

# Why Give Eternal Hell For Temporal Sin?

Recently a college student asked, "If God is just, then why give the eternal punishment of hell for temporal sin?"

It's a trick question, really, because it presumes that God will eternally, perpetually punish in some sort of hell, in eternal, conscious torment. Although many churches teach that, it is not taught in the Bible.

God is merciful, not a sadistic tormentor. There is no eternal, conscious torment in some sort of fiery hell. Consider:

In the KJV New Testament "hell" appears 23 times. But "hell" was translated from three different Greek words, each of which has a different meaning. The result has been confusion and misunderstanding ever since. The three Greek words are:

- γέεννα "gehenna" which appears 12 times: it's a reference to the dump on the south side of Jerusalem in Jesus' time
- ᾗδης "hades" which appears 10 times: meaning the grave, the pit, the place of the dead
- ταρταρόω "tartaroo" one time (2 Peter 2:4): a verb, to throw into the deepest pit

Gehenna referred to the dump in the valley of Hinnom on the south side of Jerusalem. There constant fire and maggots destroyed the rubbish and bodies thrown in. Jesus likened the fate of the unsaved to being thrown into the gehenna dump, into "hell [γέεννα] fire": they would be permanently destroyed.

Here are three of the twelve examples of γέεννα being translated as "hell":

"But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." (Jesus, in Matthew 5:22)

"And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire." (Jesus, in Matthew 18:9)

"Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Jesus, in Matthew 23:33)

The unsaved will perish, will be destroyed just as completely as trash thrown into the gehenna dump was destroyed. In Revelation - the last book of the Bible - the "lake of fire" is analogous to that dump; those thrown into the "lake of fire" perish in death, specifically the "second death" after resurrection for judgment:

"But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." (Revelation 21:8)

The unsaved will get the "second death" after judgment. The second death is death after which there is no more hope of life or resurrection. They will be destroyed; they will perish in death. That's a very different fate from eternal conscious torment.

Here are more verses about the fate of the unsaved. "Perish" and "destroy" in these verses are from the Greek word ἀπόλλυμι "apollymi" which means to "destroy fully" (Strong's Definitions):

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matthew 10:28) "Destroy" is from ἀπόλλυμι "apollymi"; "hell" is from the Greek γέεννα "gehenna")

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16; "perish" is from ἀπόλλυμι "apollymi")

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9; "perish" is from ἀπόλλυμι "apollymi")

"Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke 13:4,5; "perish" is from ἀπόλλυμι "apollymi")

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." (John 10:27,28; "perish" is from ἀπόλλυμι "apollymi")

Eternal life is a gift from God. We do not have immortal souls that can/will be tormented forever. Unless we receive the gift of eternal life, we'll perish in death:

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23)

Here's a few verses confirming the wicked are destroyed, and will never "be" anymore:

"For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be." (Psalms 37:10)

"When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed for ever" (Psalms 92:7).

"The way of the LORD is strength to the upright: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity." (Proverbs 10:29)

"As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more: but the righteous is an everlasting foundation." (Proverbs 10:25)

"Knowest thou not this of old, since man was placed upon earth,  
That the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for  
a moment?

Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the  
clouds;

Yet he shall perish for ever like his own dung: they which have seen him shall  
say, Where is he?" (Job 20:4-7)

"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that  
leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:"

"Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and  
few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13,14). "Destruction" is from the Greek  
word ἀπόλεια "apoleia," utter destruction.

"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that  
times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19,  
NKJV).

So, what about the "everlasting punishment" Jesus spoke of in Matthew 25:46:

"And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into  
life eternal." (Matthew 25:46)

The punishment of the wicked is "everlasting" in the sense that it is permanent: it is done, it is  
final. It stands forever and can not be retracted, similar to the execution of a criminal. The  
punishment is not "everlasting" in the sense of being perpetual, ongoing, active punishing.

The apostle Paul wrote, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life  
through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Yes, the wages of sin is death, not eternal life in  
some sort of burning hellfire. You either receive eternal life as a gift from God, or you perish:  
you cease to exist because you did not receive eternal life.

Salvation is not about *where* you'll spend eternity. You won't even *have* an eternity - of  
any sort, anywhere - unless God chooses to give you the gift of eternal life!!! Otherwise, you'll  
perish in death. Salvation is about receiving the gift of eternal life. Without eternal life, all is  
lost.

Am I suggesting we do not have immortal souls? Absolutely. The "immortal soul" that  
floats out of you when you die comes from pagan Greek religion. Here's the Greek philosopher  
Plato writing about the immortal soul:

*"Do we believe that there is such a thing as death? And is this anything but  
the separation of soul and body? And being dead is the attainment of this  
separation; when the soul exists in herself, and is parted from the body and  
the body is parted from the soul . . . beyond question the soul is immortal and  
imperishable, and our souls will truly exist in another world!"* (Plato, in  
*Phaedo*, about 360 BC)

If we had immortal souls, then obviously God would not need to give us eternal life. And  
remember, God put the first couple out of the Garden so they could NOT eat of the tree of life  
and so live forever (Genesis 3:22-24).

We DO NOT have immortal souls. In the Bible "soul" does not refer to some sort of invisible spiritual component that floats out of us when we die. In the Bible "soul" refers to the self, to the person, even to life other than human life. Two examples:

"And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls."  
(Acts 27:37)

"And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea." (Revelation 16:3)

Take away the "immortal soul" error and there is no longer need to explain where you spend eternity. You won't even have an eternity unless you receive the gift of eternal life.

So, what about the "weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth" Jesus spoke of? This is the mental anguish the unsaved will experience when they see others receiving eternal life. Then they'll know they, too, could have received eternal life were it not for their own foolish choice to live life apart from God.

It's interesting that most Bibles after the King James made corrections, often not translating those three different Greek words γέεννα, ᾗδης and ταρταρόω as "hell." For example, instead of "hell" they used the transliteration "gehenna" for γέεννα, and used "grave" for ᾗδης. Young's Literal Translation (YLT) does not use "hell" anywhere.

Regrettably belief in eternal conscious torment persists to this day, still portraying God as a sadistic, merciless tormentor. Unfortunately such false doctrines cause many to reject the Bible and God altogether. Hopefully that college student will seek and find the truth.