Testament.

One concerns Israel; one concerns the nations; one concerns the resurrected dead at the Great White Throne.

Dr Arnold has correctly discovered judgement in the verses he quoted, but incorrectly applied them to the final judgement - the one that best serves his doctrinal position of eternal punishment in hell for all who do not profess Christ during their physical lifetime on the earth - the final Great White Throne judgement in which *"the dead are judged according to what they have done"*. [Revelation 20 : 12 NIV]

But as we will see, none of the verses quoted refer to this final judgement at all.

Jesus' teaching recorded in the Gospels was directed only to the Kingdom Age as this was the only future the Jews knew about. They knew nothing about the church age (the age of grace) and nowhere did He mention the eternal realm, even though most of our popular Bibles insert words like "eternal" and "everlasting" into the English text.

1. Matthew 7 : 21 - 23

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?'

Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' [NIV]

I have included verse 21, which Dr Arnold omitted, to show that the kingdom was the context of Jesus' remarks.

2. Matthew 10 : 32 - 33

"Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.

But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven." [NIV]

If we go to the beginning of this conversation of Jesus and His disciples, we will again see the kingdom context.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans.

Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.

*As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'
[Matthew 10 : 5 - 7 NIV]*

3. Matthew 25 : 31 - 46

I won't quote so many verses here; please read for yourself.

If you are reading one of our popular English Bibles, you will need to make corrections for "eternal" (as literal translations do) to see more clearly that this judgement is **not** the final one.

(verse 41: eternal fire => fire of the Age; verse 46: eternal punishment => the chastisement of that Age; verse 46: eternal life => the life of that Age)

Again, the context is the King nominating those **nations** who qualify, by their good works, to participate in the kingdom.

*Then the king will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take the inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world."
[verse 34 NIV]*

So the judgement being addressed is that on the **nations** prior to the commencement of the Age of the Messianic Kingdom.

4. Luke 12 : 46 - 48

*The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.
The servant who knows the master's will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows.
But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. [NIV]*

Prior to this description of punishments, verses 31 and 32 again demonstrate that Jesus was speaking to a Jewish audience, which included His disciples, about judgement relating to the Kingdom Age.

So each of the Gospel texts quoted relates to judgements on Israel or nations concerning the future Messianic kingdom, not the final Great White Throne judgement.

5. 2 Corinthians 5 : 9 - 10

*So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.
For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. [NIV]*

The context of this chapter is the Church Age Saints and their judgement for **rewards** in the Kingdom. Paul also wrote to this church in his earlier letter giving a few more details about the process involved. [see 1 Corinthians 3 : 10 - 15]

Consequently, this judgement is also well before the final judgement, and is **only** for those already in the Body of Christ.

6. Galatians 6 : 7 - 8

*Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.
Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. [NIV]*

Once "eternal life" is replaced with the literal "life in the Age" it is clear that this is talking about life in the kingdom and is therefore well before the final judgement which will occur after the Kingdom Age.

7. 2 Thessalonians 1 : 6 - 10

*God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well.
This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.
He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.
They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.
This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you. [NIV]*

Several literal translations into English of the words I have underlined reveal that the penalty involved is to be totally excluded from the Lord's presence while Christ's Kingdom Age is in progress, **not** for eternity as our popular versions suggest. Here are some examples of those more correct translations:

Who, indeed, a penalty, shall pay - age-abiding destruction from the face of the Lord ... - Rotherham (REB)

who shall suffer justice - destruction age-during - from the face of the Lord ... - Young (YLT)

Who will pay the just reparation of ruin in the Age, coming from the face of the Lord ... - Hart (DBH)

who a just penalty shall pay, destruction age-lasting, from face to the Lord ... - Diaglott (DNT)

who shall incur the justice of eonian extermination from the face of the Lord ... - Concordant (CLV)

This judgement will occur at the parousia of Christ - when He comes to judge Israel in blazing fire with his powerful angels

Again, these verses do not refer to the final judgement which will follow the Kingdom Age.

Once we have clarified which judgement is being discussed, I then agree with the remainder of Dr Arnold's assertion that those judgements are *based on deeds done in the flesh*.

However, none of these texts refer to the final judgement, but to judgements relevant to participation, or otherwise, in the upcoming Kingdom Age.

The **final** judgement at the Great White Throne and subsequent purifying process in the Lake of Fire ensures God will indeed be the Saviour of all and achieve His plan of having everyone know the truth.

*... our Savior God, who intends all human beings to be saved and come to a full knowledge of truth.
[1 Timothy 2 : 4 DBH]*

*For we labor and struggle to this end, because we have hoped in a living God who is the savior of all human beings, especially those who have faith.
[1 Timothy 4 : 10 DBH]*

Clearly, a proper reading of correctly-translated Scriptures will not support the common church doctrine that most of creation will be eternally lost because ...

*With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.
[Ephesians 1 : 8 -10 NIV]*

*For, even as in Adam, all are dying, thus also, in Christ, shall all be vivified.
Yet, each in his own class.
[1 Corinthians 15 : 22 - 23 CLV]*

d. The Final Decision Made in this Life

Under this heading Dr Arnold states that *the fourth argument is that, according to Scripture, the final decision is made in this life* and cites 2 Corinthians 6 : 2 and Hebrews 9 : 27 to support his assertion.

Let's consider the first of these verses.

*For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.
[2 Corinthians 6 : 2 NIV]*

It seems that Dr Arnold is using one of the many interpretative English "translations" of 2 Cor 6 : 2 (like NIV above) to make the point that **the** day of salvation had arrived for the original readers of this letter, and then infer that this day is therefore the **only** day salvation is available.

However "the" is **not** in the original of this verse. Here is a literal translation from ALT3.

*for He says, "In an acceptable time I heard you, and in a day of salvation I helped you".
Listen! Now acceptable time. Listen! Now day of salvation.*

The first sentence in the verse is a quote from Isaiah 49. Paul's use of it is the second sentence. A smooth English translation from the original would use "a" or "an" to help the flow of the sentence when there is no "the" in the original, like this one.

For he says, "In an acceptable time I heard you, and on a day of salvation I helped you." Look: Now is an acceptable time. Look: Now is a day of salvation. [DBH]

Clearly more than one day of salvation exists.

Did Abraham live in a day of salvation?

What does Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness".
[Romans 4 : 3 NIV]

Did David live in a day of salvation?

After removing Saul, he made David their king. God testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.'
From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised.
[Acts 13 : 22 -23 NIV]

Do we live in a day of salvation?

So then, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."
[Romans 10 : 13 GW]

It seems a pity that a word that is **not** in the original Biblical text is used to support a point of view that denies God's plan to reconcile all of creation to Himself by the end of the realm of time.

and here is the motive of our toiling and wrestling, because we have our hopes fixed on the ever-living God, who is the Saviour of all mankind, and especially of believers.
[1 Timothy 4 : 10 Weymouth]

There are clearly many more days of salvation needed for God's plan to be completed, even after death. The final decision is **not** made in this life for most of mankind.

Now let's consider the Hebrews verse that has been cited to demonstrate that the final decision regarding salvation is made in this life.

Everyone must die once, and after that be judged by God.
[Hebrews 9 : 27 GNB]

By using this verse to make his point, Dr Arnold is inferring that the judgement mentioned here will always produce a guilty verdict after which rehabilitation is not possible.

If God is to complete His plan to reconcile all things in heaven and on earth to Himself, then a restoring process of some sort must follow the judgement after death.

Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself. God made peace through his Son's blood on the cross and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven.
[Colossians 1 : 20 GNB]

I have written several times previously that address God's judgements as a righteous Judge and a whole chapter called "God's Merciful Judgement" in the book *The Really Good News About God*.^g

Here's a snippet from page 146.

So a judgement may have a favourable or an unfavourable outcome, not always an unfavourable one as some people believe the word "judgement" implies.

However, in the case of an unfavourable outcome, the penalty is designed and administered with the purpose of improving the guilty person's behaviour or character so that he or she will eventually be different.

Once that penalty has been paid and the change in behaviour or character achieved, the previously guilty person will then become as free as a person who was immediately acquitted.

God is always in the rehab business because He is a God of love and mercy.

For God has made all people prisoners of disobedience, so that he might show mercy to them all.
[Romans 11 : 32 GNB]

Judgement is not the end, as Dr Arnold infers. It is an essential step on the way to reconciliation with God, so fulfilling His plan to bring the whole universe back to Himself.

e. The Contradiction to Scripture

Under the *e. The Contradiction to Scripture* heading Dr Arnold states that *the fifth argument is that any form of universalism is directly contrary to Scripture* and cites Matthew 25 : 46, John 5 : 29 and Revelation 20 : 11 - 15 to illustrate his assertion.

I find it interesting that anyone should say that the plan of the God of love and mercy to reconcile the world to Himself could be directly contrary to Scripture, when Scripture so clearly says things like:

(God our Savior,) who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.
[1 Timothy 2 : 4 NIV]

That is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe.
[1 Timothy 4 : 10 NIV]

*For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,
and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by
making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*
[Colossians 1 : 19 - 20 NIV]

So whatever is cited to make "the contradiction" point will almost certainly be wrongly translated or wrongly interpreted. Let's look at Dr Arnold's verses.

Firstly, Matthew 25 : 46

"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." [NIV]

I have already mentioned this verse and the whole teaching of Jesus that includes it (Matthew 25 : 31 - 46) above and devoted an entire post to it on my BLOG in 2013. ^h

In brief, this verse does not contradict the universal reconciliation verses as it addresses the judgement of nations prior to the establishment of the Christ's Messianic kingdom, not individuals at a "last chance" final judgement.

Secondly, John 5 : 28 - 29

Don't marvel at this, for the hour comes, in which all that are in the tombs will hear his voice, and will come out; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment. [WEB]

As we have stated several times above, judgement is **not** the end of the road for anyone. It is a step on the way to rehabilitation and subsequent reconciliation to God.

Thirdly, Revelation 20 : 11 - 15

The most relevant verse in Dr Arnold's position is verse 15.

If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire. [WEB]

The Lake of Fire has been discussed in several posts on my BLOG, and an introduction to the topic was posted there in 2010. ⁱ

Malachi describes God as being like a refiner's fire and launderer's soap used for refining and purifying, and Paul uses a similar description of the cleansing process for Christians (see 1 Corinthians 3 : 10 – 15).

In brief, and to be consistent with God reconciling all mankind to Himself, I see the Lake of Fire (actually fire and brimstone/sulphur) as a picture of the cleansing and purifying process God uses to prepare for eternity those who are not in the book of life.

Dr Arnold's "contradictory verses", if relevant to the universal reconciliation discussion at all, can be seen as complementary to God's ongoing process of "reconciling to himself all things".

Conclusion

We have now discussed Dr Arnold's evaluation of the Scriptural support for the doctrine of UR and shown he has misquoted some, isolated others from their context, and added dubious interpretation/commentary in his attempt to prove his theological position that God will **not** succeed in His plan to restore and bring unity to His entire creation by the end of the ages.

By carefully selecting the verses to oppose, he creates straw man arguments for his rebuttals by using peripheral verses that provide an incomplete view of the text or by using verses isolated from their contexts.

This approach is common among critics who use their a priori belief that most of humanity will end up either annihilated or eternally tormented to shape their understanding of the Scriptures.

It's obvious that if you begin with such a horrible belief, you must find ways to discredit or ignore verses in the Bible which teach the complete plan of God to redeem His creation.

More importantly, this belief totally discredits the character, love and sovereignty of God.

I find it much easier, and more faithful to God and His written Word, to start with the belief that God **will** complete His advertised plan to save all creation and then explore how the judgement and punishment verses fit within that plan.

We also need to be aware that this discrediting approach is also used by some who **translate** the Scriptures from the original languages to English.

Here is one such example – used to translate one of my favourite verses.

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

[1 Cor 15 : 22 NIV]

That is, the same all who are in Adam (all humanity) will be made alive in Christ.

Most versions translate this verse accurately, but a few change the order of the words so that it supports their view that only believers will receive the life promised.

Look at this from the New Living Translation.

Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life.

[1 Cor 15 : 22 NLT]

That is, the everyone who belong to Adam (all humanity) will be reduced to the everyone who belong to Christ (all believers) - a subtle but substantial change.

And we wonder why so many people believe that God's plan to save all creation will be defeated.

In addition, by choosing such a limited number of verses Dr Arnold claims teachers use to prove the truth of universal reconciliation, he has totally ignored the many verses that clearly demonstrate this eventuality (as well as the themes of God's love, compassion and sovereignty that weave their way through both Testaments).

Let me quote a few of those verses.

And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

[John 12 : 32 ESV]

For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

[1 Timothy 4 : 10 ESV]

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,

[Titus 2 : 11 ESV]

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.

[Romans 5 : 18 ESV]

*But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.
Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.
[Luke 6 : 35 - 36 ESV]*

Let's complete this response to Dr Arnold's critique as might the Apostle Paul.

*Oh, what a wonderful God we have! How great are his wisdom and knowledge and riches!
How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his methods!
For who among us can know the mind of the Lord?
Who knows enough to be his counselor and guide?
And who could ever offer to the Lord enough to induce him to act?
For everything comes from God alone. Everything lives by his power, and everything is for his glory.
To him be glory evermore.
[Romans 11 : 32 - 36 TLB]*

This is truly God's plan - creation, redemption, restitution - for God's glory.
And surely, God's glory is for our good.

Whatever we find in Scripture must fit that plan in some way, because I find it quite blasphemous to suggest that evil and death could possibly triumph over the risen Christ.

Similarly, it is unthinkable that the almighty, sovereign God could not accomplish the purpose for which He sent Christ – the reconciliation of the world to Himself.

FootNotes

a. BLOG at <https://barrysgracespace.blogspot.com>

Book available in softcover, eBook, Kindle formats and as a pdf file from the "Downloads" link on the website <https://www.ibtechservices.com.au>.

b. Words like "judgement" and "evangelise" are spelt differently by Dr Arnold (USA author) and me (AUS author).

c. Literal English New Testaments I most frequently use.

YLT - Young's Literal Translation (Public Domain)

DBH - The New Testament - A Translation - David Bentley Hart (Yale University Press)

CLV - Concordant Literal New Testament (Concordant Publishing Concern)

Rotherham - Rotherham's Emphasized Bible (Public Domain)

Another New Testament I find very useful, which is not a literal translation but expresses accurately the underlying Greek text: WEY – Weymouth New Testament - The New Testament in Modern Speech (Public Domain)

d. I have addressed Dr Arnold's objection using **his** assumption that the parable is being used to describe conditions in "hell" (Hades). Many commentators agree with that assumption.

However, I think the parable is telling his Jewish audience something quite different and much more relevant to them at that time.

e. As an aside, I think that Jesus' audience would have had difficulty visualising this parable as a description of "hell" as their view had "hell" populated by people who were asleep and unable to speak or debate.

For the living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything, ... (this verse is the most frequently cited)

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going. [Ecclesiastes 9 : 5, 10]

So man lies down and does not rise. Until the heavens are no longer, He will not awake nor be aroused out of his sleep. [Job 14 : 12]

Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt. [Daniel 12 : 2]

These verses from the Hebrew Scriptures demonstrate their view that the dead know and do nothing because they are asleep and therefore unconscious until the resurrection. So a parable describing inhabitants conversing and debating ... is unlikely to be interpreted by Jesus' audience in the way many Christian commentators do.

f. I have written about the Advance Party on several occasions <https://barrysgracespace.blogspot.com/2018/03/the-parable-of-local-football-match.html> and on the website here <https://www.ibtechservices.com.au> under "Believers" in the main menu.

g. A free web version of the book can be read on <https://www.ibtechservices.com.au/gnw.html>.

h. <https://barrysgracespace.blogspot.com/2013/12/the-judgement-of-nations.html>

i. <https://barrysgracespace.blogspot.com/2010/10/lake-of-fire.html>