

Eternal (human) Damnation

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The conscience of man bears witness to some degree for a belief in Hades. Man's sense of justice is virtually destroyed when it is not supposed that miscarriages of justice, necessitated by both the evil and the ignorance of fallen man, would eventually be settled in a "higher court." Without an ultimate and omniscient guarantor of justice, ultimately justice is merely "whatever I can get away with" or "whatever I am mighty enough to impose on others." In the same vein, the dread that one feels at the threat of death would be inexplicable if death were merely the end of all things, so there would be nothing to dread. Yet the fear of death is certainly an expression of guilt and the dread of an unknown punishment that awaits sinners after death, in other words, Hades or Hell.

Holy Scripture reveals clearly and emphatically the existence of eternal damnation so that denying it cannot be done without denying the authority of Scripture (Hell 16 times in NT; Hades 11 times in NT; Paradise 4 times in NT; Heaven hundreds of times, though far few times as specifying a place).

As in Matthew 25.46, Jesus says: "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." Thus the eternal fate of Christ's chosen people in faith in heaven is in direct parallel to the fate of the damned into hell, referred to as 'everlasting punishment.' Everlasting life is set in direct antithesis of eternal damnation or 'everlasting fire' or 'everlasting destruction' as frequently uttered in the Scriptures. The Augsburg Confession states "they condemn the Anabaptists, who think that there will be an end to the punishment of condemned men and angels" (Trigl. 51, XVII, 4).

The idea of everlasting punishment is barely conceivable and has had its opponents through the history of the church. The distinctively American cults created in the 19th century (especially the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and the Jehovah's Witnesses) to a large extent were reactions against the doctrine of hell and everlasting condemnation. While Jehovah's Witnesses deny the existence of Hell in favor of annihilation of the reprobate at death, Mormons preach very few will end up in hell and once there will have an opportunity of probations for their sentence after a while.

The purpose of this ³shocking doctrine of eternal damnation is to warn against unbelief and carnal security and thus to save from eternal damnation. When John the Baptist preaches: "His fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire," this preaching of damnation is to serve his main message: "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Mt. 3.12,2). When Christ points to the fact: "Many shall come from the east and west and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, but the children of the Kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt. 8.11-12), He is thereby warning "the children of the Kingdom" against proceeding farther on the wrong way of the Law. When Christ admonishes that it would be better for a person to cut off his hand or foot than be cast into hell, into fire that never shall be quenched (Mark 9.43ff), He impressively reminds also believers of the necessity of merciless crucifixion of the flesh in order to escape eternal damnation. . . And when Paul writes: "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath" (Rom. 2.5), this statement is, according to text and context, an admonition to repentance, and the aim of the Apostle is to save his readers from the wrath of the last day.

This purpose is thwarted by all theologians who treat the Scripture doctrine of eternal damnation as if it were debatable and subject to the expert opinion of theologians and consequently either deny eternal damnation outright or substitute for it doctrines that are "more worthy of God" and more in accord with "human consciousness," or "Christian consciousness." The annihilation of the wicked, "conditional damnation," the possibility of probation after death, etc., are such substitutes. But a Christian theologian must insist that the doctrine of eternal damnation is not something submitted in Holy Scripture for human criticism, but eternal punishment is taught as an incontestable fact which the Christian Church should preach to the world as well as to Christians without reservation or apology. The "mercy

³What follows is verbatim from Pieper, Vol. 3 pp. 548f.

theologians” as Quenstedt calls the deniers and critics of the Scripture doctrine, actually are most merciless. Instead of sounding the alarm against the menace of hell, they actually, as far as they are concerned, plunge men into eternal perdition.

Also, the Calvinistic doctrine that God’s will is twofold from the outset, that is, God from eternity willed to exhibit the glory of His grace in the case of some people and the glory of His punitive justice in the case of all the rest, thwarts the end God would attain through the Scriptural doctrine of eternal damnation. Discussion of the anti-Scriptural nature and the pernicious effects of this Calvinistic teaching must be taken up another time. Of course, eternal damnation ultimately serves to demonstrate also the punitive justice of God. But such retribution overtakes only whomever who decline to avail themselves of the first and original will of grace that God for Christ’s sake has toward all men. If it is objected that this distinction would impose the relation of time on the eternal God, we answer that our human conceptions are bound by time and space.

Is Hell in the OT?

Many modern liberal scholars assert that the Old Testament never speaks of hell. The reason they say this is that many times (*Sheol*) what modern translations have translated as “hell” could of “grave” also could be translated as merely ‘the place of the dead’ without prejudice as to what kind of place it is. It is a common line of instruction among these scholars that hell was introduced into the Hebrew religion during the Babylonian captivity. Yes, God needed the brutal gods of the idolatrous Babylonians to weave this into the religion the Jews were inventing and molding to the conditions of their captivity. For modern scholars, you see, religion is not revealed in something like a book or prophecies, but religion is “progressive” and evolving ever to become something better and more developed through the pious theologians in their various situations in life’s changing scenes. A revealed religion always looks back to the revelation when it was given to find its foundation. Progressive religions are built on the shifting sands of man’s experience and most current thoughts where the past must be put behind for the sake of the newly discovered promises of “now.”

However there are many allusions to this place of punishment in the OT in passages like: “For a fire is kindled in My anger, And shall burn to the lowest hell (*Sheol*); It shall consume the earth with her increase, And set on fire the foundations of the mountains.” Deuteronomy 32:22; “Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, And you perish in the way, When His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.” Psalm 2:12; and “God is a just judge, And God is angry with the wicked every day. ¹²If he does not turn back, He will sharpen His sword; He bends His bow and makes it ready. ¹³He also prepares for Himself instruments of death; He makes His arrows into fiery shafts. ¹⁴Behold, the wicked brings forth iniquity; Yes, he conceives trouble and brings forth falsehood. ¹⁵He made a pit and dug it out, And has fallen into the ditch which he made. ¹⁶His trouble shall return upon his own head, And his violent dealing shall come down on his own crown. Psalm 7:11 ff.

The prophets are also replete with the warnings about the great “day of the Lord,” when He Himself would come in judgement. See, for example: “For the day of the Lord of hosts Shall come upon everything proud and lofty, Upon everything lifted up— And it shall be brought low” Isaiah 2:12; “Wail, for the day of the Lord is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty... ⁹Behold, the day of the Lord comes, Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, To lay the land desolate; And He will destroy its sinners from it. ¹⁰For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not give their light; The sun will be darkened in its going forth, And the moon will not cause its light to shine. ¹¹I will punish the world for its evil, And the wicked for their iniquity;” Isaiah 13:6, 9f; “You have not gone up into the gaps to build a wall for the house of Israel to stand in battle on the day of the Lord.” Ezekiel 13:5; “The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. Joel 2:31; Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be darkness, and not light. ¹⁹It will be as though a man fled from a lion, And a bear met him! Or as though he went into the house, Leaned his hand on the wall, And a serpent bit him! ²⁰Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?” Amos 5:18f; etc. see also...Obadiah 15; Zephaniah 1:7,14; Zechariah 14:1; Malachi. 4:5).

Certainly these passages explain and are in perfect keeping with the numerous passages and promises of judgement that precedes the sentencing of the damned to eternal judgement and the gracious reception of God’s children following the “great day of the Lord” promised in the OT and the Judgement described so well by Jesus in Matthew 25.