

"If there is no Everlasting Punishment/Eternal Damnation then there is no free will"

Christianity and Islam teach that at death, if we are estranged from God by sin, we will go to Hell to suffer forever and once we go there it is impossible for us to leave. Catholics call such sin mortal sin. Jesus called it everlasting punishment.

Against criticisms of the motivations of believers and the doctrine as unjust, religion answers that it is all simple. It is about giving us freedom of choice. It is said that if there is no Hell or chance of finally rejecting God then we have no free will.

Why is it not, "If there is no Everlasting Punishment/Eternal Damnation there is free will only not as much?"

The excuse is just a desperate excuse to believe!

First, all the Bible says is that you will be punished forever after death and does not require you to believe that the damned do or don't have free will anymore. If Hell were about losing your free will and being stuck with your evil heart forever

Secondly, punishment is removing a lot of your free will because of something you did in the past.

Jesus and the Church both teach that if you die estranged from God by serious sin you will be punished forever for your sin in Hell. The doctrine could be a case of where grave evil - the worst evil imaginable is attributed to God and in defiance of the truth, believers still worship him as perfect! Religion has to find a way to make Hell a good thing or a necessary evil to avoid the charge of callousness.

Christianity popularises the notion that if there is no risk of going to Hell forever at death to endure unending punishment then there is no free will. Christians are trying to use people's love for their sense of freedom to get them to accept the existence of Hell. It is subtle emotional blackmail.

The Handbook of Christian Apologetics states that if there is no eternal damnation there is no free will. But that does not mean that anybody who dies in sin should be sent to Hell to be locked in sin forever. Their logic seems to be that if you can't choose a permanent state then you have no free will. But if our will is free enough though not completely free then who cares? If we are responsible for what we do but not 100% responsible then any choice for permanent suffering in Hell is impossible. Nobody wants to believe we are 100% free and nobody does believe it. It is okay to reward a person with perfect happiness for doing good if they are not 100% responsible for the good. It would show justice and generosity. It would not be okay to send a person to everlasting torment if their choice is not 100% theirs. A God who would do that should himself be damned. There is no need to believe in Hell at all and you cannot use free will as an excuse for believing in it. It is evil to even consider believing the doctrine.

Why would somebody believe in 100% free will that nobody wants to believe in except as an attempt to justify the evil doctrine of Hell?

Some say free will involves the power to make a permanent choice rejecting God.

The notion that free will means the power to fix your free will in a permanent state is a bizarre one. There is more freedom if you always keep the faculties with which you can change your mind and heart. And once you use free will to give up free will you no longer have free will and so should be allowed into Heaven.

Many who say free will requires the power to make a decision final are reasoning as follows, "You have to make up your mind sometime. You cannot be choosing good and evil every moment forever. So if God gives you a final choice he is respecting your free will."

So some say that if we will all end up in Heaven eventually then there is no point in worrying about being good and religious. You can put off conversion for trillions of years.

But there is a point in worrying about being good. It is the principle. It is not about what will happen to us if we get punished.

If you think that having a good future in this life or the next is what matters and sin or evil does not then you are already dark in the heart.

Putting a conversion off for trillions of years is actually nothing if you will change for the better permanently. What is several trillion years compared to endless years?

The argument makes you a bad ignorant person - you are corrupting yourself in order to justify people going to Hell forever. Sounds like the only person going there could be you!

Whatever the reason people can choose everlasting prison, it is not any of the ones we have seen.

Believers in everlasting punishment adopt the punishment model or the choice model. The punishment model implies you are thrown into Hell and this is only your choice in the sense that if you choose you commit a serious crime then you have to go to jail. You will not feel you have chosen Hell or jail but it is about punishing you and not about your choice.

The choice model argues that you alone cause your torment and are too stubborn to turn back to God.

Some say you can accept the choice model and the punishment model as well. But they are wrong. We have seen that you only ask for Hell or jail in the sense that you make people punish you when you commit a terrible crime. That is a sort of indirect choice. It is a mixed message choice. But the choice model is about a direct and clear choice. If you go to jail and have the key to get out and do not use it that is not punishment. So the choice model and the punishment model are not compatible.

In fact to say a person is being punished when you mean they can stop it but won't is vindictive. It is saying they suffer because they deserve it instead of feeling compassion for their self-abuse. What would you think of a person who tells a self-harming child, "You deserve all the cuts and bruises you carry"? If I rob a bank and then punish myself by starving myself. What is happening? You might say I deserve the pain of starving for I do it for myself but you cannot say it is really punishment for robbing the bank. It is not. To teach that you punish yourself in Hell is actually more callous than the notion that you are sentenced there for some sin you can no longer do anything about for it is in the past.

Suppose you need to be able to choose everlasting torment in order to have free will. What about the free will of anybody who wants to go to this Hell temporarily? Why is the permanent the only option? The damned should be allowed to change if they want to or to make themselves progressively worse and worse until they inflict everlasting torment on themselves which will never happen for we cannot choose such incredible misery. Even those who do seek pain, do so because they enjoy it or are attracted by some things that result from pain - eg attention and pity. It is argued that if God did not let you send yourself to Hell for all eternity then he would be guilty of ignoring your free will and giving you further chances of repentance that you do not want or will. If that is true then we have no free will now. If I choose to go to Hell now and forever, God ignores me. He doesn't strike me dead instantly to let me do it so to say there is no free will if there is no Hell is just to blame the damned and excuse the inexcusable God and is therefore vindictive. It is a strange kind of free will that gives you the power to lose free will for in Hell you cannot change. It denigrates the alleged value of free will. Hell destroys the love of God by saying he gave us evil free will instead of the will we really have. (The will we really have is the will not to choose good or evil but to choose good or lesser good.) If that is true the mortal sinner will go to Hell the second he sins. Interestingly, this objection is not answered in the section of the chapter of the Handbook that answers objections.

If you really choose Hell of your own free will and you really create it for yourself of your own free will, then how can you be expected to fear it? There is nothing to fear if you are in control. Here is a parallel. You can't fear making a choice to do a parachute jump. You can't be afraid of your own free will. Jesus commanded us to fear him who can get us into Hell. If you stay in jail of your own free will you are not being punished any more. Being punished means being forced to suffer. Jesus described Hell as eternal punishment. We don't understand how people could choose Hell and so it does not help to say people choose it freely. We might as well believe that people go there kicking and screaming because of some sin they committed and the reason is known only to God. The choosing Hell idea is especially upsetting to and beyond the understanding of children. They will fear their choice or the choices others make in case the choice is for going to Hell.

God's justice is supposed to be built into the way God has made us and made all things. So if we go to Hell, it is built into our nature. It is not that he takes an active role and puts us in Hell. So he makes Hell a consequence when you are bad enough. The Church says God's mercy and justice are not in combat but are intertwined and he exercises just mercy and merciful justice. God's mercy and justice are said to work together implying that Hell is merciful for the damned don't want to go to Heaven. Some even say, "The goodness of the damned will be punished because it is goodness without God or goodness that separates good from God and honours good instead of him." Forgiveness by definition means just going ahead and doing it no ifs and no buts. If God requires a son to suffer for your sins before he will forgive that is not forgiveness. The mercy of God is dubious. And worse, the consequences cannot be the same for everybody. If you bring

illness on yourself by becoming a drug addict, you may suffer more because of it than your friend who does the same. If God rigs this up then he is worse than the kind of God that gets the rod out and gives us a thrashing.

This teaching that you bring your punishment on yourself by doing wrong is nonsense. You can be a ruthless businessman and have the money to protect yourself from your enemies and live and die reasonably happy and healthy. But if you harm yourself by abusing say painkillers you will get very sick and die. It is not treating others badly that necessarily brings bad on you. It is abusing your body. It is fighting how nature looks after you. You will have a good liver if you don't abuse alcohol but if you drink loads every day you will pay a terrible price. It is not going against nature that harms you but the way you go against it. It is not being immoral that harms you but the way you choose to be immoral. If you are clever you can murder and get away with it. The hope that if you do wrong that nature will react and make you suffer is just vindictive wishful thinking. You want it to be true. But it is not true!

Can you wish that somebody will be going to Hell? You can if it is out of respect for their free will. The Church says God respects our free will if we choose Hell. You might say that it is wrong to wish Hell on a person for it denies they should be happy. If it is wrong because it makes them unhappy then you are implying unhappiness is worse than not having God. It's a sin for you to worry more about the suffering than God. So it follows that you should wish a person may choose Hell as long as it is their free choice!

Free will and Hell do not go together. If free will exists, it is not completely free thus nobody can choose everlasting torment. Those who say they do are trying to blame the damned and not God. They are religious nuts. Those who try to say we have free will therefore eternal punishment is possible or really takes place are simply liars.