

## **Chapter V: "Eschatological Apologetics"**

### **§26: "The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment"**

**by**

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There have been many attacks against Christianity on account of the doctrine of endless punishment.

The chief objections are not Biblical, but speculative, as the majority of the scholars find the tenet in the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. Even the learned English rationalistic critic Davidson admits that "if a specific sense be attached to words, never-ending misery is enunciated in the Bible." But the doctrine is rational and defensible on the basis of sound ethics. The cardinal points of Theism imply it: There is a just God; man has self-determination, and sin is a voluntary action. If man was necessitated to sin and there was no redemptive agency, endless punishment would be an impossibility. It is necessary to understand correctly what punishment means. Punishment is neither chastisement nor calamity. Calamity may include punishment, but not always. Chastisement may be felt as a punishment, but is inflicted to develop reformation. Punishment is retribution. It is the vindication of law and satisfaction of justice. Punishment is retrospective and not prospective. It concerns requital and not improvement.

The question then is, if God ever punishes. No one denies that He chastises. The Bible states clearly that He also punishes.

The endlessness of future punishment depends upon the endlessness of guilt and upon the indivisibility of guilt. But it is objected that endlessness of guilt or damnation does not imply eternal suffering. But we cannot illustrate from human judicial procedure, as God is perfect and exact. The only human punishment that approaches the divine is capital punishment, because it is not reformatory and it is endless, as it forever cuts off a man from earthly society.

The rationality of endless punishment appears from the following consideration.

a) The doctrine is supported by human conscience. A guilty conscience expects eternal punishment. The very knowledge that suffering would cease would at once relieve the apprehension of the sinner. Mankind believes in eternal punishment by reason of the moral sense. Retribution is grounded in the human conscience.

b) Endless punishment is rational, because sin is eternal and the wicked remain in the state of bondage of the sinful will.

Being in an intensified state of impenitence and increased rebellion, the conditions are such that there can be no change. Sin is an infinite evil, committed against the Infinite Being. Man cannot atone for sin by eternal sufferings, but the punishment is eternal on account of the eternal impenitence, as no new probation is possible.

c) The endless punishment is reasonable because the wicked in their state of rebellion would not feel at home among the righteous.

The sweet submission to God is repulsive to the lost. If their mind cannot be changed, heaven would be no heaven to them. If the laws of the moral world would have allowed it, the love of God had provided some means of escape. What is just is beyond all rational attack.

d) Christ, the Saviour and Redeemer, teaches this doctrine most emphatically. He, the absolute truth, would not have taught it if it had not been so.

e) The vicarious atoning death of our Saviour proves it. God would not have sent His Son to suffer death, if the punishment of sin had implied only a sentence of a shorter or longer period in hell. But as eternal punishments were the just consequence of sin and unbelief, He died for all, in order that all who believe in Him should be saved and escape eternal suffering. We do not need to discuss why not all are saved, when He died for all. His vicarious atonement was not a mathematical atonement, but equivalent to satisfy the justice of God, and the subjective condition of acceptance by faith is necessary as a matter of course. The rejection of the merits of Christ justly condemns the unbelieving sinner.

Other arguments could be brought forward, but these may suffice. This tenet of the Christian religion has been the object of the most bitter attack. It could not have maintained itself against all opposition, if it had not had a strong foothold in the human reason. As it is founded on ethics, in law, and taught by the author of Christianity, this tenet remains in the doctrinal code of Christianity.

But this doctrine does not invalidate the claim that Christianity is the best religion and the only true one. It rather proves the claim. If Christianity had been the invention of man, the impostors would have excluded such a tenet.

Chapter V, §26 from *Apologetics or a System of Christian Evidence* by Conrad Emil Lindberg (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Book Concern, 1917). **Note:** The text has not been modified except that long paragraphs have been divided.