

IS PUNISHMENT ETERNAL/EVERLASTING?

Several groups, the Jehovah's Witnesses, Christadelphians, Seventh-day Adventists and others teach the idea that when the unrighteous die they just cease to exist for eternity. The idea of a punishment that would go on eternally would be contrary to the God of the Bible they conclude. But what do the scriptures say about this.

Lets look at just one verse to start with: **Matthew 25:46**

"And these will go away into eternal (everlasting, NKJV) punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." NAS

Note in this verse that the same word is used both in relationship to "punishment" and "life", that word is "eternal. It is the Greek "*aionios*" – Strong's – perpetual. Thayer's defines it in three ways 1) without beginning or end, that which always has been and always will be; 2) without beginning; 3) without end, never to cease, everlasting. So it would appear that if the righteous are to be rewarded with a "life" the is "eternal" then the unrighteous will receive a "punishment" that is also "eternal." Now the Jehovah's Witnesses recognize this problem and translate the verse in this way "And these will depart into everlasting cutting-off" (NWT). Noting the word from the Greek used in this verse for "everlasting" is the same and translated by them properly they have to attack the word "punishment," they change it to "cutting-off." The Greek word (*kolasis*) only appears here and in 1 John 4:18. In the NASB it is translated "punishment" both times in the NKJV it is translated "punishment" and "torment." Thayer's defines the word as, correction, punishment, or penalty. There is no justification for translating the word "*kolasis*" as "cutting-off" except to justify the error that is being propagated by the Jehovah's Witnesses and others. God who is just has ordained that the only righteous thing to do is the punishment must match the reward. If the reward is to be eternal than the punishment must also be eternal.

Hell is described as a place of "eternal fire." "And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the **eternal fire**. And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out, and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into the **fiery hell**." Matthew 18:8-9 NAS. Notice how Jesus describes it in Mark 9:43-48, "And if your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, [**where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.**] And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than having your two feet, to be cast into hell, [**where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.**] And if your eye causes you to stumble, cast it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched." NAS I have always thought that this was one of the most horrific

descriptions of the punishment of the unrighteous that it is scary. I don't know about you but if this was the only description of the punishment of the unrighteous in the Bible it would scare me plenty. If one dies and never has to fear a punishment that is the opposite and equal in duration of the reward what is the point? But if the words of Jesus are true "and do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Matt 10:28, NASB, we should fear God because of the power He has to punish us in hell. But, if those who teach and propagate this theory of annihilation are correct then Jesus must be wrong, and the one who can kill my body becomes of the utmost importance to me and should be the most feared. You be the judge! Who will you fear; the one who these false teachers would have you fear or the one that our Lord would have us fear?

ES