

Infinite Punishment for Finite Sin

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The term finite expresses the opposite of the infinite. Finite is the time-bound one. The question is: How can God punish with eternal punishment people who have sinned for only a few years: ten, fifty or even a hundred? They have been sinning for, let's say, fifty years and now they have to suffer for all eternity. Is that fair? This is not only a question but an argument, although very weak.

Response to this argument is very simple. First, the penalty for violating any law is not measured by the time it took for the offense to be committed. For example, a murderer needs a second to kill a man, but he will spend years in prison. Imagine him telling a judge that a verdict is not fair. He needed a second to kill, and the judge sentenced him to fifteen years. Is this a valid objection? Of course not. The length of the sentence has nothing to do with the time it took to commit the crime.

Second, the seriousness of the offense or sin also depends on the importance of the person against whom the sin is committed. If one kills a neighbor, he or she can be sentenced to fifteen years. How much will get the one who kills the president or the king? Murder is murder, but the judicial system also takes into account who was killed, or to whom something was stolen, or who have we offended. Offending a waiter and offending a king is not the same. Jesus said, "Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit is guilty of an eternal sin." This does not mean that other sins do not have eternal consequences, but that there is a possibility of repentance and forgiveness, but there is no forgiveness for blasphemy on the Spirit. Is it the same to insult a man and insult God?

Third, this question seems to imply that people cease to sin after death. God eternally punishes people who have sinned for twenty years. And what are they doing in hell? Do they praise God there? No, they are sinning there as well. Let's take a look at some biblical texts that give us an idea of how people in hell behave.

Matt 13:41-42 ESV *The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, 42 and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

Jesus is talking about hell. He "believes" that hell exists. How could he not believe it when he created it? Jesus says there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. What does it mean? Let's find out.

Act 7:54 ESV *Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him.*

Psa 37:12 ESV *The wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes his teeth at him,*

Lam 2:16 ESV *All your enemies rail against you; they hiss, they gnash their teeth, they cry: "We have swallowed her! Ah, this is the day we longed for; now we have it; we see it!"*

From these and other texts that mention the gnashing of teeth, we can see that this is a sign of hatred and anger. So what does it mean when Jesus says that there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth in hell? It means that people will cry with pain and sorrow, but also with hatred and anger will gnash their teeth at God. Albert Barnes wrote:

The image expresses the fact that the wicked who are lost will be shut out from the light of heaven, and from peace, and joy, and hope; will weep in hopeless grief, and will gnash their teeth in indignation against God, and complain against his justice. (Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Bible*, s. v.

Matt 8:12)

If I have understood the meaning of gnashing of teeth correctly, then it is clear that people in hell continue to express hostility toward God to an even greater extent than they did on earth. There is an interesting text in Revelation:

Rev 16:9-11 ESV They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory. 10 The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish 11 and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.

This happens on earth, not in hell. But from the text we learn some interesting facts. God punishes people with heat, darkness, and torment. But what's going on? Do they repent and turn from their sins? No! They blaspheme God. In Hell it will be the same. God will punish with fire, darkness, and torment, and people will continue to blaspheme Him. Unrepentant sinners will remain unrepentant forever, and the wrath of God will remain on them forever. Thus, God is by no means unrighteous in assigning eternal torment to men for their sins.

(Bog ljubavi i vječni pakao, pp. 49-52.)

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