

## UNCEASING PUNISHING IS BIBLICAL

The doctrine of eternal punishment of sinners by God in Hell is clearly taught in the Bible though you have to think it out at times to see for yourself.

To argue, "We should not take references to eternal punishing literally for God is too loving and forgiving to punish forever" implies, "Whoever believes in everlasting punishment does not understand love and is being a fanatic." It also opens the door to maybe arguing, "God wrote Mein Kampf through Hitler - we cannot explain the nasty bits. But we know God is wise and the book is not really nasty." No one who is fully concerned about love even considers how a nasty book can really be the word of a God of love. Period.

Eternal punishment first raises its shocking head in the Book of Daniel (12:2) where it is forecasted that the wicked will rise to everlasting contempt and shame unlike the just who will rise to everlasting life. Their sin cannot be forgiven ever when the shame and contempt is unending. God wants the saints to be happy so the contempt meant is not theirs nor his. So it is the hatred of the damned have towards one another. When he says the life and the abhorrence are everlasting it is clear that everlasting is meant in the same sense in both. Nobody would talk about everlasting life meant literally and everlasting contempt not meant literally in the same breath for then no sense can be made out of them. When the wicked in Hell will face hate forever it follows that they will be there forever.

The view that the contempt can be everlasting though the wicked are not and they perish is wrong. Why raise people up to kill them again? The contempt won't need to exist anymore when they are dead.

The doctrine of everlasting punishing is clear in the gospels. But we will leave them for now.

The Book of Revelation tells us that the smoke of the torment of those who commit idolatry will ascend "forever and ever" [eis aionas aionoon – literally, from ages to ages] (14:11). I used to think that it was just saying that the smoke would rise forever not that they would be tormented forever. The picture I had was of the smoke rising from the fire they had been destroyed in. But there would be no point in preserving the smoke if that happened for the saints cannot sin so the smoke must rise forever because the damned are tormented forever. When the verse says the smoke of the torture will rise forever and ever and immediately after that they will be tormented day and night forever it clearly means that sinners will suffer forever. Put it this way, why say the smoke of their torment will rise forever when you could say the smoke of their destruction rises? Given how hot the fire is we would expect them to be dead before they can even get near it as they are flung in but they are alive in it. If you are put into a fire that doesn't destroy you, you are in it to be tormented.

Of the Devil, the false prophet and the beast it is said that, "The devil who had led them astray [deceiving and seducing them] was hurled into the fiery lake of burning brimstone, where the beast and false prophet were; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever (through the ages of the ages)" (Revelation 20:10).

It seems to some that here the Devil and the false prophet and the beast are symbols for the forces hostile to God which enables them to think that this line is symbolic and does not literally refer to any person being forced to undergo ceaseless punishment. But Revelation does not consider the Devil a symbol. If, for example, the false prophet represents the people who tell religious lies it is stupid and meaningless to say that his eternal torment is a symbol. Meaningful symbols must picture the reality. The only way false prophecy can be tormented forever is if it exists forever and does not succeed in its goal of deluding people and false prophecy only exists forever if false prophets exist as long. But the prophet is probably just the ultimate false prophet and one man.

The Dawn Bible Students have argued that the forever torment of Satan is not literal personal torture for Satan forever. They dubiously assert that it only refers to Satan being tortured forever by the derision of the people of God though he does not exist. It is like the way you can torture a man who does not live any more (page 40, The Truth About Hell). But there is no evidence for this off-the-beaten-track interpretation. The Dawns point to the verses about Satan's destruction as evidence but none of the texts make it clear that he will be literally destroyed as in being put out of existence. When the Bible never says that eternal in relation to Hell is just roughly referring to a long time and not forever it is clear that we should not take it to mean a long time.

Death and Hades were thrown into the pool of fire which is the second death (Revelation 20:14). This appears to say that death dies itself in the pool. But death and Hell being thrown into the pool signifies that they end in the pool for they are abstract things. They will be different from personal beings. If they die in the pool that does not mean that people will. If death dies in the pool and the pool is the second death then it can't be death as in becoming corpses but spiritual living

death. It will be a death to all happiness.

The Hell in this case means the grave. The grave is Hell in the sense that it is your final destruction for sin – not meaning there isn't torment in Hell - unless there is a resurrection. Death and Hell dying in the fire is a metaphor that the beings in the fire will never die.

It is a mistake to argue that the tormented forever and ever bit is non-literal because it says they were hurled into fire and fire destroys. God can prevent fire from destroying.

Sin is intending to offer God an infinite offence so each and every sinner is as evil as the Devil. The Bible says that the Devil will be tortured for all eternity so this must happen to every sinner. When it happens the Devil and death and the false prophet it will happen to other sinners too.

Non-believers in everlasting torment claim that the forever in Revelations verses about everlasting torment is not to be taken literally any more than a person saying, "I will be washing this floor forever at this rate", is to be taken this way. It is obvious that the texts couldn't mean forever in a figurative way. They don't hint at a non-literal interpretation so that interpretation should be shunned. It was too serious a revelation for Jesus to be vague on anything. His listeners would have taken him literally. When God says something is everlasting he has the power to make it everlasting. So with him the word everlasting means literally everlasting.

The texts that seem to say that the wicked will not be "destroyed" or "perish" as their final punishment are not to be taken literally for they translate the Greek word, *apollumi*, which is simply used in some places to mean lost (Luke 15) or to have become useless (Matthew 9:17). You can destroy a person without killing that person. In Revelation 17:8, we read that the Beast shall be destroyed or go into perdition. The word here can be translated perdition or destruction. In Revelation 19:20, we are informed that the beast and his prophet will be thrown alive into a lake of fire and a millennium later the Devil is cast into it too and we read that all three will be in torment forever. So the destruction they experience is not annihilation. This suggests that the lake of sulphur preserves its victims in torment and when it is a lake and not a mere pool it shows that it was meant for more than these three. One may go to Hell at death but these people could have been in Hell all the time and behaved normally for

God can inflict the pains of Hell anywhere and miraculously.

Hebrews 6:2 alludes to eternal judgment. Some say that if a sinner is put out of existence that sinner is still judged as a sinner forever so this phrase does not imply everlasting punishing. It does for it is not a fair judgment to kill a sinner for it is neglecting to punish their sin. It is no more punishment than falling asleep. Hebrews states that getting on the wrong side of God is a horrific thing (10:31).

As the main thing fire does is destroying and not causing pain it is supposed by many scholars that the biblical references to everlasting fire mean a fire that destroys sinners and does not torment them. But it is just as easy to use fire as a symbol of pain as of destruction. A symbol does not have to resemble what it pictures in every respect. Experientially, the pain is worse than being destroyed in it. There are people who could have existed but who didn't. Are they being punished by not existing? Does it do them any harm? No.

Not even once does the Bible say that the wicked will be punished with the ultimate cessation of existence, apart from the end of earthly life, alone.

Paul declared that if Jesus has not risen from the dead one of the consequences is that the dead are lost (1 Corinthians 15). The dead could live without a resurrection therefore he means they will suffer eternally in a bad place if Jesus has not risen and are spiritually lost. The dead are not God's friends if Jesus did not rise. You cannot be spiritually lost if you are non-existent so the dead would have to be alive but opposed to God. Even sincere repentance and faith cannot save if Jesus had not risen (v17). If God would consign everybody to Hell or keep them in their sins – which religion says is worse than hellfire - if Jesus did not come to rise from the dead, God is capable of making a Hell and sending people to it. Indeed there must be a Hell for those who attack the resurrection and for Christians if they are wrong about the way to salvation.

Paul said that if Jesus has not risen the dead are lost forever for God will not save them. Even though Jesus could still have died to atone for sinners God will not save them. This infers that God is perfectly capable of giving people no second chance that they could have under better circumstances that they cannot help. He can give you no more chances and will put you in a Hell forever. Thought that God was so kind that if you do your best and really want salvation he will give it for your intention is what counts? If no atonement was made and you would accept one if there were, God would have to accept you on this logic. The doctrine of Jesus being the only way to salvation and everlasting happiness is monstrous.

The Bible informs us that the fire of Hell which torments the damned doesn't give off light when it says that Hell is dark or it could mean that the damned are blind (Jude 13). Some suggest on the basis of this that the fire of Hell is a metaphor. But

God can make fire and prevent its light from being visible or maybe the fire is bright but the damned cannot see it. If Hellfire were a metaphor it would represent something as painful as the pain of burning for the symbol must accurately resemble the thing symbolised. The Book of Daniel has three young men who God preserved from pain and being burned in the middle of a furnace. Where miracles are possible this is possible. This means that anybody who says the fire of Hell is not literal is a heretic for it could be so the Bible means it is literal. Even if it is absurd the writers of the Bible would not have been educated enough or in the right way to realise that.

Some texts seem to say that all will have salvation (Romans 5:19) but it is important to remember that all (or the equivalent) is a word that is not used literally all the time. It is often meant to be understood with its obvious exceptions. When the pope says that Jesus saved all from Hell he means all those who will not go to Hell forever because he is taking it for granted that we know about Hell.

It is stupid to say that everlasting punishment exists but that there is nobody undergoing it for then it wouldn't be eternal punishment and Jesus must have lied for he said that people do go there. He said people go there. Even he cannot know that unless they do go there.

That it is good to send people to Hell forever is implied by the doctrine that Jesus had to suffer and die to save us (John 14:6; Acts 4:12) - which features more strongly in the non-gospel scriptures - and its partner, the doctrine that salvation is impossible unless this sacrifice is accepted by you and appropriated. If Jesus had to suffer and die for us then this implies that God refused to forgive and save unless he died. He is capable of putting people in Hell forever. But if Jesus came to save us from eternal punishment that does not mean that eternal punishment happens though it must be possible when he came to save us from it. But still it shows we have the kind of God that would inflict it even if he doesn't. If a God who does it is bad so is this God.

Heretical Christian teachers say that Hell is against the will of God and he does not punish there. What happens is that people go there and inflict it on themselves.

A judge who sends a thief to jail not for his crime but because he doesn't like him is not punishing him. He is taking revenge on him and using the legal system to do it. It only outwardly looks like punishment. To punish you must intend to punish.

Jesus could not have called Hell eternal punishment if people punish themselves there for they cannot. True punishment is forced on you from outside. But to inflict torment on yourself to pay for some wrong you have done may be masochism but it is not punishment. If they hate God then they wouldn't punish themselves for sin. To do that is to condemn themselves for hurting God and doing him the favour of paying for it. They are not making themselves pay for opposing God - for to punish is to hurt as you intend to pay back evil for evil. They are hurting themselves to offend him if he is against unnecessary suffering. They are hurting themselves to express their hate of him and not to punish themselves. They are trying to punish him and they are not punishing themselves though they make themselves suffer for their motive is not to punish themselves. So God must force them to suffer if they are under punishment. They do not want to be punished for they hate his will. They have a choice between suffering for his will and repenting. They know they should do themselves a favour and repent when they are doing his will by being punished anyway. When they choose to stay it shows that they will remain in Hell forever. To say that God does not punish in Hell is to deny what Jesus said.

If God does not punish, then he does not take sin seriously. If you think God is right to do that then clearly you hate the sinner when you hate the sin. If sin is evil and you oppose punishment then you do not take it seriously and you don't care about the harm done to the victims of sinners.

The doctrine of everlasting punishment is in the Bible. Anyone who rejects it rejects the Bible. Not that we are complaining but we don't like trendy ministers and priests getting acceptance from the people through manipulating them with syrupy versions of nasty doctrines.

## BIBLE VERSION

The Amplified Bible

## FURTHER READING

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