



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Luke 12:41-48

“Doctrine of Eternal Punishment, part II”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] We thank Thee for the word of God and for the privilege of pondering it. And as we do, Lord, we again are impressed with the greatness of the Scriptures, the depth with which spiritual issues are discussed and proclaimed. And we are grateful too for the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the new. And we're thankful that we are able so many hundreds of years after the writing of the last book of the word of God to be taught by the Holy Spirit having the assurance that that which we have in our hands is indeed the inspired word of God. And we thank Thee for the teacher who teaches us. And we thank Thee for the human instrumentalities that have been useful to us and helpful to us as the years have gone by. But we especially give Thee thanks for the great teacher, the Holy Spirit, who opens our minds to see the Scriptures in their true light and then by the grace of God gives us the enablement to in measure at least fulfill them. May our study tonight help us to understand many of the difficult portions of the word of God. We pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Last week we began a brief series of messages on eternal punishment. And this is the second in the series. And if you were here last week we followed the first part of the outline that is above here on the overhead. We discussed the troublesome

nature of the question of eternal punishment. We made reference to two principal theories that have been advanced in opposition to the church doctrine, universalism, or that everyone is ultimately to be saved, and then conditional immortality which is really a form of annihilationism. That is, that ultimately those that are lost will be destroyed.

Now, we didn't say too much about that, but nevertheless this is one of the important aberrations from orthodox doctrine. I did not say anything about the ways by which we may object to the doctrine of eternal punishment if we're not Christians, for example, reincarnation. Reincarnation is a doctrine which in effect is a denial of eternal punishment in its own way. But we're not discussing that because that hardly can be called a scriptural doctrine at all in the sense that usually people who hold to a doctrine like that don't claim to be Christians.

I always think of the story of two individuals who were getting on in years and they were professing Christians. And they made a little pact between themselves that after the first one of them should die that they would arrange to have a meeting, a kind of a séance in which they would try to make contact with each other. Very much I guess like Harry Houdini has tried to do now for about fifty years and has been unsuccessful in doing it. But anyway, John died first and so Elizabeth made arrangements to have contact with him. They had agreed that they would do it exactly one year after John had died. And so, the time came and she prepared everything nicely. She pulled down the shades in a room that was dark. She brought in some candles. She also brought in some other things that she thought might enable her to make contact with him. And so when the moment came she said, very still, very quiet, “John.” There was no answer. And then she said again, “John.” And then surprisingly, “Yes, Elizabeth?” “John, how are you?” “Well, I'm wonderful, Elizabeth.” “Well, how is your situation?” Well, he said, “I'm in the most beautiful place you've ever seen.” He said, “As I look out, I see magnificent snowcapped mountain peaks. I see beautiful green grass, just luscious, luscious grass. I see a little stream, cool water flowing down through this particular place.” And she said, “Oh, John,

heaven must be wonderful.” “Heaven, Elizabeth. I’m not in heaven. I’m an angus bull on a hill in Montana.” [Laughter] Dennis didn’t get it, so I have to tell it again. He’s shaking his head. He doesn’t understand. [Laughter]

Now, we, as I say, will not be saying anything further about reincarnation. And I know you’re happy about that. At the conclusion of the last hour, I made reference to the fact that William G.T. Shedd, one of the finest of the Christian theologians, has some very strong words to say about eternal punishment and the denial of it in various forms. I read these words for you. I’m going to read them again because I think they’re very important. He said, “The dogmatic bearings of Universalism are not to be overlooked. The rejection of the doctrine of Endless Punishment cuts the ground from under the gospel. Salvation supposes a prior damnation. He who denies that he deserves eternal death cannot be saved from it so long as he persists in his denial. If his denial is the truth, he needs no salvation. If his denial is an error, the error prevents penitence for sin, and this prevents pardon. No error, consequently, is more fatal than that of Universalism. It blots out the attribute of retributive justice; transmutes sin into misfortune, instead of guilt; turns all suffering into chastisement; converts the (peculiar or substitutionary) sacrificial work of Christ into moral influence and makes it a debt due to man, instead of an unmerited boon from God. No tenet is more radical and revolutionizing, in its influence upon the Christian system. The attempt to retain the evangelical theology in connection with it is futile.”

Well, I think that is true. That if we try to hold Christianity and the same time hold universalism, we really do not have a gospel. And universalism is one of the ways by which eternal punishment is denied. Well, we looked at the history of the doctrine. We just simply pointed out that, so far as we can tell, it was the view of the ancient church. The early decenters included some men like Origen who lived in the 3rd century. But he was a relatively rare instance of it. And then since the reformation there have been some well known opponents of eternal punishment: Schleiermacher, one of the

most famous of the German theologians, and then Müller, also a German theologian, and Emil Brunner, a Swiss 20th century neo-orthodox theologian. They have, in one form or another, denied eternal punishment.

Professor Brunner has had a great influence on theology in the United States. In that, in our theological schools, many of our schools, many of our schools that you might think would be relatively sound are influenced by the doctrine of universalism. And as a result, well, the preaching of the gospel for individuals in that kind of situation is not the preaching of the sin of man, the substitutionary and saving work of Christ, and the appeal to faith in him, but the preaching of the gospel is simply the announcement that God has received everyone and that the only thing that we need is knowledge of the fact that we already have been received by God. So, you can see that there is no earnestness, no zeal in the proclamation of the gospel, no sense of the lost condition of men, no sense of the fact that they may slip off into an eternity of separation from God at any moment and consequently the preaching of the gospel suffers from it.

Now, tonight I'd like to take a look at some of the contemporary errors and deal just a little bit in more detail with conditional immortality since this is a view that is held not simply by individuals who are unsound, but by some who are in many points sound in the faith, but nevertheless have question about the eternal conscious punishment of the lost.

Now, our outline is Roman II, contemporary errors and Capital A, materialistic error. This type of thought about which I will say nothing more than this, is simply the view that all men inevitably cease to exist at death. That is, that when an individual dies he just does not exist anymore. After all, all he is is just flesh and blood and when he dies what remains is put in the grave. There is no continuation of life after death at all.

Now, of course, almost all students of biblical literature reject out of hand this because it's so obvious that it is contrary to the biblical teaching. But, Capital B, universalism.

Now, we've already introduced this subject. But the teaching of universalism is very simple. All fallen beings, not even excluding the devil and his angels, have been chosen by God to enjoy eternal life in communion with God. Universally, men are elected and shall be saved. I mentioned Origen a few moments ago. Origen, the Alexandrian church father, was the first to openly teach it. He spoke of it as restitution or restoration. And he sought to ground it in Scripture. After all, if you're going to propound an error, the best way to find acceptance for it is to put it in the words of the Scriptures. Because the closer you can make your error to the truth, the more difficult it is for individuals to perceive that it is erroneous. That is why when we preach the gospel it is so important that we compare everything that is said with the word of God. And it's also the reason why so much can be deceptive. Because you can make things very, very close to Scripture, but then omit a vital part. And you will deceive even those who have some knowledge of Scripture.

Now, in Acts chapter 3 and verse 21 when Peter is preaching after the healing of the lame man, I'm sure you remember that in preaching in the city of Jerusalem he told them that if the nation responded to the message and turned to the Lord even after the death and resurrection of our Lord and even after the coming of the Holy Spirit, even after in a sense this age is on its way from the day of Pentecost on, there was opportunity for Israel to reverse things by faith in the risen Christ. And in verse 17 of chapter 3, Peter says,

“And now, brethren, I know that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the

heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”

Now, later on Peter will make this plain in this message that what he’s talking about is the fulfillment of the messianic promises given to Abraham. For example, he says in the 25th verse speaking to the nation,

“Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in Thee shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.”

And so, Peter preaches the gospel to the nation Israel and its leaders gathered still in the city of Jerusalem and offers them salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ and promises that the times of the restitution of all things spoken out by the prophets shall be fulfilled if they, as the nation, turn to him.

Now, the expression in verse 21, “The times of the restitution of all things,” has been taken by some to be a reference to universal salvation. Every thing is going to be restored to the place that it should have before the Lord God. One of the German theologians, a man by the name of Oetinger, uttered a statement which became something of a proverb among Universalists. He said, “Corporeity (or that having to do with the body), corporeity is the end of the ways of God.” Everything ultimately is related to life in the body. And so universalism is the salvation of all, the restoration of all, all shall have ultimately salvation in a way that will please God. The rational basis of universalism has always been the love of God.

Now, one might ask the question, of course, “Is love a sufficient summary of God’s nature?” We don’t deny that the Bible says that God is love. But in Believers

Chapel, at least, we have many, many people who are teaching here that God is not only love. That he is also just and righteous. And he is holy. But lying back of universalism is the idea that God is so loving that he would not commit anyone to eternal punishment. So, lying back of it is really a rational idea built upon certain biblical concepts, but at the expense of other biblical concepts.

As a matter of fact, one might ask a question “Is there here a slur on the character of our Lord? After all, who is the person who has spoken more of hell and hellfire than anyone else?” Well, it’s clearly the Lord Jesus Christ out of – I think I’ll, in the next message or so, will deal with this, but so my figures may not be quite accurate. I’m doing it out of my memory. I think thirteen times Gehenna or hellfire is mentioned in the New Testament and twelve of those occurrences are from the mouth of our Lord. So, if we are to say that the love of God is such that we cannot think of the fires of hell as really expressive of the character of God, it’s not simply a slur on preachers who preach hellfire and damnation. It’s a slur directed to Jesus Christ himself because he is the one who is responsible for this teaching if any biblical character is responsible for it. Was Jesus Christ only bluffing? Did he say these things about hell and hellfire in order to scare us into heaven only?

Now, there’s nothing wrong with being scared into heaven. In fact, any way that we can get into right relationship with God is useful. Jude speaks about that as a legitimate motive. Some people think it’s not a legitimate motive. It’s a legitimate biblical motive for men because of fear to turn to the Lord. But if it’s not a reality and if our Lord does know all things and he knew that then he was only bluffing when he talked about eternal punishment or maybe I should put it in a question. Was he only bluffing?

The biblical basis of universalism is very meager. It consists largely of those passages that are referred to last Tuesday night, Romans chapter 5 and verse 18 where the apostle, in the great chapter in which he compares the work of Adam with the work of Christ, speaks of what Adam has done for the race and what Christ has done for his

people. And in chapter 5, verse 18 – by the way, sometime I want to give a message or two on the subject of why it was gracious of God to deal with us representatively. There are people who think that it’s not fair that what Adam did should affect us, little realizing, of course, that the way we share in the blessings of life is because of what Christ has done for us. And I want to devote some time one of these Tuesday nights probably to raise the question, “How could God have dealt with men?” And I’d like to show you, I think it can be shown very plainly, that the most gracious way to deal with us is to deal with us through representative individuals.

At any rate, Paul is talking about Adam, the first, and Adam, the last. And in verse 18 he says, “Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.” A Universalist might say, “Don’t you see? Do we not have a hermeneutical rule that if you have a word in one part of a sentence and it’s used again in the latter part of the sentence that you should give them the precisely same significance?” “Therefore, as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation. Are not all fallen men in Adam?” And all of us who are orthodox must answer “Yes, that’s right.” “Even so by the righteousness of one (of course, the reference is to Christ) the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.” So, if all men refers to all who have fallen in Adam and all without exception have fallen in Adam, then are we not forced to say that all men have received a free gift from Christ to justification of life?

Now, of course, if you’re not a student of hermeneutics, you’re not a student of the Bible. You might be fooled by that. You might even say, “Well, I don’t know how to answer that. That’s not a bad thing to say, incidentally.” You shouldn’t necessarily give up your orthodox faith because someone has posed a problem you cannot at the moment answer. But if you just look at the preceding verse he says, “For if by one man's offence death reigned by one (that’s Adam); much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.” So, in the

preceding verse it is stated that in order for the justification of life to come to all men there must be a reception of it. And, of course, in other places in the Epistle to the Romans over and over again Paul makes it plain that the reception of it is through faith, a faith given by God, but nevertheless through the instrumentality of faith.

Another text that is often used by Universalists who like to appeal to the Bible – by the way, very few Universalists like to appeal to the Bible. The Bible is so much against them they don't want to raise the question of the Bible. But occasionally, if a person's not very knowledgeable in Scripture they would like to snow him with one of these verses if they know them. You don't have to worry too much about it because I've yet to run across a Universalist who had much of a knowledge of the Bible. But 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and verse 22 says much the same thing as Romans 5. In fact, it is a parallel passage. And here Paul says, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”

Now, that reference to “made alive” is a reference to quickening. Some have said, “It means simply to be resurrected and what Paul is teaching is universal resurrection. That's a biblical doctrine.” That is, all the lost and all the saved shall be resurrected. One resurrected to damnation, the other to eternal life. So, when Paul says, “For as in Adam all die,” the “all,” that refers to everybody, does it not? “Even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” One might say, “As in Adam, everybody dies, so also in Christ everyone shall be resurrected.” That is, all people are going to enjoy – I don't know whether you'd call that enjoy for the lost – but experience resurrection. That would be a truth. It just so happens that this term “made alive” is not ever used of resurrection. It's rather used of regeneration. It's used of entrance into spiritual life. So, that raises the question then “As in Adam, all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive,” shall receive spiritual life. Well, does not that teach universalism? Everybody in Adam dies, everybody in Christ and all in one clause must equal the all in the other clause must it not? All shall have spiritual life. But again, if you're not a careful student of the Bible, you might be led to believe

that must be what Paul is saying. Of course, you can retreat and say, “Well, Paul’s usually right. That time, he was a little confused.” But that does not work very well if you believe in the inspiration of the Scriptures.

But so you must pay a little more attention to verse 22, “For as in Adam all die. Notice, it’s in Adam, everybody dies. But it’s in Christ that all are made alive. Those who are in Adam die; those who are in Christ are brought to the possession and experience of spiritual life. But while everybody is in Adam, not everybody is in Christ. Only the people of God are in Christ. Christ offers his atoning work for his people. That’s why he’s called Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins. So, again, universalism really doesn’t work, does it?

Now, over in 1 Peter chapter 3 – I didn’t refer to this last week because I want to give you something new every week – 1 Peter chapter 3, verse 18 through verse 20 we have another text that has sometimes been used by universalists to suggest that everybody is going to be saved.

“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.”

So, here it is thought that what Peter is saying is that Jesus Christ suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. He was put to death in the flesh; he was quickened in the spirit. And by the spirit he went and preached to the spirits in prison. And he preached to them the gospel giving them a further chance to respond to the gospel after they had died physically. And after all, if you should die lost and you should have a second chance, would not everybody respond? And so, this text has sometimes

been used in order to support universalism. It fails to recognize that the term “spirits” is usually a reference to angelic beings. And, furthermore, it fails to recognize that when it says here that “he went and preached to the spirits in prison,” the reference is in the word preached, not to preaching the gospel, the Greek word *euangelizomai*, but it is the word that means to make a proclamation. It wasn't the preaching of the gospel at all. It was a proclamation of the victory of the cross, most likely. And so, there is no reason for hope that the spirits in prison, the angelic beings, probably a reference to Genesis 6 and the things that happened there. What our Lord did was to come and give a proclamation of the victory of the cross which sealed the doom of those who had not believed in him. Further, even if this were a reference to preaching the gospel and even if it were in the word spirit a reference to people, you'll notice it's just some people anyway. And it wouldn't teach universalism under any circumstances. But if you're not careful about what the Bible says word by word, phrase by phrase, clause by clause, well then, of course, you can make people believe things that are not really true at all. And if you're not careful, you can be misled by individuals who do that. That's why I would like for others to say, “Those people over at Believers Chapel, they are Bereans because they search the Scriptures to see whether these things are so.” It'd be nice if you could do this just for fun. Slip in something that's a little wrong and see if anyone would catch it. But I don't feel very free to do that. And so, I can't satisfy my curiosity.

Now, let's come to conditional immortality. Another doctrine different from universalism, but one that alleviates endless conscious punishment is conditional immortality. It's a form of annihilationism. Annihilation is a term that comes from the Latin noun nihil. We get philosophical terms like nihilism. Nihil in Latin means nothing. So, annihilationism means that an individual is consigned to nothing; he is destroyed brought to nothing. And so, annihilationism is related to conditional immortality. But conditional immortality is more moral than simple annihilation. Some people believe, and usually these are cultic Christian groups, that when a person dies, if he's not a believer in

Christ, he's annihilated at that moment. That's characteristic of some of the cults that you know about. Conditional immortality is not quite the same. Conditional immortality does not teach that a person is annihilated immediately after he dies, but is rather only annihilated at the last judgement which will occur at the end of time.

Now, it is more moral than universalism. And, of course, it's better than annihilationism per se because it insists that there should be some punishment for those who are lost, for the unbelievers, but that ultimately at the last judgement they will be destroyed and come to nothing. So, you can see that a person who is a believer in conditional immortality and a number of really professing Christians of some significance have held to this view. What it really teaches is that there is no such thing as endless conscious punishment of the finally impenitent, punishment, endless punishment, but not endless conscious punishment of the finally impenitent.

Now, you can see it's an alleviating doctrine because it in effect will ask also is it like God. Will he get pleasure out of causing an individual to suffer for all of the ages of eternity endlessly because of his sin? Is it not a much better doctrine to teach that he will have to suffer and the suffering will be related to his sin? But that ultimately at the final judgement after he has suffered in measure to his sin, he will be annihilated made extinct, exist no longer. So, conditional immortality. The issue then between conditional immortality and Christian doctrine as it has been held down through the centuries is, is it eternal conscious punishment of the finally impenitent or is it eternal extinction of the finally impenitent. That's the issue.

Conditional immortality teaches several things. It teaches first of all that man is not inherently immortal. That he becomes so by faith in Christ. That it's a gift of God. In other words, it's not something that we have because we are men and women. It doesn't pertain to human nature as an inherent part of human nature that we exist forever. But immortality is something that is conveyed as a gift to those who have believed in Christ.

It also teaches that unbelievers will bear just punishment after death, as I've mentioned. And then that thirdly after that they will be annihilated.

The rational basis for the view is heavily dependent upon the same conception of the love of God, as is found in annihilation at death and universalism. Recent writers have sought to ground its support in exegesis, however. And there have been, down through the years, some who have sought to show that the Scriptures teach this. Well, of course, we give them praise for trying to find in Scripture their doctrine. That's what they ought to do. And if they can find it there, then of course it would be nice if we then respond and believe it ourselves. There have been, in recent years, some who have sought to show that conditional immortality is the teaching of the word of God.

Now, generally speaking until recently there's been no detailed attempt. There is a fairly detailed attempt in Edward Fudge's book called *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of Final Punishment*. This is quite an extensive work by a Christian man. In fact, he's a Texan. And the book is five hundred pages long. It's a treatment of a number of the texts that have been thought to teach eternal punishment. And some people who have read Mr. Fudge's book are very much persuaded by it.

F.F. Bruce, a well known evangelical scholar, has a forward to the book. But then professor Bruce, after acknowledging it's a very worthy work, says that he doesn't really accept the teaching that Mr. Fudge have given. On the other hand, Clark Pinnock, a well known evangelical professor of systematic theology, used to be at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, was my predecessor some time a few years back at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, now is teaching in Canada, he is a Canadian, very highly respected evangelical. He says he doesn't know of any answer to this book. In other words, one would get the impression he's embracing conditional immortality. Professor Pinnock has embraced a number of other things that would cause some scholars not to be surprised at his embracing this. But, nevertheless, it's rather striking that he has.

Now, the evidence contrary to conditional immortality is rather significant. And I'd like for the remainder of our few moments to say just a few words about it. In the first place, the Jews did not accept conditional immortality. And if you read the New Testament, you, of course, would have to acknowledge that Jesus Christ made no effort to distinguish his view from theirs. In other words, it's a well known fact that the Jews believed in eternal conscious punishment of the finally impenitent. And the Lord Jesus who speaks so much about hell did not say anything to indicate that he did not accept their views.

Charles Hodge says that in the light of this fact that is an almost invincible presumption that the Bible teaches the eternal conscious punishment of the finally impenitent because it's hard to see how if our Lord's views were different from the Jewish views that he would not say something about so important a thing. In addition, all Christian churches as churches down through the centuries have taught the eternal conscious punishment of the finally impenitent. It's not a doctrine of just a few people; it's a doctrine of the whole Christian church. It's a doctrine of John Wesley and it's a doctrine of John Calvin. And obviously, if you can get Calvin and Wesley together you have a pretty good idea that this is a rather widespread view and generally held by Christians.

Another thing, if the eternal conscious punishment of the lost is not the biblical teaching and is worthy of the earnest denunciation that Restorationists give it, then the fact that our Lord and the apostles did not clearly denounce such teaching ought to convince them of the truth of it. They're so anxious to denounce eternal conscious punishment. If it is so wrong how can it possibly be that Jesus and the apostles did not show some of the same zeal that they're showing in denouncing the orthodox doctrine. That in itself ought to make them think, “Well, we're denouncing it. If the apostles didn't denounce it and if the Lord didn't denounce it, it may be true.”

Another thing, the extinction of consciousness is not of the nature of punishment. The essence of punishment is suffering. And suffering belongs to consciousness. If we say that an individual is to suffer punishment, there is no suffering of punishment if he's not conscious. Consciousness belongs to suffering. And if the eternal punishment of individuals is something of which they do not know anything, have no concept of it happening, do not experience it, how can it be called eternal punishment? But the Bible calls it eternal punishment.

Another thing, according to this theory, animals are punished too because they die and they incur an everlasting loss. They lose whatever existence they had. True, not the full existence that human beings have, but they have some existence, don't they? That is, all animals but cats. [Laughter] Did you read in this morning's paper about cats? Oh, I recommend that you read that. Men don't love cats. That was the title of the article. Mike Royko, wonderful article, very true. Men don't like cats. They don't eat quiche, they don't like cats. That goes together. [Laughter] That's sub-apostolic teaching.

At any rate, animals do have a form of existence, even cats. But if, for example, when a person or thing dies you cannot speak of the animal suffering afterwards if the substance of punishment is in the result. That is, the individual loses his existence and eternal punishment is the loss of his existence, then cats and dogs and all the animals are punished too. But yet, that would be a strange doctrine to hold, wouldn't it? So, if the substance of punishment is in the result, not in its being felt or experienced, then the brute is punished too. But for what reason? What are dogs and cats and animals punished for? Well, one cannot hardly answer that.

Another thing, in answer to pure annihilationism it might be pointed out that the extinction of being admits of no degrees of punishment. If a person is ultimately to be extinguished and to become extinct, how can you then have degrees of punishment? Well, an individual might reply to this. He might say, “Well, he can have degrees of punishment until he is extinguished. But, finally, everybody is extinguished and there is

no difference. Throughout all of the ages of eternity, all are extinct. So, the words that our Lord uses have to be adjusted to that.” In other words, the punishment is temporal. Listen to what our Lord says as he tells the parable of “the faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season.” This is Luke 12:43. Our Lord says,

“Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath. But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.”

Now, of course, if a person believes in simple annihilation, that would be hard to square with it because no distinction could be made. But even in conditional immortality there is no indication of how much punishment and so it does raise a bit of question.

Another thing, the spiritually dead are described in Scripture as conscious. Did not, for example, God say in the Garden of Eden, “Adam and Eve and the day you eat of the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden in that day you will surely die.” Well, they ate. And they died. They died spiritually. So, they were dead spiritually, but they were conscious. So, the spiritually dead are described in Scripture as conscious.

Now, spiritual death and eternal death are the same thing. Eternal death is simply spiritual death prolonged into eternity. And so, if consciousness characterizes spiritual

death now, why should it not characterize spiritual death after we die? In other words, in eternal death, we have spiritual death simply prolonged. All sentimental arguments about a father not punishing his children forever measure God by human sinful men’s thoughts. He is not measured by us. Scripture reveals what we know about him.

Let me close this section of our study with some comments by the great southern Presbyterian theologian, Robert L. Dabney. This is what he says, “Nor does the quibble avail, that the phrase, 'everlasting destruction,' or such-like, implies annihilation. If this consisted in reducing the sinner forever to nothing, it would be instant destruction, not everlasting destruction. How can punishment continue, when the subject of it has ceased to exist?” And so if we speak of eternal punishment, we necessarily have the continued existence of the one who suffers it. We cannot speak of eternal punishment when the subject of it has ceased to exist.

Well, next Tuesday night, the Lord willing, we will pick this up and continue from this point. Let’s close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the teaching of the word of God. And as we think about it, Lord, may it very solemn in realizing that the judgment that falls upon failure to respond to the gospel is an eternal judgment. On any terms, the judgment is called eternal. The punishment is called eternal. The death is called eternal. How important it is that by Thy grace we come to know the triune God through Jesus Christ. We worship Thy name. Lord, deliver us and at the same time give us the earnestness and the zeal to proclaim the message concerning...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]