

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

I. Biblical Terms

1. Sheol. Grave in Numb. 16:30, 33. Place of departed spirits redeemed (Gen. 35:37) and unredeemed (Prov. 9:18).
2. Hades. Usually the temporary place for the wicked dead, Luke 16:23. It will be cast into the lake of fire at the end of the millennium, Rev. 20:13-14.
3. Gehenna. Mark 9:48.
4. Tartars. 2 Pet. 2:4. Prison for fallen angels.
5. Black darkness. Jude 13, Matt. 22:13; 25:30.
6. Separation. 2 Thess. 1:9 and Rev. 14:10.

II. Is Hell Eternal or Just Age-Long?

Word "eternal" is used of God (Rom. 16:26), of life (John 3:26) of punishment and life (Matt. 25:46), of fire (Jude 7). The phrase "unto the ages of ages" occurs in Rev. 14:10-11; 19:3; 20:10/

III. Christ's Teaching in Luke 16: 19-31

1. There is conscious existence after death.
2. Hades and torment are real
3. One's destiny is fixed at death. No second chance.
4. Dead cannot communicate with the living.
5. The Bible gives sufficient revelation for faith to save.
6. There will be recall of life's experiences.

IV. Some False Views of the Afterlife

1. Universalism.
2. Annihilationism.
3. Second chance after death.
4. Anyone who wants mercy will be saved without hearing the gospel.

BIBLICAL TEACHING ON HELL

Words used.

1. Sheol. Grave, Numb 16:30, 33. Place of departed spirits both redeemed, Gen 35:37 and unredeemed (Prov. 9:18).
2. Hades. Grave, death Acts 2:27, 31. Usually place of wicked dead, Luke 16:23. ^{16:18-31 Mt 5:22} Cast into lake of fire, Rev 20:13-14. Hades intermediate state. Lake fire eternal. ^
3. Gehenna. Valley of Hinnom s and w of Jerus where continuous fires burned to consume worm-infested garbage. Mk 9:48 fire never goes out. Worm=internal torment. Fire=external torment. Salted with fire, v 49. For unbel refers to being preserved forever in the fire. For bel refers to refining fire to purge out what is contrary to God's will and preserve what is consistent with it.
4. Tartarus. 2 Pet 2:4 only. Prison holding fallen angels until final judgment.
5. Black darkness. Jude 13 (forever), Matt 22:13; 25:30. Away from lights of wedding feast. Where gnashing of teeth.
6. Lake of fire. Rev 21:8. Eternal, Matt 25:41; 5:22.
7. Separation, 2 Thess 1:9. Many prefer to use this term rather than fire today. ^{Rev 14:10}

Is hell eternal?

Age long. Same in Jn 3:16 of life. Rom 16:26 of God. Of punishment and life, Matt 25:46; Fire, Jude 7 (Sodom and Gor). Unto age(s) of ages Rev 14:10-11; 19:3; 20:10; Of God living forever, Rev 5:14; 15:7.

Teaching of Christ, Luke 16:19-31.

Some say He was not teaching about afterlife primarily, but to emphasize that being rich (Lk 16:1) does not guarantee being in paradise. But even if so would He teach wrong facts about afterlife? Parable=illus, simile, proverb, metaphor, story. This one teaches:

1. Conscious existence of soul immediately after death as Phil 1:21.
2. Torment and reality of hades.
3. Destiny fixed at death. No second chance.
4. Dead cannot communicate with living.
5. Sufficient evidence in Bible for faith to save.

OTHER VIEWS ON ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

OTHER VIEWS ON ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

1. Universalism. (apokatastasis=restoration). Either sal after period of punishment OR all now saved and will be happier if they know it, tho not nec to know it. Jn 12:32; 1 Cor 15:22; 1 Tim 2:4. Emphasize love of God. Origen, Barth, CH Dodd, Ferre, JAT Robinson, Barclay, Schleiermacher.

2. Annihilationism. 3 forms. (1) Naturalistic--all humans cease to exist at death. (2) Conditional--wicked suffer for an appropriate time in eternity then destroyed. (3) Classical or primary form--wicked annihilated at final judgment without further punishment. 2 Thess 1:9 destruction=extinction. Everlasting=fire that neither begins nor ends with present age. Don't press Matt 25:41. Stott says it means 2 contrasting destinies but nature of each not defined. So punishment can mean extinction. If wicked are to suffer unspecified time of torment then be destroyed, why is such a climactic event not mentioned anywhere in Bible? Stott, Pinnock, Fudge, Hughes. Death=separation, not extinction. apollumi, destroy=extinction of being. Rom. 2:12. Stott on Rev. 20:10. Beast and false prophet are symbols as death and hades and all cast into lake of fire=destroyed, annihilated. Evangelical Essentials, David Edwards and John Stott, IVP, 1988.

3. Post-mortem conversion. 2nd chance after death. 1 Pet 3:18-20. Donald Bloesch: "We can affirm sal on the other side of the grave, since this has scriptural warrant (cf. Isa. 25:19; John 5:15-19; Eph 4:8-9; 1 Pet 3:19-20; 4:6); yet we cannot preach that any of those who are banished to hell will finally be saved." Evan Theol, 227.

IS AN EXPLICIT GOSPEL MESSAGE NECESSARY FOR SALVATION?

1. Yes, no one who does not bel gosple today will be saved. LSC, CFHH, Sproul, Acts 4:12; Jn 14:6. Seeker will be sent the message, Acts 10. Geisler CCR
2. Anyone who repents and wants mercy will be saved even tho doesn't know or hear gospel. Kraft, Pinnock.
3. Possibility that unevangelized will be saved. Can't be sure, so leave it to God. Packer, Nicole.
4. Post-mortem conversion. Bloesch.
5. Simultaneous dispensationalism. If haven't heard and living under OT requirements will be saved. But if deliberately reject like MUslim, then no hope.

Living up to Cor, with IS can save Jew today. But Rom 3:20!

SOME CONSIDERATIONS

1. Eph. 4:8-9. Lower parts=earth. 1 Pet 4:6. Dead=martyrs. 1 Pet 3:18-20. Whatever it means, no second opportunity.
2. Phil 2:9-11. Forced acknowledgment that X alone has right to reign. Col 1:19-20 can't mean all saved bec of Col 1:23 and 3:6. Cosmic harmonization including rebels. Jn 12:32, all includes Greeks.
3. Wrong def of words. Destruction. Matt 10:28 used by annihil. But see LUke 15^{4,6,24} where used of lost but existing sheep, coin, son. =ruin, unfit for use, existing in diff form. Death=separation, not extinction. Eternal of God in Matt 25:46 and Rev 5:14, 15:7 (age of ages). Eternal life, Jn 3:16. So also of eternal fire, JUde 7, Matt 25:46.
4. Luke 16:19-31.

*πρωτόδικη =
put to death
lost*

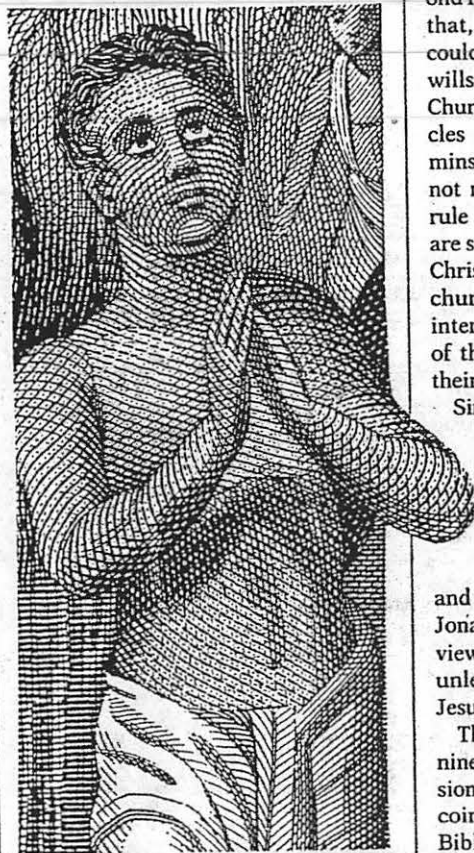
The Perennial Debate

Throughout history Christians have wrestled with the question of salvation for those who have never heard of Christ. No single answer to this question has ever won consensus in the church, and committed Christians have espoused widely differing views. An overview of their perspectives is helpful in any discussion of today's encounter with world religions.

The early church—which, until A.D. 313 when Constantine and Licinius made Christianity a fully licit religion, was a minority movement fighting for its place in society—produced a plethora of answers. Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165) said, "Those who lived according to reason [the *logos*] are Christians," even though they did not know about Jesus. Tertullian (c. 160–c. 220) claimed that it had been a common belief since the days of the apostles that Jesus descended to hell and preached the gospel. There was debate, though, as to who benefited from the preaching. Irenaeus (c. 130–c. 200) and Tertullian held that Jesus delivered only the believers of the Old Testament from hell. On the other hand, Clement of Alexandria (mid-100s), Origen (c. 185–c. 254), and Athanasius (c. 296–373) taught that Jesus delivered from hell both Jews and Gentiles who accepted the gospel and that postmortem evangelism continues even today.

Augustine (354–430) rejected such ideas, arguing that before we die we must know about Jesus in order to be saved. Consequently, he believed that all the unevangelized are condemned to hell. Much later, Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–74) agreed with Augustine on the necessity of knowing about Jesus, but went further to claim that for those few "brought up in the forest or among wolves," God would send the gospel message through miraculous means.

The "age of discovery," during which the voyages of Columbus, Magellan, and Drake brought Christians into contact with other cultures, revived the issue, but the Reformers were not able to give it a great deal of attention. Martin Luther held out hope for the salvation of the unevangelized (especially the Roman orator Cicero), but he did not dogmatize this view. Ulrich Zwingli believed that pagans like Socrates and Cato were saved.



What fate for the "heathen"? Christianity's great thinkers have offered several verdicts.

John Calvin took a more restrictive view, believing that all unevangelized and those of other religions (primarily the Turks) would be damned since "apart from Christ the saving knowledge of God does not stand." Dutch Reformed controversialist Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609) taught that anyone who had not heard the gospel would receive an opportunity even if by direct revelation from God.

The topic was also broached in several early Protestant confessions. The Second Helvetic Confession (1566) asserted that, while it would be unusual, God could send the gospel to whomever he wills through miraculous means. The Church of England's Thirty-Nine Articles (1563) and the Calvinistic Westminster Confession (1647 and 1649) did not rule out such views, but they did rule out the idea that non-Christians are saved by their religion instead of by Christ. Later, some Anglicans like high-churchman Edward Pusey (1800–82) interpreted this to mean the possibility of the unevangelized being saved in their religion, but by Christ.

Since the eighteenth century the topic has received much discussion.

John Wesley believed that many of the heathen were taught by the "inward voice" of God and that no person should "sentence all the heathen and Mahometan world to damnation." Jonathan Edwards took the opposite view, holding that no one can be saved unless he had explicit knowledge of Jesus.

Then, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the rapid expansion of American and British influence coincided with the establishment of Bible societies and mission efforts. This great missionary expansion brought the issue to the fore. European Protes-

tant divines such as Johann Lange and Frédéric Godet suggested that the unevangelized will receive an opportunity to accept Christ after death. The Princeton Calvinists Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield ruled out all hope for those ignorant of the work of Christ; whereas William Shedd, the noted Calvinist defender of orthodoxy at Union Seminary, and Northern Baptist theologian A. H. Strong believed otherwise, arguing that the unevangelized would be saved if they accepted the light God had given them.

Each of the views mentioned above is represented in contemporary evangelicalism, but two positions are especially popular. Perhaps the dominant view, espoused by L. S. Chafer, Carl F. H. Henry, and R. C. Sproul, is that no unevangelized person will be saved. The other popular evangelical position, held by J. N. D. Anderson, Clark Pinnock, and Charles Kraft, is that if any unevangelized person repents and desires God's mercy, he will be saved by the work of Christ even though ignorant of that work. Other perspectives include that of Norman Geisler, who says that anyone who follows the light he has will receive an opportunity to hear the gospel before death, and Donald Bloesch, who affirms the possibility of conversion after death. John Stott believes that multitudes of the unevangelized will be saved, although he has not advanced a theory of how this may come about. J. I. Packer and Roger Nicole allow some possibility for the salvation of the unevangelized but say that instead of speculating about it, we should leave it in the hands of God. Although God's decision on this issue is final, the church has never agreed on the nature of that decision. □

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destroyed. "Conditional immortality," a related term, means that no one survives death except those to whom God gives life; that is, man is immortal by grace, not by nature.

One of the driving forces behind the evangelical exodus from the traditional doctrine of hell is that of setting forth a biblical and reasonable theodicy to the world. A "theodicy" is a defense of God's justice in the face of evil's reality. One theologian says that "the idea of everlasting torment (especially if it is linked to soteriological predestination) raises the problem of evil to impossible dimensions. If Christians want to hold that God created some people to be tortured in hell forever, then the apologetic task in relation to theodicy is just hopeless."¹

This same theologian argues that the problems of Auschwitz and cancer pale in comparison to the problem of God allowing most of His creatures to go ignorantly to hell. The doctrine of annihilation is seen, therefore, as a superior theodicy, for it emphasizes that those who are not saved will not exist forever in a place called hell or the lake of fire, but will either simply pass out of existence or be actively put out of existence by God. A number of prominent contemporary evangelicals advocate annihilationism: the late Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, John Wenham, and Stephen Travis, as well as John R.W. Stott and Clark H. Pinnock.² We will note some of the statements made by the latter two evangelicals and then respond to their reasons for holding to annihilationism.

■ John R.W. Stott

A highly regarded British evangelical, John Stott has challenged the Christian community to faithful preaching and steadfast spirituality. Over twenty of his books continue to be published. In one booklet he poignantly argues, "If we come to Scripture with our minds made up, expecting to hear from it only an echo of our own thoughts and never the thunderclap of God's, then indeed he will not speak to us and we shall only be confirmed in our own prejudices."³

John Stott engages in a book-length debate with the liberal Anglican David L. Edwards in *Evangelical Essentials*. In that work Stott does a masterful job of faithfully representing evangelical theology, defending the orthodox position on miracles,

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the deity of Christ, the atonement, and other areas, but departing from the long-held view of the eternal conscious punishment of the wicked.

Stott is put on the spot by Edwards to take a stand either for or against the traditional view of hell. Some have suggested that Stott was baited by Edwards into disclosing his annihilationist view. However, Stott says to Edwards:

I am grateful to you for challenging me to declare my present mind. I do not dogmatise about the position to which I have come, I hold it tentatively. But I do plead for frank dialogue among Evangelicals on the basis of Scripture. I also believe that the ultimate annihilation of the wicked should at least be accepted as a legitimate, biblically founded alternative to their eternal, conscious torment.⁴

Stott expresses gratitude that he, perhaps after years of holding to annihilationism, can publicly affirm his belief that the wicked will be consumed by the fire of God.

Pleading with evangelicals "to survey afresh the biblical material" on the fate of the wicked, Stott advises that they must open their hearts and minds "to the possibility that Scripture points in the direction of annihilation, and that 'eternal conscious torment' is a tradition which has to yield to the supreme authority of Scripture."⁵ He then presents four lines of argument which we will consider shortly.

■ Clark H. Pinnock

This influential Canadian theologian has challenged the church to defend biblical Christianity and to present the message of the Gospel in a contemporary and relevant manner. Responding to a liberal theologian's review of his *Scripture Principle*, Pinnock writes: "As an evangelical I believe there is a truth deposit in scripture which needs to be guarded (2 Tim. 1:14)."⁶

However, he charges Christians who still hold to the eternal conscious punishment view of the Other Side with failing to come to grips with "the moral horror and exegetical flimsiness of the traditional view of hell," challenging the evangelical world with the question: "How can one imagine for a moment

that the God who gave his Son to die for sinners because of his great love for them would install a torture chamber somewhere in the new creation in order to subject those who reject him to everlasting pain?"⁸

Pinnock sees only three possible options concerning the lost: the traditional doctrine of eternal torment (which he says is "morally and scripturally flawed");⁹ universalism (to which he says "large numbers of sensitive Christians" will turn if the traditional view of hell is not abandoned), and¹⁰ annihilationism. The last appears to have the fewest problems to Pinnock. God doesn't raise the wicked in order to torture them eternally and consciously, but "rather to declare his judgment upon the wicked and to condemn them to extinction, which is the second death (Rev. 20:11-15)."⁹

In a dialogue similar to Stott's with David Edwards, Pinnock engages in a *Theological Crossfire*¹⁰ with the liberal Delwin Brown. Beginning with a discussion of theological method, Pinnock then discusses with Brown the doctrines of God, sin, Christ, and salvation. The last chapter concerns the Christian hope and there Pinnock defends his annihilationist view of hell.

Pinnock argues that the New Testament writers "surrendered entirely to Hellenism" in their expectation that God would raise up the whole person in body and soul.¹¹ He questions the traditional doctrine that Christians go immediately to heaven when they die, stating that "this is not really an accurate way of speaking biblically."¹² He is arguing against what he considers the Greek idea of the existence of man's eternal soul—an issue which we will discuss shortly.

Concerning the question, What will happen to those who finally reject God's love? Pinnock writes:

[Evangelicals] have taught that there will be a literal fire in which people will be tortured forever and ever. But surely this is both morally intolerable and fortunately biblically unnecessary. . . . The belief in hell as everlasting torture is probably based upon the Greek view of the immortality of the soul, which crept into Christian theology and extended the experience of judgment into endless ages.¹³

The traditional doctrine of hell, Pinnock argues, is "a clear

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example of how moral sense causes us to reopen an exegetical question."¹⁴ He then drops the gloves and issues the challenge: "It's time for evangelicals to come out and say that the biblical and morally appropriate doctrine of hell is annihilation, not everlasting torment."¹⁵

The liberal Delwin Brown is not convinced that the traditional doctrine of hell as eternal conscious punishment can so easily be abandoned by evangelicals. He asks Pinnock: "Why is belief in hell as eternal punishment not mandatory for evangelicals? Aren't you playing the game you attribute to liberals—'picking and choosing' what you want to believe?"¹⁶ Although Pinnock believes that Brown has misunderstood him ("I do not in fact deny hellfire"), Brown echoes the position of Ferré (noted in chapter 2) that the Bible sets forth several views of the fate of the wicked. Brown challenges Pinnock:

Your "reform" of the traditional view of hell is a considerable improvement, in my judgment. . . . You want in the end to say that what the Bible "really" teaches is the destruction of the wicked, not their everlasting torment. Is it not nearly accurate to say: (a) the Bible contains differing views about what happens to the wicked, (b) there are several more or less plausible ways to construe the biblical message as a whole, and (c) the broad interpretation of the biblical witness that you defend (but not prove) leads you on this particular point to deny conscious everlasting torment and affirm a doctrine of hell as annihilation?¹⁷

Brown then concludes by saying to Pinnock that "We [liberals] are not picking and choosing anymore than you are. Like you, we find ourselves drawn to the biblical witness and compelled to listen to its manifold voices. Like you, we struggle, amidst the wealth and diversity of these voices, to come to some interpretation of that witness as a whole."¹⁸

Brown both disagrees and agrees with Pinnock's doctrine of annihilation:

According to the alternative and more dominant view in the New Testament, hell represents something that has an everlasting reality. This, of course, is the view that became