

Hell and Judgment

"If a game is played, it must be possible to lose it." C. S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain

When was the last time you heard a sermon on hell? I think I would not be wrong to state that for many, they have never heard one. Hell, like sin, has pretty dropped off the scope in most churches. Despite neglect of the doctrine, the subject of hell is taught in the Scriptures. I would venture that most people, if asked who spoke the most about hell, would name the apostle Paul. But they would be wrong. It is not a prominent subject for Paul. Hell is, however, a prominent subject for—and this is initially rather shocking—our Lord. Jesus taught more about hell and judgment than anyone in Scripture. This fact is less shocking when one recognizes that the Bible teaches that hell is a real place and that Jesus himself as Judge sends people there (John 5.22-29). Consider Jesus' words:

"For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes. For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, in order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him" (John 5.21-23).

Jesus is the judge of humanity. Hell is a real place. This is the reason Jesus warned men about it. The verses below demonstrate the consistent revelation of the doctrine of hell and judgment throughout Scripture.

Words For "Hell"

In the Old Testament the word for hell is "Sheol" (שְׁאוֹל). It was the world of all the dead but not the permanent abode of the righteous (Psalm 16.10, 49.15; Hosea 13.14). The New

Testament has three Greek words for hell: “Hades” ([ᾍδης](#)), “Gehenna” ([γέεννα](#)) and “Tartaroo” ([ταρταρώ](#)).

The word “hades” is used for the place of the departed spirits of the lost and is found in Matthew 11.23, 16.18; Luke 10.15, 16.23; Acts 2.27, 31; Revelation 1.18, 6.8, 20.13, 20.14.

The word “Gehenna” is the place or state of the lost or condemned and is found in Matthew 5.22, 29, 30, 10.28, 18.9, 23.15, 23.33; Mark 9.43, 45, 47; Luke 12.5; James 3.6.

The word “tartaros” was the subterranean abyss of Greek mythology where demigods were punished. The pseudepigraphic book of Enoch mentions it as the place where fallen angels are confined. It is found only once in the Bible and only in its verbal form. Peter appropriated the word to describe God’s incarceration of fallen angels to a netherworld dungeon until the day of final judgment (2 Peter 2.4).

Hell is described in a number of passages: Matthew 13.42; Matthew 25.46; Philippians 3.19; 2 Thessalonians 1.9; Hebrews 10.39; 2 Peter 2.17; Jude 1.13; Revelation 2.11; 14.9-11, 19.20; 20.6, 10, 14; 21.6-8. According to Revelation 20, hell will be absorbed into a place called the Lake of Fire. Hell is terrifying; it is a place of hopelessness and eternal imprisonment and torment.

Jesus on Hell

As mentioned above, Jesus taught more about hell than anyone else combined. In reading the gospels, the subject of hell and judgment was one He could hardly stop talking about. He considered it an extremely important subject. The following words are from the Lord Himself in the gospel of Matthew.

Matthew	Passage
But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty <i>enough to go into the fiery hell</i> .	Sermon on the Mount Matthew 5.22

²⁹ If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.	Sermon on the Mount Matthew 5.29-30
¹³ "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. ¹⁴ For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.	Sermon on the Mount Matthew 7.13-14
²¹ "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. ²² Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' ²³ And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'	Sermon on the Mount Matthew 7.21-23
¹⁰ Now when Jesus heard <i>this</i>, He marveled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. ¹¹ I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline <i>at the table</i> with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; ¹² but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."	Encounter with Roman Centurion Matthew 8.10-12
Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.	Warnings of Persecution Matthew 10.28
²⁹ But he *said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn."'"	Tares Among Wheat Matthew 13.29-30
⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, ⁵⁰ and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.	Instruction on the Kingdom of Heaven Matthew 13.49-50
⁸ "If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire. ⁹ If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell.	Warning of Impediments to the Kingdom of God Matthew 18.8-9
¹¹ "But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, ¹² and he *said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' And the man was speechless. ¹³ Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴ For many are called, but few are chosen."	Inadequate Preparation for the Kingdom of God Matthew 22.11-14
¹³ "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.³² Fill up, then, the measure of <i>the guilt</i> of your fathers. ³³ You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?	Condemnation of the Religious Matthew 23.13, 32-33

⁵⁰ the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect <i>him</i> and at an hour which he does not know, ⁵¹ and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.	Christ's Return and Judgment Matthew 24.50-51
²⁹ "For to everyone who has, <i>more</i> shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. ³⁰ Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.	Christ's Return and Judgment Matthew 25.29-30
⁴⁰ The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, <i>even the least of them</i> , you did it to Me.' ⁴¹ "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴² for I was hungry, and you gave Me <i>nothing</i> to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; ⁴³ I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.' ⁴⁴ Then they themselves also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?' ⁴⁵ Then He will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' ⁴⁶ These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."	Christ's Return and Judgment Matthew 25.40-46

In Mark, Jesus spoke of hell in the following passages: Mark 3.28-29, 9.43-48. In Luke, He taught about hell and judgment in Luke 10.14-15, 12.4-5, 13.24-28, 16.22-28. And finally, in John, John 5.28-29.

Since Jesus spent so much time warning us of hell and judgment we do well to pay attention. Men and women live careless lives without thought of God but a day of accountability is coming. It does little good to push it from one's mind. It is reality.

The Love of God

God loves every person. He has done everything to spare each person from the judgment of hell. God the Son, Jesus Christ, went to the cross, suffered and died for every person to pay the penalty of God's judgment on sin. He was our substitute. The proof that His work was effective was His resurrection from the dead. That is the good news! One need only believe God to be saved from eternal doom (1 Corinthians 15.1-4). This is the [gospel](#)!

Most people believe one goes to hell because one has done bad

things, i.e., because of sin. God solved the sin problem with Christ's death on the cross and His glorious resurrection. Ultimately, the Bible teaches that one goes to hell because he has rejected God's love and Christ's work on the cross. John recorded what he saw in the Lord's revelation to him of the final judgment. He wrote:

"And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20.11-15)."

The Biblical account of judgment is that only when one's name is not found in the "book of life" is one judged for his works or deeds (cf. Romans 2.6). The book of deeds contains a record of the works one did during his life. If one is not found in the book of life, if no record exists of one having believed the gospel that Christ died for them and rose from the dead, then the basis for judgment becomes one's "works", i.e. one's deeds—good works and evil works. This is what Jesus meant when he declared in John:

"He said therefore again to them, "I go away, and you shall seek Me, and shall die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come" (John 8.21).

and

"I said therefore to you, that you shall die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins" (John 8.24).

The individuals at the final judgment, described in Revelation 20, are there because they rejected Christ and His gift of salvation. They only have their good deeds to commend themselves to God. But the Scriptures teach that no one has the necessary righteousness to meet the approval of God (Romans 3.20, 28). Paul wrote,

"Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness" (Romans 4.1-5).

Paul also wrote about Jesus as the Judge,

"For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus" (Romans 2.14-16).

According to the Scriptures, human works can never satisfy the righteousness of God. A person can do all the good deeds of a Mother Teresa or an Albert Schweitzer and go to the Lake of Fire (Romans 3.20, 28; Galatians 2.16). If one could make himself acceptable to God by works, why was it necessary for Christ to go to the cross? Does it make sense for God to send his Son to die for something we could do ourselves? It is *precisely* because man *cannot* save himself that Christ came to die and make an atonement for sin. Jesus warned of this very matter when he said,

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never know you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS'" (Matthew 7.21-23 cf. Luke 13.24-30).

When Christ died on the cross, he died for all (Romans 5.7-8; 1 Timothy 4.10; Hebrews 2.9; 1 Peter 3.18; 2 Peter 2.1; 1 John 2.2). He paid the penalty for man's sin. He was the "lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1.29).

Christ's death on the cross was the fulfillment of hundreds of years of God's teaching Israel by means of the Levitical sacrifices. The animal sacrifices typified the true and final sacrifice of Christ himself. Those whose names are in the "book of life" are those who have recognized their inability to justify themselves before God and have accepted God's free gift of salvation by trusting in the work of Christ. Jesus said in his conclusion to the parable of the lost sheep that more joy exists in heaven over one sinner who repents than over the ninety-nine who need no repentance (Luke 15.3-7). Those at the judgment of Revelation 20 are the ninety-nine—those who refused to repent. They made the decision to reject God's mercy and rely upon their own goodness.

God requires absolute righteousness because he is holy. Such a standard is impossible for man to achieve. Since we are all sinners (Romans 3.23, 6.23) Jesus Christ is our only hope. No amount of good works one can do can satisfy the righteous demands of God. The only work satisfactory to God is the work on the cross of His Son for us. To believe that Christ has died and was raised from the dead, to trust in him and his work, ensures one that he will never face judgment and hell. Consider the words of Jesus:

⁹ Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel. ²¹ For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes. ²² For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, ²³ so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life'" (John 5.19-24).

Divine judgment of the human race will be done by Jesus himself. The Scriptures declare that all who have placed their trust in Christ will not face that judgment. Paul affirmed this truth when he wrote,

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8.1).

Every person in hell is there because of his own choice. He has rejected God's grace and the gift of his Son. C.S. Lewis wrote in *The Problem of Pain*,

"In the long run the answer to all those who object to the doctrine of hell is itself a question: 'What are you asking God to do?' To wipe out their past sins and, at all costs, to give them a fresh start, smoothing every difficulty and offering every miraculous help? But he has done so, on Calvary. To forgive them? They will not be forgiven. To leave

them alone? Alas, I am afraid that is what he does."

God is merciful but will not force Himself upon anyone. He has provided the way of escape through the death and resurrection of His Son. This is the good news, the gospel.

How does one avoid the condemnation of God and have eternal life? The choice is simple. Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead for your sins (1 Corinthians 15.1-5). Will you believe it? If so, God's Word ensures you have eternal life and will never come before God's judgment. Forgiveness of sins and eternal life is a *gift*—because Christ paid the price for you.

An issue that always seems to come up in a discussion of hell is the matter of "those who have never heard." The objection is, "How can God send anyone to hell, especially those who have never heard." What about this? The Bible teaches that God is self-evident. Creation declares God's existence (see Psalm 19.1-6 and Romans 1.18-2.16). God has provided each person with an innate ability to perceive Him. Every person knows God exists but most suppress this knowledge (John 1.9; Romans 1.19-20; Titus 2.11; Colossians 1.23). As such, no one ever goes to hell who has not had a fair chance. God knows each heart and every circumstance. He is smarter, more loving, and more merciful than we. The objection fails when one considers the character of God.

C. S. Lewis wrote as clearly as anyone on the matter of hell and judgment. Lewis wrote in *The Problem of Pain* that "the doors of hell are locked on the inside." We are rebels. It is because a person will not lay down his arms and end his rebellion against God that he goes to hell. Jesus will pronounce the judgment of the Lake of Fire but it is the individual who has condemned himself. Jesus, in a real sense, honors each person's rebellion and God "loses" because he has made the provision of salvation available to everyone. I also

commend to the reader, Lewis' work, *The Great Divorce*. In this fiction, Lewis attempted to explain the choices individuals make which lead them to hell. In the final analysis, all in hell are there by their own choice. They have rejected God's love and Christ's mercy. No reality is more sobering than this.

Addendum: Objections to the Doctrine of Eternal Punishment

The doctrine of hell or eternal condemnation is difficult and unpleasant. It is, however, a doctrine that receives significant attention in the Bible, especially by the Lord Jesus Christ. Some reject the doctrine and some, known as Universalists, teach God will save everyone or that hell is a place of temporary, corrective discipline. Do such beliefs have a Biblical basis?

The major objections to the doctrine of eternal punishment are addressed below. While these objections are broken out separately, such an arrangement is artificial for the issues are intertwined and interrelated.

Objections:

1. God wills all to be saved. Since He is sovereign all will be saved.
2. God reconciled man through the work of Christ so all will be saved.
3. Words for eternal, punishment, forever do not mean what they appear to mean.
4. God's punishment is corrective, not punitive.
5. God is love and it is inconsistent with His character to consign men to eternal punishment.

Objection 1: God's Will Is That All Be Saved

Paul declared God's will is for all to be saved (1 Timothy 2.4). Peter stated God was not willing any should perish (2 Peter 3.9). These verses revealed God's heart and His will.

God's desire is that all be saved because He loves us. He went to the cross and paid the penalty for our sins. His desire is that every person take advantage of this work and be saved.

While God *desires* all to be saved it does not follow that all *will* be saved. God has given men and women freedom to reject Him.

Objection 2: God Has Reconciled the World So All Will Be Saved

The Bible teaches Christ died for every person.¹ His death and resurrection have provided salvation for all who will respond to His love. It does not provide salvation for those who reject His salvation.

Universalists cite passages which they argue demonstrate God will save all. Some of these are the following:

"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself" (John 12.32).

Christ's death on the cross solved the problem of sin. His salvation does draw all men. But man must accept God's gift to receive it. John wrote,

⁶ There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him (John 1.6-7).

God's desire is that man accept His salvation. But God's love forbids making man accept it. John wrote,

There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man (John 1.9).

God gives every man an opportunity for salvation. God is fair and has provided sufficient evidence of Himself for everyone

to possess salvation in this life. In addition to what John wrote, Paul wrote the following:

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse (Romans 1.18-20).

No one who has ever lived has not had access to God's salvation. Paul wrote:

¹⁸ So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. ¹⁹ For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous (Romans 5.18-19).

Adam's disobedience doomed us all. Christ's obedience saved us all. But Christ's work is ineffective for one who rejects it. Christ work on the cross was effective from God's point of view for it satisfied the requirements of His justice. It is effective for all who accept it.

For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all (Romans 11.32).

The context of the passage in Romans 11 is God's mercy to Jew and Gentile. He has grafted both into the olive tree, the source of blessing. This blessing is available to all who will accept it.

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive (1 Corinthians 15.22).

Paul wrote that through Adam's disobedience we became children of Adam and shared in the penalty for his disobedience: death. God told Adam if he ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil he would die (Genesis 2.16-17). He died spiritually immediately and died physically at age 930. Since we are "in Adam" we die also. But because Christ died in our place, suffered our condemnation, all "in Christ" will be made alive. How does one journey from being "in Adam" to being "in Christ" and "made alive" ([ζωοποιηθήσονται](#))? The pathway is to believe the gospel (1 Corinthians 15.1-4). It requires an act of the will: a choice.

When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15.28).

so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, (Philippians 2.10)

⁹ *He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him ¹⁰ with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth (Ephesians 1.9-10).*

¹⁹ *For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, ²⁰ and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven (Colossians 1.19-20).*

Universalists argue all cannot be summed up, reconciled, and

subjected to Christ unless all are saved. Such a conclusion is a *non-sequitur*. One can acknowledge God's sovereignty without accepting His salvation. Subjects bow before a conqueror without loving him or embracing his rule. Paul stated every knee would bow in heaven, earth, and under the earth, i.e., hell. Those in hell will bow but remain alienated in their hearts to God's salvation and rule.

¹⁸ Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹ namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5.19).

From the standpoint of God's justice, Christ's death and resurrection solved man's sin problem. He removed the sin barrier. Nothing stands between Himself and man except man's will. Man has but to accept His work. Without this acceptance, God's work on behalf of an individual is ineffective. And God, being love, will force no one to accept it.

Objection 3: The Words "eternal," "punishment," "forever" Have Been Misunderstood

Several words are used in relation to God's punishment of unbelievers. Universalists argue these words do not mean what they appear to mean. Some of them are the following:

[αἰών](#): Matthew 6.13, 12.32, 13.22, 13.39, 40, 49, 21.19, 24.3, 28.20; Mark 3.29, 4.19, 10.30, 11.14; Luke 1.33, 55, 70, 16.8, 18.30, 20.34, 35; John 4.14, 6.51, 58, 8.35, 51, 52, 9.32, 10.28, 11.26, 12.34, 13.8, 14.16; Acts 3.21, 15.18; Romans 1.25, 9.5, 11.36, 12.2, 16.27; 1 Corinthians 1.20, 2.6, 7, 8, 3.18, 8.13, 10.11; 2 Corinthians 4.4, 9.9, 11.31; Galatians 1.4.

[αἰώνιος](#): Matthew 18.8, 19.16, 29, 25.41, 46; Mark 3.29, 10.17, 30; Luke 10.25, 16.9, 18.18, 30; John 3.15, 16, 36. 4.14, 36, 5.24, 39, 6.27, 40, 47, 54, 68, 10.28, 12.25, 50, 17.2, 3; Acts 13.46, 48; Romans 2.7, 5.21, 6.22, 23, 16.25, 26; 2 Corinthians 4.17, 18, 5.1; Galatians 6.8; 2 Thessalonians 1.9, 2.16; 1 Timothy 1.16, 6.12, 16, 19; 2 Timothy 1.9, 2.10; Titus 1.2.

In defending universalism, one writer has stated that words used for “everlasting” or “eternal” derive from αἰών, from which we get “eon,” a long age.² On this basis, he argues “eternal” means a long time. Such reasoning reveals an ignorance of how words acquire meaning. While it is interesting and informative to trace a word to its parent or root this is not what determines its meaning. A word’s meaning is discovered by usage in context. How this works in English can be found by examining words in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. If the writer’s logic is correct regarding αἰώνιος, God does not give eternal life to believers but long-life, or possibly “enhanced” life (John 10.10). And when used of God, it would mean God is not eternal, just long-lived (Romans 16.26; 1 Timothy 6.16). A study of the verses in which αἰώνιος is used, reveals eternal life and eternal condemnation are parallel and equal.

Objection 4: God’s Punishment is Corrective, not Punitive

[βασανίζω](#): Matthew 8.6, 29, 14.24; Mark 5.7, 6.48; Luke 8.28, 2 Peter 2.8; Revelation 9.5, 11.10, 12.2, 14.10, 20.10.

[κόλασις](#): Matthew 25.46; 1 John 4.18.

Universalists argue “punishment” from God is probationary and corrective. But since “punishment” is coupled with αἰώνιος “everlasting,” this is meaningless. Eternal correction is meaningless.

God has revealed His love and work and provided sufficient

warning about hell. Two examples are offered to illustrate why hell is eternal and not “corrective” as claimed by Universalists:

1. In Luke 16.19-31, Jesus told the story of a rich man and Lazarus. The rich man went to hell and Lazarus to paradise. The rich man wished relief from his torment but Abraham told him this was impossible (Luke 16.24-26). The rich man then asked Abraham to send Lazarus to his five brothers to warn them about the torment that awaited them (Luke 16.27-28). Abraham responded that Moses and the prophets were sufficient witnesses to them (Luke 16.29). The rich man argued that if one were to rise from the dead and warn them they would repent (Luke 1.30). Abraham answered that if they would not listen to Moses and the prophets they would not listen to one who rose from the dead (Luke 1.31).³
2. The book of Revelation provides details about the Day of the Lord, which Jesus called the Tribulation (Matthew 24.21), that the prophets had foretold (Joel 2.1-11, 28-32; Zephaniah 1). The Day of the Lord is a period in which God will exert His wrath upon mankind. As the Day progresses, God’s judgments intensify. John described God’s wrath through seals, trumpets, and bowls. In Revelation 16.8, John described the fourth bowl judgment. By this time, God’s judgments are nearing an end. Soon the Lord Himself will return to defeat the powers of darkness and establish His kingdom. Even though His return is near and He has been applying “corrective” punishment for nearly seven years, how do men respond? Do they repent and worship Him? On the contrary, they blaspheme Him (Revelation 16.9).

The Tribulation provides substantial insight into man’s depravity and rebellion against God. Even though God’s judgments apply pressure by which men should recognize Him they refuse. The “corrective” punishment of the Universalists

is fantasy. Revelation shows men curse Christ, not accept Him. The Tribulation and Jesus' story of the rich man and Lazarus explain why the Lake of Fire is eternal. Jesus taught that Moses and the prophets were adequate witnesses for repentance. Lazarus' rising from the dead would affect no remedy. The same lesson is found in Revelation. Instead of responding to God's correction, men curse God. God has given each person ample opportunity to respond to Him during one's lifetime. A "probationary" time in hell would effect no change. The response to God would be the same.

Hebrews

Paul provided a devastating description of man's nature in Romans 1.18-32. He taught that God has revealed Himself to mankind and that all men know God exists (Romans 1.19-21). Man's problem is not ignorance of God. Man knows God exists but suppresses this knowledge in unrighteousness (τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐν ἀδικίᾳ [κατεχόντων](#), Romans 1.18). God responds by allowing man to exercise his will and ([παραδίδωμι](#), Romans 1.24, 26, 28) degrade himself.

Objection 5: God is Love and His Character Forbids Eternal Punishment

God is love. God loves man. His ultimate demonstration of His love was His humiliation in becoming a man, suffering at the hands of the Jews and Romans, and bearing our sins and its penalty. Love cannot exist apart from freedom. Love cannot be forced. Love apart from free will is meaningless. God has given His creatures wills by which they can respond to Him. They can accept or reject Him.

While eternal punishment is terrible, worse would be for God to force His creatures to accept and love Him. God made us in His own image (Genesis 1.26-27). This means God has given us the freedom to choose, to exercise our wills. God has provided a witness of Himself (John 1.9; Romans 1.19-20; Titus 2.11;

Colossians 1.23) so that every man has an opportunity to accept His love and salvation. Because God is love, He will coerce no one to accept Him. He allows one the freedom to reject Him.

Conclusion

The argument for eternal condemnation and against universalism stands on two pillars. The first is God's justice. God solved the problem of sin by Christ going to the cross. Man only need appropriate God's work by believing the gospel (1 Corinthians 15.1-4). The second is God's love. God demonstrated His love by dying on the cross and taking our penalty. But God's love forbids forcing one to accept His salvation. All who spend eternity in the lake of fire do so in the realization that they have rejected God's grace and goodness. As Lewis stated, the gates of hell are locked on the inside. Men go to hell and remain there because they reject God's love and salvation.

¹ See the author's study, [For Whom Did Christ Die?](#) for more information on this subject.

² See the article, [Christian Universalism](#).

³ The rich man wished to be relieved of suffering but gave no indication of a change of heart.

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