

**Adult Sunday School TFPC October 10, 2021 10 a.m. By Ian Goligher**

**The doctrine of Eternal Punishment.** Eternal punishment is a most sobering truth that is often accepted by Christians, but not well studied. You may hear occasional references to this unpalatable doctrine, but is it sufficiently studied, even by those who are saved from it by the power of the gospel? That failure tends to downgrade the gospel.

The eternal nature of God's punishment of the wicked who die in their sins is the historical position of the Christian church since the days of Christ and even back to times of Job, a contemporary of Abraham.

The eternal nature of hell is denied among so many religions.

The main religions of the world teach about some place of destruction for the wicked but deny its eternal nature.

**Roman Catholicism** has their notion of purgatory.

**Islamism** holds to something similar – they commenced in the 7<sup>th</sup> C. and borrowed much from apostate Christianity.

**Buddhism** believes in 6 cycles of life with no literal place of eternal torment.

**Hinduism** has a theory of 28 hells, from which souls can be reborn through their merits and be rewarded with a higher form of life.

**Cults** – all deny eternal torment, including SDA. They have a form of annihilation for the unworthy.

**Liberalism denying the supernatural in most things** have resisted the notion of a literal hell. Mainline churches in Canada – Presbyterian, United, Anglican, Methodist have fallen into liberal positions. You would be very hard pressed to hear a sermon in such churches warning people about hell as eternal punishment.

The eternal punishment of the wicked is the consistent position of true Biblical churches and is often the test of orthodoxy.

In Christianity, the existence of souls goes in a straight line. Souls are born once, live once, die once and after judgment go out into an eternal state. Heaven for the redeemed. Hell for the wicked.

**5 Reasons for the doctrine of eternal punishment.**

1. **Because the doctrine of eternal punishment is Biblical.** You cannot read much of the Bible until you come across clear texts on hell as a place of eternal, or everlasting torment.

“The strongest support for the doctrine of eternal punishment is the teaching of Christ, the Redeemer of man. Though the doctrine is plainly taught in the Pauline epistles and other parts of Scripture, yet without the explicit and reiterated statements of God incarnate, it is doubtful whether so awful a truth would have had such a conspicuous place as it always has had in the creed of Christendom.” W.G.T. Shedd

Luke 16:19-31 The rich man and Lazarus. Whether this account is built on a fact or is a parable, the Lord used it to teach that the wicked are in a conscious state after death. This is the opposite to false notions of annihilation of the soul after death..

“The essence of punishment is suffering, and suffering is consciousness.” W.G.T. Shedd

Regarding the Lord's statement: "There is a great gulf fixed," J. C. Ryle stated,

“This verse clearly teaches, if words mean anything, that there is no hope of deliverance from hell for those who die in sin. Once in hell, men are in hell forever. The doctrines of purgatory or of a limited duration of punishment cannot be reconciled with this text.”

Ryle points out that this account of the rich man's eternal state in torment was given by the Lord who delighted in mercy and came into the world to secure mercy for repentant sinners. The Lord was, therefore, warning sinners of the realities of hell that they might seek mercy in this life.

Christ spoke of “...everlasting punishment: [for the wicked] but the righteous into life eternal” (Matt. 25:46). Behind the English terms “everlasting” and “eternal” is one Greek word, AIONIOS. This reveals that hell is equally eternal as heaven. This has led to the cliched, but true statement, “as long as there is a heaven there is a hell.”

At the outset of his gospel treatise in the book of Romans, the apostle Paul states that the absolute reason for the gospel is that all men are under God's wrath. “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness...” (Romans 1:18 ). All are guilty, none are righteous. All need a gospel righteousness if they are to be fitted for heaven. Without that they are under God's wrath now and for all eternity. “Destruction and misery are in their ways” (Romans 3:16). See also, Revelation 20:13-15, 21:8. Sinners by their works shall be condemned to the lake of fire, which the Lord Jesus strongly emphasized to be eternal by saying it, “shall never be quenched” (Mark 9:43-45).

2. **Because the doctrine of eternal punishment is clearly taught in Reformation, Protestant creeds.**

**W.C.F. CHAPTER 33 - Of the Last Judgment**

I. God hath appointed a day, wherein he will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ, to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father. In which day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged; but likewise all persons, that have lived upon earth, shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds; and to receive according to what they have done in the body,

whether good or evil.

II. The end of God's appointing this day, is for the manifestation of the glory of his mercy in the eternal salvation of the elect; and of his justice in the damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient. For then shall the righteous go into everlasting life, and receive that fullness of joy and refreshing which shall come from the presence of the Lord: but the wicked, who know not God, and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.

2Thess. 1:7-9 [Note the language of the confession. This statement is word for word as found in this text of scripture.]

III. As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there shall be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin, and for the greater consolation of the godly in their adversity: so will he have that day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come; and may be ever prepared to say, Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen.

3. **Because the doctrine of eternal punishment is based on the righteous character of God.** Because all of His attributes are His perfections, God by nature is perfect in His justice and thereby inflexibly upright, or righteous. God cannot arbitrarily choose to honour what is right, nor chose to sanction what is evil. It is impossible for God to change, for if he did he could no longer be God so then it is impossible for Him to change His holy standard of what is right. It also follows that because God created man morally responsible to love, honour and obey Him He is personally offended when we sin, because sin is rebellion against God's holy character. Sin offends God and stirs His righteous indignation against the wicked.

God can do only one thing with sin. He must judge it. Hell exists because God must declare sinful men and angels to be guilty because of the offence to His Holy character, and that offence stands as long as the guilt stands. When the Lord taught that there is a great gulf fixed with no passing backward or forward, He warned that there is no remedy for guilty souls who go into eternity under God's wrath. Hell exists because God exists as a righteous judge who must always judge sin according to His own holy nature – which is His law, for the moral law comes from the very heart of God.

4. **Because the doctrine of eternal punishment is the basis for penal atonement.**

Hell is not remedial – to reform wicked men.

“Suffering that is merely educational does not require a vicarious atonement in order to release from it. But suffering that is judicial and punitive can be released from the transgressor only by being inflicted upon a substitute. He, therefore, who denies personal penalty must, logically, deny vicarious penalty. If the sinner himself is not obliged by justice to suffer in order to satisfy the law he has violated, then, certainly, no one needs suffer for him for this purpose.” W.G.T. Shedd

Penal, refers to punishment as payment for sin. The Lord Jesus was called upon by the Father to offer Himself as a substitutionary sacrifice to endure the wrath of God upon Himself in order to make payment on the behalf of sinners. The death of Christ on the cross, then, was nothing less than Christ taking all the hell due to sinners. The Lord bore in His body the wrath of God due to all for whom He became surety. Jesus stood in the place of sinners as the just for the unjust to reconcile guilty men to God (1Peter 3:18).

Because this work of making satisfaction to God's justice for sinners required a sacrifice of infinite value, God sent His Son, the second person of the Trinity in human flesh. He alone could offer an all-sufficient sacrifice in His one death to make satisfaction to divine justice. It was because the Lord's sufferings were of eternal value (Heb. 9:14) that He could make atonement for all the sins of all God's people who would ever be redeemed. His virtue of His eternal sacrifice turned away the wrath of God. God is satisfied for his justice is maintained. Reconciliation with sinners is made. The way of pardon and peace for guilty sinners is guaranteed. It took the death of an infinite person to settle the account of infinite debt due to the justice of an offended God.

We must conclude, therefore, that the gospel way of reconciling sinners to God through the sufferings and death of Christ is based on the fact that God's punishment upon sin is eternal. Hell's eternal reality is at the heart of the very gospel we are called to preach to lost sinners.

5. **Because the doctrine of eternal punishment was behind the early church's burden for evangelism.**

Although it was the Lord himself who taught the doctrine of eternal punishment in the most forthright manner, the apostles did not fail to warn sinners of God's wrath against all sin and the of eternal destruction of the wicked.

Romans 2:12, 1Cor. 1:18, 2Cor. 2:15. 2Cor. 3:4, 2Peter 2:4-9.

If man's soul is set on a circular course of re-birth, then there is a faint hope of long-term deliverance for the wicked, and his misery is not eternal. But if man's soul is on a straight trajectory where he is born once, lives on this earth once - all he while under God's wrath - faces God's strict judgment once after death only to continue under God's wrath for all eternity, then we must warn the wicked to turn from their evil ways. This makes the gospel urgent and vital to faithful ministry.

