

## Eternal Destruction (1)

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The subject of Hell has come under a lot of fire in recent decades, illustrated by the statistic that only 74 percent of professed Christians believe in Hell (Gallup Poll, AP, October 2005). That number may be lower now, since it has steadily declined over the last fifty years – interestingly almost 90 percent of all Americans polled do believe in God and Heaven. Even in the realm of “theologians” and supposed religious experts, the nature of Hell has been hotly debated. British philosopher, Bertrand Russell said in his essay *Why I Am Not A Christian* that one of the reasons he was not a Christian, was because the founder of Christianity, Jesus Christ, believed in Hell. As Wayne Jackson observed, “*When I first read that observation, my inclination was this: ‘Well, at least Russell understood what Jesus believed about that matter’ which is considerably more than can be said for many religionists today who profess an acquaintance with Christian doctrine*” (*Christian Courier Penpoints*, 3-6-2000).

### Is It Eternal Punishment?

Various scholarly attempts have been made to tame the idea of Hell, but there are just too many passages that teach the eternal, unquenchable nature of the punishment:

- Jesus describes Hell as a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12), which is hard to do while unconscious.
- The rich man in Luke 16:26 is eternally consigned to punishment without any reprieve or hope.
- Jesus describes the fire of Hell as unquenchable (Mark 9:43).
- In Hell, the worm does not die (Mark 9:44,46,48), which is symbolic of the everlasting experience of punishment.
- It is called “eternal punishment” (Matthew 25:46). In modern vernacular, if I was to punish a criminal to the point of death (physical annihilation), would I say I was continually punishing him ten years after the fact?
- The suffering is seen as conscious and never-ending in Revelation 20:10.
- In 2 Peter 2:9 the wicked are seen as currently and continually under punishment, not instantly destroyed.

In a scholarly sense, some have argued that the very term “eternal destruction” (2 Thessalonians 1:9, Matthew 10:28) means annihilation, but this is simply a skewed interpretation of the Greek words *apolesai* and *appollumi*. Both of these terms have been translated, in various contexts, as “perish”, “destroy”, “lost” or “lost”, but never as “go out of existence”, “extinction” or “annihilation”. If Bible translators had ever had any inclination to translate them as annihilation, it certainly is never observed in the product of their research (in any Bible translation). The two Greek words are used to describe things that get lost, damaged, or worn out (Luke 5:37 and the wineskins; A wandering sheep in Luke 15:4,6; the “lost” prodigal son of Luke 15:15,24; food that perishes in John 6:27; and the potential doom of the disciples in Matthew 8:25). Nowhere is the idea of “going out of existence completely” intended in any of these verses. Similarly, it is simply inaccurate to say that the phrase “eternal destruction” means annihilation.

Even when we encounter the idea of “second death” in the Bible, referring to Hell, we are not to squeeze annihilation into the concept. Try, for example, substituting the word ‘annihilation’ in place of ‘death’ in verses such as Revelation 20:10 or Revelation 20:14. Furthermore, when the term ‘death’ is applied to the afterlife, it is speaking of the spiritual death that we experience out of the presence of God. People who are spiritually dead continue to exist, but they are separate from the eternal life of God (Isaiah 59:1-2). The terms ‘life’ and ‘death’ are intended to convey a juxtaposition of the benefits of Heaven and the alarming despair of Hell.