

## ON ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

By the final judgment we understand that wonder-work of the Triune God in Christ whereby He manifests all rational, moral creatures in connection with the works performed by them in time in the light of His holy law before the consciousness of the entire rational, moral world, judges them, and expresses the verdict which forever determines their future state.

The final judgment is the perfect theodicy.<sup>1</sup>

***Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life. Matt. 25:46.***

Eternal Punishment, perhaps no doctrine is as maligned and reacted to with as much antagonism as this doctrine. It is, without doubt the doctrine most objected to in the modern world.

1. The objections generally run along two lines. (1) Some see it as incompatible with *nature* and *attributes* of God. (2) Others find it difficult to see how a *finite* creature, sinning within *time*, can deserve *eternal* punishment.
  - a. **Objection.** The first says God is love and God is Father and the doctrine of eternal punishment and hell is incompatible with God as love. **A.** God is love, but love is not God. He is not only love, but also love, goodness, mercy, justice and a host of other attributes. Furthermore, Fatherhood is not the only relationship He sustains to the creation. He is also sustainer, lawgiver and judge.
  - b. **Objection.** The second asks the question how could a creature, being finite and having as life span as man, in that short time merit an eternal punishment? **A.** Two principles are common and unquestioned touching this. (1) The greater the person sinned against the greater the sin. Any sin against God, however small it may be is an infinite sin. (2) The greater the obligation to act otherwise the greater the guilt. What greater obligation does man have, than to love God?
  - c. **Summation.** Both objections come from man's tragic lack of regard for God and sense of self-importance.
2. What is meant by Hell? Hell is the place of eternal punishment where impenitent sinners experience anguish and sufferings in both body and soul eternally.
  - a. **It is a literal place.** Some object that the words often translated 'hell' do not mean the place of eternal punishment. There is some truth in this. Sheol and Hades often mean 'grave' or 'state of the dead.' However, the word 'gehenna' always denotes the place of eternal desolation, and must be translated 'Hell.' **Mk. 9:43-48.**

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<sup>1</sup> Hoeksema, 849.  
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- i. It is a place of confinement. The righteous has liberty and the wicked are restricted.
    - ii. It is described as being outside the city. **Rev. 22:15**; the Lake of Fire, **Rev. 20:14**.
  - b. It is a place of great sufferings.** The clearest portrait of this we have is the parable of Lazarus. **Luke. 16:23–24**. It makes not the slightest difference that it is a parable, it is the express purpose of the parable to teach us that the wicked are tormented after this life.
  - c. These sufferings are in both body and soul.** *Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell.* **Matt. 10:28**. It is in everyway fitting that we should suffer in the body we willingly made instruments of unrighteousness. It implies a different body than we now have.
  - d. These sufferings are eternal in duration.** *Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.* **Matt. 25:46**. The duration of the one is the duration of the other.
    - i. The terribleness of the punishment is no argument against the fairness of it. The punishment simply must fit the crime. It is perfectly right for an *infinite* crime against heaven to suffer *infinitely* in *degree* and *duration*.
- 3. What is God's relationship to Hell?** Is Hell merely separation from the presence of God? Though it is sometimes described this way, it is probably best understood as separation from the comfort and mercy of God.
  - a. Obviously there is nowhere where God is not. He fills all heaven and earth. He is Lord in heaven and in hell.
  - b. Hell is what it is because of the presence of God, not the absence. **Cf. Rev. 14:10**.
  - c. The eternal punishment of the impenitent will perfectly manifest the righteousness of God publicly punishing even the secret sins of men. **1Tim. 5:24, 25**.
- 4. What is the relationship of the redeemed to Hell?** Are they completely unconscious of the sufferings of the damned? No, they are aware of it. **Isa. 66:24; Luke 16:23–24**.
  - a. In the glorified state they have been conformed to the image of Christ and now relish the glory of God in both His justice and His mercy above all else. **Rev. 11:16–18**.
  - b. By the sufferings of the impenitent the righteous will eternally cherish the mercy received. **Rev. 9:22–24**.
  - c. All injustices perpetrated in time will be righted in eternity. **Rev. 19:1–5**.

**GREAT GOD, WHAT DO I SEE AND HEAR!**

Great God, what do I see and hear! The end of things created!  
The judge of mankind doth appear, on clouds of glory seated!  
The trumpet sounds; the graves restore the dead which they contained before:  
Prepare, my soul to meet Him.

The dead in Christ shall first arise, at the last trumpet's sounding,  
Caught up to meet Him in the skies, with joy their Lord surrounding;  
No gloomy fears their souls dismay; His presence sheds eternal day  
On those prepared to meet Him.

But sinners, filled with guilty fears, behold His wrath prevailing;  
For they shall rise, and find their tears and sighs are unavailing:  
The day of grace is past and gone; trembling they stand before the throne,  
All unprepared to meet Him.

Great God, what do I see and hear! The end of things created!  
The Judge of mankind doth appear, on clouds of glory seated!  
Beneath His cross I view the day when heav'n and earth shall pass away,  
And thus prepare to meet Him.

**Thomas Cotterill**  
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