

Eternal Conscious Torment vs Annihilation 011

Matthew 25:46

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Well, let's open our Bibles to Matthew 25:46. We are going to try to complete this Annihilation versus eternal torment study. The reason we got into this is that this concept of the conditional immortality Annihilationism combo has been floating around for a long time.

Conditional immortality is the idea that the soul was never created to be eternal, and that people's souls do not become eternal till they get saved, which means that what happens to unsaved people is annihilation. They do not spend eternity in hell. Annihilationism says that they just go into hell, and then after a period of time, they cease to exist.

This view is such a minority view, I probably would not have bothered you with it until I saw Kirk Cameron, with his millions and millions of followers, come out and endorse it. Then people like Eric Metaxas are running interference for Kirk Cameron as he endorsed this position.

After introducing the controversy, we went to Point Number Two: the Biblical arguments against Annihilationism. These are the strongest verses that I know of that go against the Annihilationist perspective and teach that hell is a reality and people will be in hell forever if they do not know Christ.

We went to Point Number Three, where we dealt with the realm of broader theology: these are the strongest arguments that I know of against the Annihilationist point of view.

Then we moved to Point Number Four, where we let the other side talk. These are the verses that Annihilationists use to say that people just disintegrate if they are unbelievers. I went through all of these verses with you and showed you that they are not teaching what Annihilationists argue that they are teaching.

From there, we went to Point Number Five, where we started to answer the broader theological arguments that Annihilationists use. We finished that two weeks ago, and then last Sunday was Resurrection Sunday. We were away from this for one Sunday, but today I want to come back to it in Sunday School, Lord willing, and finish this series.

I just want to give you something that you probably do not get much in your typical local church. It has to do with examining church history. The reason I want to talk just a little bit about church history and Annihilationism is that I want to communicate the point that if someone is holding a view that almost nobody in church history has held, they might want to rethink their view.

Church history is not on the same level as Scripture—Scripture is inspired by God—but you can use church history as a guide to help you understand: "Am I really understanding the Bible correctly if I am understanding it to say X and church history says Y?"

It is okay to hold positions that go against church history; Martin Luther did that at the Protestant Reformation. When he was challenged in the debates at the Diet of Worms with Johann Eck, Eck would quote all the popes and monks and priests, and Luther said that he asked for the sun, and Eck gave him the lanterns.

Luther said, "I have an authority that outweighs all the popes and priests. It is the apostle Paul: 'the just shall live by faith alone' (paraphrase, Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Hebrews 10:38)."

Luther called Galatians his wife. The German phrase for that is 'mein Frau' (my wife). Luther famously said, "Here I stand—I can do no other—unless I am convinced by Scripture alone and sound reason, I will not change my belief."

So Luther had to take a stand against the pattern of church history because the Scripture clearly taught justification by faith alone, which the Roman Catholic hierarchy rejected. It is okay to have a view that goes against church history as long as it is clearly taught in the Bible.

But having said that, this doctrine of Annihilationism is clearly not taught in the Bible as I have tried to communicate. So, if I am going to hold to it anyway, in spite of the evidence from Scripture and in spite of the evidence from church history, then I am probably going the wrong direction.

That is how you can use church history. You do not hold it up to the same level as the Bible, but you can use it to check if your Biblical interpretation is correct. With that in mind, I wanted to expose you just a little bit to church history and what church history has to say on this subject of conditional immortality and Annihilationism.

Is this a view that everybody embraced? The answer is no. It is a splinter view that hardly anybody embraced throughout the last 2,000 years of church history.

Let me give you some quotes from Dr. Norman Geisler, to give you the general overview of church history on this subject of conditional immortality and Annihilationism.

He writes this—all these quotes that I am going to give you here are in his book "Systematic Theology: Volume Four, church and last things."

He does a great job here showing that church history is not in favor of this Annihilationist perspective.

He says,

"After already having been earlier condemned by the Second Council of Constantinople (553), the denial of hell was condemned by the Fifth

Lateran Council in 1513 (see Cross, *ODCC*, 328). The last of the nine anathemas (543)..."¹

'Anathema' is a strong word; it is a condemnation.

Geisler says,

"The last of the nine anathemas (543) of Emperor Justinian (c. 483-565) against Origen (c. 185-c. 254)..."²

Now, Origen was a spiritual advisor. He was not known for taking the Bible literally, and Origen was one of the promulgators of this Annihilationist view.

But Geisler says,

"The last of the nine anathemas (543) of Emperor Justinian (c. 483-565) against Origen (c. 185-c. 254) reads: 'If anyone says or thinks that the punishment of demons and of impious men...'"³

That means non-sanctified people—unbelievers, in other words.

"...is only temporary and will one day have an end...let him be anathema' (in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, Vol. 14)."⁴

There the early church anathematized Origen for promoting this Annihilationist view.

Geisler goes on and says,

"As stated previously, annihilationism was condemned as heretical by a Constantinople synod in 543, by the Second Council of Constantinople in 553, and by the Fifth Lateran Council in 1513 (see Wenham, *GG*, 28, and Cross, *ODCC*, 328). The traditional orthodox doctrine of hell as the eternal conscious punishment of the wicked has been upheld by most of the church's great fathers and theologians, including Tertullian (c. 155-c. 225), Augustine (354-430), Anselm (1033-1109), Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Martin Luther (1483-1546), John Calvin (1509-1564), Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758),..."⁵

But at any rate, none of these luminaries held to this doctrine of annihilation.

"...Augustine (354-430), Anselm (1033-1109), Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Martin Luther (1483-1546), John Calvin (1509-1564), Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), Charles Hodge (1797-1878), William G. T. Shedd (1820-1894), and B. B. Warfield (1851-1921). One of the orthodox

¹ Geisler, N.L. *Systematic theology, volume four: church, last things*, 351.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Geisler, N.L. *Systematic theology, volume four: church, last things*, 391.

position's best defenses is 'Hell on Trial' by Robert A. Peterson (b. 1948), and there is no more magnificent literary expression of the doctrine than 'The Great Divorce' by C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)."⁶

C. S. Lewis was not on board at all with this doctrine of Annihilation, as I will show you with some quotes from C. S. Lewis in a little bit.

Geisler says,

"The historical evidence against annihilationism is the same as the historical argument for eternal conscious punishment—that is, the historical evidence against annihilationism is identical to the evidence for hell, already summarized; annihilationism is opposed by most orthodox teachers in church history, from the beginning to the present. We saw earlier that annihilationism was roundly condemned by the early church."⁷

Geisler summarizes it this way. He says,

"In one example, the last of the nine anathemas of Emperor Justinian (c. 483-565) against Origen reads: 'If anyone says...that the punishment of demons and of impious men is only temporary...'"⁸

That is what Annihilationists are saying: "Hell is just temporary and will one day have an end."

"...let him be anathema'.... Before the Reformation, the Fifth Lateran Council (1513) also condemned the denial of hell (see Cross, *ODCC*, 328)."⁹

One fellow saw that I was doing this series against Annihilationism and he sent me an email and—they always try to sell you on their view—he made a statement in his email that Annihilationists are just like the Protestant Reformers, they are going back to what the text really means.

I usually try not to respond to these types of emails because I get upset about it and I do not want to get carnal on the guy, but this particular time I wrote him back and I said, "Are you really comparing yourself to the Protestant Reformers? Can you name one Protestant Reformer that held to this view that you are promoting?" I haven't yet got a response from him on that.

You have the sweep of church history that is against this conditional immortality Annihilationist view. I do not mind people holding it if the biblical text supports it,

⁶ Geisler, N.L. *Systematic theology, volume four: church, last things*, 391.

⁷ Geisler, N.L. *Systematic theology, volume four: church, last things*, 411.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

because church history is not the final court of arbitration in settling theological controversies, but you had better make sure that the Bible is on your side.

In this case, the Bible is not on their side. One of the clues that the Bible is not on the Annihilationists' side is to look at the sweep of church history that has condemned this over and over and over again as heretical and has pronounced actual anathemas on people that promote it.

That is the general overview of church history. Let me take you here to Point B: into some of the early church fathers and how they totally rejected this doctrine of Annihilationism.

One of them is Polycarp. Polycarp should get your attention. Polycarp was a direct disciple of John—the John who wrote the Book of Revelation, the apostle John who wrote the gospel of John and wrote 1, 2, and 3 John. According to John 13:23, John is the one who leaned against the chest of Christ. John, in his gospel, keeps referring to himself over and over again as the disciple whom Jesus loved.

There probably is not a closer relationship that Jesus had with any human other than John. The inner circle was Peter, James, and John, and of that inner circle John was the closest of the three. What you have to understand is that Polycarp was a disciple of John.

Polycarp is connected to the apostles; and Irenaeus, whose name shows up in Geisler's work condemning Annihilationism, was a disciple of Polycarp. The strand goes like this: from Jesus to John, from John to Polycarp, from Polycarp to Irenaeus.

Do you remember the E. F. Hutton commercial? "When E. F. Hutton talks, people listen." When Irenaeus talks, you should listen—because of this chain. When Polycarp talks, you ought to listen, because of this chain. Obviously when John talks, you ought to listen because he wrote inspired Scripture, and he is the one who had this intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.

People do this with the date of Revelation also: there are a bunch of people out there called Preterists, and they want to date the Book of Revelation in the A.D. 60s because they want to make it a prophecy that was fulfilled in A.D. 70. 'Preterist' means 'past' or 'gone by.'

Now, you cannot make Revelation a prophecy about A.D. 70 if it was written 25 years after the fact. Why would I reject the Preterist argument and date the Book of Revelation in A.D. 95, which would destroy Preterism, versus dating it A.D. 65? Because of this guy right here: Irenaeus.

Irenaeus says the Revelation was written during the reign of Domitian, toward the end of his reign. Irenaeus is connected to Polycarp; Polycarp is connected to John—so why in the world would I hold a position on something when this direct chain says the opposite, that Revelation was written in A.D. 95, not A.D. 65? That completely destroys the doctrine of Preterism. Revelation cannot be a prophecy about A.D. 70 if it was written 25 years later.

I am doing the same kind of thing with this doctrine of Annihilationism. How do I know that hell is forever for unbelievers? It is because of Polycarp, who is connected to John, who is connected to Jesus Christ.

Polycarp says this:

"Thou threatenest me..."¹⁰

And here he is speaking to people that were trying to burn him to death. These Christians early on had a rough go of it, let's just put it that way. There were martyrdoms all over the place until you got to Constantine and his Edict of Milan about A.D. 313, when Constantine ascended to the throne of Rome and made Christianity the official religion of Rome.

Until that happened, all of our forebears were experiencing martyrdom and persecution. Tertullian said that the blood of the saints is the seed of the church. In other words, the church is growing because of a seed that is put in the ground by these martyrs.

Anyway, in the midst of all of this, here is what Polycarp said in the second century,

"Thou threatenest me with fire which burneth for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but art ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. (*EECS*, 11)."¹¹

"You want to burn me to death? Go for it. It is going to last an hour (which would be a horrible way to die), but the fire that is coming upon you (speaking of hell) that you are going to experience will never be put out."

In the process of this statement, Polycarp is rejecting Annihilationism. He is saying that his persecutors are going to go into an eternal damnation. Now, that is Polycarp speaking. Another early church father is a guy named Theophilus who ministered about A.D. 130 to 190.

This is what he says,

"Admitting, therefore, the proof which events happening as predicted afford, I do not disbelieve, but I believe, obedient to God, whom, if you please, do you also submit to, believing Him, lest if now you continue unbelieving, you be convinced hereafter, when you are tormented with eternal punishments;..."¹²

There is no annihilation here. There is no disappearance of the unbelieving soul.

"...which punishments, when they had been foretold by the prophets..."¹³

¹⁰ Geisler, N.L. *Systematic theology, volume four: church, last things*, 348.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Geisler, N.L. *Systematic theology, volume four: church, last things*, 349.

¹³ Geisler, N.L. *Systematic theology, volume four: church, last things*, 349.

Theophilus is building his case on what the Bible says. Maybe he is thinking of Isaiah 66:24, one of the verses I have shown you in this series.

"...the later-born poets and philosophers..."¹⁴

Apparently some of them believed in eternal damnation. I think Plato did. Theophilus says that the philosophers and the poets got this eternal damnation idea from the prophets.

"...the later-born poets and philosophers stole from the holy Scriptures, to make their doctrines worthy of credit. (*TA*, 1.14)."¹⁵

If you die without Christ, you are going to go off, according to Theophilus, into eternal punishment. He was getting this idea from the prophets, and some Greek philosophers taught this too, but they stole the idea from the Bible. (I am wondering what prophet Theophilus has his eye on. I am thinking probably Daniel 12:2, which is a very clear eternal damnation passage. He might have his eye on Isaiah 66:24.) Clearly, these early church fathers did not embrace this doctrine of Annihilationism.

Now, here is Tertullian. He ministered A.D. 155 to 225. This is what he writes:

"O ye heathen; who have and deserve our pity, behold, we set before you the promise which our sacred system offers. It guarantees eternal life to such as follow and observe it; on the other hand, it threatens with the eternal punishment an unending fire those who are profane and hostile; while to both classes alike is preached a resurrection from the dead. (*AN*, 1.1.7)."¹⁶

He is obviously referring to Daniel 12:2; Matthew 25:46; John 5:28-29; and Acts 24:15. Those are passages that teach that there is a resurrection for everybody, saved and unsaved: the saved to experience eternal bliss with God forever, the unsaved in a resurrected body to experience eternal damnation.

So, Tertullian is saying that if eternal life is eternal, then so is eternal punishment. He talks about 'unending fire' to those who are profane and hostile, and that both classes alike go off into eternity, some into eternal life and eternal bliss, some into eternal damnation.

With language like this, obviously, there is not a shred of evidence that Tertullian believed in the soul not being designed by God to be immortal or that it only becomes immortal at the point of faith alone in Christ alone, so therefore the soul goes into hell and just ceases to exist. Tertullian never would have taught such a thing.

You do not want to believe something just because Tertullian or whoever says it is true, but if these early church fathers are this aggressive about this view, and I am coming up

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Geisler, N.L. *Systematic theology, volume four: church, last things*, 349-50.

with some view that is the opposite, maybe I should second-guess whether I am interpreting the Scripture correctly.

Here is Justin Martyr. He ministered A.D. 100 to 165, and he wrote,

"...since God in the beginning made the race of angels and men with free-will..."¹⁷

So, from the beginning, angels were different because they had free will. That is why a third of them use their free will to rebel against God. Revelation 12:3-8 indicates that. Who else has free will? Human beings do. The reason we have a free will is that we are made in God's image. What does it mean to be made in God's image? We share in many of God's communicable attributes. God does not share all of His attributes, but He shares some of them, and one of them is volition and free will. God has free will; so do human beings.

What happens if I use my free will to rebel against the Creator, and I spend my whole life rejecting him, and I die in an unbelieving state? What happens to me then? Well, Justin Martyr says,

"...since God in the beginning made the race of angels and men with free-will, they will justly suffer in eternal fire the punishment of whatever sins they have committed."¹⁸

So, if you will not accept Jesus, who paid your sin debt for you, then you are going to spend all eternity paying off your sin debt in eternal fire. That is the way it is. Punishment needs to be eternal because you have the free will to change your destiny. (You will notice there is not a lot of seeker-friendly talk in these church fathers. These are get-down-to-business-quick kind of guys.)

That is a general overview of church history. We have looked at some of the early church fathers. Let's switch here for a moment to look at some of the medieval fathers. Here is Augustine, who messed up a lot of things—I will be the first to admit it: the doctrine of Amillennialism comes from Augustine, in his book "The City of God." But I will tell you something about Augustine: he was exactly right on this doctrine of eternal punishment. Here is what Augustine writes. He ministered from A.D. 354 to 430.

"If the soul live in eternal punishments, by which also those unclean spirits shall be tormented, that is rather eternal death than eternal life. For there is no greater or worse death than when death never dies."¹⁹

What Augustine is saying here is that death is eternal separation from God. It does not mean cessation of existence.

¹⁷ Geisler, N.L. *Systematic theology, volume four: church, last things*, 351.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Geisler, N.L. *Systematic theology, volume four: church, last things*, 352.

"But because the soul from its very nature, being created immortal,..."²⁰

Every single human being, whether they are saved or unsaved, is created immortal. They cannot die just like the angels cannot die, because they are made in God's image. For God to suddenly take them out of existence would be for God to deny how He has manufactured them as image bearers.

This is exactly the opposite of what Kirk Cameron and all of these people are teaching related to the soul not becoming immortal until you get saved. That is not what Christendom has advanced. It may be a kooky splinter view somewhere, but it is not the voice of church history. Everyone is created to last forever. Saved and unsaved people last forever. It is just that the quality of existence between the two is different.

Augustine says,

"But because the soul from its very nature, being created immortal, cannot be without some kind of life, its utmost death is alienation from the life of God in an eternity of punishment. (CG 6.12)."²¹

Here is Anselm, another medieval church father. He ministered A.D. 1033 to 1109. He writes,

"So then, nothing can be seen to follow more consistently, and nothing ought to be believed more assuredly, than that man's soul was created in such a way that if it despises loving the Supreme Being it will suffer eternal wretchedness."²²

In other words, man's soul is created in such a way that if you reject God and reject Jesus Christ, then you will suffer wretchedness eternally. It is crystal clear.

"Consequently, just as the loving soul will rejoice in an eternal reward, so the despising soul..."²³

Who would that be? Unbelievers.

"...will grieve in eternal punishment."²⁴

Not just punishment, but eternal punishment.

"And as the former will experience immutable sufficiency, so the latter will experience inconsolable need."²⁵

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Geisler, N.L. *Systematic theology, volume four: church, last things*, 353.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Geisler, N.L. *Systematic theology, volume four: church, last things*, 353.

²⁵ Ibid.

Both groups are going off into eternity. Both groups exist forever. It is just that believers experience eternal bliss with God, and unbelievers experience eternity under His wrath.

Now, it does not stop. You might have heard of Thomas Aquinas. He ministered from A.D. 1225 to 1274. This is what he writes.

"The suffering of eternal punishment is in no way opposed to divine justice."²⁶

See, this is one of the arguments that Annihilationists use. How could God punish someone forever when their sins took place in a finite period of time? Thomas Aquinas actually answers this.

"The suffering of eternal punishment is in no way opposed to divine justice."²⁷

How could God be a God of love if He is going to punish someone forever for sins that they committed over—if they lived to 90 years old—a 90-year period? Aquinas says,

"Even in the laws men make, punishment need not correspond to the offense in point of time. [For example, one may commit murder in a minute but deserve a lifetime in jail]. (CT, 183)."²⁸

Even in our justice system, you take someone and you put them away with a life sentence. They cannot stand before the judge and say, "Why are you going to put me away in a life sentence? It only took me thirty seconds to kill so-and-so." What kind of logic is that?

In the same way, God is more than just, to give someone an eternal punishment even though the sins that they committed against Him take place in a finite lifetime. Not to get too deep into all that kind of stuff, but I am just trying to show you that this is how the church has handled this subject of Annihilationism.

In other words, you are not weird, you are not wacko, you are not out on a limb, you are not mean, and you are not unloving, if you hold to eternal punishment, because this is what the voice of church history for 2,000 years has said.

Then we come to the Protestant Reformation during the sixteenth century. The two most famous Protestant reformers were Martin Luther and John Calvin. Luther lived from 1483 to 1546, and Luther said this about eternal damnation:

"The fiery oven is ignited merely by the unbearable appearance of God and endures eternally. For the Day of Judgment will not last for a moment only but will stand throughout eternity and will thereafter never come to an end. Constantly the damned will be judged, constantly they will suffer pain,

²⁶ Geisler, N.L. *Systematic theology, volume four: church, last things*, 354.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

and constantly they will be a fiery oven, that is, they will be tortured within by supreme distress and tribulation. (WLS, 2:627)."²⁹

These things make me just as uncomfortable as they make you, but I do not think these guys could be clearer on this subject. Luther translated the Bible from Greek and Hebrew into German. He knew a lot about the Bible. Without Martin Luther, you do not have a Protestant Reformation. He clearly rejected this doctrine of Annihilation.

The second most famous Protestant reformer is John Calvin. With Calvin, like Augustine, I have some differences of opinion—we did a whole series on Neo-Calvinism versus the Bible—but John Calvin gets this doctrine totally right. This is what he says in the "Institutes of Christian Religion":

"On the other hand, he [God] proclaims not only that iniquity is hateful in his sight, but that it will not escape with impunity, because he will be the avenger of his insulted majesty. That he may encourage us in every way, he promises present blessings, as well as eternal felicity, to the obedience of those who shall have kept his commands..."³⁰

Obviously, the most important command to keep is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ so as to be saved.

"...while he threatens transgressors with present suffering, as well as the punishment of eternal death. (ICR, 2.8.4)"³¹

He is defining 'death' not as cessation of existence, but what the term actually means: separation from God. Calvin believed that just as the saved go on for eternity, the same is true with the damned. No hint here of Annihilationism.

I will finish this list here. We have looked at the early church fathers, medieval fathers, and the Reformation leaders. How about the post-Reformation leaders? How about some of the prominent teachers in church history that had ministries after the Protestant Reformation? What did they think about this doctrine of eternal damnation? Well, one of them is named John Wesley. He was part of the foundations of the Methodist Church. John and his brother, Charles Wesley, had a huge impact for God in Europe. What did John Wesley say about the doctrine of eternal damnation?

"Consider a few of the circumstances which will follow the general judgment. And the first is the execution of the sentence pronounced on the evil and on the good: 'These shall go away into eternal punishment, and the righteous into life eternal.'"³²

²⁹ Geisler, N.L. *Systematic theology, volume four: church, last things*, 355.

³⁰ Geisler, N.L. *Systematic theology, volume four: church, last things*, 355.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Geisler, N.L. *Systematic theology, volume four: church, last things*, 356.

Does that sound familiar? That is the verse I had you open up to. That is the Sheep and Goat Judgment. That is what Wesley is quoting: Matthew 25:46.

"These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matthew 25:46).

As we have noted in this series, 'eternal' is used to describe both saved and unsaved. If life in the afterlife is forever for the believer, then you cannot switch horses in midstream and say the punishment is temporary for the unsaved. You cannot do that. The basic laws of language and logic and consistency will not allow that, and we have taught it that way in this series. It is encouraging to look back at John Wesley and see him saying the exact same thing. Wesley says,

"Consider a few of the circumstances which will follow the general judgment."³³

He is talking about the Sheep and Goat Judgment, Matthew 25:31-46.

"And the first is the execution of the sentence pronounced on the evil and on the good: 'These shall go away into eternal punishment, and the righteous into life eternal.' It should be observed, it is the very same word which is used, both in the former and the latter clause: It follows, that either the punishment lasts for ever, or the reward too will come to an end: No, never, unless God could come to an end, or his mercy and truth could fail. 'Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father, and shall drink of those rivers of pleasure which are at God's right hand forevermore.' (WJW, 5.15.3.1)"³⁴

It looks like he is taking some verses there and merging them together. Here is John Wesley saying, "If you take eternal life as forever, you have to take damnation as forever too, because the word 'aionios' (αἰώνιος) is repeated twice." And then he says this:

"No, never, unless God could come to an end,..."

Why does he say that? Because the exact same Greek word 'aionios' (αἰώνιος) that is used to describe eternal life and eternal damnation is also used to describe God.

Romans 16:26 describes God as eternal:

"but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith;" (Romans 16:26).

It has to be Jesus saying that hell is eternal, or we probably would not believe it was true. This doctrine does not just come from the mouth of a run-of-the-mill servant of

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Geisler, N.L. *Systematic theology, volume four: church, last things*, 356.

God. This is the incarnate Son of God saying this. As Jesus is talking, He says punishment is 'aionios' (αἰώνιος) just like life is 'aionios' (αἰώνιος) just like God—in Romans 16:26—is 'aionios.'

Is God forever?

“Yes.”

Is eternal life forever?

“Yes.”

Well, Mr. Annihilationist, is hell forever?

“No.”

Do you follow how out of whack that is? That is what John Wesley is saying here. John Wesley is a pretty important voice. Would you not agree? You do not have the Methodist church without John and Charles Wesley, and they clearly rejected Annihilationism.

I have two more quotes. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the prince of Preachers, ministered from 1834 to 1892. Here is what he says about eternal retribution:

"It hopeth not; it knoweth no escape; it guesseth not of deliverance; it pants for death, but death is too much its foe to be there; it longs that non-existence would swallow it up,..."³⁵

He is describing people in hell. They want it to end, but Spurgeon says,

"...but this eternal death is worse than annihilation."³⁶

So, obviously, Spurgeon rejected Annihilationism as a doctrine.

"It pants for extermination as the laborer for his Sabbath; it longs that it might be swallowed up in nothingness just as would the galley slave long for freedom, but it cometh not—it is eternally dead." (SSC, 1.52)³⁷

'Dead' does not mean cessation of existence. It means eternal separation from God. Now, Jonathan Edwards had a famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." He read a sermon like this and from what little I have read about this, it was not a great oratorical pizzazz. It was kind of boring. He got up with his manuscript and he just read it in front of his church.

What happened? The first Great Awakening happened from that sermon. The power of the Holy Spirit on that sermon was so profound that even people in the bay could sense

³⁵ Geisler, N.L. *Systematic theology, volume four: church, last things*, 357.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

the guilt of their own sin and their need to trust Christ as Savior. Spurgeon's teaching sounds a lot like Jonathan Edwards as he is describing hell here.

The last quote I have for you is from C. S. Lewis. He wrote "Mere Christianity"; "The Great Divorce"; and "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe." He is a famous Christian author, and he clearly rejected annihilation. He says,

"In a sense, it is better for the creature itself, even if it never becomes good, that it should know itself a failure, a mistake. Even mercy can hardly wish to such a man his eternal, contented continuance in such ghastly illusion."³⁸

Now he quotes Thomas Aquinas, who also rejected Annihilationism.

"Thomas Aquinas said of suffering, as Aristotle had said of shame, that it was a thing not good in itself, but a thing which might have a certain goodness in particular circumstances..."³⁹

When Lewis uses this word 'eternal' and the phrase 'continued existence,' he is rejecting annihilation. Then C. S. Lewis says something very interesting:

"I willingly believe that the damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the inside." (PP 110, 115-16)⁴⁰

He is acknowledging that they are in hell because they put themselves there.

Someone says, "I do not believe in a God that sends people to hell."

Well, I do not believe in that either. People send themselves to hell. The doors are locked on the inside, because they reject what Jesus did for them 2,000 years ago.

There is the general overview of church history: early church fathers, medieval fathers, Reformation leaders, post-Reformation leaders. The last part of this study is the conclusion. Why did we go into this?

One of the things to understand about theology is that it is dominoes in a row. If you knock over one domino—it is like a seamless tapestry—other dominoes, if they are in a nice neat row, start to fall.

Look at all of the different doctrines that have been impacted by this study that we have done here in asking if Annihilationism is true: it affects your soteriology, the doctrine of salvation; it affects your eschatology, what happens to the unsaved at the Great White Throne Judgment; it affects your anthropology, the study of man, because the

³⁸ Geisler, N.L. *Systematic theology, volume four: church, last things*, 358-59.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Annihilationists are saying that the soul is not created forever. They have a different anthropology.

If annihilation is true, you have just thrown a wet blanket over missionary activity. The incentive and the urgency to reach the lost was just taken away. Why should I share my faith with the waitress at lunch today if she is just going to go into hell for a kind of weekend trip and disappear? That is not that bad. But if I understand that she is going to be in hell forever, that adds to my urgency to share the gospel with her.

That is what bothers me about Kirk Cameron and all of these people running around teaching all this stuff, because they are throwing a wet blanket over evangelism and missions work. At this church, we give around twenty percent of our budget to missionary activity. We screen our missionaries to make sure that they are doing actual missionary work and not social gospel or something masquerading as missionary work.

Why go to that rigor and trouble if hell is not as severe as the Bible says it is? Why would you spend your life trying to translate the Bible into a foreign dialect if hell is not serious? People are going to die without Jesus and they are going to spend an eternity separated from Him.

Why would you be a missionary? As a missionary, you go through your whole life learning another culture so that you can penetrate a foreign culture with the hopes of sharing the gospel with the lost. Why even do that? According to Annihilationism, people are just going to die, and it is going to be a bad weekend trip and it is no big deal.

Well, the Bible is saying, and church history is saying, that it is a big deal. If hell stops being what the Bible portrays it as, then the dominoes start to fall over. One of those dominoes is world missions. World missions take a beating if Annihilationism is true.

That is the whole series: seven major points.

Point One: Introduction to the Controversy.

Point Two: Biblical Arguments Against Annihilationism.

Point Three: Theological Arguments Against Annihilationism.

Point Three: Answering Annihilationist Biblical Arguments.

Point Four: Answering Annihilationist Theological Arguments.

Point Six: Examining Church History.

Then Point Seven: the Conclusion—so what? Who cares? I have tried to explain why we should care. It does matter because theology is dominoes in a row.