

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT IN JOHN'S REVELATION

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Church history has witnessed many challenges to the traditional doctrine of eternal punishment, but John's Revelation—particular chapters 14 and 20—emphasizes the effect of this life's belief or unbelief on afterlife consequences. The angelic warning in Revelation 14 speaks of the eternal penalty resulting from the wrath of God in concert with Revelation 20 and its apostolic announcement that describes the same in terms of the lake of fire and the second death. The two passages specifically contradict recent claims that future punishment is remedial, not retributive. They also point out that God's righteousness and holiness will prevail over His love, mercy, and grace in dealings with the lost after this life ends. Neither do they allow for the idea that the punishment is not conscious torment. They teach that the unsaved will experience the same fate as Satan, the beast, the false prophet, and demons. These chapters in John's Revelation do not constitute an empty threat that God will not implement. They instill a fear that is justified in light of the irreversible consequences of divine judgment.

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The reality and validity of eternal punishment in hell has been called into question frequently throughout church history.¹

¹Thomas Talbot, "The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment," *Faith and Philosophy* 7/1 (January 1990):23, remarked, "The evil of everlasting separation is itself . . . inconsistent with the existence of God." He also opined, "God would never promote the happiness of one loved at the expense of

another" (28) and "A doctrine of hell is defensible only if modified in one of two ways: one must either deny that hell is *everlasting* or deny that it is a place of *punishment*" (34). Charles H. Pridgeon, *Is Hell Eternal or Will God's Plan Fail?* (Pittsburgh: The Evangelization Society of the Pittsburgh Bible Institute, 1931) unashamedly declared, "Hell was invented by pagans" (35), and Paul S. L. Johnson, *Life, Death, Hereafter*, revised and enlarged (Philadelphia: P. Johnson, 1937) 46, stated, "Thinking people cannot but disbelieve this legend." He added further that the doctrine of eternal torment was undoubtedly introduced by the Papacy to induce the pagan to join in support of her system (49). Useful bibliography may be found in Freeman Barton, "Evangelicals in Defense of Hell—An Annotated Bibliography with Extended Introduction," *Journal of Religious & Theological Information* 2/2 (1996):73-94.

Such questioning also stands attested as one of the hallmarks of different cults and sects.¹ When proposing a position that quite obviously sounded different from the propositions of the biblical text, then the literal words of that text had to be explained in another way in order to maintain that new proposition.² Either (1) the hermeneutic was deliberately faulty, (2) the proposer redefined his bibliology to warrant challenging the text and altering the meaning of different terms, or (3) he used inferential reasoning from the character of God, His love, mercy, and grace to establish the total unreasonableness of eternal punishment.³ Of course, all of this happened alongside fervent declarations of letting the Word of God speak for itself, so that it would be appropriate thereafter to assert that hell is indeed a grim prospect, and the proposer intended nothing to lessen it.⁴

¹Alan W. Gomes, "Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell," *Christian Research Journal* (Spring 1991):15, writes, "Denial of this teaching [conscious everlasting torment] has, until recently, been limited almost exclusively to cultic or quasi-cultic groups." He then names Jehovah's Witnesses, Armstrong's Worldwide Church of God, Christian Science, Mormonism, the New Age movement, and Seventh Day Adventism.

²William G.T. Shedd, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment* (1980 reprint, Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, n.d.) 5-6, reminds that "the denial of endless punishment is usually associated with the denial of those tenets which are logically and closely connected with it, such as original sin, vicarious atonement, and regeneration. Thomas Talbot, "The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment" 20, goes further by concluding that Jesus' rhetoric left room for His disciples to reinterpret Him as they matured in the faith. It was not, he says, "intended to provide final answers to their theological questions."

³William Crockett, "The Metaphorical View," in *Four Views on Hell* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 50, cites Celsus' words of God becoming a "cosmic cook." See also Clark Pinnock, "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," *Criswell Theological Review* 4/2 (Spring 1990):253, who forcefully observes that everlasting torment turns God into a "bloodthirsty monster."

⁴Pinnock, "Destruction of the Finally Impenitent" 259.

This essay does not cover (1) the evidence for eternal punishment in John's Gospel, since a previous essay on the teachings of Jesus dealt with that, and (2) the sole mention of the day of judgment in John's epistles (1 John 4:17), which obviously recalls all other instances in both Old and New Testaments of such a day at the end of time, a day which the believer knows he need not fear.

It will rather focus on John's Revelation,¹ a book replete with details about the outbreak of God's wrath upon the earth prior to the kingdom's being established, but also with information on hellfire and torment beyond time and history (Rev 14:9-11; 20:10-15 with additional identification of its victims in 21:8 and 22:15). The unmistakable attestations of John's inspired words on the irreversible nature of the final state rule out (1) any idea of pagan legend or myth or metaphorical/symbolical language as somehow having crept into the record making restatement essential, and (2) any attempt to determine punishment as temporary and/or remedial. Rather, they bring to the forefront the reality that this life's belief or unbelief has after-life consequences.

Revelation 14 and 20, then, may function as the matrix through which to respond to selected issues related to eternal punishment and conditional immortality.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS ON CONTEXT, VOCABULARY, AND EMPHASIS

In the interests of brevity, this essay sets aside needless repetition of standard comments available from good exegetical commentaries. The observations made below are most worthy of note.

The Angelic Warning

In both contexts the judgment of God is definitely the setting for the words of angelic warning (Revelation 14) as well as for the words of apostolic announcement (Revelation 20). The divine messenger specifically says, "The hour of His judgment has come" (14:7), bringing to attention—as it most assuredly does—the extensive information in both testaments about God's judgment day and the irruption of wrath with which it is associated.² The angelic warning follows with a selection of specific, graphic terminology reminding of

¹Faulty hermeneutic arises when the Book of Revelation is summarily evaluated as being so symbolic and pictorial that its statements are non-propositional or unable to sustain doctrinal conclusion. See Larry Dixon, "Warning a Wrath-Deserving World: Evangelicals and the Overhaul of Hell," *The Emmaus Journal* 2 (1993):11 n 16. He cites Michael Green, *Evangelism Through the Local Church* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990) 70, who pointedly notes that Revelation is a highly pictorial book, i.e., something "not enough to hang a doctrine of such savagery on. . . ."

²Cf. Psalms 49; 75; Isaiah 24; 66; Jeremiah 25; John 5:22 ff.; Acts 17:11; 2 Tim 4:1; 1 Pet 4:5; *inter alia*,

such irruption, namely “drink of the wine of the wrath of God . . . in the cup of his anger” (v. 10). The succeeding context underscores the judgment terminology already used as it vividly describes what would soon occur within future world history—note “hour to reap” (v.15), “harvest of the earth” (v. 15), and “the great winepress of the wrath of God” (v. 19).

Although John did not use specific terms of judgment and wrath (θύμος [*thumos*] and ὀργή [*orgē*]) in relation to Satan, the actions of God reported by the apostle—the binding and incarceration in the abyss (20:1-3) and the casting into the lake of fire (20:10)—constitute judgment, one temporary and one permanent. Furthermore, the account of the final assizes that follows (vv. 11-15) only serves to maintain the picture of final judgment wherein the destiny of the unsaved is alongside that of the devil, the beast, and the false prophet (vv. 13-14; cf. 19:20).

Employment of “torment”³ and “fire and brimstone”⁴ augments the tenor of doom that pervades the immediate contexts. The absence of a specific mention of torment in connection with the sentencing at the final assizes is not that significant because the threefold mention of the lake of fire (20:14-15) is sufficient and emphatic enough to point back to any previous description given.

Furthermore, emphasis on the ceaseless, unrelenting nature of that torment comes out in the adverbial phrases “day and night” and “forever and ever.”⁵ Endlessness receives emphasis both from the absence of the definite article in the one phrase and the doubled use of the definite article in the other.⁶ All other occurrences of the plural αἰών (*aiōn*, “forever”) formula in Revelation are marked by an absence of any such additional temporal indicators to stress endlessness. Nothing extra is necessary to produce the meaning of “unlimited duration” and at that beyond time when the formula describes God who lives forever (4:9-10; 10:6; 15:7), of His attributes being eternal (1:6; 4:9; 5:13; 7:12), or of Christ who reigns forever, His saints also being with Him (11:15; 22:5). But when the formula describes Babylon’s smoke ascending forever (19:3),

³The future βασανισθήσεται (*basanisthēsetai*) and the noun βασανισμού (*basanismou*) in 14:10-11 and the future βασανιθήνται (*basanisthēsontai*) in 20:10.

⁴Ἐν πυρὶ καὶ θείῳ (*en puri kai thei*) in 14:10 and τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ θείου (*tou puros kai theiou*) in 20:10.

⁵Εἰς αἰῶνας αἰῶνων (*eis aiōnas aiōnōn*) in 14:11 and εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων (*eis tous aiōnas ton aiōnōn*) in 20:10.

⁶*TDNT*, s.v. “αἰών, αἰώνιος,” by Herman Sasse, 1:199, the twofold use of αἰώνιος emphasizes the concept of eternity. Cf. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation* (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg, 1943) 38, “The strongest expression for our ‘forever’ is . . . ‘for the eons of eons.’ . . . The Greek takes its greatest term for time, the eon, pluralizes this, and then multiplies it by its own plural, even using articles which make these eons the definite ones.” See also the examination of αἰώνιος undertaken by Shedd, *Doctrine of Endless Punishment* 76-90, wherein he shows that αἰών and αἰώνιος denote the “one infinite and endless aeon, or age, of the future.”

nothing additional is necessary to indicate that the “forever” formula is a “forever” of “limited duration.”⁷ That the ascending smoke will terminate at the end is something to be reasoned out from Babylon being in this age and this age coming to a definite end. It is a very long but limited time-span, but a very long, limited stretch of time in this world is not descriptive of what belongs in the coming ages beyond world history. The plural formula and its accompanying temporal indicators in the angelic announcement are different from Babylon’s smoke then and are significant: they do point to what belongs beyond time and history, they do stress “of unlimited duration” or “for eternity.” Torment is forever and ever and evermore!

“They will have no rest,” describing the fate of the worshipers of the beast, functions as a third adverbial phrase emphasizing ceaselessness, but it also stands in stark contrast to the promised rest for those martyrs who will remain loyal to their Lord (14:12-13; cf. 13:15). This life’s religious loyalties and beliefs do indeed have endless consequences for the afterlife.

Different overt symbols will portray, or betray, religious loyalties—the name of the Lord written in the forehead of the 144,000 (14:1) or the particular mark of the beast on the forehead or hand (14:9). The latter will have rejected the appeal of the angel to worship the Lord and give Him glory (14:7). The particular mark of identification for other believers will be their obedience and steadfastness. Such marks of identification, of religious loyalties, come with their own sets of works (τὰ ἔργα [*ta erga*] in 20:12, 13; τῶν κόπων and τὰ ἔργα [*tōn kopōn* and *ta erga*] in 14:13), that is, the inevitable outworking of their worldviews. The listings of those whose place will be in the lake of fire (21:8) and of those who will be outside the New Jerusalem (22:15) reflects something of the spectrum of the evidence of unbelief which had been and would be worked out.

In both contexts, notwithstanding the events of the future taking place on earth—whether before, during, or after the millennial reign of Christ—the references to the lake of fire and torment are neither earth-bound nor time-bound. The reader moves easily from history to eternity to history.

Each context, however, also provides its own perspective. The angelic warning includes a reference to the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb (14:10). In so doing, it draws attention to the quite different relationship of two groups, the 144,000 and the beast-worshipers, to the Lamb (14:1, 7). Seven angels carry out God’s purpose (14:6, 8, 9, 15, 17, 18, 19) and serve to remind the reader that nought will happen apart from His design. The repetition of the warning’s protasis (14:11, καὶ εἴ τις λαμβάνει . . . [*kai ei tis lambanei* . . . , “and if anyone receives . . .”]) suggests that the reader should pause, fill in the ellipsed apodosis, and then reflect on the graphic description of the lot of the wicked. As

⁷ *TDNT*, s.v., “αἰών, αἰώνιος” 202-3, has a helpful discussion on αἰών as limited by creation and conclusion.

a warning and threat, it bears repetition!

The Apostolic Announcement

The apostolic announcement mentions the second death, defined by appositional statement (20:14) and adjectival subordinate clause (21:8) as the lake of fire. In so doing, it draws attention to earlier comments on resurrection and second death (20:6) and indicates that the righteous are immune to its power. The unrighteous, on the contrary, are those over whom the second death does have power because their names are not recorded in the book of life (20:15). An individual's works will not mandate favorable relief from punishment (cf. e.g., Mt 7:22).⁸ No record in the book of life justifies the sentence passed.

The intermediate state, personified in the double title "death and Hades" (20:13), releases its grip with the result that the unrighteous dead are raised for their individual accounting. The use of the personification a second time (v. 14) may simply refer to the end of death and the intermediate state, that is, death will meet its end and will not be there to disturb the new heavens and the new earth. Thus, none of the unrighteous dead will escape sentencing.

Not only a tenor of doom but one of finality pervades this context as well; it is an "absolute finality."⁹ And that sense of finality also pertains to the destiny and experience of the righteous whom the closing two chapters (Revelation 21–22) clearly show to be the insiders—those in heaven rejoicing in the light of the Lord's presence and having everlasting life.

THEOLOGICAL RESPONSES, QUESTIONS, AND REFLECTIONS

Responses to amendments to the traditional evangelical understanding of the unsaved enduring hell forever should come in light of the preliminary observations above.

Punishment Retributive Not Remedial

Does the thought of remedial suffering or punishment spring immediately to mind when reading the passages in John's Revelation? On the basis of the observations made above, the answer must be a ringing No!

Being subject to wrath, being made to drink of the cup of God's anger,

⁸Any discussion on the degrees of punishment suggested by the judging of works does not detract from the length of the sentence passed. Peterson, *Hell on Trial* 198, sums it up well: "Scripture teaches that although hell is everlasting for all its inhabitants, some suffer worse than others. God's justice demands that there be degrees of punishment."

⁹Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, "Conditional Immortality," *Evangel* 10/2 (Summer 1992):11, although, when treating the second death, did not use these words to mean finality in the sense of irreversible but in the sense of ongoing; the above discussion nevertheless lifts them out as an appropriate expression to convey that idea.

and being tormented forever, without rest day and night, hardly seems like one last attempt to motivate a renewed consideration of religious-loyalty decisions previously made. No, the warning delivered points to a just recompense for deeds done and decisions made this side of the grave.¹⁰

The message of judgment and hellfire may very well be preventative, and in that sense might be spoken of as remedial. Change could always occur before death, but when the time comes to be actually part of the reality proclaimed, then the experience will only be retributive. Never does the Scripture suggest that hell is some kind of anteroom or a temporary school from which the unbeliever might eventually graduate and pass from death to life. The second death is not life but death, an existence of permanent confinement excluded from the pleasurable presence of God enjoyed by the assembly of the righteous. An everlasting existence it will be, and *not* just a moment of agonizingly realizing too late that exclusion from God's kingdom and glory was their plight—that is, exclusion in the sense of being cast without hope into the “abyss of obliteration.”¹¹

This already impinges upon any discussion of God's purposes and power. Surely God fails in His purposes if He is unable to do something effective for salvation before death and, moreover, remains unable, even when presenting torment, to retrieve an unbeliever after death? Why leave it until after death to convince of heaven and hell? To remove retribution is to be influenced by a foreign agenda which (1) takes no account of the full-measure of divine wrath poured out—“mixed in full strength” (14:10)—and (2) ignores the force of the most serious term for wrath—eschatological *orgē* does not reform¹²—and (3) conveniently overlooks, in the immediate context, the threat which itself indicates that not all will be saved.

God's Love and His Actions

No matter how commendable it may be to elevate the love, mercy, and grace of God, it should not be done at the expense of God's wrath and vengeance, nor should it be prefaced by emotive comments on God's character being impugned if He were to sentence unbelievers to eternal torment.¹³ Being

¹⁰Peterson, *Hell on Trial* 212, cross-references 2 Thess 1:5-9 and concludes, “This punishment is retributive: God ‘will pay back’ the wicked with eternal ruin.” Cf. also Heb 10:27 and the “certain terrifying expectation of judgment” with its accompanying citation from Isa 26:11, “the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.”

¹¹Hughes, “Conditional Immortality” 12.

¹²William Crockett, “Wrath That Endures Forever,” *JET S* 34 (1991):196, writes that ὀργή, the apostle Paul's most serious word for divine wrath, “expresses the utter hopelessness of the wicked in the face of an angry God.” “Eschatological ὀργή,” he writes, “is genuine anger devoid of love.”

¹³Steward D. F. Salmond (*The Doctrine of Immortality* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897] 666) explains the motivation to elevate divine love as “an intense craving for the triumph of God's love

uncomfortable with God's plan does not mean ignoring the plain meaning of the biblical text. What is sometimes forgotten is that all God's acts are acts of righteousness and holiness but not all His acts are always and only acts of love and mercy.¹⁴ In fact, "there is no meaningful way to speak of God loving the wicked after death."¹⁵

Acknowledgment of perfection and trueness in all His attributes rules out speaking of divine vengeance and wrath in terms of human vindictiveness and sinful anger. God definitely does not act with malice aforethought, and the apostle John's two key passages should not be treated as portraying the Lord in that light.

Acknowledging the horribleness of eternal hellfire does not reduce God to some sort of monster running His own Auschwitz.¹⁶ Being tormented at the hands of cruel, unjust tyranny is a far cry from punishment inflicted by a totally pure, righteous, holy, and perfect Lord. His holiness has already been the subject of praise in Revelation (4:8, 11) and should recall the many statements of Scripture about His character and attributes.

Smoke Signals and Poena Sensus

Does "the smoke of their torment" (14:11) merely signal punishment previously carried out? At the least, recognition of the durative present ἀναβαίνει (*anabainei*, "is ascending") in the text is necessary, but appending "no rest day or night" adds force to the previous adverbial phrase "forever and ever" and forbids mistaking (1) the nature of personal and individual torment of the lost to be something less than eternal, (2) the smoke as only the ever-ascending evidence of what had been done, and (3) the punished as having become eternal non-entities unable to experience anything consciously. "One can exist and not be punished, but one cannot be punished and not exist."¹⁷ That which becomes nothing cannot be referred to in anything else but the past

and grace over all obstacles" because it is so inconsistent to have evil alongside love and grace. See also Talbot, "Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment" 39, who concludes, "An omnipotent and perfectly loving God would never permit sinners to damn themselves."

¹⁴Carl F. H. Henry (*God, Revelation & Authority* [Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983] 6:352) observes that God's love should not be manipulated so as to strip judgment of its substance in Christ's declarations and warnings. This observation applies equally well to John's two key passages. Dixon ("Warning a Wrath-Deserving World" 20) states plainly, "God does *not* remain infinitely loving; there are *limits* to His love."

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 201.

¹⁶See n. 4 above. David Moore, *The Battle for Hell: A Survey and Evaluation of Evangelicals Growing Attraction to the Doctrine of Annihilationism* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1995) 28, calls Pinnock's remarks an "absurd analogy."

¹⁷Gomes, "Annihilation of Hell" 11.

tense—"they were" not "they are." A witness to this smoke would not exclaim, "Ah! There's the evidence of them once having been," but "Ah! There's the evidence of them currently being in the fire."

If in the future they are outside, banished from among the redeemed, but still there and described by well-known terms for the unrighteous, *and* if reference to the lake of fire and second death recalls the description of eternity from the previous references (21:8)—and it does so without prompting—then the dead are not non-entities but still existing. "If non-existence is actually a state, then nothing has become something."¹⁸ Nothing is simply nothing and no ingenuous arguing will make it otherwise.

Poena damni (the punishment of the damned) is inextricably linked with *poena sensus* (punishment of the senses). To speak of torment is to understand immediately, without necessarily having to say so explicitly, that it is a painful experience. "What other kind of torment is there besides conscious torment? Torment, by its very nature, demands a sentient (i.e., feeling) subject to experience it."¹⁹ End of sentient being, therefore, must mean end of punishment in which, at the very most, torment or punishment would be transient, something felt only at the instant of affliction. A "transient instant," a flash of pain, hardly projects forever and ever with no rest day or night.

Descriptions of being outside and cut off from the tree of life (22:15) also quickly recall the book of life and names written or not written therein as well as the finality of judgment day. The first death removes a person from life in the present creation but without ending his existence. Similarly the second death removes that person from the new creation, the new heavens and the new earth, without signifying that absence from the place where only righteous dwells equals non-existence.

¹⁸Samuel C. Bartlett, *Life and Death Eternal: A Refutation of the Theory of Annihilation* (Boston: American Tract Society, 1866) 274.

¹⁹Gomes, "Annihilation of Hell" 18.

Identical Fates and Afterlife Choices

Unsaved humans and wicked angels share the same fate. The close proximity of the final assizes and its reference to the lake of fire and the second death into which the condemned dead are cast precludes making their fate different from that of Satan, the beast, the false prophet, and the demonic host.²⁰ Although torment may not be specifically mentioned with the judgment of the dead, it carries over with ease from earlier references. Indeed, mention of fire/lake of fire should suffice to recall for the reader other references in earlier revelation confirming everlasting suffering for condemned humans in the place of unquenchable fire and the undying worm.²¹

To conclude blithely that only the “infernal troika” are the eternal, suffering inhabitants of the lake of fire is to ignore willfully the impact of both the surrounding and wider contexts. More, to do so suggests that it is right and acceptable for the God of love to sentence the evil trio to eternal damnation but that it is not right with respect to unrighteous humanity for Him to do so.

The two listings of the *outsiders* (21:8; 22:15) form a litany of depravity showing that unsaved man has no redeeming features or graces to offer in mitigation or to prod himself to submit voluntarily to God's love and mercy. Those in hell never truly repent of their sin. They forever remain in a state of rebellion toward God, because their fallen nature does not carry the ability to recognize its own depravity and need for God.²² Final judgment hinges on decisions made in this life before the first death and not in some future life or state. Unbelieving men are declared in this life to be without excuse (Rom 1:20) and facing judgment after death (Heb 9:27). “Scripture nowhere affirms that opportunity for regeneration exists beyond the grave.”²³ Nor do John's words in Revelation present judgment as a post-mortem chance to convert from “without excuse” to “with excuse,” thereby allowing for a personal choice before entering the final state.

Threat, But No Threat

A threat devoid of authenticity because the deliverer had neither the authority nor the intention to carry it out becomes a hollow sham that

²⁰Cf. Matt 25:41. Although Revelation 20 says nothing about demons, they obviously receive their sentence with Satan.

²¹See Peterson, *Hell on Trial* 190-91, where he deals with the imagery of fire in the NT, and concludes, “Damned humans, therefore, will suffer forever.”

²²Moore, *Battle for Hell* 48. Cf. Rev 9:20, 21 and 16:9-11 where people under God's judgment unrepentantly blaspheme the more.

²³Henry, *God, Revelation & Authority* 6:511; Harold O.J. Brown, “Will the Lost Suffer Forever?” *Criswell Theological Review* 4/2 (1990):271, concurs: “Nothing will soften or alleviate their conscious misery ever.”

casts aspersion on the integrity of the one who delivered it. Once the Lord delivered the warning via His angelic messenger (14:10-11), its authenticity was beyond doubt and His authority to enact it was beyond question.²⁴ The words of the threat also imply that some would not heed the warning and upon them the stated judgment would fall. The record of Revelation bears out the reality of disobedience, wickedness, hostility against God, and rejection of His message. Given that record and that of the Lord's character, the reader of Revelation, unless primed in advance, (1) takes seriously the threat and does not think of it being just an exhortation with no sting, and (2) takes seriously the sentence passed without thinking of it as being wholly unfair and disproportionate.

All God's warnings to repent, all His prophetic pronouncement of judgment to come and of wrath outpoured cannot be re-evaluated and downgraded to only an hortatory level with the result that they are rebuffed by sinners without fear of the sentence being carried out in full.

CLOSING REMARKS

"No correct view of final judgment can be elaborated that empties hell of its terrors and depicts God's last judgment as a benevolent act toward the impenitent and ungodly."²⁵ Further, Carl Henry recalls that the Bible's exposition of the torment of hell keeps in the foreground the fact of divine moral judgment and does not offer the reader a lurid portrayal of torture.²⁶ The sentence to which the worshipers were alerted and which God doubtlessly carries out at the final assizes, will be deserved. The stark clarity of the accounts hints not at any post-mortem chance to escape the second death either before or after the books are read. Punishment after death is outside time and thus eternal. It is not benevolence but justice in operation. Judgment is neither prefaced by opportunity to believe nor constituted as forcing or persuading belief.

Life's religious loyalties and beliefs demonstrate the reality of not having had one's name in the book of life, and they, in recognizable tension, hold the sinner responsible and without excuse, and might determine degree of everlasting punishment. Punishment is eternal but so is the unrepentant condition of the unredeemed dead.²⁷

²⁴See Paul Helm, "Universalism and the Threat of Hell," *Trinity Journal* 4 (1983):35-43, for a good treatment of when a threat is not a threat in his discussion on universalism.

²⁵Henry, *God, Revelation & Authority* 6:352.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 510.

²⁷Talbot, "Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment" 39, presents a transmogrified caricature of man's sinful condition: the more one freely rebels against God the more miserable and tormented one becomes; and the more miserable one becomes, the more incentive one has to repent of one's sin and to give up one's rebellious attitudes."

After a final one thousand year period, it is clear that the depravity of evil mankind is so great that an eternity of opportunities would not suffice. This in a very real sense is a theodicy of eternal punishment, showing the justice behind the final judgment of God. In the light of an eternity of rejections, eternal punishment is mandated.²⁸

Both the angelic warning and the apostolic announcement unmistakably attest the reality of the irreversible consequences of divine judgment.

²⁸Grant Osborne, "Theodicy in the the Apocalypse" *Trinity Journal* 14 (1993) 70.