

Universalism

- Just as there will be a final reward, there will also be a final judgment.
- There are three challenges that oppose this teaching of eternal, conscious punishment of the wicked: universalism, conditional immortality, and annihilationism.
- Universalism emphasizes the wideness of God's mercy (Rom 5:18; 1 Cor 15:22).
 - Rom 5:18 – So then, as through one trespass there is condemnation for everyone, so also through one righteous act there is justification leading to life for everyone.
 - This states all fallen human beings (for some, even demons), will ultimately enjoy eternal life.
 - Concerning human beings, it says all humans have been elected.
 - This will take place either immediately after death, or after a period of post-mortem punishment. Then they will be given a second opportunity to repent and will do so. The alleged Scriptural justification for this are the passages above.
 - Pinnock talks about the expanding mercy of God. These passages need to be read in context, and doing so undoes the universalist interpretation. This is an unbiblical position and has been historically condemned by the church.

Conditional Immortality

- The next challenge is conditional immortality.
 - 2 Thess 1:9 – They will pay the penalty of eternal destruction from the Lord's presence and from his glorious strength.
- Immortality belongs properly to God and God alone.
 - Immortality is a gift that God gives to those that trust in Jesus Christ.
 - Non-believers after their death will suffer for a time (pay penalty for sins), but because they do not possess immortality, they will simply cease to exist.
 - It believes in conscious punishment in Hell, but it is not eternal.



Annihilationism

- This is similar to conditional immortality.
- The eternal punishment is annihilation. It emphasizes the ultimate punishment of God is annihilation. God causes them to cease to exist.
 - Edward Fudge (Covenant seminary) is the best known annihilationist.
 - John Stott held to conditional immortality.
 - Both views are wrong, but it is possible for saved people to hold these views.
- These positions often appeal to our emotions.
 - They also try to find a biblical basis, but biblically they are wrong and they are breaking away from the historical position of the church.



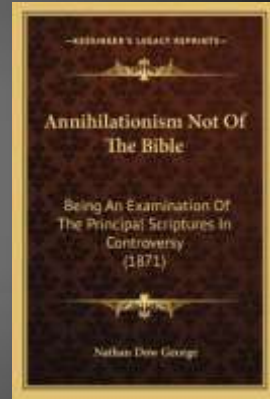
Annihilationism

- This position is often advocated from some sort of moral argument that claims everlasting torment is inconsistent with the loving nature of God.
 - This view is most often held by Arminian thinkers who view the traditional view as monstrous.
- In terms of passages, they appeal to texts that speak of the wicked being consumed in fire, which implies a temporary condition.
 - To answer the passages that speak of everlasting punishment, they attempt to create a definitional difference between that and everlasting torment.
 - If God annihilates the wicked, the condition of that annihilation is everlasting since they are permanently destroyed.
 - Thus, they can claim to believe in everlasting punishment. What they reject is everlasting torment.



Annihilationism

- Many of this camp also attack the immortality of soul holding to a form of monism instead.
- Their final argument is that God is supposed to make everything new with no evil anywhere in the new creation.
 - His creation would be flawed if at some place there were wicked beings still in existence.
- There are different forms of annihilation.
 - Some believe that when a sinner dies, they slip out of existence, and this is their annihilation. This view is called pure mortalism. Thus, the punishment is death itself.
 - Another view stresses that the wicked are resurrected, but then they are all annihilated by intense fire. This is called Annihilation Proper.
 - A subset under this view is the idea that some people will take longer to be annihilated than others due to the amount of their sin. For example, Hitler might take much longer to be consumed than the non-genocidal sinner.



Orthodox Views of Hell

- There are two orthodox views of Hell.
- The first is the literal view, meaning that the descriptions given of it by Jesus are to be taken literally.
 - Jesus spoke on Hell more than any other biblical figure. The majority of Christ's statements about Hell present it as everlasting torment in fire.
 - That combined with description of the final judgment in Revelation 20 makes a pretty compelling case.
 - The dead are cast into a lake of fire to be tormented day and night forever and ever.
 - It also fits the picture of Gehenna.
 - Rev 20:10 The Devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet are, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.
 - Mat 25:41 Then He will also say to those on the left, 'Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels!



Literal Hell

- One issue highly important to those who hold the literal view is that of hermeneutics.
- If a person holds to Scriptural inerrancy, then they usually hold to a literal view of Hell.
- The heaviest support today for an actual Hell of tormenting fire comes from Dispensationalists, which makes sense with their hermeneutics.
 - This is not to say that non-Dispensationalists do not hold a literal view of Hell, but the Dispensational hermeneutic requires it 100% of the time, whereas other positions do not.



Metaphorical View

- The second view is the metaphorical view, but do not let this title deceive you.
- They do not believe that Hell is metaphorical, but instead believe it to be a real place of everlasting torment.
 - It is the descriptions of Hell found in the Bible that are said to be metaphorical.
- The main argument for this is that the descriptions of Hell from Christ and other biblical figures are a form of rabbinic hyperbole, which are figurative exaggerations.
 - The idea here is that ancient people taught truth through figurative pictures, much like Jesus' parables.
- When it comes to fire, we see the Bible use it to describe lust, the tongue, and God.
- Also, some of the descriptions seem to be opposite.
 - It's fire, but then it is outer darkness.



Metaphorical View

- In the name of consistency, this view also sees descriptions of heaven as figurative.
 - The description in Revelation 21 speaks of a city that is like ancient cities with walls and gates. Therefore, they believe this makes the description figurative. If heaven is described figuratively, then so too should Hell be.
- As evidence that Hell is described figuratively, this camp emphasizes the conflicting images such as fire and darkness.
- As a result, the metaphorical view teaches that Hell is everlasting torment for the wicked, but is impossible for us to know exactly what it entails.
- This is not a new view since people like Luther, Calvin, and Hodge held to it. Many today hold to it as well, such as J.I. Packer.
 - Many who hold to this view today claim that the view of literal fire was an embarrassment for the church. That is an unfortunate reason to reject the literal view.



Conclusion

- Cosmic eschatology often captivates the interest of believers.
- It is encouraging to understand Christ will return in an imminent invasion of the world and bring the kingdom in its fullness.
 - The rapture, tribulation, resurrection and millennium relate to this.
- One way or another, all humans will be consigned either to heaven or hell. Christians should have no problem with degrees of hell since we all know there are degrees of reward in heaven.
 - Christ speaks of storing up treasure in heaven, and Paul speaks of the Bema Seat of judgment where we are rewarded for our faithful deeds done in Christ.
 - Likewise, Jesus spoke of degrees of hell where depending on the types of sin and the amount of sin, punishment may be more or less intense.
 - Either way, I will end this by a quote from the character Maximus Decimus Meridus from the blockbuster movie *Gladiator*, “What we do in life echoes in eternity.”

Concluding Systematic Theology

