

The Reality of Eternal Punishment

Eternity. We often use this word to describe some unpleasant thing that seemingly has no end. Eternity is something that all men face—as the soul within us is eternal in nature. (Eccl. 12:7) Where our souls will be during eternity depends upon choices made here, now, before we die.

Matthew 25:46 states an important fact: the righteous will inherit *eternal life* and the unrighteous will inherit *eternal punishment*. While most people believe in heaven (78% in a *U.S. News & World Report* issue), less believe in the fact of a real place called hell. In fact, out of the 60% who believe in hell, **only 4% think they will go there!** This stands in great contrast to what our Lord said in Matthew 7:13-14: *Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.*

While many agree that hell exists, some now question the duration of punishment inflicted upon those who experience *the second death*, (Rev. 21:8). Revelation gives us the best picture of the length of the punishment (experienced in hell) and eternal bliss (experienced in heaven.)

Note the heavenly beings in Revelation 4:8 who praise God **day and night** saying *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty who was and who is and who is to come*. In Revelation 7:15, the saved who came out of the great tribulation are pictured in heaven serving God **day and night** in His temple. Contrast this by examining Revelation 14:11 where we are told the lost are tormented *forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night*. John continues his explanation of the torment of hell by stating the devil and his angels will be tormented **day and night forever and ever**, (Rev. 20:10).

Tommy Hagewood (*Locust Light*, 11/15/96; Vol. 28, No. 22) points out that there will be no night in heaven (Rev. 21:25; 22:5). Heaven will be one eternal day of joy where the redeemed will worship and serve God. Hell will be the exact opposite. The Bible describes hell as a place of *outer darkness* (Mt. 25:30; 25:41, 46). Hell will involve separation from **everything holy!** 2 Thess. 1:9 says, *These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power*. Matthew 25:41 indicates that the punishment will involve a fire that burns **throughout eternity!** Since the punishment and the fire are eternal—we must assume that those receiving it will remain conscious throughout eternity!

What can we learn from this? Hagewood observes:

The day and night references to both heaven & hell in Revelation obviously refer to the state of both places going on at the same time and for the same length of time—forever and ever! (Emphasis mine, MHA) While the saved will enjoy an eternal day the lost will endure an eternal night. Both heaven and hell will be places of everlasting consciousness. Everlasting awareness is not the same as everlasting life. Whereas heaven will be a place of eternal glory, honor, peace, and immortality, **hell will be a place of eternal separation (death) from God and the saved**. In hell, the lost will experience indignation, wrath, tribulation, and anguish (Rom. 2:6-11.) The eternal destruction of which the Scriptures speak is a loss of well being—**not a loss of being** (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

What about the love and forgiveness of God? Some say “if God is cruel enough to make man and punish him with fire then I have no need for a God like that.” This argument fails to realize that God has frequently used fire to punish the disobedient. He rained brimstone and fire on Sodom & Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24). He brought hail mingled with fire upon the Egyptians (Ex. 9:23). By fire God destroyed 250 men who were in rebellion (Num 16:35). God sent fire upon Nadab and Abihu to devour them because they acted without His authority (Lev. 10:2). Peter says that sometime in the future this world will be dissolved by fire and the elements shall melt with fervent heat (2 Pet. 3:12).

What is the bottom line? **We don't want to go to hell!** We should do whatever possible to get home to heaven! Have you received forgiveness of your sins? Are you prepared face eternity?

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