

Eternal Conscious Torment vs Annihilation 009

Genesis 3:22

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All right, let's locate, if we could, the Book of Genesis: Genesis 3:22.

We are continuing our study on Annihilationism versus eternal torment. The view that we are critiquing is called conditional immortality: what they are trying to say is that not everyone is immortal, that you are only given the gift of immortality at the point of faith alone in Christ alone.

Well, if unbelievers are not given the gift of immortality because they have never trusted in Christ, what happens to them?

Well, they get annihilated: meaning they go into hell for a season, but then they just cease to exist at some point.

The reason we are getting into this is that it is a position now that Kirk Cameron has opened the door to—"Kirk Cameron Denies 'Eternal Conscious Torment,' Is Now An Annihilationist?"¹ He has backed off a little bit, saying, "Well, I am just asking questions."

Well, there is someone that asks a lot of questions in the Bible. It is the devil, right, in Genesis 3? Kirk Cameron would not be showcasing this if he did not think there was merit to it. And part of the problem is that all the people who should know better run interference for him.

Here is Eric Metaxas, whom I like on a lot of different issues, but he is obviously wrong here. He tweeted recently,

"Anybody who thinks my friend Kirk Cameron is a heretic is a heretic."²

That is what he says. In the body of Christ, there is something called a party spirit. Paul talks about this in 1 Corinthians 1(:12):

One person says, "I follow Cephas" (or Peter).

Another person says, "I follow Paul."

Another person says, "I follow Christ."

What can happen to us in our carnality is that we start to divide amongst whom we think we like the most. Metaxas calls Kirk Cameron his friend. What is important to Eric

¹ <https://protestia.com/2025/12/06/kirk-cameron-denies-eternal-conscious-torment-is-now-an-annihilationist>

² <https://x.com/ericmetaxas/status/2016251973931069605>

Metaxas is not defending what the Scripture says; he is defending what Kirk Cameron says.

That is a very sad state of affairs. People will be rigorous on false doctrine, unless the false teaching comes from someone they like—then they will defend them.

So, that is a very sad reality that you see. It has actually been happening for 2,000 years. Paul is dealing with it there in 1 Corinthians 1. It is a sign of carnality, or immaturity, within the body of Christ.

Kirk Cameron is advocating, or at least he is platforming, people that advocate this position. And here are conservatives like Eric Metaxas, who is a well-known figure within Evangelicalism, defending a false doctrine. That is the reason we are getting into this subject.

We moved from the introduction to the controversy to the Biblical arguments against Annihilationism. Those are my top Bible verses that I would use to show you that hell is not just forever—because Kirk Cameron believes hell is forever—but people will actually be there forever, which is what Kirk Cameron is denying here.

Then from there, we went through the theological arguments against annihilation. These are broader theological, philosophical comments as to why Annihilationism cannot be true. I gave you four of those.

Then from there, we moved to Point Number Four, where we tried to answer the arguments that the Annihilationism and conditional immortality people use—and they have their verses: 'second death' (Rev. 20:14), 'destroy' (Rev. 11:18), 'destruction' (2 Thess. 1:9), 'burning up' (Matt. 3:12), 'eternal results' (Rev. 14:11), 'perdition' (2 Pet. 3:7), 'it would have been better if you had never been born' (Mark 14:21), 'perishing' (2 Pet. 3:9), 'blotted out of existence' (Heb. 9:25-26), and 'life activity suspended in death' (Ecc. 9:10).

We talked through all of those and showed you that none of those can be used to teach this doctrine of Annihilationism. Where we had moved into most recently was Point Number Five: answering Annihilationists' theological arguments. They not only have textual arguments that they use, but they have broader theological and philosophical arguments. That is what we are in the process of critiquing.

The first one on the list there is something we did the last time I was with you. It is this idea that immortality is a gift only for the believer. They like to quote 1 Timothy 6:16, which says, "God alone is immortal" (paraphrase).

Basically, what they think that means is that only God lives forever and only those to whom He gives the gift of immortality—believers—live forever. Everyone else who is not given the gift of immortality does not live forever. I tried to show you last time that immortality is a concept that speaks not of duration of existence, but of quality of existence.

Everyone—believer and unbeliever alike—will exist forever. It is just that believers have the gift of immortality in the sense that they enjoy a quality of existence that is far superior to that of the unbeliever. But both, if you just draw parallel lines, will exist forever. The Annihilationists are taking something that is a quality of life concept and they are trying to turn it into duration.

For example, angels do not die. You will see that in Luke 20:35-36. You will see that demons, or fallen angels, do not die. Hell, according to Matthew 25:41, was created for the devil and his angels. Although those entities exist forever, they are never called immortal. Angels are never called immortal, neither are demons. This idea of the gift of immortality...it is not speaking of duration; it is speaking of quality of life.

From there we move to Point B, which deals with the temporal nature of the soul. Basically, what the Annihilationists are trying to argue is that when God put the soul in human beings, the soul was never designed to live forever. That is why only believers who are given the gift of immortality live forever.

The Annihilationists like to compare how we are similar to the animals: we have something called 'nepesh' (נֶפֶשׁ), in Hebrew: 'life-giving spirit.' This is what God breathed into the nostrils of the first man, Adam, in Genesis 2. Then we also have something called a 'psyche' (ψυχή), which is the soul.

What they will do is they will say, "Well, animals have those too. Animals have 'nepesh' (נֶפֶשׁ) and they have 'psyche' (ψυχή; soul), and they do not live forever. Therefore, God never designed us to live forever as human beings."

But the basic answer to that is that we have a quality that the animals do not have. We are made in whose image? God's image. That is not said of the animals.

Genesis 1:26:

"Then God said, 'Let Us make man...' (Genesis 1:26).

Not animals, but man.

"...in Our image,..." (Genesis 1:26).

Genesis 1:27:

"God created man..." (Genesis 1:27).

Not the animals.

"...in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27).

That is why you cannot make this comparison between us and the animals. Are we similar to animals in some ways? Yes, we both are given that life-giving spirit, but that is really where the similarities stop.

We have something that the animal kingdom does not have: we are image bearers of God, whether we are saved or unsaved. Just as God lives forever, the fact that we are image bearers of God means that we also live forever from our beginning point, which is the point of conception. (I hope some of this sounds like a review, because we covered that.)

By the way, our image-bearing status was not erased with the Fall. The Fall of man effaced our image-bearing status, but it never erased it, because we are called image bearers long after the Fall of man. You see that designation given post-Fall, post-Flood in Genesis 9:6.

You will see it all the way into the New Testament, in James 3:9. This is one of the major reasons that a human soul does not disappear at some point. For that to happen would be to deny who we are as image bearers. God created us for eternity.

Everyone, believers and unbelievers, will be alive somewhere a hundred years from now, a thousand years from now, a million years from now, a billion years from now, a trillion years from now, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. It is just that believers will enjoy immortality, and unbelievers will not. Immortality relates to the quality of one's existence, not the duration of one's existence.

One of the reasons the Annihilationists do not think that the soul of people lasts forever is because of Genesis 3:22, which is what I had you open up to.

Notice Genesis 3:22. This is right after the Fall of man. It says,

"Then the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'—" (Genesis 3:22).

What they will say is, "Look, God never designed people to live forever. Adam and Eve had to keep eating from the tree of life to live forever. Therefore, the soul was created inherently temporal."

Do you see that? But the problem with what the Annihilationists are doing here is that they are mixing physical death and eternal death together.

The reason God banned Adam and Eve from the garden so they would not eat from the tree of life and live forever is that He did not want to help them or assist them or empower them to avoid physical death. He did not want them to live forever and ever and ever and ever in their sinful state—physically. It is not a statement that when they died—unbelievers died—they would stop existing.

You see a description of the cherubim blocking Adam and Eve from re-entering Eden in Genesis 3:24:

"So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life" (Genesis 3:24).

Why did God not let Adam and Eve back into Eden after they fell into sin? Well, God did not want them to eat from the tree of life and live forever physically. They were already going to live forever at the soul level, but He did not want them to go on and on and on, living forever on this earth in their physical bodies.

It is very clear here that the context is not talking about the duration of the soul after death. It is talking about how Adam and Eve would have a natural inclination to try to avoid the consequence of their sin, which is physical death, by re-entering Eden, eating from the tree of life, and living forever.

Before that, Genesis 3:19 comes. Before Genesis 3:22 comes Genesis 3:19. Do you guys agree with me that Genesis 3:19 comes before Genesis 3:22?

If you read Genesis 3:19 first, you will see that the context there is not about spiritual annihilation, but it is about physical death.

Genesis 3:19 says,

"By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19).

When God told our forbearers, "You came from the dirt and you are going right back to the dirt," He was making a statement there, not of the cessation of the soul, but of the cessation of the physical body. These physical bodies will not last forever: that is the consequence of sin.

God was very clear with our forbearers that the day you eat from the forbidden fruit is the day you will surely die. Had the cherubim not been stationed, and had Adam and Eve been allowed to re-enter Eden and eat from the tree of life, they would have lived forever.

They would have lived forever and ever and ever in corrupted bodies with a sin nature. God did not want that. As wicked as humanity can get, could you imagine how much worse it could be with people living forever and ever as wicked individuals on this earth?

Could you imagine the Ayatollah who was just taken out—and has gone on to his reward, so to speak—could you imagine someone like that living forever? Could you imagine an Adolf Hitler living forever? Could you imagine a Fidel Castro living forever? Could you imagine a Saddam Hussein living forever?

It is actually a good thing when certain people die, because they are unrepentant. They are causing great evil on the earth. Had that path been open to Adam and Eve, they would have been in that same boat: they would have lived forever and ever and ever with a sin nature.

So, when God says, "I do not want you to eat from the tree and live forever," He is talking about physical death. "I am not giving you an end run around physical death." He is not making some statement about the soul not existing after it dies.

God was very clear: "The day you eat from the tree is the day you shall surely die." It is amazing how accurate God's prophecies are. If you go over to Genesis 5 (where you see a long genealogy), tell me if you see a pattern.

"So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died" (Genesis 5:5).

His death would not have happened had Adam and Eve been allowed to eat from the tree of life.

"So all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years, and he died" (Genesis 5:8).

"So all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years, and he died" (Genesis 5:11).

"So all the days of Kenan were nine hundred and ten years, and he died" (Genesis 5:14).

Gee, I am seeing a pattern here. How about you?

"So all the days of Mahalalel..." (Genesis 5:17).

Say that five times fast.

"...were eight hundred and ninety-five years, and he died" (Genesis 5:17).

"Jared lived one hundred and sixty-two years, and became the father of Enoch" (Genesis 5:18).

Now, Enoch is an exemption to the rule because he got raptured to heaven. Maybe we will be exempt from the rule too. Maybe we will get raptured to heaven and we will be able to avoid the penalty of physical death. Can I promise that? No, but I surely can hope for it. There is a generation living in time that will not die. Enoch is a type of the Rapture generation.

The narrative goes on in Genesis 5:20. It says,

"So all the days of Jared were nine hundred and sixty-two years, and he died" (Genesis 5:20).

Genesis 5:27 says (about the oldest living man, Methuselah),

"So all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years, and he died" (Genesis 5:27).

By the way, Methuselah's name means, "When he dies, it shall be sent." That means that when Methuselah dies, the Flood will come. (Could you imagine having a kid like that in your neighborhood? Every time he falls off his big wheel tricycle or something, everybody gets nervous.)

It is interesting that the Lord attached the coming of the flood to the oldest living man. That shows you the patience of God and His reluctance to judge. Eventually Methuselah died.

"So all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years, and he died" (Genesis 5:27).

"So all the days of Lamech were seven hundred and seventy-seven years, and he died" (Genesis 5:31).

If you watched the news this week, we could say that all the days of Chuck Norris were 86 years. With some people like him, you are sad when they die. He was a committed Christian. But he lived to the age of 86, and he died. You could just put your own name in that previous sentence, because if we are not the Rapture generation, this is what is going to happen to you. It is going to happen to me.

The mortality rate is still one hundred percent. This perpetual death (I am talking about physical death) would have been avoided had Adam and Eve been given re-entrance into Eden and eaten from the tree of life and lived forever. That is all that Genesis 3:22 is saying. It is not making any statement about the souls of people existing forever after death. The whole context here is physical death.

Anyway, that is a big argument that the Annihilationists try to use. They try to argue that the soul was created temporally. I am here to tell you that the soul is not created to be temporal. It is created to last forever because we are image bearers of God. As God lasts forever we last forever, from the point of our conception onward.

The difference is that believers, throughout eternity, enjoy a quality of existence that unbelievers under God's judgment do not enjoy. Both groups last forever; and the difference between one and the other has nothing to do with whether one lasts forever and the other one does not: it has to do with the quality of life (that the believer enjoys and the unbeliever does not enjoy).

These are some of the Annihilationist arguments that you run into. With all of that being said, let me take you to a third argument that Annihilationists use: let's go over to John 19:30. (This has to do with the nature of Christ's death.)

Here is the Annihilationists' argument: they say that if the penalty for Adam's sin was eternal suffering, then why was Jesus not tormented eternally when He was paying our sin debt? It is very clear when you look at the death of Christ—and this is a good thing to think about as we are entering Holy Week and thinking about Christ's death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and, a week before that, His triumphal entry into Jerusalem—it is very clear that He did not pay the sin debt of the world forever. It was a limited judgment.

It says in John 19:30,

"Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished!' And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit" (John 19:30).

The good old King James Version says,

"...and gave up the ghost" (John 19:30 KJV).

That means He died.

The Annihilationist comes along and says, "Well, if the penalty for Adam's sin was being forever in hell, then Jesus should have suffered forever. But His suffering on the cross did not last forever; it was finite. Therefore, when unbelievers die, their suffering in hell is finite until they are annihilated, which means they disappear."

I am going to quote Doctor Norman Geisler, but he is quoting Leroy Froom—he was a Seventh-Day Adventist, and he believed in this doctrine of Annihilationism. Froom has some wonderful things to say on church history, and I have his volumes, but he is one of these guys that wants to promote this Annihilationist perspective.

When Kirk Cameron adopted this view, and then Eric Metaxas—who I like on a lot of issues—runs interference for Kirk Cameron, and they bring all these people on their podcasts to promote Annihilationism, what you have to understand is that everybody thinks it is some kind of new teaching they have come up with.

But as Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 1:9, there is nothing new under the sun. What you have to understand is that these guys are recycling old stuff. Everybody listens to these guys as if it is a new teaching they have never heard. The audience thinks it is so captivating, but the Annihilationists are just recycling things that the Seventh-Day Adventists and the Jehovah's Witnesses have been saying from time immemorial. They are just bringing this view into Evangelicalism.

Leroy Froom, here quoted by Geisler, says,

""[Death] means cessation of life, not eternal life in torment.... [It is a] strange contention of some that to perish is to live on forever!""³

Now we have dealt with the Greek word translated 'perish' ('apollymi' [ἀπόλλυμι]) before. Earlier in the series, I showed you that that word does not mean you stop existing; neither does the concept or the word 'destruction' ('diaphtheiro' [διαφθείρω]) mean you stop existing.

For example, you can take your car that has many miles on it to the junkyard, and they will do all kinds of things with it. Maybe they will smash it with that big metal thing that they use, or maybe they will take the tires off or take the engine out or something. The car then goes into a destroyed state.

The car is in an unusable state, but that does not mean the car does not exist anymore. It is still there. It is just wrecked. That is what is meant by 'destruction' in Scripture. If you enter hell, you are still in existence, but you are just in a ruined state, not a lifeless state.

³ Geisler, N.L. *Systematic theology, volume four: church, last things*, 402-03.

Froom (being quoted by Dr. Geisler) says,

""[Death] means cessation of life, not eternal life in torment.... [It is a] strange contention of some that to perish is to live on forever! [For] if the death that threatened Adam were eternal torture, then it would have necessitated that our Savior, as man's complete Substitute, must be tormented eternally in order to pay his designated debt.' (CFF, 1.78)."⁴

Basically, he is saying that since Jesus suffered temporally, that means unsaved people in hell will suffer there temporally, not forever.

The response to this is that it confuses value and duration. Jesus Christ was eternal. There never was a time in which He was not. He is the un-caused Cause who has always been. He is the eternally existent second Member of the Godhead. You have to understand that when the virgin conception happened, leading to the virgin birth, Jesus did not start existing at the point of the virgin conception.

The virgin conception was not a subtraction, nor was it a substitute, but it was an addition. A lot of people think that since Jesus was virgin-born, that means He took off the God coat and put on the man coat. That is totally terrible theology. When Jesus was conceived in the Virgin Mary's womb, at that moment, humanity was added.

Did you catch what I just said: "was added"? Nothing was taken away. There was no exchange. There was no substitution. Humanity was added to eternally existent deity. At that point, Jesus did not start existing. At that point, He became the God-Man. The Greek word that is used to describe Him is 'monogenes' (μονογενής). 'Mono-' means 'alone,' as in the game 'Monopoly.' '-Genes,' as in, if you are a biology major, you study different genera (plural of 'genus').

'Monogenes' literally means 'one of a kind.' Jesus was one of a kind. There has never been anyone like Jesus, nor will there ever be anyone like Jesus, because there is only one God-Man. Not even the Father was the God-Man; not even the Holy Spirit was the God-Man.

Jesus, at the point of the virgin conception, became the God-Man: one hundred percent God, one hundred percent Man, in a doctrine that we call the Incarnation. 'Carne,' you recognize as in 'meat,' 'carnivorous.' You may have had some chili con carne recently: chili with meat. 'Incarnation' literally means the infleshment of God.

A fancy name for the Incarnation is the Hypostatic Union at the point of the virgin conception. Jesus did not start existing, nor was there a subtraction, nor was there an exchange. There was an addition. He became the God-Man. Therefore, when He died on the cross, His death was of infinite value, even though it did not last forever. The bearing of the wrath of the Father on Him for the sins of the world—even though that wrath did not last forever, it still counted as eternal, because it was borne by the eternally existent second Member of the Godhead.

⁴ Ibid.

People say, "Well, it only lasted three hours." Well, maybe they are right on that. That is when He prayed. He did not want to go through with this; He prayed in Gethsemane: "Let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, not My will be done, but Thy will be done" (paraphrase, Matthew 26:42; Luke 22:42; Mark 14:36).

For a series of hours, He bore the wrath of a holy God in our place. What He did there may have lasted three hours, but it was of infinite value because it was borne by the One who lasts forever. That is basically how to answer Leroy Froom's argument.

Leroy Froom is trying to say, "Well, Jesus did not suffer forever, so therefore people in hell do not suffer forever." But he is not telling you who did the suffering. The One who did the suffering was the eternal Son of God. Therefore, His death is of infinite value, even though it occurred in a finite moment, or amount, of time.

Norman Geisler is very good on this subject. I am summing up what he is trying to say. He says it better as follows: to Leroy Froom's contention he says,

"This contention confuses the *value* and the *duration* of Christ's death. Being by nature the infinite God, Christ's death had infinite value, even though His suffering and death occurred in a finite amount of time. Time is not a mandatory measure of worth—..."⁵

Geisler gives an example of why time is not a mandatory measure of worth:

"...birth, for instance, happens over a relatively short span..."⁶

Unless they have to do a C-section, which was the case with us. To my wife, it seemed like it went on forever with the birth of my daughter. But even that circumstance is a situation that took place in a finite amount of time, yet what was brought forth was a being made in God's image—in this case, my daughter, who will live forever. Even though her birth took place in a finite moment of time, what transpired in a finite moment of time was of infinite value.

That is how to understand the atoning work of Jesus. Yes, it was limited in terms of hours and duration, but what it accomplished brought forth eternal results because the One who bore our sin is the One who has always been.

Do you see that? If you had died on the cross, or if I had died on the cross, it would not have accomplished an infinite result because we are not infinite. But in this case, it did: the cross of Christ accomplished an infinite result, because Jesus is infinity. Jesus is eternity.

That is why Geisler, responding to Froom, says,

"Time is not a mandatory measure of worth—birth, for instance, happens over a relatively short span but produces something of extraordinary

⁵ Geisler, N.L. *Systematic theology, volume four: church, last things*, 403.

⁶ Ibid.

value. One death in limited time achieved something of limitless value for all eternity."⁷

Geisler goes on and says,

"The fallacy in this conditionalist argument..."⁸

Do you know what I mean by 'conditionalist'? Conditionalists basically believe the soul was never created to last forever, and that only when a person receives Christ and fulfills that condition do they become immortal.

"Unsaved people will not last forever," is what Annihilationists and conditionalists are saying, which is not a brand-new teaching, although Kirk Cameron presents it like that. This is just old stuff he is recycling.

Geisler says,

"The fallacy in this conditionalist argument is akin to the claim that punishing someone forever is overkill for sins he committed in a lifetime. This is *not* overkill because sin against the Infinite has infinite significance and endless ramification. In the same sense, Christ's finite suffering has infinite significance because of the suffering's infinite value."⁹

You cannot just say, "Well, Jesus did not suffer on the cross forever. Therefore, unbelievers will not suffer in hell forever." You cannot make a statement like that because Jesus, when He suffered on the cross, was doing so as an infinite Being. These are all things that Leroy Froom and others do not tell you.

A fourth argument that Annihilationists will use is appealing to God's justice. They say something like this: "Eternal judgment for temporary sins is not justice. Sins that people commit on this earth are temporary. They do not last forever. For God to put people in hell forever would be for God to punish people in hell forever for temporary sins that they committed on this side of the grave."

And therefore the eternal conscious torment perspective (that is what our church teaches), is somehow a violation of God's sense of justice. How could God punish people forever in hell when their sins on this earth did not last forever? The way to answer that is you have to look at the nature of God. As I said before, God is forever.

Psalm 90:2 says,

"Before the mountains were born Or You gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God" (Psalm 90:2).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Geisler, N.L. *Systematic theology, volume four: church, last things*, 403.

The word translated 'everlasting' there is the Hebrew word 'olam' (עולם), which in this case means 'forever.' You find the same concept in the New Testament.

Romans 16:26 says,

"but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God,..." (Romans 16:26).

That is the Greek word 'aionios' (αἰώνιος). God is forever.

"...has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith;" (Romans 16:26).

When a person sins, it is not like they are just having a good time for a season, although on earth it seems that way. Sin is an offense against an eternal God. Do you see that? Every time we sin, we are committing an offense against a God who lasts forever.

Because our sin is an offense against an eternal God, according to God's scales of justice the only way that can be dealt with—if a person will not receive what the Infinite Son of God did in our place as a free gift—the only standard of justice that can be measured out is eternal justice, because it is a sin against a God who lasts forever.

If you sin against a God who lasts forever, then according to proper justice, the only thing that settles the account is eternal suffering. Sin against an infinite God demands eternal justice. Sins committed in time are perpetrated against the timeless One.

Let's say you killed somebody; you committed murder. It only took me five minutes to do it; or with a gun, half a second. How could you punish me in hell forever for something that only took me a few seconds to do? That is not fair, God.

Well, you have to understand that the moment we sin—obviously murder is the worst of the worst in terms of consequences—any sin; every time we sin in any way, shape, or form; we are committing an offense against a God who lasts forever, and therefore in the scales of divine justice there must be eternal damnation. Eternal justice is necessary for those who reject eternal life.

What does God give us in the gospel? He gives us eternal life.

John 3:16 says,

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have..." (John 3:16).

What kind of life?

"...eternal life" (John 3:16).

"Well, I do not want eternal life." someone says foolishly. "I am not interested in eternal life."

Well, then the only justice left for such a human being is eternal damnation. Eternal damnation has to happen for someone who rejects the offer of eternal life, because we are not just dealing with temporary issues, we are dealing with eternal issues because God Himself is eternal. That is a very different way to look at sin.

If sin was not as bad as the Bible says it is, why in the world would Jesus have to pay the price He paid to forgive our sin debt? I cannot think of a greater price God the Father could have offered the world, other than His only Son. That is an extreme measure.

If the rescue operation was that extensive and that extreme, then sin must be extremely bad. I know this day and age we do not talk about sin—we call it bad choices, and we blame it on everything but ourselves, typically. But the truth of the matter is: what is sin? You have to look at it from God's perspective. It is an offense against not just a holy God, but a God who lasts forever. If you turn down His offer of salvation, then the only thing that awaits you is eternal damnation.

We are on Point Number Five. A fifth argument that the Annihilationists use is that they say, "Well, this whole eternal conscious torment thing violates God's standard of mercy." They say something like this, "Putting hopeless creatures out of their existence via annihilation would accord much better with God's standard of mercy.

"Even in the human realm, we do not let animals just go on and suffer and suffer and suffer if they have some issue. We put them to sleep and put them out of their misery. Surely God would do that with human beings if human beings do it with animals. To make it any less than that would make it out to be that God is really not as merciful as we once thought."

A verse that is used frequently when this argument is made is 1 John 4:8.

1 John 4:8 says,

"The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:8).

This becomes the favorite verse of many people like the Annihilationists. They will take that verse and they will read it everywhere in the Bible. It is what is called an interpretive center. You take one part of the Bible that you are comfortable with, and you elevate it over the rest of the Bible; then you use that as a lens to rewrite the rest of the Bible.

Eternal conscious torment does not fit what you think a loving God is, so hell becomes something that is not forever. There is no such thing as people lasting forever in damnation. That is an interpretive error called the exegetical error of the interpretive center.

The Evangelical feminist does this also when they grab Galatians 3:28, which says that in Christ there is neither male nor female, slave nor free; for we are all one in Christ. They will grab Galatians 3:28 and use it as a lens to rewrite Ephesians 5, which says

that the man is the head of the woman in marriage. They say Ephesians 5 violates Galatians 3:28.

Then they will use it to rewrite 1 Timothy 3:1-13, where there is a gender limitation on leadership roles within the church. There is a gender limitation on the office of pastor-teacher in a church. There is a gender limitation on the selection of elders in a church. There is a gender limitation on the role of the office of deacon in the church.

When I say that, I say it very hesitantly, because I do not want women to get the impression that God does not use them in the life of the church. Clearly, He does. In fact, if you took every woman out of this church, this whole place would collapse overnight. The women do a ton of stuff here.

It is just that certain offices within the church are limited by gender. What people do is they grab Galatians 3:28, and they use it to rewrite all the other passages in the Bible that place gender limitations in marriage or in the church.

Well, the same thing is happening with 1 John 4:8, "...*God is love.*" That is elevated over the rest of the Bible—the fallacy of the interpretive center—and you run every Scripture through 1 John 4:8. When you come to a passage on hell, you say, "Well, that does not look loving, so let's cancel that."

That is no way to treat the Bible. Every part of the Bible is important. Every part of the Bible has a distinctive input. Yes, God is love—no qualms from me on that one—but He is also righteous. He is also holy. The seraphim in Isaiah 6, when they stand before the Lord day and night, what do they say?

They do not say, "Love, love, love is the Lord God Almighty." They say, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty." If you want to have a discussion about God's love, let's do that. But let's also have a discussion of His holiness, because that is who God is. He is both.

The moment you take one part of the Bible that better fits your worldview or what you are comfortable with and use it to start canceling out other parts of the Bible is the moment you do not have the true God anymore. If you take one attribute of God and magnify it and elevate it, and the other attributes of God start to shrink, then as Jesus said that we are to worship the Lord in spirit and truth (paraphrase, John 4:23), you are not worshipping the true God anymore.

What you really have at the end of the day with this interpretive center approach is a golden calf. You have a God in your own likeness and making. Instead of God making man in His image, man has made God in his image.

That is what is happening here with this whole Annihilationist thing. How could a loving God send someone to hell forever? That seems so brutal. 1 John 4:8 is used as an interpretive center to cancel out all the damnation passages. Thus putting helpless creatures, as the argument goes, out of their existence via annihilation much better accords with God's mercy.

Notice how Geisler interacts with this: he says,

"Because man is made in God's image..."

How do we know man is made in God's image? Genesis 1:26 tells me. Genesis 1:27 tells me. Well, how do I know that after the Fall we are still made in God's image? Genesis 9:6 tells me. Toss into the mix James 3:9. It also tells me.

"Because man is made in God's image, not allowing people's chosen destiny throughout eternity would be to deny their image-bearing status..."

If God out of mercy says, "You know what, I am just going to take so-and-so out of their misery"—and they are going to stop existing because God is merciful—for God to do that would be subtracting another part of the Bible which says that we are image bearers of God and we last forever.

You cannot use one part of the Bible to cancel out something else the Scripture teaches.

"Furthermore, God's mercy is not an emotion that overcomes His justice."

We can talk about the mercy of God and the love of God and the grace of God all day long. We can buy very emotionally into the mercy and the grace of God. As we do that, you cannot use it to cancel out His standard of justice, which is equally revealed in Scripture. In fact, Jesus talked more about hell than He ever did about heaven. Did you know that?

I think there is a reason for that. If this place called hell is real, the only person I could really believe it from is Jesus Himself. If it just came from Isaiah or Jeremiah or Daniel, those are just men that God used. I would have a tendency to second-guess whether this place called hell is really a real place.

But because Jesus, the God-Man, talked about it over and over again, I have a tendency to say, "This is a real place," because of the source from which the doctrine emanates.

"God's mercy is not an emotion that overcomes His justice."

Geisler further says,

"If eternal suffering violates God's love, then so does any punishment, temporary or eternal."

If you are going to play this game, "Boy, it sure is unmerciful for God to put people into hell forever." Then it is also unmerciful for God to put people in hell for ten hours or ten minutes or ten years. According to the way the Annihilationists talk, that is unfair too.

This is why Rob Bell's book—which is really a book about universalism—is titled "Love Wins." That is the title of it. Why would he call his book "Love Wins"? Because he went

to the fallacy of the interpretive center. He used love—and God is loving—to rewrite any passage that goes outside of his standard of a loving God.

In the end, everybody is saved. Isn't that great? We are all one happy family, sheep and goats alike. What he is doing there is just creating a golden calf. He elevated one attribute of God, and he shrunk the rest of His attributes to an almost inexistence. He created God in man's image rather than God creating human beings in God's image.

People do this with the Scripture all of the time: the open theist, who does not think God knows everything. Did you know there is a massive movement within Evangelical scholarship that teaches that God does not know everything?

For example, when I put on this tie this morning, God did not know I would put on this tie. But what God saw is all the ties in my closet, and He knew all of the choices I could make; but He did not know what choice I would make until I made the choice. That is open theism.

If you ask the open theist, "Well, if that is true, then how did Jesus know that Peter would deny Him three times? Not four times, not two times, not seven times—but exactly three?"

They cough up some answer: that Jesus knew Peter's character so well that He knew the denial would be just three times—but He really did not know that Peter would deny the Lord three times until Peter denied the Lord three times.

What are the open theists doing here? They are taking an attribute of God, and they are using it to erase another attribute of God. When people get into this kind of weird theology, what you will discover is it typically relates to some tragedy that happened in their life—and I empathize with and sympathize with anyone who suffered a major tragedy.

In the case of the open theist, I believe it dealt with a young child—either a daughter or a granddaughter or something to that effect—who got killed in a crosswalk. That tragedy is so severe that they do not know how to cope with it as a believer. They say something like this: "Why did God not stop it? God could have stopped it and He did not stop it."

Then out of that comes open theism, which says, "The reason God did not stop it is that He did not know what would happen." Do you see that? It is a "spoonful of sugar to make the medicine go down."

That is easier to swallow than a God who knows everything but did not stop it. That is a tough one; it is much easier to think, "Well, God did not stop it because He did not know it would happen; maybe God does not know everything."

What they just did is they built an interpretive center. They used 1 John 4:8 to rewrite omniscience. That might make someone feel better about things for a season, but that is not how the Bible represents God.

That is what people are doing with this whole concept of eternal retribution. They are using something in the Bible to rewrite something else in the Bible that they do not like. What do you have at the end of the day? You have a God with one attribute magnified and the others shrunk, and maybe you feel better about it, but it is not the Bible anymore. It is not the God of the Bible.

When you put together your theology on any doctrine—whether it is the doctrine of God, the doctrine of Christ, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, whatever doctrine you want to develop—let every verse have its say. They all have something to contribute. If you find yourself skirting over certain things, then you run the risk of this fallacy of the interpretive center.

That is what is happening here with this conditional immortality. We all know people—I have got them in my extended family—who went to the grave, to my knowledge, with no profession of faith in Jesus; they thought the whole thing was silly, and yet they were very nice people.

It is just really hard for me to believe that members of my extended family are right now in eternal torment. It is very tempting to say, "Well, that is not merciful of God; maybe they are just going to disappear at some point." But if you do that, what has happened is an emotional sentiment is overriding truth.

We will pick it up here with Point F next time.