

Concerning Unending Torment in Hell

God Doesn't Lie

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If it is true that all human beings who fail to meet God's requirements for salvation are to suffer endless punishment, then it is terribly true to all who are in danger and, in fact, is one of the most important truths that could possibly be known. If it is true, as most churches claim, then it should have been made known in the clearest manner possible from the very beginning. It should have been announced in language which no one could misunderstand, to every generation, and one would expect to read it in no indefinite terms in Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation.

When God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, He pronounced a law for their observance, and clearly stated the penalty attached to it. This penalty was to serve as a warning to all humanity that was to follow. Surely, if endless punishment were to be part of that penalty, justice would demand that it be stated in specific terms. Did He do this?

Here is the clear statement: "*Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*" (Gen. 2:17). This is far from saying, "Thou shalt die, and after that, be subjected to the torment of endless hell."

After Adam had sinned, God spoke and said that the serpent was cursed, the ground was cursed, and that Adam would return to the dust from whence he came (Gen. 3:17-19). Nowhere can we find even the slightest hint that Adam was to be sentenced to endless punishment.

The killing of Abel was not only the first murder, but also the most famous murder in all of history. (Gen. 4:1-16). God pronounced the punishment in simple terms, but it did not include endless punishment. Cain then said, "*My punishment is greater than I can bear...and it shall come to pass that every one who finds me shall slay me.*" God's answer was, "*Therefore, whosoever slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him seven-fold.*" If infinite, endless torment is Cain's punishment, *how can seven-fold more than this be inflicted on anyone else?*

The flood is an example of the worst wickedness found in the Bible (Gen. 6-6). If endless punishment awaits the sinner, surely it would be mentioned here. Details are given: the height of the water above the mountains, the number of days it prevailed, etc. If these people were all to be subjected to endless punishing, what is to be made of the fact that it is not even mentioned?

In the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, God said, "*Shall I hide from Abraham that which I do...?*" (Gen. 18:17). The destruction of the wicked people is expressed in terms such as *consume*, *slay*, and *destroy* (Vs 22-23). They were destroyed by fire, but nothing is said of their being subjected to an endless fire after death. Jude 7 tells us that they are "*set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.*" Eternal fire and endless fire are two different things. Eternal fire means that the effect of the fire is eternal, just as scripture speaks of eternal salvation and eternal judgment. The fire destroyed them forever, but that fire did not continue to burn. It could not be

an example if there was some part of man to suffer endlessly after death, as is taught in most churches today.

What do we find in the Law given through Moses? In Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy the commandments are set forth, along with penalties for refusing to obey them, but there is not one syllable to warn them of endless woe to come. In Deuteronomy (Chapter 28) God detailed the curses to fall upon the people for not observing His commandments. Please read them for yourself. These curses were carried out on Israel in 1400 years of history culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Now, if after these judgments of which God had warned were all carried out, can it possibly be supposed that God then casts them into some kind of endless fire, without a note of warning, and without leaving even a word on record of their terrible fate?

Moses had to be well aware of the doctrine of future endless punishment, as it was the common doctrine of Egypt, and “*Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians*” (Acts 7:22). Yet he rejected it, along with all the other superstitions of the Egyptians. This is strong evidence of the fact that this doctrine is not of God, but of pagan origin. But, if the doctrine were true, and for thousands of years God saw the guilty creatures plunging into unutterable endless torture, after He had clearly stated that their punishment would be death, just how are we to understand the character of Him who claims to be just, righteous, and true?

The New Testament record also fails to give support for the doctrine. John the Baptist, in denouncing the Pharisees, said that Jesus would “*thoroughly cleanse the threshing-floor; and he will gather his wheat into the garner, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire*” (Matt. 3:12). Unquenchable does not mean unending. The fire goes out when the chaff is burned up. No unending punishment here.

Jesus warned of being cast into Gehenna. (The KJV uses *hell*, but the word Jesus used is *Gehenna*.) This was the city dump outside Jerusalem, where fire was never put out, and where the maggots fed on dead carcasses. What the worms didn't eat, the fire consumed. No unending punishing here.

In his parables Jesus portrayed the sinner as burned up like weeds, as *cut asunder, destroyed, slain, losing life, scattered as dust*, all in keeping with God's warning to Adam, “Thou shalt surely die,” and Ezekiel's statement, “*The soul that sins, it shall die*” (Ex. 18:20).

The attempt to use Matthew 25:41, 46 to prove perpetual punishment also fails totally. At judgment both the saved and the lost have their fates sealed eternally. The righteous will receive unending life, and the unrighteous will suffer the punishment of death, which will be eternal. It will be the everlasting punishment of death, not everlasting punishing.

After thousands of years of God revealing His message through prophets and through Jesus His Son, with never any warning about unending punishment, suppose that after death people learn that such is the case after all – not death, but unending torture. What would that say of God? It would make Him a liar, for He said that the sinner would die, but instead, He keeps him alive to make him suffer. Such a doctrine makes a mockery of God's justice and portrays Him as a sadistic monster.

Some say, "But God never sends anyone to hell; they send themselves there by refusing to accept Jesus." Indeed, anyone can avoid the sentence of death by repentance toward God, faith in and full trust in Christ, God's Son. But, life depends on the life-giver. No one could spend a day in the alleged hell unless God gave him life. Also, the final word of execution falls from the mouth of Jesus, as portrayed in the parables and in Revelation.

No man on earth, no matter how blinded by some religious creed, would say that it would be just and right to keep a person alive in order that he might suffer endlessly. Certainly man has no right to ascribe to his Father in heaven actions which any human being would shrink from in horror.

No trace of endless punishment is found in the Old Testament. Moses, who did know of it existing among the Egyptians, repudiated it by his silence. The law did not mention it among all its warnings. Job, the Psalms of David, the Proverbs of Solomon, and the Prophets made no mention of such a horrible thing.

How, then, did the doctrine ever become so widely accepted by Christians, since it is not taught in Scripture? Tertullian is said to be the first Christian leader to teach eternal torture, around 200-220 AD. Augustine was the next writer to champion the doctrine. The Catholic Dictionary says: "So great a punishment, says St. Augustine, that no torment known to us can be compared to it." Augustine was an avid fan of Plato, who is known for his pagan doctrine of an "immortal soul."

When I first began to declare that the wages of sin is death and not unending torture, an evangelist friend wrote to tell me that if we didn't preach the horrors of endless torment in hell, sinners would never turn to God and be saved. On the contrary, this doctrine hardens the hearts of men and is a barrier to their receiving God's truth and seeking fellowship with Him. For forty years I have received letters from those who testify that, since knowing the true penalty for sin, they have a better understanding of God and the Bible, and greater zeal and joy in serving Him.

The clearest evidence against unending punishment, other than the fact that it isn't taught in Scripture, is that Jesus suffered the penalty of our sin, and the penalty He paid was death, not unending punishment.

"The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 6:23).

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