



# **THE FATE OF UNBELIEVERS**

**The Condensed Version**

**By  
Charles R. Chesnutt**

**Disproving from scripture the doctrine  
of the eternal torment of the unredeemed**

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THE CONDENSED VERSION

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Biblical quotations are from the New American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

This is a condensed version of a book originally entitled *A Scriptural Discussion of Hell* and re-named *The Fate of Unbelievers* which may be downloaded from biblebooks.co.

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## **About the Author**

Charles Chesnutt, Sr. is an attorney and graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary. Other theological works of the author include *Believe in God*, *The House*, *A Reason for Adversity*, *Endless Love* and *The Fate of Unbelievers*. All of these works may be downloaded at [BIBLEBOOKS.CO](http://BIBLEBOOKS.CO).

No portion of this work has been endorsed or, as far as the author knows, supported by Dallas Theological Seminary.

The author lives with his wife Mary in Dallas, Texas.

## **Dedication**

The author dedicates this work to his wife, Mary, who help and insight, dedication and encouragement has been invaluable, and without which this book could not have been written.

## About this Book

This book is the condensed version of a book of the same name that is published by BIBLEBOOKS.CO. It is an examination of the scriptures relating to the eternal fate of unbelievers. Because no scripture teaches that the unredeemed (unbelievers) are condemned to eternal torment, the book concludes that the doctrine is theological error and should not be taught.

The book is a polemic against the doctrine of eternal torment. There is but one verse in the Bible that teaches eternal torment and that is Revelation 20:10 and that verse teaches the eternal fate of Satan, the antichrist and the false prophet.

In order to make its case, the book examines those scriptures that are most often cited in support of eternal torment. All of these verses are ambiguous and teach eternal torment only when one presumes that eternal torment is what they teach. None of them refer to it directly. On the other side of the argument there are almost 50 verses teaching that the final state of the unredeemed is death.

Faced with numerous scriptures pointing to death as the ultimate punishment of unbelievers, the advocates of eternal torment purport to re-define the meaning of death into a kind of life without death. And this they do—with no substantive basis whatever.

The comprehensive original work entitled *The Fate of Unbelievers* which may be acquired at BIBLEBOOKS.CO without charge.

## The Facade

Perhaps the most famous facade in the world is one that was seen by the Apostle Paul on many occasions. It is the facade of the library at the ancient city of Ephesus.



The facade of the Ephesus Library is a magnificent and intricate multi-columned work of art that still stands today. However, anyone who walks through the front door of the library will discover an empty room and the back of a beautiful facade. The library that once stood behind it has long since crumbled away.

The Christian doctrine of the eternal torment of the unredeemed is much like the facade of the Ephesian library. It is an intricate and carefully crafted facade that is centuries old standing on the main boulevard of Christian doctrine. It is as much a part of that ancient street as the doctrine of salvation by grace or the deity of Jesus Christ.

But when one walks into the front door of Salvation by Grace, one finds substantive scripture that establishes the doctrine, such as Ephesians 2:8 (“By grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God”). Or behind the door of the doctrine of the Deity of Christ one finds John 8:58 (“Before Abraham was, I am...”). But walk through the front door of the doctrine of Eternal Torment and one finds presumption and circumvention.

There is no Ephesians 2:8 or John 8:58 behind the door of eternal torment, nor are there any other scriptures behind that door. No scripture in the Bible says that unbelievers will be

tormented for eternity. Certainly, there are scriptures that are used to support the doctrine, but each one of those scriptures is applicable only if one first presumes that the doctrine is true. There is no scripture that actually teaches the doctrine.

On the contrary, scripture repeatedly teaches that the fate of the unbelievers is “death,” not eternal torment. So there is a contradiction between the doctrine of eternal torment and the teaching of scripture; scripture teaches death and death is not the same as eternal torment. The doctrine of eternal torment circumvents this contradiction by re-defining death. It re-defines death to mean an eternal conscious sentient existence. This permits the the unredeemed to die in the second death but not really die, so they can be tortured forever. But there is no scripture that re-defines the meaning of death and the that teaching is precisely the opposite of what death actually is. And it is in no way similar to the established meanings of all of the Greek and Hebrew words for death.

This is not to say that eternal torment does not exist. Eternal torment certainly does exist. It is mentioned once in all of scripture and then only in reference to Satan, the antichrist and the false prophet (Revelation 20:10). Nor is this to say that hell does not exist. Hell certainly does exist, but in the end, hell and death are cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14) and destroyed. There is no Ephesians 2:8 or John 8:58 behind the door of eternal torment, nor are there any other scriptures behind that door. No scripture in the Bible says that unbelievers will be tormented for eternity. Certainly, there are scriptures that are used to support the doctrine, but each one of those scriptures is applicable only if one presumes that the doctrine is true. There is no scripture that actually teaches the doctrine.

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On the contrary, scripture repeatedly teaches that the fate of the unbelievers is not eternal torment but “death.”

This booklet addresses the scriptures that are most often quoted to support eternal torment and it touches on the doctrine’s most spectacular inconsistencies. But a much more thorough treatment of the subject, including word studies and numerous scriptural quotations, may be found in the comprehensive work entitled *The Fate of Unbelievers* by Charles Chesnutt published by BIBLEBOOKS.CO.



## Chapter 1

### **The Smoke of Their Torment**

THE SMOKE OF THEIR TORMENT  
RISES FOREVER

REVELATION 14:10

One of the scriptures most often quoted to support the doctrine of eternal torment is Revelation 14:9-11. It reads as follows:

“If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand ... he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image...”

This verse can be understood to support eternal torment only if one presumes that eternal torment is true and fails to read the verse carefully. The passage does not teach eternal torment for three reasons: 1) The passage is limited by its own terms to those who worship the beast in the end times, so by its own words it cannot be referring to eternal torment for all unbelievers; 2) it does not refer to the eternal state after death but instead to a condition on earth in the end times; and 3) it contains no statement of the duration of the torment.

The passage is self-limiting. The passage contains two very clear limitations at the beginning and at the end. At the beginning, the passage states that it applies to “anyone who worships the beast and his image” and at the end it states that it applies to “those who worship the beast and his image.” These two state-

ments limit the application to those who worship the beast and the beast occurs during the great tribulation. Therefore the passage cannot apply to all unbelievers.

The passage does not refer to the eternal state. The passage is a statement made by one of the three messenger angels sent to warn mankind in the great tribulation. The passage is therefore not a reference to the eternal state. It is a reference to the state of mankind in the tribulation. The passage uses the present tense to indicate an ongoing worship of the beast in the great tribulation. It is one of the bowl judgments referenced in (Revelation 16:2):

“And the first angel went out and poured out his bowl into the earth; and it became a loathsome and malignant sore upon the men who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image.”

Those who worship him receive malignant sores and “have no rest day or night” (Revelation 14:11). The reference to fire and brimstone refers either to the pain of the sores or to actual fire and brimstone that may be on the earth at the time of the great tribulation. The passage refers to the earth during the great tribulation, not to the eternal state.

There is no specified duration of the torment. The passage does not say that the torment is eternal. It says only that they will be tormented and that they have no rest day or night while being tormented. It does not say how long this torment will continue.

The phrase “forever and ever” refers to a column of smoke that extends as far as the eye can see, not to the duration of the smoke or the duration of the torment. The phrase in the original Greek is exactly the same phrase that is used in Revelation 19:2,3, where scripture describes the destruction of the “great whore,” a city that was destroyed and “her smoke rose up forever and ever.” That passage is a description of smoke extending up as far as the eye can see, not of a fire that burns for the rest of eternity. It could not refer to a fire that burns for the rest of eternity unless God is going to burn a city forever. There is scripture that describes such an event. Therefore the passage refers to smoke rising as far as the eye can see.

The same is true for the smoke of the beast worshipers where scripture uses exactly the same phrase. Also, the smoke of the beast worshipers cannot continue for the rest of time because God will make a new heavens and a new earth:

“...according to His promise we are looking for a new heavens and a new earth” (Second Peter 3:13).

In that day, God

“...Will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

Therefore, Revelation 14:9-11 does not refer to eternal torment.

## Chapter 2

### Parable of Lazarus

IN HADES HE LIFTED UP HIS EYES,  
BEING IN TORMENT, AND SAW  
ABRAHAM FAR AWAY AND LAZARUS  
IN HIS BOSOM

**LUKE 16:19-31**

The Parable of Lazarus is often used to show that there is an afterlife and that hell is real. It is also used to argue that death in the Bible is not death as we know it because two men who died on earth were alive in the afterlife.

The parable tells of a beggar named Lazarus who was spurned and ignored by a rich man. Both Lazarus and the rich man died. That is, their bodies died and their souls went into the afterlife. The soul of Lazarus went to a place of peace called Abraham's bosom but the soul of the rich man went to hell, which is a place of torment. The two places were not so far apart that the rich man could not speak to Abraham.

The soul of the rich man was tormented. He cried out to Abraham asking him to send Lazarus back to warn his brothers. But Abraham tells him that "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31).

The parable contains fictional characters and it is intended to teach salvation and to foreshadow Christ's resurrection. It is therefore questionable that it can be used to teach about the afterlife. But for purposes of this booklet, we will assume that it does teach about the afterlife.

Given that assumption, the parable does teach torment, but it does not teach that the torment is eternal and it does not mention the eternal state. The soul of the rich man is in hell and the eternal state does not begin until the judgment when all unbelievers will be cast into the lake of fire (see Revelation 21:8). It is certainly true that the rich man was tormented (but not so much as to prevent his lucid conversation with Lazarus and Abraham) and it is certainly true that the rich man was in hell. But this scripture does not say that this torment is eternal and it is clear from the context of the passage that the parable is not speaking of the the eternal state that will follow the final judgment.

Many use this parable to teach that the word death does not really mean death in the Bible because after the rich man died he remained sentient (he could feel things like torture) and he could speak and he could reason. It is therefore argued that death in the Bible is not really death.

This argument is meritless because the term “death” is not used to describe the status of the soul of the rich man; it is used to describe what happened to the rich man’s body. The rich man’s body and Lazarus’ body are dead corpses buried somewhere in Israel. Life had ceased in the bodies of both of them but their souls survived. Their souls went to their respective places in the afterlife. The issue is not what happened to their bodies, but what will happen to their souls. This passage does not teach that death in the Bible is not actually death as we know it because there two deaths. In the first death the body dies and in the second death the soul dies. Only the first death had occurred in the Parable of Lazarus because the soul of both Lazarus and the rich man was still alive and the final judgment had not yet occurred.

“He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death” (Revelation 2:11).

The second death occurs after the unredeemed have been judged. They will be cast into a lake of fire and there they will die a second time. This is the second death,

“The] unbelieving...their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8).

But the souls of the saved in Christ will not die because they will live forever:

“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:25,26).

Those who trust in Christ will die only once. They will die the first death but not the second.

So, death in the Bible is no different than any other death. It is just a question of what dies and what death. In the Parable of Lazarus, the bodies died, but the judgment had not yet occurred, so the soul of the rich man was still alive, but confined to hell until the judgment. Only his body had died. But his soul would die in the second death and when it does, it will be just as dead as his body was in the first death. So death in the Bible is still exactly what the words mean: death.

Hell and the lake of fire are not just one jumble of eternal flame. Each one has a specific function. Hell is a repository for unsaved souls until the final judgment and the second death in the lake of fire. We know that hell is a repository because souls do not die in hell; they die in the lake of fire in the second death (Revelation 21:8).

And hell is a place of torment for at least some souls, “In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom” (Luke 16:23). And hell is a place of despair, especially for Jews who have not come to their own Messiah, “The sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 8:12). The lake of fire is a place of death (second death) for unbelievers (Revelation 21:8) and a place of eternal torment for Satan (Revelation (20:10). The unredeemed souls die in the lake of fire but Satan, who is never judged but thrown summarily into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:2,3) is not permitted to die.

The second death is much more painful than the first because at this point the unbeliever knows that God is real, that Jesus Christ tried to save him, that heaven is real and that eternal life was once a possibility. But he would not trust in Christ.

All of the scriptures in Revelation that address the final state of the unredeemed refer to it as “death.” In fact, there is not one verse in the bible that uses to term eternal torment to describe what happens to the unredeemed.

Every verse in the Bible that does describe what happens to the unredeemed is always a word that means death. There are 48 scriptures teaching that the final end of the unredeemed is death or destruction or some other word that means the same. Some of these scriptures are:

Job 20:6,7 “perish forever;” Psalm 1:6 “the way of the ungodly shall perish;” Psalm 37:20 “the wicked shall perish;” Psalm 52:1,5 “God shall destroy thee forever;” Psalm 56:11,13 “Thou hast delivered my soul from death;” Psalm 92:7 “they shall be destroyed forever;” Psalm 116:8 “thou hast delivered my soul from death;” Psalm 145:20 “all the wicked He will destroy;” Proverbs 19:9 “he that speaketh lies shall perish;” Isaiah 1:28 “they that forsake the Lord shall be consumed [the Hebrew word translated consumed in this verse means to be wholly spent or to perish. It does not mean torment];” Ezekiel 18:4 “the soul that sinneth shall die;” Ezekiel 33:11 “that the wicked turn from his way and live...why will ye die?” Hosea 13:9,14 “I will redeem thy soul from death;” Obediah 16 “they shall be as though they had not been;” Matthew 7:13 “broad is the way that leadeth to destruction;” Matthew 10:28 “fear Him which is able to destroy both the soul and body in hell;” John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish;” Matthew 10:28 “And fear not them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell;” John 6:50,51 “This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die [that is, his soul would not die];” John 8:51 “if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death [there are two deaths, the death of the body and the death of the soul. Jesus was saying that we would not see the second death, which is the death of the soul];” John 10:28 “I give them eternal life



and they shall never perish;" John 11:26 "whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die;" Romans 1:32 "knowing the righteous judgment of God that those who practice such things are deserving of death;" Romans 5:12 "just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men because all sinned;" Romans 5:21 "sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life;" Romans 6:16 "sin leading to death;" Romans 6:21 "the end of those things is death;" Romans 6:23 "the wages of sin is death;" 1 Corinthians 1:18 "the cross is foolishness to those that are perishing;" 2 Corinthians 1:9 "we had the sentence of death;" 2 Corinthians 2:16 "to the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life;" 2 Timothy 1:10 "Jesus Christ who has abolished death;" 2 Thessalonians 2:9 "all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved;" Hebrews 2:9 "that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man [Jesus Christ paid our penalty, which was death, by dying in our place. He was our substitute. He took our punishment for us; that punishment was death, not eternal torment];" Hebrews 2:14 "that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil;" James 5:20 "he who turns a sinner from the error of his will save a soul from death;" 2 Peter 2:9 "to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished...shall utterly perish [the punishment for the unredeemed is to utterly perish, die]; 2 Peter 3:9 "the Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance;" 1 John "He shall give him life for them that sin not unto death;" Revelation 1:18 "the keys of hell and death;" Revelation 2:11 "He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death;" Revelation 20:6 "on such the second death has no power;" Revelation 20:14 "this is the second death;" Revelation 21:8 "which is the second death."

In order for the doctrine of eternal torment to prove itself be true, it would have to circumvent all of these scriptures. Three of them are perhaps the most notable and imminently straightforward:

Ezekiel 18:4 “Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die.”

James 5:20, “He who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death.”

Romans 6:23, “The wages of sin is death.”

There is only one scripture in all of the Bible that teaches eternal torment for anyone, and that scripture applies only to Satan, the antichrist and the false prophet, “And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Revelation 20:10).

The belief that all of the unredeemed will suffer the same eternal punishment as Satan in spite of all of the verses that teach that the unredeemed will ultimately die is doctrinal error.

## Chapter 3

### **The Righteous Judge**

THE DEAD WERE JUDGED OUT  
OF THOSE THINGS WHICH  
WERE WRITTEN IN THE BOOKS,  
ACCORDING TO THEIR WORKS

REVELATION 20:12

**G**od is a righteous judge who judges everyone based only upon the life that each one has lived. Revelation 20:12 teaches that God will judge the soul of every man and every woman according to their deeds:

“...the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.”

But in the end, all souls who have not trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins will receive a death sentence and will die:

“Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die” Ezekiel 18:4.

And also:

“The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

The concept of God’s justice is not easily defended when the same people who are teaching that God is just are also teaching that unbelievers receive the same punishment as Satan (eternal torment in the lake of fire).

This is neither logical, consistent nor scriptural. Nowhere does the Bible say God will punish all unbelievers the same as He will punish Satan. He gives mankind free will to live life as they see fit. Death, however, is the inevitable result of sin and He warns us repeatedly of this. He places an awareness of sin inside of us and an awareness of spiritual death and gives us an inherent knowledge of good and evil.

If we sin, He tells us that there is way out. There is a Savior who died in our place. Those who heed that warning and turn to Jesus Christ are saved from eternal death. Those who do not will die, never to be resurrected again. But eternal torment, the most horrible of all conceivable punishments is reserved for the most horrible of all entities: Satan, the antichrist and the false prophet:

“And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone...[and will be] tormented day and night forever and ever” (Revelation 20:10).

That is not to say, however, that the unredeemed do not have to face consequences for their sins. Not at all. Each one of them will suffer through a stay in hell before the final judgment and the second death. A Hitler or a Himmler who designed and implemented the holocaust cannot escape his crimes with a vial of poison. We live in a moral universe and in the end they will face God and they will be held in hell and in the end they will die in the lake of fire. And between the second coming and the final judgment is 1000 years.

But what of those evil men who turn to Christ? Do they escape? Yes, everyone who turns to Christ escapes. But the deeper and the longer they wade into sin the less likely it is that they will be inclined to sincerely turn to Jesus Christ and ask for the forgiveness of all that they have done. Why? Because the farther they go the more they self-justify or harden themselves against the existence of a just God and their own need for a Savior and the more their pride is hardened against guilt and conviction of sin. It is safe to assume that Hitler did not attend an altar call before he committed suicide. He simply did not expect to come face to face with the God of Israel, but he will--in another 1000 years.

One example of an evil man who did turn to Christ is John Newton. He was a slave trader who made his living selling stolen lives for a profit. But when he saw the futility of attempting to justify what he was doing, and the sin he was committing, he repented sincerely and came to Jesus. He went on to write the Christian hymn Amazing Grace. And indeed, when he reflected on the evil that he had done he saw God's grace to him as truly amazing.

God's grace certainly is amazing, but God is also just, and the wages of sin is death. God cannot tell us that the wages of sin is death and then retreat from that position because God cannot lie. That is the reason why we are all in need a Savior, a Savior who saves us from eternal death. But whenever it comes, the end is death, not eternal torment. We know this because He told us so:

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

The choice is eternal life or eternal death

## Chapter 4

### **Eternal Punishment and Eternal Destruction**

THESE WILL GO AWAY INTO  
ETERNAL PUNISHMENT, BUT THE  
RIGHTEOUS INTO ETERNAL LIFE

**MATTHEW 25:46**

THESE WILL PAY THE PENALTY OF  
ETERNAL DESTRUCTION

**SECOND THESSALONIANS 1:9**

When we come to a scripture that can have two meanings, we read it through the lens of our established doctrine and we choose the meaning that fits that doctrine. We do this because that is what the study of theology is. It is a search for understanding and continuity. And this is good, but the lens itself must be based upon scripture.

Matthew 25:46 teaches that those who do not turn to Christ for the forgiveness of their sins “will go away into eternal punishment...” If we read that scripture through the lens of eternal torment, we see a proof text for eternal torment. We see a scripture teaching that unbelievers will be punished eternally. We believe that the eternal punishment is eternal torment because that is what we have always believed.

But the scripture does not say it. The scripture does not say what the eternal punishment actually is.

If we remove the lens of eternal torment and look just at the scripture itself, we see something entirely different. We see a scripture teaching that unbelievers will be punished for eternity with no statement as to what that punishment is. The passage leaves the name of the punishment blank and calls upon us to

look to other scriptures to fill in that blank. Those who believe in the doctrine of eternal torment look to their doctrine to fill in the blank, but the doctrine of eternal torment is a facade.

Instead of looking to tradition to find the answer, let us look to scripture to fill in the blank.

When we look to scripture to see if the blank should be filled with “eternal torment,” we find that there is no such scripture, not even one. There is no scripture that teaches that the eternal punishment of Matthew 25:46 is eternal torment. Therefore, Matthew 25:46 cannot be used as a proof text for eternal torment.

But if the eternal punishment in Matthew 25:46 is not eternal torment, what is the punishment? Are there any scriptures that give us an explicit statement of what that punishment is? Yes, there are. There are many and all of them say that the eternal punishment is death.

When we look through the rest of scripture without the lens of eternal torment, we find that the entire Bible is a warning that the punishment for sin is death. It is repeated over and over again from Genesis to Revelation. Many of these 48 scriptures have already been quoted in Chapter 2 (The Parable of Lazarus). All of them, including their original languages with discussion, are carefully set forth in the full, book version of Fate of Unbelievers which may be downloaded at [biblebooks.co](http://biblebooks.co).

But death is already eternal. So why does Matthew 25:46 specify eternal punishment? The reason is that there are two deaths and the first death is far from eternal. Matthew 25:46 specifies eternal punishment because the second death is an eternal punishment.



The first death is only temporary because the soul survives the first death and later the bodies of the unredeemed will be resurrected and live again, but only to face judgment:

“... an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment” (John 5:29).

Following that judgment, eternal punishment will occur and that eternal punishment is eternal death. It is the second death of Revelation 21:8.

Believers will not be resurrected to judgment because Jesus Christ has already died for our sins and paid for them and they have trusted in Him. He was our substitute. So, believers die only once (the first death). That is what Jesus meant when He said, “If any man keep My saying, he shall never see death” (John 8:51). He did not mean that our bodies would never die in the first death. He meant that our soul and resurrected body will not die in the second death.

Similarly, Second Thessalonians 1:9 says that unbelievers “will pay the penalty of eternal destruction.” Scripture says that the destruction is eternal because the punishment is destruction (death in the lake of fire) and it is eternal. It is saying that when the resurrected sinner is cast into the lake of fire his destruction will be eternal. That is, it will be permanent. Why does it say eternal destruction? Because many bodies are destroyed in their earthly life, but that destruction is temporary. All will be resurrected, some to eternal life and others to judgment:

“Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment”  
John 5:28,29.

The grammatical structure of the phrases eternal punishment and eternal destruction make it clear that their English translations are accurate. They do not mean eternal punishing or eternal destroying. They refer to punishment and destruction that are permanent, one-time occurrences and they are not on-going. The reader is directed to the full version of Fate of Unbelievers for a comprehensive treatment of the Greek syntax showing that these phrases do not mean eternal punishing or eternal destroying.

Taken with the 48 scriptures that describe the final end of the unredeemed as “death” and the total absence of any scripture that says the final end is eternal torment, it is clear that the eternal punishment referred to in Matthew 25:46 is eternal death without a resurrection, and that the everlasting destruction of Second Thessalonians 1:9 is the permanent destruction of the souls and resurrected bodies of the unredeemed. Their eternal punishment is total destruction without resurrection. Scripture teaches repeatedly that they will die. Death is therefore the end, not eternal torment.

## Chapter 5

### **Their Worm Does Not Die**

THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE AND  
THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED

**MARK 9:48**

**I**n Mark 9, Jesus gives a warning. He warns us three times that if we sin, we will enter into hell “where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.” See Mark 9:44, 46 and 48. These passages are often quoted as a proof texts for eternal torment.

It is certainly true that in hell the soul of the unredeemed does not die. The reason is because the souls of the unredeemed do not die in hell. They suffer in hell but they die when they are cast into the lake of fire. We know that they die when they are cast into the lake of fire because scripture tell us that when they are cast into the lake of fire they suffer a second death:

“But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral [fornicators], those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars--they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.” (Revelation 21:8 NIV).

We know that hell is not the same thing as the lake of fire because hell is cast into the lake of fire as well:

“death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death” Revelation 20:14.

Mark 9 does not teach eternal torment for the following reasons:

1. The word “worms” means exactly that: worms. This word is never used to refer to people. So when the scripture says that their worm does not die, it is not referring to people who do not die.

2. The passages in Mark 9 do not say that anyone will be eternally tormented. They imply that there will be torment, but they say nothing of the duration of that torment.

3. The passages refer to fire that cannot be quenched, but again, they do not specify the duration of the fire. Fire that is unquenchable is not necessarily eternal. The only fire that scripture specifies as eternal is the lake of fire. And, as set forth above, the fires of hell are not the lake of fire.

4. The souls referred to in these passages are confined to hell, not the lake of fire. These are two entirely different places in scripture. Hell is a place of torment; the lake of fire is a place of death. The lake of fire is eternal; hell is not eternal because it too is cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14).

5. The entire Bible states repeatedly that the end of the unredeemed is death and never states that the final end of the unredeemed is eternal torment.

6. Christ was not saying that worms are people, nor was He teaching that there are eternal worms that never die. He was quoting from Isaiah 66:23,24:

“And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against Me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.”

Isaiah was stating what is continually taught by scripture: that sin causes death. We know that Isaiah was referring to death and not to eternal torment because he says “carcasses [dead bodies] of the men that have transgressed.” The picture described by Isaiah is a picture of Gehenna, an actual place outside of Jerusalem with worm infested dead bodies and continual burning. The dead bodies of beggars and prostitutes who could not afford a tomb were placed in Gehenna.

Christ was analogizing hell to Gehenna and in doing so He was painting a picture of ignominious death. He was not teaching that there are eternal worms in hell that are eating living human beings who never die in the midst of a fire that is burning them forever. That is a Catholic myth. Not even Satan, who is tormented forever is inflicted with eternal worms. There is no such thing as an eternal worm.

The eternal worms argument is not a secondary argument for eternal torment. It is one of the primary arguments used to support the doctrine. This argument is supposed to show that 48 scriptures that teach death as the final end of the unredeemed are not really teaching death at all, but, in fact, are teaching exactly the opposite. They are actually teaching that the unredeemed do not die, but instead have a “living,” sentient conscious existence for eternity so that God may inflict unimaginable pain on them forever by burning them and send-

ing eternal worms to eat them up. This is precisely the opposite of the meaning of “death” in either Greek or in English. It is also precisely the opposite of God’s justice. It is also absurd.

The key to an understanding of what scripture is teaching is an understanding of what death actually is.

## Chapter 6

### What is Death?

VERILY VERILY I SAY UNTO YOU, IF  
A MAN KEEP MY SAYING HE SHALL  
NEVER SEE DEATH

JOHN 8:51

**T**hat is death? The meaning of the word “death” is crucial, because every relevant scripture teaches that the final end of sin is death, including the words of Jesus Christ who said that His ministry was to save us from death:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death” (John 8:51).

Scripture also teaches that Jesus “tasted death for every man” (Hebrews 2:9). When Christ tasted death for every man, He took our death penalty for sin upon Himself. This is called the doctrine of substitutionary atonement: Jesus died in our place.

From Genesis to Revelation, scripture uses words meaning garden variety “death” to describe the inevitable end of sin. Scripture uses the classic Greek word for plain and simple death (thanatos) to describe the unbeliever’s part in the lake of fire:

“...the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral...and all liars-- they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death [thanatos]” (Revelation 21:8)

This echoes the same teaching in the Old Testament, where Ezekiel speaks the words of Yahweh, “the soul that sinneth, it shall die...” (Ezekiel 18:4).

If the word “death” means death as we know it, then scripture teaches that the soul and the body that has been resurrected for judgment will die in the second death (Revelation 21:8) when it is cast into the lake of fire. If the second death is really death, then eternal torment cannot be true because eternal torment effectively teaches the exact opposite, that there is no death. A dead body cannot be tormented.

Therefore, the advocates of eternal torment argue that death in the Bible does not really mean death. They say that death is really a state of eternal conscious existence and physical sensation, which is essentially being alive. They take this position because it is the only way that they can reconcile their teaching with the exhaustive scripture teaching that unbelievers die in the lake of fire. What they are doing is re-defining death. But this re-definition of death does not occur in scripture. It occurs outside of scripture and then only when someone is attempting to justify the doctrine of eternal torment.

The Greek and Hebrew words that are used to mean death have never changed and these words mean death plain and simple.

Death is a common word in both Biblical Greek, Hebrew and modern English and Greek dictionaries show that the word “death” means the same thing in Biblical Greek as it does to us today.



The Greek word for plain death is thanatos. It is used to describe what happens when the body dies in the first death. That is, the body ceases to live and decomposes in the ground. Think of a dead animal decomposing on the side of a road or in a field; that is thanatos. There is no feeling, no self-awareness, no consciousness, just nothing. That is thanatos.

And it is used to tell what happens when the unredeemed are thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 21:8). The meaning of the word does not change just because it is used to refer to the second death rather than the first. When the body dies on earth, it is destroyed and when the soul dies in the lake of fire the same thing happens. It is destroyed.

It is the same word (thanatos) that Jesus used to describe what He saves us from in John 8:51:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death [thanatos]”

It is the same word that Paul uses when he tells us what happens as the result of sin, “The wages of sin is death [thanatos]” Romans 6:23.

And it is the same word to describe the natural death of the body:

“For indeed he was sick to the point of death [thanatos], but God had mercy on him...”

“Now it came about that the poor man died [thanatos] and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom; and the rich man [thanatos] also died and was buried” (Luke 16:22).

What did Jesus mean when He said that if anyone kept His saying “he will never see death?” He certainly did not mean that Christians never die. Everybody dies; Jesus Himself died. He meant that if a man keep His word he will never see death [thanatos]. But there are two deaths in scripture. He was referring to the second thanatos (the second death).

“Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power” Revelation 20:6.

The point is that it is the second death that Jesus saves us from, and the word for the second death is the same word that is used for the first death. In the first death the body dies and it no longer lives, feels or has any awareness. In the second death the soul and lives, feels or has any awareness.

How do we know that the soul dies in the second death? Because God said so, “...the soul who sins shall die” Ezekiel 18:4. We know that He was speaking of the second death because souls do not die in the first death (see the Parable of Lazarus, Luke 16:19-31). Therefore, soul that sins shall die in the second death, unless, of course, Christ has died in that soul’s place.

There is nothing in scripture that teaches that the death of the soul in the second death is not just as complete as the death of the body in the first death. It is the same word. It cannot mean one thing in one death and another thing in another death. No, scripture is the inspired Word of God and it means exactly what it says. Death is death in scripture as it is in life and that is all that it is. Death in the Bible means death; it does not mean “separation.”

Scripture never uses the word for death to mean real death in one place and eternal sentient existence in another place. Any teaching to the contrary is not Biblical and it is doctrinal error.

How often did Jesus mention eternal torment for the unredeemed? Never.

How often did Jesus mention eternal torment for anything or anybody? Never.

How often does all of scripture mention eternal torment for the unredeemed? Never.

How often does scripture mention eternal torment for anyone? Once, and that is for Satan, the antichrist and the false prophet.

How often does scripture teach that death is the consequence for sin? Repeatedly from Genesis to Revelation (see Chapter 2).

How often does scripture teach that the garden variety word for death really means eternal sentient conscious existence? Never.

THE FATE OF UNBELIEVERS CONDENSED

How then can scripture teach that all unredeemed will be tormented eternally as a consequence for their sin or rejection of Christ? It does not. Nor should we.

## Chapter 7

### **The Death of Hell**

DEATH AND HELL WERE CAST INTO  
THE LAKE OF FIRE. THIS IS THE  
SECOND DEATH

REVELATION 20:14

**M**ost Christians have been taught that hell is eternal, that it has to be eternal because that is where unbelievers are supposed to be tormented eternally. But hell is not eternal.

Most Christians confuse hell and the lake of fire. But they are two separate things, and scripture says hell itself will be cast into the lake of fire, “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death” (Revelation 20:14).

Those who advocate the doctrine of eternal torment theorize that hell just goes on being hell or perhaps all of the occupants of hell fall into the lake of fire and are effectively burned alive forever. But scripture says nothing of the kind.

Scripture does not tell us explicitly what happens to hell in the lake of fire other than to say that it is “second death” for hell. But scripture does explicitly tell us what happens to death when death is cast into the Lake of Fire. Death is totally destroyed in the lake of fire because later on scripture tells us that “there shall be no more death” (Revelation 21:4). So we know what happens to death when death is cast into the lake of fire; death dies. It is completely eradicated.

Scripture tells us that the lake of fire is “death” to both death and hell. There is no reason to believe that the same thing that happens to death also happens to hell. It is eradicated. After hell is thrown into the lake of fire, scripture mentions it no more. Hell is empty because all of its occupants are thrown into the lake of fire and suffer the second death (Revelation 21:8).

God throws death and hell into the lake of fire because He is creating a new heavens and a new earth. He is starting a new world,

“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things will not be remembered or come to mind” (Isaiah 65:17).

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

So, scripture tells us that there will no longer be any death. But if death is eternal torment and scripture says that there is no more death, then scripture is telling us that there is no more eternal torment. If eternal torment (death) ever ends, then it cannot be eternal. Therefore, the word death cannot mean either separation from God or eternal torment. Whereas, if death in the Bible really means what the word death means, and scripture says that that there is no more death, then it means in the age of the new heavens and the new earth there will be no more death. In that case, the passage does not effect the second death because the second death refers to one-time death that had al-

ready occurred (the second death). Thus, death cannot mean continuing existence for the rest of eternity because when God creates a new heavens and a new earth, there is no more death.

A cauldron filled with billions of burning people simply does not fit with the Bible's description of a new heavens and new earth where there is no more death and no more pain.

What happens to the unredeemed when they are cast into the lake of fire? The same thing that happens to hell and death. They are destroyed for the rest of eternity, "These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction..." Second Thessalonians 1:9. They are destroyed forever and they will no longer exist. Remember, there is no mistake in translation here; these words mean exactly what they say in both the original Greek and in the English translation. "eternal destruction" means eternal destruction; it does not mean eternal destroying, and "eternal punishment" means eternal punishment, not eternal destroying. The unredeemed are totally destroyed forever and that destruction is their eternal punishment.

But Satan is tormented eternally, and in the same lake of fire into which the unbelievers are thrown. Why are the unbelievers killed and Satan is not?

Because everything that suffers the second death actually dies and the unredeemed suffer the second death. But scripture carefully avoids saying that Satan will suffer the second death. There is a very clear line between what happens to the unredeemed and what happens to the unholy trinity.

It is certainly true that Satan, the antichrist and the false prophet will be cast into the lake of fire, but they are specifically excluded from the second death. Their part in the lake of fire is not the second death, but eternal torment, "...they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" Revelation 20:10. Whereas, the part of the unredeemed in the lake of fire is death. The unholy trinity gets no second death. That's the whole point. They are not permitted to die. There are no books for them and there is no judgment for them. They are case summarily and fully alive into the lake of fire. There no first death and there is not second death for them.

This is the reason why Revelation 21:8 says that the "part" that unbelievers have in the lake of fire is the "second death." When scripture makes this statement, it is distinguishing the unbelievers' part, which is death, from Satan's part, which is eternal torment.

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## Chapter 8

### **The Effect on Substitutionary Atonement**

ETERNAL TORMENT  
CONTRADICTS THE DOCTRINE OF  
SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT

The strength of scripture-and the faith that it produces-lies in its magnificent consistency, a consistency that renders inerrancy to be far more of a logical conclusion than a leap of faith. This consistency is much like salvation: its power and transforming nature lies outside of ourselves. And the imposition of our own enhancements of scripture do not improve it; they adulterate it. Scripture taken for its plain meaning is like a perfectly made watch, except in this watch one gear written in one century meshes in perfect harmony with its mate that lies perhaps half a millennium away. No man has created this.

The introduction of circumventions of meaning for the purpose of shoring up the specious doctrine of eternal torment adulterate scripture not only within the scope of the intended effect, but in other doctrines as well. One of the doctrines that are effected by the interjection of the error of eternal torment is the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. The doctrine of substitutionary atonement teaches that Christ died in our place:

The penalty for sin is death:

“Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die” (Ezekiel 18:4).

“The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

Since death is the inevitable result of sin, all mankind must die because all have sinned.

“Death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12).

But God is also love. “...God is love” (First John 4:8). And God loves the world that He created, “...God so loved the world...” (John 3:16), and He does not wish that any should perish, “not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (Second Peter 3:9).

So, God places all believers “in Christ” and executes the death penalty (only once) on Jesus Christ. He makes believers new, “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature” (Second Corinthians 5:17). We who are in Christ will dwell spiritually in heavenly places; He has “seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6). All those who trust in Christ are “in Christ.”

Thus, in a spiritual sense, when Christ was crucified, we were crucified with Him, and, in a spiritual sense, we died with Christ, “We have died with Christ” (Romans 6:8). But having died with Him, we also live with Him. “Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him” (Romans 6:8). We were “in Christ” when he died.

Christ became sin for us when He died. “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf” (Second Corinthians 5:21). And in becoming sin for us, He bore our sins, “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross” (First Peter 2:24). In bearing our sins, He took upon Himself the punishment that we deserved. He was our substitute because we were in Christ when Christ died. The death that we were to die was inflicted upon Him.

The death penalty for sin was ours, not His, but He suffered it. He suffered it for us. Jesus Christ did not sin; we did, “[Jesus Christ] committed no sin” (First Peter 2:22). That is the reason why Jesus Christ is so very important. He was our substitute. It was by His death that we have been healed:

“He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

That is the reason why all believers have eternal life. Because He died for us all in our place. That is the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. His death was our death. We had the death penalty for sin and Jesus Christ paid it for us.

Now look what a mess eternal torment makes of substitutionary atonement. If we say that eternal torment, not death, is the penalty for our sin, then we are saying that although Christ died for us, He was not our substitute because our penalty was not death at all but being tormented forever.

Therefore either eternal torment or substitutionary atonement is true, but not both of them.

This is not to say that the people who really believe in eternal torment have rejected the cross. Certainly not. But they have certainly rejected the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. They believe that Christ's sacrifice paid for our sins, but they do not believe that the penalty that He paid was our penalty because the penalty that Christ paid was death and becoming sin for us, but our penalty was, they argue, eternal torment. And Christ did not suffer eternal torment.

Scripture gives us two births and two deaths. The first birth is physical birth; the second birth spiritual birth. The first death is physical death; the second death is spiritual death.

God gives us two choices as well. We may choose eternal life or we may choose eternal death. Those who have trusted in Jesus Christ have chosen eternal life and by doing so, they have been born again. It is and always has been either life or death, not life or eternal torment.

The penalty that Christ paid was death, not eternal torment. Jesus was not eternally tormented for our sins. He died for our sins. It is not scriptural to argue that the wages of sin is eternal torment when scripture clearly states that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:3).

## Chapter 9

### Effect on Faith

THE EFFECT OF PROPER DOCTRINE  
ON FAITH

A paradigm shift in faith occurs for the Christian when he realizes that there are two actual deaths. The reason why this realization is so important is not simply because this understanding fits with scripture, but also because when one realizes that there are two deaths, one sees, perhaps for the first time, that there is no nebulous state of un-dead that we are required to accept.

And when theology finally hammers home the fact that death is really death, we come face to face with the frightening reality of our own death. It is going to happen and it is real. But we now see that there are two deaths and two different things that die. There is a living body that dies and there is a living soul as well. And this realization is everything because for the Christian only one of them dies. Christians have only one death.

“Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power” (Revelation 20:6).

Only our body dies. The real person, the real “we,” the soul, does not. The real “we” never dies because Christ has already died in our place. His death was our death because we were in Him when He died. He paid our death penalty.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (John 5:24).

With this concept fully in place, the first death loses its power because we see it for what it really is. It is the inevitable death of a body. But that is all that it is. There is no need to spiritualize it; there is no need to pretend that it is not really going to happen and no need to grasp at furtive ill conceived redefinitions of what death really is. There is no longer any need to believe that “in the Bible death is not really death but only separation so when we die we do not really die.” These nebulous, unscriptural beliefs are no longer necessary because we now know that there are two actual deaths but we die only one of them.

Death is not the issue for believers at all. The issue for us is not death. Death is a given. The issue is what dies.

What dies is our body and just our body, and in that respect our death is no different from the death of unbelievers. All bodies really die. The crucial issue is whether the soul, which is who we truly are, will die and the answer is no. Our soul will live forever because there is no second death for us. And, at a later time, He will give us a resurrection body.

“So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown [buried] a perishable body; it is raised an imperishable body” First Corinthians 15:42

The first death for us is like a woman who walks home on a cold winter day. The wind is bitter and the tattered old coat she is wearing cannot keep it out. When she reaches home, it is warm inside and she is alone. She walks through her house and lets her arms fall behind her and her old coat slips down to the floor. But she, the real she, walks on. That person, the person who she really is, will never die. And soon the Father, her Creator, will give her a new coat. That is His promise.

“O death, where is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (First Corinthians 15:55). A

## Chapter 10

### Conclusion

**G**od does not burn people alive forever. But He does punish sin and those whose penalty has not been paid by Jesus Christ will have to pay their own penalty themselves. The final penalty is the eternal death of their soul.

But the offer of eternal life is made to anyone who is willing to come and take it, “Let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost” (Revelation 22:17).

Trust in Christ by sincere prayer. Tell Him in your own words that you are trusting in Jesus Christ for your eternal salvation and that you want to take from the water of life without cost. It is free. No church-work, no Bible reading, no church services, no masses and no figuring things out. It’s just free for the asking.

After trusting in Christ, you may come to actually know Him. But that part is not free. That part requires obedience because God will not condone your sin. He will make Himself known to you if you look at His commandments (scripture) and keep them:

“Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show Myself to them.” (John 14:21)



THE FATE OF UNBELIEVERS CONDENSED

“And this is eternal life that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent” John 17:3.

If there was ever a time to trust in Christ, that time is now. Now is the time. Do it now. You have absolutely nothing to lose and eternity to gain.