

# Why Do Seventh-day Adventists Reject Eternal Punishment?

## Bible Answers About Denominations

*"We reject the doctrine of eternal torment for the following reasons: (1) Because everlasting life is a gift of God (Rom 6:23). The wicked do not possess this – they 'shall not see life' (John 3:36); 'no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him' (1 Jno. 3:15). (2) Because eternal torment would perpetuate and immortalize sin, suffering, and woe, and contradict, we believe, divine revelation, which envisions the time when these things shall be no more (Rev. 21:4). (3) Because it seems to us to provide a plague spot in the universe of God throughout eternity, and would seem to indicate that it is impossible for God Himself ever to abolish it. (4) Because in our thinking, it would detract from the attribute of love as seen in the character of God, and postulates the concept of a wrath which is never appeased. (5) Because the Scriptures teach that the atoning work of Christ is to 'put away sin' (Heb. 9:26) – first from the individual, and ultimately from the universe. The full fruition of Christ's sacrificial, atoning work will be seen not only in a redeemed people but in a restored heaven and earth (Eph. 1:14)" (Questions on Doctrine, p. 543, released by the General Conference of Seventh Day Adventists in 1957).*

One aspect of "materialism" is the theory that man is wholly mortal. He thus does not possess a "soul" (or "spirit") that will inhabit eternity. Companion to this, of course, is the belief that there is no eternal punishment for those who reject God. Even though Seventh-day Adventists profess a reverence for the Bible, they argue that the idea of eternal anguish in hell is not biblical; rather, they surmise that the wicked simply will be annihilated after an appropriate punishment. (Seventh-day Adventists Believe, Washington, D. C. Ministerial Association General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988, pp. 369-372).

It is simply human emotionalism that obscures the issue of eternal punishment because the biblical doctrine is crystal clear. One should consider this study under several categories:

### **The Incorruptible Spirit**

Jesus said that even though an enemy may terminate one's bodily existence, he cannot destroy his soul. "And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt 10:28). Jesus could not have made this statement if human beings were entirely mortal. The apostle Peter spoke of the need to clothe one's "spirit" with "incorruptible" apparel (1 Pet. 3:4). This imagery would hardly be appropriate if the human spirit itself were corruptible. In Revelation 6, John saw a vision of martyrs underneath the altar of God. The text specifically affirms that John saw "the souls of them that had been slain." "Soul" cannot be a figure of speech for the entire person, because John saw the "souls of them" that were slain. Moreover, these souls were under the altar of God, but their dead bodies were still on earth. The resurrection had not transpired. Additionally, these souls were conscious, as evinced by the fact

that they: spoke, wondered, remembered, reasoned, and received a preliminary reward (white robes) in anticipation of the final victory (Rev. 6:9-11).

### **The Consciousness of the Wicked**

While it may be granted that the faithful survive the death of the body, does that premise hold true for the lost? The answer to that question is a definite yes! Even in the Old Testament we see this verified. Daniel wrote concerning the condemned who are raised from the dust to a state of “shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2). As we enter the New Testament we find that Jesus declared that those who die unprepared will be subjected to “eternal punishment” (Matt. 25:46). Observe also that the punishment of the unbeliever is as enduring as the “life” (fellowship with God) of the believer. Paul also affirmed that those who “know not God,” and those who “obey not God,” and those who “obey not the gospel,” will “suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might” (2 Thess. 1:9). The term “destruction” does not connote annihilation. Rather, it is “the loss of a life of blessedness after death, future misery,” J. H. Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament). John, in the book of revelation, describes the anguished fate of those who experience the “wrath of God.” They are tormented forever and ever (Rev. 14:10-11).

### **Bible Descriptions of Eternal Punishment**

There are numerous figures of speech in the New Testament that are designed to stress both the conscious nature of hell’s punishment, and its abiding duration. The ultimate fate of the wicked will be like an “eternal fire” (Matt. 25:41); their “worm dies not (i.e., the gnawing anguish continues on and on) and the fire is not quenched” Mk. 9:48). Hell is a place or state of outer darkness where there is weeping and the gnashing of teeth (Matt. 25:30), as God treads the winepress of His holy wrath (Rev. 19:15). It should be obvious that these symbols intended to convey the horrors of eternal rectitude. The actual punishment will be greater than any figure of speech can portray.

Many have a difficult time reconciling the doctrine of eternal punishment with the character of a benevolent God. Over against this emotional reaction is the sobering testimony of the Bible. When all factors are taken into consideration, the problem is not insurmountable. Consider the following points: (1) No one will be in hell who does not deserve to be there. God is loving, good and merciful (1 John 4:8; Psa. 145:9; Eoh. 2:4). The Lord does not desire that a single soul should perish (2 Pet. 3:9), but when men choose to live alienated from Him, and cast their eternal welfare toward hell, God will honor their decision. (2) Because God is holy, He cannot simply overlook sin as if it does not exist (Hab. 1:13); and so, because the Lord is just (Psa. 89:14), evil must be punished (cf. Rev. 16:5). That is why the Father gave His Son as a sacrifice for sin—that He might remain just, and yet be a justifier of those who obey Christ (Rom. 3:24-26; Heb. 5:8-9). No man can complain about the injustice of hell in the face of the cross! (3) Even in hell the judgment will be fair. The Scriptures teach that punishment will be proportionate to the degree of one’s guilt (cf. Matt. 10:15; 11:20-24; Lk. 12:47-48; Heb. 10:29; Rev. 20:12-13). One will be judged according to his knowledge, ability, and opportunity. God will be equitable!

The doctrine of eternal punishment was taught by Jesus Christ (who said more about hell than He did about heaven). This subject was acknowledged by the early church, it was endorsed by the “church fathers,” and it was defended by the Reformation period. It wasn’t until the eighteenth century a new wave of “clergymen” within the ranks of “Christendom” began to deny this

fundamental tenet of the biblical doctrine. The Seventh-day Adventists are wrong about the punishment of the wicked. You have the choice of believing what men teach or what the Bible teaches. My prayer is that you will accept God's word.

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