

## JESUS' VIEW OF ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

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*Jesus' last extended teaching about how the lost would spend eternity came in His description of the sheep-and-goat judgment in Matt 25:31-46 where He made pronouncements of judgment regarding two groups. The pronouncements will come when He returns to earth to initiate His millennial reign and will deal specifically with the living Gentiles on earth at that time. He will reach His verdict on the basis of how the two groups have treated believing Israelites during the persecutions of Daniel's seventieth week, treatments that will reflect whether they have trusted in Him to receive eternal life. The consequences of Jesus' pronouncements will be happy for believers, but for unbelievers they will be unspeakably horrible. The latter group, the goats, will depart from His presence into unending punishment worse than the suffering one experiences when he has his flesh consumed with fire. Evangelicals who have flirted with notions of watering down Jesus' teachings on the subject would do well to pay closer attention to His words.*

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In an investigation of a subject like Jesus' view of eternal punishment, many options present themselves. (1) One could with great profit select from Jesus' teachings a response to each of the evangelicals who has gone astray in his view of this doctrine. (2) Or he could profitably study a number of Greek words Jesus used that are crucial to this doctrine. (3) Or an examination of all the passages in which Jesus spoke of this doctrine would be of profit. Since space does not allow for this last alternative, the following essay will concentrate on one of those passages. In doing so, it will also give limited attention to recent evangelical deviations from Jesus' teaching and several especially significant Greek words. The passage in focus is a critical one because it is the last occasion known when Jesus elaborated on the subject of eternal punishment. It is a passage that is important for a number of other reasons. For example, George Ladd said this was the passage that turned him away from being a dispensationalist,<sup>1</sup> and Clark Pinnock acknowledges this as a passage

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<sup>1</sup>George Ladd, "The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats in Recent Interpretation," in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, Richard N. Longenecker and Merrill C. Tenney, eds. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan,

that could go against his doctrine of annihilationism.<sup>2</sup> Also, Heil notes that it is a passage about which no consensus exists regarding its meaning.<sup>3</sup>

The passage selected for investigation is Matt 25:31-46, Jesus' description of the King's judgment of the sheep and the goats. Some call this description a parable, perhaps because they are under the influence of more liberal scholars,<sup>4</sup> but it is most basically a prophetic picture of future judgment. The only parabolic features are the similes of the sheep and goats in v. 32 and the metaphors of the sheep and goats standing in v. 33.<sup>5</sup> The following is an enhancement of Jesus' words—not a translation of them—based on various exegetical features of the account:

25:31 After strong words against the Jewish leaders and words about accountability during Israel's future judgment (Matt 23:1-24:44), Jesus illustrated the implications of that judgment through three parables: that of the faithful and unfaithful servants (the lesson of readiness [24:45-51]), that of the wise and foolish virgins (the lesson of watchfulness [25:1-13]), and that of the profitable and unprofitable servants (the lesson of diligence [25:14-30]). He followed the parables with a direct prophecy about and description of a future judgment scene that will deal with the remainder of the human race, the Gentiles. This judgment scene picks up from Matt 24:20-31, the direct prediction of His return to earth, a return that will follow the predicted great tribulation (Matt

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1974) 196.

<sup>2</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, "The Conditional View," in *Four Views on Hell*, ed. by William Crockett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 156.

<sup>3</sup>John Paul Heil, "The Double Meaning of the Narrative of Universal Judgment in Matthew 25:31-46," *JSNT* 69 (1998):3.

<sup>4</sup>E.g., Ladd, "Parable of the Sheep and the Goats" 191.

<sup>5</sup>Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1898) 1:255; Alan Hugh M'Neile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (London: Macmillan, 1961) 368; John Peter Lange, "Matthew," in *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, trans. and ed. by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.) 448; David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NCB (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 330.

24:29). The Judge on the earthly throne radiating the supernatural glory of God is the Son of Man, to whom the Lord has delegated this responsibility. Spirit beings known as angels, who are witnesses and executors and who take a deep interest in man's final destiny, will accompany the Judge on that occasion. As the Judge takes His position of royal authority on the throne, which incidentally is the expected throne of David on earth, His sitting posture pictures finished victory.

25:32 In preparation for the judicial hearing and pronouncement of sentences, the angels will gather all living people of a Gentile lineage before the Judge, those not numbered among the servants in Israel about whom the three parables have just spoken. These are people who, in one way or another, have survived the horrors of the great tribulation until this moment. Next, the Judge will separate this larger group of Gentile defendants into two groups the way a shepherd separates his sheep from his goats at night when assigning each species to appropriate overnight quarters. That separation recalls how Matthew records the teachings of John the Baptist and Jesus about such a future separation of wheat from the chaff (Matt 3:12), the sincere from the hypocrites (6:2, 5, 16), the wise builder from the foolish (7:24-27), the wheat from the tares (13:30), the good fish from the bad (13:48-49), and the profitable from the unprofitable servants (25:14-30). Here it is a separation of those who are teachable, gentle, and profitable—the sheep—from those who are stubborn and egotistical—the goats.

25:33 The Judge will place the two groups of defendants, one in a position of honor and the other in a less favorable role. That positioning indicates He has already reached a verdict, even before He pronounces the sentence.

25:34 Then the Son of Man who now receives recognition in His office as King, as anticipated often in the OT and in earlier gospel accounts, will speak to the group on His right. He will invite them to join Him as those blessed by the Father to accept their inherited position in the Messianic kingdom, an inheritance assigned to them and in readiness since the foundation of the world. This is the practical equivalent of granting them salvation. Gentiles along with Israel will have a place in the kingdom.

25:35-36 The King explains the basis for His invitation by listing six temporal needs of His that the group on the right have met, needs that are universally recognized the world over even though those who have not experienced them seldom sense them as those who are so afflicted. Furnishing food, drink, and hospitality provides relief for the first three needs, but meeting the last three needs requires more. Clothing someone who is ill-clad, visiting and helping the sick, and experiencing the shame of association with someone in jail demand much more by way of charity.

25:37-39 Calling the ones on the right by a new name, the King predicts the response of the righteous ones. For the moment, they will have forgotten the

unity of the King with His people. They will demonstrate that whatever they did for others, they did because of unselfish love, not because of a desire to earn merit with the King. Because of their humility, they will ask six questions corresponding to the six needs they are credited with meeting. They will ask the King when they met His needs in these different ways. Their professed ignorance of how they have gained approval will simply reflect hearts that were disposed to act kindly toward others, regardless of what it would mean to themselves.

25:40 The King's response to their professed ignorance of how they won approval informs the sheep that their acts of kindness toward Jewish people who will have embraced Jesus as their Messiah were acts directed toward the King Himself. That response aligns with part of Jesus' commissioning of the twelve in Matt 10:40: "the one who receives you receives Me." It also aligns with Jesus' words to Saul the persecutor of Jewish believers in Acts 9:4: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Acts of benevolence toward Jewish believers during the severest of persecutions in the midst of the great tribulation will identify Gentiles who have accepted the gospel message. They will extend a helping hand to persecuted Jewish saints at the risk of their own lives.

25:41 At that point the King will turn to those on His left side and will make remarks correspondingly opposite to those He made to those on the right. Instead of the invitation to join His company, He will command them to depart from His presence. Instead of speaking of the blessedness that is theirs from the Father, He will refer to the curse they have brought on themselves. Instead of telling them to enter the kingdom, He will dispatch them into never-ending fire. Instead of a place prepared for them, He will speak of a place prepared for the devil and his angels. The righteous will inherit what has been prepared for them, but the accursed will enter what was prepared not for them but for others.

25:42-43 Then the king will repeat His list of benevolent acts, this time as charges against the accursed ones because of their failure to render assistance to Him when He was in need. Sins of omission caused by an overruling concern for self will be sufficient not only to deny entrance to the kingdom, but also to consign the negligent to everlasting fire.

25:44 As with the righteous, the accursed people will profess ignorance of the relevance of their failures to the King. They will claim innocence by asking, "When did we ever see you hungry without giving you food, as you have accused? Such an occasion never occurred, because we have never seen you in those circumstances. So we never could have refused You our good services." In their self-justification they imply that if they had ever seen the King in those circumstances, they would have responded with acts of kindness toward Him.

25:45 In response to this claim of innocence, the King will then reply along the same lines as He did to the righteous: "Because you failed to assist my Jewish followers in their predicament of persecution, you failed to assist Me."

25:46 After the clarification of the charges in v. 45, the King announces the implementation of the sentence stated in v. 41. The accursed will depart into a state of everlasting punishment that does not equate to annihilation, but rather a condition of ongoing punishment. The righteous, on the other hand, will depart into everlasting life, which equates to entering the kingdom and the joy of the Lord.

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### **When Will the Pronouncements Come and Who Are the People Involved?**

The first question comes in two parts, the first dealing with the time of the verdicts and the second with the people involved.

#### **The Time**

The time of the judgment coincides with the central focus of the earlier part of this same discourse, the return of Christ as specified in 24:29-31. The account at 25:31 picks up the action from Matt 24:31, the intervening material being mostly parables about how to watch for the Son of Man's return.<sup>6</sup> The Son of Man has now taken His seat on the earthly throne of His father David.

More specifically, the time of the pronouncements is the occasion for assigning individuals either to participation in the promised kingdom or to eternal fire (25:34, 41). The former assignments necessarily come at the beginning of the kingdom period, a period specified in Revelation 20 to be 1,000 years. The assignments to eternal fire do not come at that precise moment, however. Later revelation discloses the need to understand an instance of prophetic foreshortening in this case. Revelation 20:5, 12-15 shows that 1,000 years will separate the resurrections of the just and the unjust, requiring the judgment of the unjust to come a thousand years later than the entrance of the just into the kingdom.<sup>7</sup>

The case resembles Jesus' description of resurrection and future judgment in John 5:24-30, where He spoke of two future resurrections without referring to elapsed time between them. He likewise speaks here of an assignment to the kingdom and an assignment to eternal fire without referring to the time interval that will separate them. The final relegation of the lost to the lake of fire will not come until after the second resurrection that will follow the enjoyment of the temporal

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<sup>6</sup>H. N. Ridderbos, *Matthew*, Bible Student's Commentary, trans. by Ray Togtman (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987) 465. Toussaint is more precise in fixing the time when he points out that the  $\tau\alpha\nu$  (*hotan*, "when") and the  $\tau\acute{o}\tau\epsilon$  (*tote*, "then") of v. 31 set the time of the judgment as coinciding with the return of Christ to earth (Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold the King* [Portland, Ore.: Multnomah, 1980] 289). The  $\tau\alpha\nu$  ties 25:31 to the coming of 24:29-31, and the  $\tau\acute{o}\tau\epsilon$  locates the judgment at the time of the coming.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995) 420-21, 428-35.

phase of the kingdom by those assigned thereto. The “goats” of this judgment will be in a place of waiting with the rest of the lost until time for the second resurrection.

### The People

Two groups of people require special identification.

**Πάντα τ\_θνη (*panta ta ethn\_*, “all the nations”).** The identity of the people judged on this occasion—πάντα τ\_θνη (*panta ta ethn\_*, usually translated “all the nations,” 25:32)—has been the subject of wide discussion. Various theories have suggested that they are (1) Christians,<sup>8</sup> (2) non-Christians who are judged on the basis of how they treat one another,<sup>9</sup> (3) non-Christians who are judged on the basis of how they treat Christians,<sup>10</sup> (4) all men,<sup>11</sup> (5) all the Gentiles alive at the time of Christ’s return.<sup>12</sup>

The theory that the people being judged are all Christians is weak because the sheep are not the only ones who stand before the king. Goats will receive their sentences too. Further, Jesus can hardly mean that all the nations will have been converted by the time of Christ’s second advent, because Matthew has indicated that persecution by non-Christians will last right up to the end (Matt 10:22-23; 24:9, 30; cf. 10:14-15, 35-36; 22:5-7).<sup>13</sup>

The second view—that non-Christians are the ones judged on the basis of how they treat one another—is beset with even more weaknesses. The Messianic kingdom has not been prepared for nonbelievers (cf. 25:34), nor is that group compatible with *π\_ καταβολ\_ς κόσμου* (*apo katabol\_s kosmou*, “from the foundation of the world,” 25:34) which implies they are among the *\_κλεκτοι* (*eklektoi*, “elect”).<sup>14</sup> In addition, *ο\_ δίκαιοι* (*hoi dikaioi*, “the righteous,” 25:37) could hardly refer to unbelievers.<sup>15</sup> Non-Christians could not perform the kind of works

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<sup>8</sup>Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of Matthew*, 6th German edition trans. and ed. by Peter Christie and William Stewart, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1879) 2:178-79.

<sup>9</sup>Alford, *Greek Testament*, 1:256.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.; Alexander Balmain Bruce, “The Synoptic Gospels,” in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, ed. by W. Robertson Nicoll (1956 reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.) 1:304.

<sup>11</sup>Ridderbos, *Matthew*, 466; D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *EBC*, 8:521; Craig L. Blomberg, in vol. 22 of *The New American Commentary*, ed. by David S. Dockery (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman, 1992) 742.

<sup>12</sup>Ed Glasscock, *Matthew*, Moody Gospel Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1997) 489; John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come* (Chicago: Moody, 1974) 201.

<sup>13</sup>Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a mixed Church under Persecution*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 511.

<sup>14</sup>Meyer, *Matthew* 2:178.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

attributed to some of the *ethn\_* in 25:35, 36, 40.<sup>16</sup> To identify the *ethn\_* as unbelievers would necessitate allowing that people will find eternal life (cf. 25:46) through “real, though unconscious, faith in Christ.”<sup>17</sup> Nothing could be further from the spirit of Christ’s teachings (cf. Matt 7:22-23). How can faith in Christ be an unconscious act?

The same problems as those that eliminate the second view face the third view that the *ethn\_* are non-Christians judged on the basis of how they treat Christians.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Lange, “Matthew,” 447.



The fourth view is a very popular one, that is, the inclusion of all human beings in *panta ta ethn\_*. One supporter reasons that all will have heard the gospel by this time—erasing the distinction between those who have never heard of the Messiah and those who have heard and rejected Him—and that the King asks no question that would be applicable only to professed Christians.<sup>18</sup> Others see this as a universal judgment in agreement with Christ's earlier teachings (Matt 13:37-43, 49; 24:31),<sup>19</sup> at which time all will have become nominal Christians.<sup>20</sup> A further observation that supports this fourth view is the use of the same phrase in Matt 28:19 to speak of universality.<sup>21</sup>

Yet the universality view cannot overcome the same obstacles faced by the second and third views. No rationale exists to justify the inclusion of non-Christians as part of *panta ta ethn\_*. Further, it leaves no room for "my brothers" (25:40) as a group distinct from *panta ta ethn\_*. If "all the nations" covers all humanity, "my brothers" must be a part of that group. Yet a natural reading of the passage indicates that the two groups are different.

A far better solution is to refer the expression to all the Gentiles alive at the time of Christ's return. The common usage of *ethn\_* to distinguish Gentiles from God's chosen people, the Jews, is an important consideration.<sup>22</sup> The Gentiles are different from God's chosen people and stand in contrast to the "brethren" of 25:40 who as wise virgins (25:10) and faithful servants (25:21, 23) had already received their reward. The parables preceding this judgment scene have focused on privileged Israelites, specifically the servants of the Son of Man, so this scene must

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<sup>18</sup> Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953) 350.

<sup>19</sup> Lange, "Matthew" 447; Ridderbos, *Matthew* 466.

<sup>20</sup> Lange, "Matthew" 447; A. B. Bruce, "Synoptic Gospels" 305.

<sup>21</sup> Blomberg, *Matthew* 742.

<sup>22</sup> Alford, *Greek Testament* 1:255; A. Carr, *The Gospel According to St Matthew*, CGT (Cambridge: University Press, 1906) 279; Walvoord, *Matthew* 201.

pertain to Gentiles.<sup>23</sup> Jesus began this segment of His ministry with judgment against Israel (23:1–24:22)<sup>24</sup> and followed that with four parables alluding to Israel's eternal judgment (24:43–25:30). It is fitting that He end His remarks with words about eternal judgment of Gentiles (25:31–46). The criteria for judgment will be how the Gentiles have treated “the brothers” (25:40, 45).

A major reason why interpreters have preferred the fourth view over this fifth and more obvious view is their confusing of this judgment with three other judgment descriptions. This is different from the judgment of John 5:24–30 in that no resurrection is involved here as it is in that passage. The Olivet Discourse contains nothing about resurrection and thereby limits the sheep-and-goat judgment to those who will be alive when Christ returns. This judgment differs from the one in 2 Cor 5:10 also. In that passage about “the judgment seat of Christ” Paul writes only about Christians, including those of both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds. It is not limited to Gentiles. The Olivet Discourse judgment-scene is also distinct from the Great White Throne Judgment of Rev 20:11–15. That judgment follows resurrection which is not in view in this one. It also involves only unsaved people, in contrast to this one which directs itself toward both goats and sheep. The place will also be different, that one transpiring after the disappearance of the present heaven and earth. The King will conduct this judgment on the earth as presently known.

These distinctions do not mean that the saved in this description will enjoy less felicity than the saved in John 5 and 2 Corinthians 5, or that the lost will experience less misery than the lost of Revelation 20 and John 5. It simply notes that they will receive their sentences on separate occasions.

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<sup>23</sup>Glasscock, *Matthew* 489.

<sup>24</sup>Cf. A. B. Bruce, “Synoptic Gospels” 305, and Blomberg, *Matthew* 375.

**Τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου (*t\_n adelph\_n mou*, “my brothers”).** The next step in an elaboration of Jesus' view of eternal punishment as reflected in His description of the sheep-and-goat judgment is to identify τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου (*t\_n adelph\_n mou*, “my brothers”) in 25:40. Several of the proposed identifications are very improbable. One of them, that “the brothers” include all poor and miserable sufferers,<sup>25</sup> lacks support in that it finds its basis in a universal fraternity with Christ. Matthew and the rest of the NT contain no sign of such a teaching.<sup>26</sup>

Another view holds “the brothers” to be the Christian church in distress.<sup>27</sup> This explanation provides a very unlikely possibility because it ignores the context of the Olivet Discourse with its relevance primarily to the Jewish nation. The view is also incapable of finding a distinction between the brothers and the sheep who are judged.

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<sup>25</sup>M'Neile, *Matthew* 371; Meyer, *Gospel of Matthew* 2:181-82.

<sup>26</sup>Ladd, “Parable of the Sheep and Goats” 195; Carson, “Matthew” 519.

<sup>27</sup>Meyer, *Gospel of Matthew* 2:181.

A view that holds a little more plausibility identifies the brothers as Christian brothers.<sup>28</sup> It does so on the grounds that the adjective μικροί (*mikroi*, “little ones”)—of which *λαχίστων* (*elachist\_n*, “least ones,” 25:40, 45) is the superlative form—without exception in Matthew refers to the disciples (10:42; 18:6, 10, 14; cf. also 5:19; 11:11).<sup>29</sup> This writer always uses “brothers” to refer to spiritual kin whenever he is not referring to literal, biological siblings. A special case in point is Matt 12:46-50 where Jesus calls all His followers “brothers.”<sup>30</sup> The problem with this view, however, is that it ignores the fact that three groups are involved in this judgment: the sheep, the goats, and the brothers.<sup>31</sup> The brothers differ from the sheep and the sheep must be Christ’s spiritual brothers, so the brothers cannot refer to the same group.<sup>32</sup>

An explanation that identifies “the brothers” as the apostles rather than as all believers has in its favor Christ’s instructions to the Twelve in Matt 10:40, 42 (cf. Matt 18:6, 10, 14).<sup>33</sup> There He refers to the Twelve as “little ones,” and says that whoever receives them also receives Himself, a close parallel to 25:40, 45. Yet this view unjustifiably restricts the reference to the apostles and excludes those who are disciples in general.<sup>34</sup> Some of the passages cited in support of it—Matt 18:6, 10,

<sup>28</sup>Ridderbos, *Matthew* 468.

<sup>29</sup>Blomberg, *Matthew* 377-78; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, vol 33B of *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. by David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas: Word, 1995) 744-45.

<sup>30</sup>Glasscock, *Matthew* 491.

<sup>31</sup>E. W. Bullinger, *The Companion Bible*, Part V (London: Oxford University Press, n.d.) 1369.

<sup>32</sup>Heil proposes that the brothers represent the same group—the Matthean audience, presumably Christians—as do the sheep. He does so by assigning two levels of meaning or a double meaning to the passage (Heil, “Double Meaning” 11, 14). That, of course, violates sound principles of interpretation and makes the account self-contradictory.

<sup>33</sup>Ladd, “Parable of the Sheep and the Goats” 197-98; cf. Carson, “Matthew” 519.

<sup>34</sup>Ladd, “Parable of the Sheep and the Goats” 199; Carson, “Matthew” 519.

14; 23:8—apply to all true disciples, not just to those who are apostles and missionaries in a technical sense. In addition, it is doubtful that Jesus would have referred to the apostles as “the least” of His brethren.<sup>35</sup> In its essence, then, this view is the same as the “Christian brothers” view and suffers from the same disadvantages as that view.

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<sup>35</sup>Meyer, *Matthew* 181.

The only view that is not beset with insuperable obstacles is the one that sees “the brothers” as Jesus’ Jewish Christian brothers alive at the time of His return. The ones separated from one another (i.e., α\_το\_ς [autous, “them”], 25:32) in preparation for this sentencing must be the Gentiles (τ\_θνη [ta ethn\_], 25:32), so the Gentiles are the ones being judged for their conduct toward Jewish Christians.<sup>36</sup> In this description, the brothers are neither sheep nor goats. True Israelites are the only remaining people who remain to be contrasted with all the Gentiles.<sup>37</sup> These will be faithful Jews who suffer during Daniel’s predicted seventieth week.<sup>38</sup> The claim that Jesus never called Jewish people His brothers<sup>39</sup> overlooks the fact the group to whom Jesus pointed in His statement of Matt 12:46-50 were Jews.<sup>40</sup> It was quite natural for Jesus to refer to His Jewish brothers in this manner at the conclusion of a discourse devoted primarily to the future of the Jewish people.

### **What Are the Grounds for the Pronouncements?**

The basis for judgment of Gentiles on this future occasion will be their treatment of faithful Jewish followers of the Messiah, those who at greatest risk have remained true to Him. By helping the besieged faithful remnant of Israel, the sheep among the Gentiles will demonstrate the reality of their own close relationship with Jesus. The goats, on the other hand, will be callous to the needs of Jewish Christians in those days of harshest persecution and will be participants in inflicting that suffering.

This is not the only ground for condemning people to eternal punishment, however. During his ministry on earth, Jesus taught many others. Sometimes he emphasized the consequences of the wrong kinds of external fruit, such as calling someone a fool (Matt 5:22), having lustful desires (Matt 5:28-30), choosing the broad way rather than the narrow one (Matt 7:13: Luke 13:24-30), or practicing

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<sup>36</sup>Willoughby C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912) 265.

<sup>37</sup>Walvoord, *Matthew* 201.

<sup>38</sup>Glasscock, *Matthew* 492.

<sup>39</sup>Carson, “Matthew” 520.

<sup>40</sup>Glasscock, *Matthew* 491.

lawlessness (Matt 7:23). Other types of actions He connected with eternal loss include careless words spoken (Matt 12:35-37), a false profession of faith (Matt 13:37-43), wickedness (Matt 13:49-50), a wrong value system (Matt 16:25-26; Mark 8:35-37), becoming a stumbling-block to others (Matt 18:7-9; Mark 9:42-49), failure to dress properly for a wedding feast (Matt 22:12-13), hypocrisy (Matt 23:2-33), a lack of watchfulness (Matt 4:50-51), a lack of readiness (Matt 25:10-12), a lack of diligence (Matt 25:29-30; Luke 12:45-48), an “eat, drink, and be merry” philosophy (Luke 12:20), and a failure to respond to God’s Word (Luke 16:23-31).

But Jesus gave closer attention to the root of such adverse activities, the inner condition of a person’s heart. He spoke of the consequences of a lack of faith in Israel: “I have not found such faith with anyone in Israel. . . . The sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth there”<sup>41</sup> (Matt 8:10, 12). He denounced a lack of repentance in those who had witnessed His miracles: “Then He began to upbraid the cities in which His greatest miracles had occurred, because they did not repent” (Matt 11:20-24; Luke 10:15).

He noted the severe consequences of unbelief: “Then the Lord of that servant will come in a day when he does not expect and in an hour which he does not know and will cut him in two and assign his part with those who are unbelieving” (Luke 12:46). He promised the condemnation of those who fail to trust the one and only Son of God: “The one who believes in Him is not condemned, but the one who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God” (John 3:18). He touched on the consequences of failure to hear Christ’s word and believe on Him who sent Christ: “Truly, truly I say to you that the one who hears My word and believes the one who sent me has eternal life, and shall not come into condemnation, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24). He also spoke bluntly of the result of not abiding in Christ: “Unless one abides in Me, he is thrown outside as a branch and is burned, and they gather them and throw them into the fire and they are burned” (John 15:6).

The ultimate basis for a negative pronouncement by the Lord in future judgment will be a person’s inner condition. Jesus was very clear about the root of evil being the human personality: “The thing coming from within man, that defiles the man. For from within, from the heart of men, come evil reasonings, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetousness, iniquities, guile, licentiousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, arrogance, foolishness. All these things that are evil proceed from within and defile the man” (Mark 7:20-23). A person’s inner condition is the ultimate basis for his placement among the goats—lacks of faith, repentance, and abiding in Christ.

### **What Are the Consequences of the Pronouncements?**

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<sup>41</sup>All Scripture quotations in this essay are personal translations.

The sheep receive good news from the pronouncements: an inheritance of the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world (25:34) and everlasting life (25:46). News for the goats is far from cheerful, however. “Everlasting fire” (25:41) and “everlasting punishment” (25:46) define their destiny.

With the focus of this discussion on Jesus’ teaching about eternal punishment, an elaboration on the meanings of three words is imperative. The words  $\alpha\ \acute{\omega}\nu\iota\omicron\nu$  (*ai\_nion*, “everlasting”),  $\pi\ \rho$  (*pur*, “fire”), and  $\kappa\acute{\omicron}\lambda\alpha\sigma\iota\nu$  (*kolasin*, “punishment”) combine to tell what Jesus said about that subject on this occasion.

### **$\text{A}_\omega\nu\iota\omicron\nu$ (*Ai\_nion*, “Everlasting”)**

Some debate revolves around the adjective translated “everlasting” or “eternal” in 25:41, 46. One opinion calls for a limited meaning of “age-long,” necessitating the conclusion that the fire (v. 41) and the punishment (v. 46) will some day come to an end. This approach usually seeks support in the etymological derivation of *ai\_nion* from the noun  $\alpha\ \acute{\omega}\nu$  (*ai\_n*, “age”). It matches the idea of a time or corrective punishment, after which punishment will end, leaving hope of ultimate salvation. But the doctrine of future states must rest on more basic considerations than those of etymological derivation.<sup>42</sup> The contextual emphasis of Jesus’ statements must be the determining factor.

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<sup>42</sup>A. B. Bruce, “Synoptic Gospels” 306.



Another way of handling the adjective “everlasting” has been to deny its temporal aspects and limit it strictly to a qualitative significance. For example, Hill says the word “eternal” refers to “that which is characteristic of the Age to come” and whatever emphasis it puts on temporal lastingness is secondary.<sup>43</sup> Plummer concurs: “The meaning of ‘eternal’ may possibly have no reference to duration of time. Nor is the expression ‘eternal *punishment*’ synonymous with ‘eternal *pain*,’ still less with ‘*unending* pain,’ and we are not justified in treating these expressions as equivalent. ‘Eternal punishment’ may mean ‘eternal *loss*’ or ‘*irreparable* loss’; but there is no legitimate inference from ‘irreparable loss’ to ‘everlasting suffering.’”<sup>44</sup>

Lange veers away from the temporal connotation of *ai\_nion* also when he calls the dominant idea of κόλασιν α\_ώνιον (*kolasin ai\_nion*) an intensive one.<sup>45</sup> He says the same is true with ζω\_v α\_ώνιον (*z\_n ai\_nion*) which speaks primarily of the intensive boundlessness of life because an abstract endless life might be one in torment. He views the distinguishing between religious and chronological notions and calculations as important.<sup>46</sup> By this, he avoids finding eternal punishment taught in this description of the sheep and the goats.

In an evaluation of the foregoing theories, a distinction between the noun *ai\_n* and the adjective *ai\_nios* is significant. The noun sometimes may refer to limited time as it does, for example, in Matt 28:20—“the consummation of the age”—but even the noun appears most of the time in phrases that have eternal connotations.<sup>47</sup> An example of the latter is Matt 21:19, Jesus’ cursing of the fig tree

<sup>43</sup>Hill, *Gospel of Matthew* 331.

<sup>44</sup>Plummer, *Gospel According to S. Matthew* 352; cf. Colin Brown, “Punishment,” *NIDNTT* 99.

<sup>45</sup>Lange, *Matthew* 450.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup>Other passages where Matthew uses the noun α\_ών (*ai\_n*, “age”) for a limited duration include 13:22, 39, 40, 49; 24:3, but in each of these some contextual indication shows the speakers to have in mind an ending of some kind—“the worries of this life” (13:22), the “end of the age” (13:39, 40, 49; 24:3), or the spread of the gospel till the return of Christ (Matt 28:20) (Scot McKnight, “Eternal Consequences or Eternal Consciousness?” *Through No Fault of Their Own?*,” ed. by William V. Crockett and James G.

meant that the tree would never bear fruit again: “No longer will fruit come from you forever (*eis ton ai\_na*).” The consequences of the cursing were not temporary in nature.

The NT usage of the adjective, on the other hand, is quite consistent in referring to endless or unlimited time, a meaning consonant with the word *αἰ* (*aei*, “always”) from which it is probably derived.<sup>48</sup> In its seventy-four occurrences in the NT, it always has the connotation of something that is unending or without time limitations.<sup>49</sup> Seventy-one of the uses look forward to eternity future, and only three refer back to what mortals would call eternity past (Rom 16:25; 2 Tim 1:9; Tit 1:2).

The OT counterpart to *ai\_nios* supports that extended meaning. *ἀόλιμος* (*‘ól\_m*) pointed to futurity of indefinite length, because its duration was unknown. Sometimes plural of *‘ól\_m* had the effect of intensifying. Based on the usage of its Hebrew counterpart, *ai\_nios* denoted perpetuity, permanence, inviolability, such as that of God’s covenant (Gen 9:16), ordinance (Exod 12:14), gates of Zion (Ps 23[24]:7, 9) and her foundations (Isa 58:12), boundaries of the sea (Jer 5:22). This is the meaning of the Greek adjective in both classical Greek and in later vernacular Greek.<sup>50</sup>

Efforts to tone down the force of *ai\_nios* cannot sidestep the absolute idea of eternity in connection with Jesus’ teaching of eternal punishment. It is an exegetically established reality in this passage (cf. Matt 3:12; 18:8) because it is antithetical to ζῶν αἰώνιον (*z\_n ai\_nion*) in v. 46, the latter being a designation for everlasting Messianic life (Meyer, 183).

## Π\_ρ (*Pur*, “Fire”)

Jesus made extensive use of fire, burning, or a flame to portray the agony of those who will experience everlasting punishment. The gospels record at least thirteen instances of such descriptions from the lips of Jesus (Matt 5:22; 7:19; 13:40,

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<sup>48</sup>John A Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, An American Commentary on the New Testament, ed. by Alvah Hovey (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1886) 512.

<sup>49</sup>Referring to Matthew alone, McKnight writes, “Matthew never uses the adjective *ai\_nios* (‘eternal’) in the sense of ‘belonging to this temporally limited age.’ . . . [I]n Matthew the adjective *ai\_nios* refers to something eternal and temporally unlimited” (“Eternal Consequences or Eternal Consciousness?” 153).

<sup>50</sup>M’Neile, *Matthew* 263.

42, 50; 18:8-9; 25:41; Mark 9:43, 48-49; Luke 16:24; John 15:6) and six more mentions of the same by John the Baptist (Matt 3:10, 11, 12; Luke 3:9, 16, 17).<sup>51</sup> Jesus used the related figure of Gehenna eleven times to portray the misery of eternal punishment (Matt 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5). In two instances He combined the two words into the expression "Gehenna of fire." Gehenna was the designation of a valley to the south and southwest of Jerusalem where garbage was dumped to furnish fuel for a fire that burned continually.<sup>52</sup> Earlier the place had acquired a bad reputation because of sacrifices offered to the god Moloch there. The name became the equivalent to the hell of the last judgment.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Cf. M<sup>c</sup>Neile, *Matthew* 28.

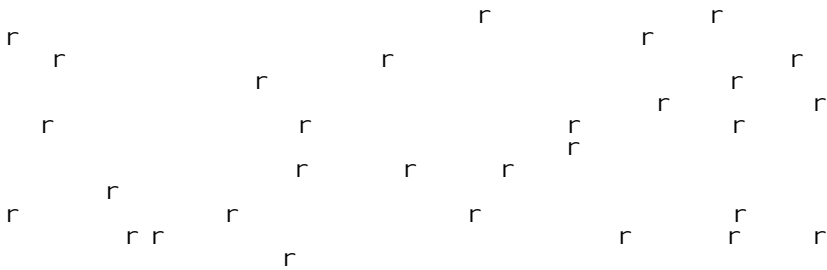
<sup>52</sup>R. E. Davies, "Gehenna," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. by Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975) 2:671.

<sup>53</sup>Joachim Jeremias, "γέεννα," *TDNT* 1:657.

Yet some contend that Jesus' mention of eternal fire (Matt 25:41) "does not necessarily imply that those concerned go on being judged or continue to be consumed. If the metaphor of fire is to be pressed at all, it would imply that the fire of righteousness continues to burn, but that what is consumed once is consumed for good. . . ." <sup>54</sup> When combined with the idea that the soul of man is not necessarily immortal, this teaching leads to the conclusion that the torment of the unrighteous is not necessarily endless, <sup>55</sup> a position otherwise known as conditional immortality.

Such a conclusion runs counter to a person's permanent exclusion from the Messianic kingdom Jesus mentioned in His description (25:34). A person so excluded has no other expectation than to experience this constant burning. Broadus describes that fate thus: "Whether eternal punishment involves any physical reality corresponding to fire, one cannot tell. However, it will be something as bad as fire and doubtless worse, something earthly images are inadequate to describe." <sup>56</sup> One difference between fire as known in the present life and eternal fire is that this fire will never run out of fuel and burn out. Jesus described the fire as "unquenchable" (Mark 9:43), as did John the Baptist (Matt 3:12; Luke 3:17). Jesus said it will be a fire that acts like salt, preserving rather than destroying, when He said, "Everyone will be sated with fire" (Mark 9:49). <sup>57</sup> Its burning will never end.

A description of its opposite—the bliss of the Messianic kingdom and the new Jerusalem—is perhaps the best way to comprehend the awfulness of such a condition.



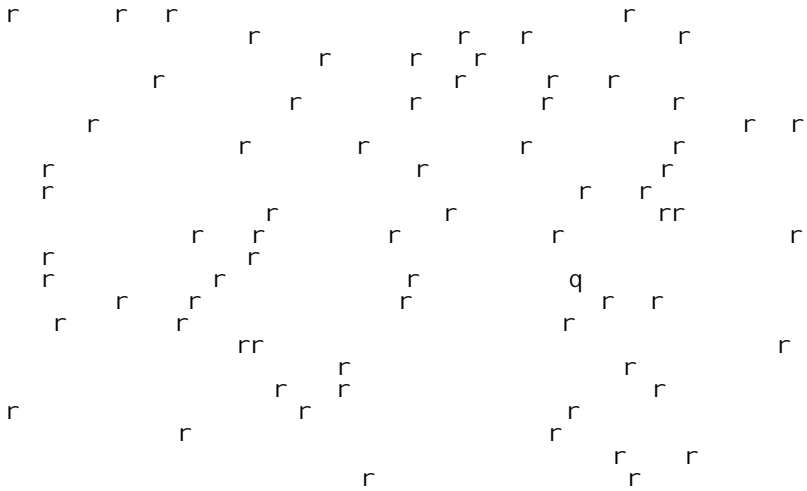

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<sup>54</sup>E.g., Brown, "Punishment" 3:99.

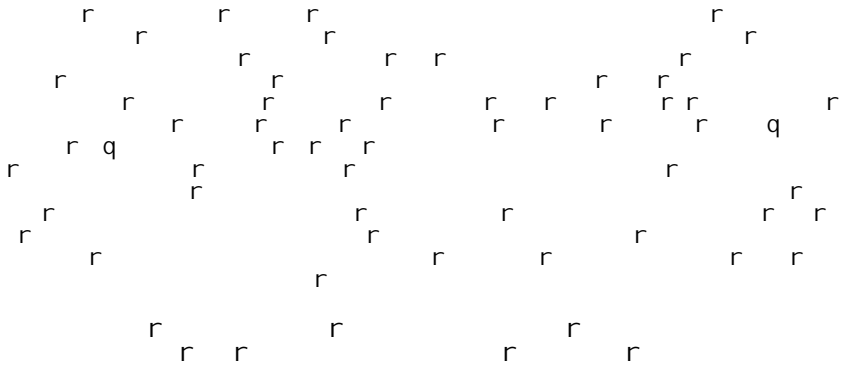
<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Broadus, *Gospel of Matthew* 511.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 514.



Corresponding observations are in order regarding eternal fire and Gehenna of fire. It will be a place of great heat in a literal sense, probably hotter than any heat ever generated in this creation, and a place of great suffering, both physical and spiritual, suffering the likes of which no human has yet endured, suffering that Jesus likened to other types of human misery as the survey below will reflect. In attempts to describe the indescribable, some early Christian literature offered quite grotesque embellishments of the biblical descriptions. Crockett summarizes their portrayals:



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<sup>58</sup>Robert L. Thomas,

<sup>59</sup>

ῥ ῥ ῥ ῥ ῥ ῥ and leave untouched the spiritual, immaterial suffering that will be equally bad or worse.

**Κόλασιν (Kolasin, “Punishment”)**

Some contend that eternal punishment (v. 46) does not necessarily mean endless punishment, because “eternal” (α\_ών, ai\_n) has both a qualitative and a quantitative meaning.<sup>60</sup> By pointing to the other side of the contrast in v. 46—i.e., “eternal life”—which, they say, refers primarily to the intensive boundlessness of life, they reason that the idea of eternal punishment is one of intensive punishment, not necessarily endless punishment.<sup>61</sup> Doubtless, the punishment will be intensive in its quality, but the context in which Jesus made His statement requires that it have a quantitative force also. The “eternal life” to which “eternal punishment” is opposed in v. 46 has a quantitative temporal and eternal meaning, entailing a person’s entrance into the future period of the Messianic kingdom (cf. 25:34). That kingdom will have two phases, a temporal one and an eternal one (cf. Rev 20:1–22:5). Those “blessed by the Father” will enjoy both phases. The other side of the picture, to constitute a suitable contrast, must likewise mean that “eternal punishment” will entail a quantitative consequence that knows no time limit.<sup>62</sup>

Another slant on interpreting Matt 25:46 is to conceive of the punishment as not sensed by the punishee. Regarding the verse, Pinnock has written, “I admit that the interpretation of hell as everlasting conscious torment can be found in this verse if one wishes to, especially if the adjective ‘conscious’ is smuggled into the phrase ‘eternal punishment’ (as is common).”<sup>63</sup> He accurately observes that the word “conscious” does not appear in Jesus’ statement, but he goes awry by failing to acknowledge that the nature of punishment requires the victim’s suffering be conscious. If a person does not *feel* the consequences, he has not experienced punishment.

A further way of explaining Jesus’ statement about eternal punishment is by observing the derivation of *kolasis*. Bruce calls attention to the root of *kolasis* which is κολλάζω (*kolaz\_*, “mutilate, prune”) and concludes that the noun refers to a corrective type of punishment rather than a vindictive one.<sup>64</sup> He notes the possibility of combining that notion with α\_ώνιον (*ai\_nion*) which etymologically means “agelong,” not “everlasting.” The idea of agelong pruning or discipline leaves open

<sup>60</sup>E.g., Brown, “Punishment” 99.

<sup>61</sup>E.g., Lange, *Matthew* 450.

<sup>62</sup>Cf. McKnight, “Eternal Consequences or Eternal Consciousness? 154.

<sup>63</sup>Pinnock, “The Conditional View” 156.

<sup>64</sup>A. B. Bruce, “Synoptic Gospels” 306.

the hope of ultimate salvation.<sup>65</sup> To his credit, however, he notes that the doctrine of future states must rest on more basic considerations than those of etymological derivation. In the present context, the contrast with eternal life establishes that eternal punishment is not a limited period of discipline, but is without limits.

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid.



Still another approach compares the term *kolasis* with one of its synonyms, τιμωρία (*tim\_ria*, “vengeance”). The former word, according to Aristotle, is disciplinary and refers to the sufferer, and the latter is penal, referring to the satisfaction of the one who inflicts the penalty.<sup>66</sup> *Kolasis*, then, is the milder term that in classical usage suggested the betterment of the punished one.<sup>67</sup> That distinction between the two words did not continue with consistency in later Greek, however.<sup>68</sup> It is a very serious error to press the distinction in its entirety in the NT, because “the κόλασις αὐτῶν of Matt. xxv. 46, as it is plain, is no merely corrective, and therefore temporary, discipline. . . .”<sup>69</sup> The only element of Aristotle’s distinction that remains is *kolasis* and its special relation to the punished and *tim\_ria* and its special reference to the punisher (cf. Heb 10:29).<sup>70</sup>

A basic principle for interpreting NT synonyms dictates that a distinction in meaning between two words does not necessarily exist unless they occur in the same immediate context. That principle applies to pairs such as ἀγαπάω (*agapa\_*, “I love”)/φιλέω (*phile\_*, “I love”) and ἄλλος (*allos*, “other”)/ἕτερος (*heteros*, “other”). Unless they occur together, an interpreter cannot press for differences. The same applies to *kolasis/tim\_ria*. It is poor exegetical methodology to try to evade the teaching of eternal punishment on the basis of a distinction in vocabulary.

As for the idea that *ai\_nios* is qualitative rather than quantitative, speaking of possessing eternal life in the present and having no reference to the future, that signification of the adjective appears in the Gospel of John, not in the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>71</sup> Usage in the synoptics requires the quantitative connotation.<sup>72</sup> That is especially true in the present passage where, even if “eternal punishment” were taken as an irrevocable decree of annihilation, still the parallel “eternal life” makes the meaning of eternal torment more probable.<sup>73</sup> It is a punishment that continues indefinitely for an endless duration.<sup>74</sup>

A survey of the rest of Jesus’ teachings about the destiny of the lost leads

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<sup>66</sup>Cf. Bullinger, *Companion Bible* 1370; Broadus, *Gospel of Matthew* 513; Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: American Book, 1889) 353.

<sup>67</sup>Broadus, *Gospel of Matthew* 513; Richard Chenevix Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, 9th ed. (1958 reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1880) 25.

<sup>68</sup>Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon* 353.

<sup>69</sup>Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* 25.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>71</sup>Even in the Gospel of John, however, the quantitative dimension is not totally absent.

<sup>72</sup>Cf. McKnight, “Eternal Consequences or Eternal Consciousness?” 152 n. 14.

<sup>73</sup>Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, trans. by David E. Green (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975) 478.

<sup>74</sup>Phillip Schaff in Lange, *Matthew* 450.



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Nothing short of endless, unspeakable agony can characterize Jesus' descriptions of how the lost will fare in the future.

Luke 12:47-48 clarifies that all the goats will not endure the same degree of suffering:

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The measure of a person's punishment will depend on how much of the Lord's will a person knew and disobeyed, but even those knowing the least will face unimaginable anguish that never ends. Incidentally, an annihilationist has no response to the biblical teaching of degrees of punishment. If the lost are to become obliterated, degrees of nonexistence are impossible.

All this sounds too horrible to imagine. Yet one more aspect of the destiny of the goats is worse than all others. That comes in Matt 25:41 when Jesus tells them, "Depart from Me." Separation from the Lord Jesus Christ and from God forever is the worst punishment anyone could ever bear. Jesus had spoken of it earlier when He told those with an empty profession, "I never knew you; depart from me" (Matt 7:23); when the bridegroom responded to the five foolish virgins, "I do not know you" (Matt 25:10, 12); and when the head of the household pronounced sentence on the unprepared servant, "I do not know where you are from" (Luke 12:25, 27). The victim of everlasting punishment will have no one to turn to in his time of hopelessness. The child of God can always turn to Him when everyone else forsakes him, but helplessness will compound the goats' hopelessness. They will have no one left to resort to because they have distanced themselves from the only one who could have given them encouragement.

**Predicaments Resolved by the Pronouncement**

A serious predicament faces today's evangelicals, who must decide between a number of options as to how and where the lost will spend eternity:

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gave a deeper meaning to the expressions that went beyond any idea of a culmination of suffering for the lost, contrary to the way Fudge interprets the expressions.

(1) The metaphorical view of punishment suggests that the punishment will be bad but nowhere near as awful as a literal interpretation of relevant passages would dictate.<sup>77</sup> It rests heavily on extrabiblical writings, however, rather than on Scripture itself, and upon a nonliteral interpretation of prophecy.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Cf. William V. Crockett, "The Metaphorical View," in *Four Views of Hell* 43-76; cf. Millard J. Erickson, "Principles, Permanence, and Future Divine Judgment: A Case Study in Theological Method," *JETS* 28/3 (September 1985):323-25.

<sup>78</sup>Cf. John F. Walvoord, "Response to William V. Crockett," in *Four Views of Hell* 77-81.

(2) The annihilationist or conditional-immortality view proposes that the punishment will be unpleasant but that it will have an end, after which the victims will cease to exist.<sup>79</sup> Various comments in earlier discussion have shown how this view fails to meet the criteria set down by Jesus' teaching in Matt 25:31-46 and elsewhere.

(3) A second-chance view proposes that those who have heard the gospel and learned their lesson will eventually find salvation following a period of disciplinary punishment after being judged as a goat.<sup>80</sup> Jesus in His account of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) clarifies that such will never be the case, however.

(4) Another second-chance view upholds the possibility that those who never heard the gospel will have another chance after the future judgment occurs,<sup>81</sup> but Jesus in John 14:6 made it perfectly clear that He is the only way to God. A person failing to find that way, regardless of the reason, must face the same eternal consequences as the rest who are not among the sheep.

(5) The anonymous-Christian view supports the possibility of people meeting the King's criteria for entering the kingdom without ever hearing about Jesus.<sup>82</sup> That view also is contrary to what Jesus taught in John 14:6: no one comes to the Father except through Jesus.

(6) The easy-believism view proposes that a person can enter the kingdom without works that evidence faith.<sup>83</sup> That view violates the principle that Jesus taught so consistently, i.e., that a person's faith will evidence itself by his works. The treatment of Jesus' brothers in the description of the sheep-and-goat

<sup>79</sup>Pinnock, "The Conditional View" 135-66.

<sup>80</sup>Cf. A. B. Bruce, "Synoptic Gospels" 306.

<sup>81</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, "Toward and Evangelical Theology of Religions," *JETS* 33/3 (September 1990):367-68.

<sup>82</sup>Plummer, *Gospel According to S. Matthew* 350. A. B. Bruce writes, "All who truly love are implicit Christians" ("Synoptic Gospels" 306).

<sup>83</sup>Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel under Siege* (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1981) 33, 44-45, 65-66, 76-78, 96-97, 106-7, 122-23.

judgment is one way that a person's faith will show itself.

(7) The universalism view holds to the prospect that everyone will receive eternal life. One version of it suggests that by the time of the sheep and goat judgment everyone will have heard about Jesus and become Christians.<sup>84</sup> The problem with this view is that it ignores the presence of goats at this judgment scene as representative of those who will not receive eternal life.

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<sup>84</sup>Lange, "Matthew" 447; A. B. Bruce, "Synoptic Gospels" 305.

The wide diversity of options open to evangelicals regarding eternal punishment is unfortunate. Evangelical leaders could have put the position of annihilationism to rest at a conference held in 1989. In May of that year, The National Association of Evangelicals and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School co-sponsored a consultation on Evangelical Affirmations. The consultation debated the issue of conditional immortality versus eternal punishment vigorously both in private and plenary sessions and by a narrow vote stopped short of labeling annihilation as an unacceptable doctrine for evangelicals.<sup>85</sup> A substantial number of Seventh Day Adventists who had been invited to the consultation were instrumental in increasing the vote against the traditional doctrine of eternal punishment. The evangelical church today suffers the consequences of that unfortunate decision. That vote has enabled evangelicalism to swell its numbers by including groups and individuals who embrace the doctrine of conditional immortality, but the evangelical movement is inwardly weaker because it has shrunk back from endorsing what Jesus taught on the subject.

Throughout His ministry Jesus taught that the lost would depart into eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels and eternal punishment. In other words, they will suffer endless, conscious agony away from the presence of God and His Son. None of the other options that confuse the evangelical spectrum are viable in light of Jesus' view of eternal punishment.

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<sup>85</sup>The relevant paragraph in the statement approved by the conference reads, "We affirm that only through the work of Christ can any person be saved and be resurrected to live with God forever. Unbelievers will be separated eternally from God. Concern for evangelism should not be compromised by any illusion that all will be finally saved (universalism)" (*Evangelical Affirmations*, ed. by Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990] 36). The paragraph avoids dealing with annihilationism or conditional immortality in that being "separated eternally from God" can mean being separated because of annihilation.