

Associated Gospel Churches - Articles of Faith and Doctrine

The Eternal Blessedness of the Saved, and the Eternal Punishment of the Lost

March 12, 2006

Eternal Rewards

XVII. The Eternal Blessedness of the Saved, and the Eternal Punishment of the Lost

We believe that the attitude of either reconciliation or enmity toward God is fixed eternally at death, and that the saints of all ages will be forever with the Lord and will become joint heirs with Him as their Redeemer in His inheritance. We further believe that there is an appointed day for the judgment of the wicked when they will be cast into the Lake of Fire, there to remain forever and ever, in varying degrees of torment according to their works.

*1 Thessalonians 4:17; 2 Peter 2:9; Romans 8:17; Daniel 12:3, 7:22-27;
Revelation 20:11-15, 21:8, 22:11*

Eternal Rewards

- **Eternal rewards**
 - **eternal rewards dependent on standing before God in this life**
 - **eternal blessedness for the saved, i.e. those reconciled with God**
 - **eternal punishment for the lost, i.e. those living in enmity toward God**
 - **“fixed eternally at death”**
 - **i.e. no “second chance” to repent after death**

Eternal Rewards

- **Eternal rewards**

- “fixed eternally at death”

- **i.e. no “second chance” to repent after death**

- “But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, *between us and you a great chasm has been fixed*, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’” (Luke 16:25-26)

- “Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy.” (Rev. 22:11)**

Eternal Rewards

- **Eternal rewards**

- **final judgment based on what has happened in this life, not on anything after death**

**“Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment...”
(Heb. 9:27)**

- **also undermines concept of reincarnation**

“And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. *The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.* The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and *each person was judged according to what he had done.*” (Rev. 20:12-13)

Eternal Rewards

- **Final judgment**

- **both believers and unbelievers will face judgment**

- **but the nature and results of judgment will differ**

- “But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when His righteous judgment will be revealed. God ‘will give to each person according to what he has done.’ To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, He will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.” (Rom. 2:5-10)

Eternal Rewards

- **Final judgment**

- both believers and unbelievers will face judgment

- **but the nature and results of judgment will differ**

- “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left. Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.... Then He will say to those on His left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels... Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.’” (Matt. 25:31-34,41,46)

Eternal Rewards

- **Final judgment**

- **unbelievers will face a judgment of condemnation**

- **condemned for rejecting the truth and for their evil deeds**

- “Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.” (John 3:18)

- “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.” (John 5:28-29)

- “But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.” (Rom. 2:8-9)

Eternal Rewards

- **Final judgment**

- **unbelievers will face a judgment of condemnation**

- **will be cast into the Lake of Fire**

- “Then He will say to those on His left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”
(Matt. 25:41)

- “And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever... If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” (Rev. 20:10,15)

Eternal Rewards

- **Hell**

- **Lake of Fire (hell) will be a place of eternal conscious torment**

- **a place of eternal punishment**

- “Then He will say to those on His left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the *eternal fire* prepared for the devil and his angels... Then they will go away to *eternal punishment*...” (Matt. 25:41,46a)

- “**And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be *tormented day and night for ever and ever.*”**
(Rev. 20:10)

Eternal Rewards

- **Hell**

- **Lake of Fire (hell) will be a place of eternal conscious torment**

- **a place of conscious suffering**

“The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’” (Luke 16:22b-24)

“This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matt. 13:49-50)

Eternal Rewards

- **Hell**

- **Lake of Fire (hell) will be a place of eternal conscious torment**

- **a place of eternal and conscious punishment**

“A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of His wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. *And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night* for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.’” (Rev. 14:9-11)

Eternal Rewards

- **Hell**

- **varying degrees of punishment**

- **based on works, including response to available light**

- “Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.” (Matt. 11:21-24)

Eternal Rewards

- **Hell**

- **an unpopular doctrine in many circles**

- **denied by most liberal Christians**

- **often one of the first doctrines dispensed of by those questioning the authority of Scripture**

- **changing concepts among some evangelicals**

Eternal Rewards

- **Hell**

- **Annihilationism**

- **denies that hell is place of eternal torment**
 - unbelievers are ‘annihilated’ (i.e. cease to exist altogether) either at death, at the final judgment, or after a time of punishment in hell
 - hell may exist eternally as a reminder of God’s righteous judgment on sin, but people will not inhabit it eternally
 - **position of Seventh Day Adventists**
 - **evangelical proponents include John Stott**

Eternal Rewards

- **Hell**

- **Annihilationism**

- **rationale**

- eternal conscious punishment seems inconsistent with the love of God
 - it seems unfair or unjust to punish finite/time-limited sins eternally (i.e. punishment seems disproportionate to the crime)
 - the continuing presence of evil in the new universe would mar the perfection of a universe created to reflect God's glory

Eternal Rewards

- **Hell**

- **Annihilationism**

- **rationale**

- some verses speak of the destruction of the wicked – implies that they will be completely destroyed (i.e. cease to exist entirely)
 - aside: this is also the position of the Seventh Day Adventists

e.g. **“Their destiny is destruction...” (Phil. 3:19)**

“They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord...” (2 Thess. 1:9)

“By the same word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.” (2 Pet. 3:7)

Eternal Rewards

- **Hell**

- **Annihilationism**

- **Response**

- the love of God does not overrule the justice and perfect righteousness of God – He must punish sin
 - annihilationism seriously underestimates the severity of sin by arguing that temporal sins do not warrant eternal punishment
 - wrongly assumes that we know the extent of evil done when sinners rebel against God
 - sin against the Creator is heinous to a degree beyond our sin-warped imagination's ability to conceive – and deserving of eternal punishment

Eternal Rewards

- **Hell**

- **Annihilationism**

- **Response**

- evil remaining in the universe only detracts from God's glory if it remains unpunished
 - but when God triumphs over and punishes evil, the glory of His justice, righteousness and power is actually magnified

“After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: ‘Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are His judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of His servants.’ And again they shouted: ‘Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.’” (Rev. 19:1-3)

Eternal Rewards

- **Hell**

- **Annihilationism**

- **Response**

- passages that speak of “destruction” of unbelievers speak of the harmful/destructive consequences of final judgment on them, not of their ceasing to exist

e.g. **Matt. 26:6-8** - “While Jesus was in Bethany... a woman came to Him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on His head as He was reclining at the table. When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. ‘Why this waste?’ [Greek = *apoleia*, or “destruction” in 2 Pet. 3:7]

- perfume did not “cease to exist” but was “destroyed” in the sense that it couldn’t be sold/used on someone else

Eternal Rewards

- **Final judgment**
 - **unbelievers will face a judgment of condemnation**
 - **condition fixed at death, with no recourse**
 - **condemned for rejecting the truth and for evil deeds**
 - **will be cast into the Lake of Fire, a place of eternal conscious punishment, but with varying degrees of punishment**

Eternal Rewards

- **Final judgment**

- **believers will face a judgment of evaluation**

- **we must give account of ourselves to God**

- “You, then, why do you judge you brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat. It is written, ‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.’ So then, each of us will give account of himself to God.” (Rom. 14:10-12)

- “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” (2 Cor. 5:10)

Eternal Rewards

- **Final judgment**

- **believers will face a judgment of evaluation**

- **but no condemnation for believers in the sense of being punished out of wrath, or for our harm**

- **Christ atoned for our sins – thus no penalty left for us to pay**

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1)

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life... Whoever believes in Him is not condemned...” (John 3:16,18a)

“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.” (John 5:24)

Eternal Rewards

- **Final judgment**
 - **believers will face a judgment of evaluation**
 - **but no condemnation for believers in the sense of being punished out of wrath, or for our harm**
 - **sins will be revealed – and forgiven because of Christ → magnifies the depth of the riches of God's grace, especially when contrasted to the punishment we deserve, as demonstrated in God's righteous judgment on unbelievers**

Eternal Rewards

- **Final judgment**

- **believers will face a judgment of evaluation**

- **no condemnation for believers in the sense of being punished out of wrath, or for our harm**

- **no need for purgatory since Christ's redemptive work was sufficient for all of our sins**

- **concept of purgatory (i.e. place where believers go to be punished for their sins and purified before entering heaven) – implies Christ's work of redemption was not enough, but that there is still some penalty that needs to be paid**

Eternal Rewards

- **Final judgment**

- **believers will face a judgment of evaluation**

- **a judgment to determine degrees of reward**

- **different degrees of reward for believers, just as there are different degrees of punishment for unbelievers**

- “If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.” (1 Cor. 3:11-14)

Eternal Rewards

- **Final judgment**
 - **believers will face a judgment of evaluation**
 - **a judgment to determine degrees of reward**
 - **different degrees of reward for believers, just as there are different degrees of punishment for unbelievers**
 - **yet, the joy of each person will still be full and complete for eternity**
- **“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” (Ps. 16:10, ESV)**

Eternal Rewards

- **Eternal blessedness of the saved**
 - **believers will spend eternity in the New Heaven and New Earth**
 - **heaven and earth made new**
 - **eternally in the presence of God, enjoying unhindered fellowship with Him**
 - **a new existence far exceeding anything we presently know**

Eternal Rewards

- **Eternal blessedness of the saved**

- **believers will spend eternity in the New Heaven and New Earth**

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

“He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’ Then He said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.’” (Rev. 21:1-5)

Eternal Rewards

- **Application**

- **How then should we live?**

- **knowing the eternal blessedness of the saved and the eternal punishment of the lost, we should proclaim the Gospel with urgency and conviction**

- “Say to them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?’” (Ezek. 33:11)

- “With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.’” (Acts 2:40)

Eternal Rewards

- **Application**

- **How then should we live?**

- **we should live so as to store up treasures in heaven**

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matt. 6:19-21)

Eternal Rewards

- **Application**

- **How then should we live?**

- **we should set our hearts on things above, and so persevere in holy living**

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.” (Col. 3:1-6)

Eternal Rewards

- **Application**

- **How then should we live?**

- **we should live in glorious hope**

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” (2 Cor. 4:17-18)

Eternal Rewards

- Application

- How then should we live?

- we should worship and give thanks to our merciful God

“But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel...

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our ‘God is a consuming fire.’” (Heb. 12:22-24,28-29)

Next class

The Personality of Satan

March 19, 2006

References

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