



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 25:31-46

“Doctrine of Eternal Punishment, part III”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the word of God. And not only for the sections that remind us of the goodness of God to us, but also for those sections which solemnly warn us of failure to respond to the divine revelation. We thank Thee for the promises of divine grace and the promises of mercy and the promises of enablement. We pray, oh God, that Thou wilt implant within our hearts the desire to please Thee and the desire to lean upon Thee, both for time and for eternity. We're grateful for the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ who has made it all possible. And we give Thee thanks for him for the presence of the Holy Spirit who takes of the things of Christ and shows them to us. And we ask, Lord, that as we study tonight and conclude our discussion of eternal punishment that it may have a solemnizing effect upon us and cause us to be more zealous in the proclamation of the gospel of Christ. And, Lord, help us to be fruitful as we seek to encourage and also to warn of judgment to come. We pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Well, the outline that we have been following is here to my right and on the overhead. We begin by discussing as just a word of introduction some of the modern attitudes toward the doctrine of eternal punishment. We all know, of course, that

it is an unpopular subject. People do not like to think, in our day particularly, of the fact that there may be such a thing as endless punishment of the lost.

In the opening study we made mention of two particular theories, the theory of universalism, namely that everybody would ultimately be saved, and the theory of conditional immortality, the teaching that immortality is only for believers and that the wicked are subject ultimately to annihilation after they have endured some measure of punishment conceived by them to be a just punishment, but of course, denied as being just by those who believe in the doctrine of endless punishment. There are some other theories, of course, that we might have spoken about. But we've tried to confine our comments to what things that arise out of the Christian faith. And so we've not discussed other theories that other religions have concerning life after death.

In our second study, after we had looked at the history of the doctrine a bit, pointing out that the ancient church believed in the doctrine of endless punishment, that there were some early decenterers such as Origen and Clement and some of the Gregory's. But these were exceptions to the general belief of the early church and that is can be said without fear of contradiction that the early church believed in the endless conscious punishment of the finally impenitent. And so, it is not a new doctrine, not a modern doctrine, but has really been the doctrine held by the main body of the church down through the years.

We discussed also the fact that since the time of the Reformation there have been some studied attempts to avoid and do away with even the doctrine of eternal punishment, and particularly the doctrine of the endless torment, endless conscious punishment.

Schleiermacher, who was the source of a lot of error in theology, a well known influential German theologian, was one of the men. Müller, also a German theologian, had questionable views concerning this, although in other points he was a standard Lutheran and believed many of the orthodox doctrines. In the 20th century, Emil

Brunner, the well known Swiss neo-orthodox theologian from the University of Zurich, had questionable views on the doctrine of eternal punishment at times seeming to teach universalism, but at the same time insisting that there would be some form of judgement. In other words, his views were not absolutely plain and clear. I think I mentioned Professor Karl Barth of the University of Basel is another one who talked confusing things on the subject of universalism and eternal punishment. I heard Professor Barth personally say an answer to a question from a theological student “I do not believe in universalism, but I know that my theology tends to that.” And the reason that he said he knew that it tended to that was the simple reason that he believed that everybody was ultimately elect, or everybody was elect. And arising out of the neo-orthodox movement was the view that when we preach the gospel we do not preach the Lord Jesus Christ and call upon men to believe in him and if they do not believe in him they will be lost forever. But rather we preach the gospel of what Jesus Christ has done in order to make known to them the fact that they have been elected and that they will be saved so that the preaching of the gospel is not an appeal to men to respond for life or for death, but really to preach the gospel is simply to cause men to know that they are elect and will ultimately be saved. That kind of teaching has permeated our theological seminaries and the theological seminaries of mainline denominations.

My guess, and this is speculation because I've not made any scientific study of this, but I think that if you went into the major Methodist seminaries and the major Presbyterian seminaries and the major seminaries of Protestantism, you would find that the vast majority of the professors teaching in them believe in the doctrine of universalism. That is, that ultimately because of the love of God everyone is going to find his way into the presence of God. There are, of course, exceptions to this. And there are some seminaries in which there are exceptions to this. But, nevertheless, the vast majority of men in our western world in the Protestant side of the Christian church are largely Universalist in their teaching.

Now, we, in our last study, paid particular attention to materialistic theory just saying a word about that, spending more time on universalism and finally concluding with not a lengthy study, but at least a bit of stress upon the doctrine of conditional immortality. And I had tried to point out that conditional immortality talked first that man was not inherently immortal, but that he becomes so when he believes in Jesus Christ, that unbelievers will bear a just punishment for their failure to respond to the gospel, but will ultimately be annihilated when that just judgement has reached its conclusion.

Of course, an orthodox man cannot say that the just judgement will ever reach a conclusion, but that, of course, is the assumption of conditional immortality men. And after that then they will be annihilated. And so, conditional immortality teaches the eternal extinction of unbelievers, whereas the Christian church has historically taught the endless or eternal conscious punishment of the finally impenitent.

So, the question between the orthodox doctrine and conditional immortality is the question of the consciousness of the believer in experiencing eternal punishment. Both believe in eternal punishment. If you were to speak to a conditional immortality believer and you were to say to him, “Do you believe in eternal punishment?” He would say, “Yes, I believe in eternal punishment.” But if he were honest with you, he would then say, “But not in the way in which the Christian church has historically believed it. I do not believe in the eternal conscious punishment of the finally impenitent, but rather that they will ultimately be annihilated.”

I gave you a series of objections to this theory, some, of course, stronger than others. And I concluded with some words by Robert L. Dabney, one of the leading Presbyterian theologians, an orthodox man of the last century, who said that there is, of course, in his mind, a weakness in this doctrine that may be expressed something like this. That when we talk about the eternal destruction of the finally impenitent, if that eternal destruction is annihilation, then we should not speak about the eternal destruction of the finally impenitent, but we should speak about the instant destruction of the finally

impenitent because they are extinguished in an instant. And also, Professor Dabney pointed out, and I think this is a rather significant comment, “How can punishment continue when the subject of it has ceased to exist?”

And there are other reasons, of course, why one might not believe it. William G.T. Shedd used to say that suffering is actually of the essence of punishment. And if there is no suffering as annihilation suggests, then how can it be punishment? Well, the debate, of course, continues. It probably will continue until our Lord comes. As you probably guess, Christian church is not believed in conditional immortality.

Conditionalism has been something that a few people have believed in down through the years, but it's been an unacceptable theory to the vast majority of the orthodox Christian church. I don't think we can speak quite as harshly about it as could be spoken about certain other theories. I'm not sure I would say in the immortal words of Peter Sellers playing Inspector Wang, “An interesting theory is your theory sir. Only one thing wrong with your theory is stupid.” [Laughter] Well, we probably wouldn't honestly say that about conditional immortality. But, nevertheless, it has not been the Christian faith and I think it's wise for us to put it aside as one of the many attempts to avoid the teaching of the word of God concerning eternal punishment. That's not a very pleasant subject. And anybody who can reasonably tamper the doctrine of eternal punishment will gain some followers because it's natural for human beings, remembering that their minds are touched by sin, they do not think clearly concerning spiritual things to want to avoid what seems an extremely harsh doctrine, eternal conscious punishment.

How can a loving God do that? That has a great appeal to a lot of very sentimental minded people. And probably always will. But, nevertheless, if it's the teaching of the word of God we are responsible as the servants of the Lord to make it known and to preach it. And preach it with the proper attitude, of course. There're many illustrations of preachers who have insisted that if we're going to preach this doctrine, we ought to preach it with kindness and understanding and concern and even with tears.

And surely, that's the right way in which a person should preach it. And we should preach it with the greatest of concern for those with whom we come in contact. But we should not avoid preaching it. If this is the teaching of the word of God, we must preach it. And we should not neglect to warn our relatives and our friends and the people with whom we come in contact that the issue of Jesus Christ and his saving work is an eternal issue, very, very important, nothing more important in all of life than that.

Now, tonight we want to just take up the last part of our study. And I hesitate to say proof -- perhaps we should say the reasons why we believe, or why I believe, in eternal punishment. And so, I'll look at it as evidences for the doctrine. To my mind, they are proof. But for others, perhaps you don't even need this much. All you need is a clear statement from the word of God. That would be enough for me were it not for the fact that many of the statements are disputed. I mention that men usually object by reasoning about a father and his child. Or as Ingersoll did, about a God who was guilty of great judgement. Robert Ingersoll, the famous unbeliever who went around the country lecturing against the Christian faith usually would begin when he was speaking about the doctrine of eternal punishment by saying something like this. “Now, we're going to take a look at the God of the Bible. And what kind of a God is he? Why, he's a God who drowned the whole world.” And that's the way he would open up his discussion, “A God who drowned the whole world in the flood.” Well, of course, if you were speaking to people who didn't have much knowledge of the Bible, you pretty well have won your case by a comment like that.

There are people who, of course, would look at it differently. They might, like Ingersoll say, “Let's just imagine that you were living in the day of Noah. And you saw Noah constructing this great big ark. And you went down where Noah was building this and you said, ‘Noah, why are you building this?’” And he would say, “Well, there's going to be a flood.” “You mean there's going to be a flood from heaven above? (So far as we know from Genesis, they had many kind of rain like this). You mean the waters from

above and the waters from below are going to rise up and everybody is going to be drowned?” And Noah would say, “Yes, everybody going to be drowned except those who are in this ark.” “Why, Noah, don’t you know that God is a God of love? Don’t you know that he has created us, he’s provided for us all of these wonderful things? Don’t you know that a God of love would not do anything like that? What kind of concept of God do you have? Your God is surely not the kind of God we have. He’s a vindictive persecutor of his own creatures.” And then I can imagine there are some sidewalk theologians who would give Noah a lecture or two on the nature of divine judgement as it must ultimately be, knowing what they thought they knew about God. But, of course, in the final analysis they were all swept away by the fact of the flood.

Now, when we turn to the Bible there are several kinds of reasons that we might look at. I call these natural reasons because they’re reasons that one might find in nature itself and that’s the sense in which I’ve used the adjective natural. We could say reasons from the creation or from nature. And then reasons from man’s reason, logical reasons. All of these, of course, may have some biblical tone to them. And then finally at the end, we’ll just look at a few verses from the Scriptures themselves.

But now, natural reasons, let’s take a ride down a few avenues of thought that might occur to us, first of all, the testimony of the physical universe. If you look at the universe around you, it’s probably, if you look at it honestly, it’s crowded full of jagged points of orthodox theology. The Apostle Paul says, as he discusses the doctrine of election and the fact that God has passed by some and he’s elected others, he says, “Behold the goodness and the severity of God.” One can look at nature itself and see evidences of this.

We all probably in this room like to look at beautiful flowers. You like to look at beautiful roses, but it’s not long before your roses decay and the pedals look brown and fall off. You like the sky, it’s beautiful, it’s part of God’s creation, but there are times when the sky is full of forked lightening. And it’s something of which to be extremely

afraid. It's beautiful to have birds flying around those beautiful little animals that we, who have grown old, like to watch. But at the same time, they're not simply birds that are cute and nice to watch, but they're also hawks that prey on others. There are beautiful mountains, not in Texas much, but in other places, beautiful mountains.

But at the same time, in those mountains there are volcanoes. There was a beautiful Mount St. Helens until a few years ago. And now you look at it and the whole top of it is blown off and it's a flat top mountain now because of the volcano and the destruction, of course, that was wrought by it. Or, we look at the sea. What a magnificent site the sea is for the person who sees it for the first time, but the sea is the source of tidal waves and many people lose their lives because of the severity of God's creation. So, volcanoes – the twinkles in the stars which impress us so much, or the sun itself. And when we realize from scientific study that the sun is made up really of storms of fire, you even have a suggestion in the things that benefit us of the eternal conflagration taught in the word of God.

There is the testimony also of history. History shows us that God is not only a God of love. He has caused great scientists to discover secrets of his universe, many of whom were Christians. And he has benefitted our lives by science. We have had many great men. The United States has been blessed by great men such as George Washington and Abraham Lincoln and particularly Robert E. Lee. [Laughter] And we can think of all of the ways in which God has raised up men with remarkable gifts to be a blessing to us, but then if that is reflection of the God of love, we also see reflections of the fact that God is a consuming fire in the fact that he has also raised up men like Hitler and Stalin and Mao. And he has a few in our present day life like Khomeini, who, to my mind, can be classified with some of these people, Gaddafi, perhaps. And the point is, of course, that there are men who have been blessings to us or to humanity and there are those who seem to be curses for humanity.

Then, there is the testimony of the human mind. What a blessing the human mind is and all of the blessings that come from our mind and the enjoyment that we have because we have a mind, or a soul, the childish laughter, the holy imaginations and memories, lovely music, rapturous imagination. And yet, all at the same time, in our minds, there are indications of the other side of God too. For we have guilty consciences. We recognize the fact that when we've sinned we stand under some form of ultimate judgement. We have anguish, we have remorse. There are other experiences of the human mind, even bereavement, that indicate to us that life is not all lovely and nice.

The last words of people who die often reflect this. Hannah More, when she died, said, “Joy.” James Macintosh said he was “happy.” That was his last word “happy” as he passed into the presence of the Lord. Richard Baxter, the great Calvinistic theologian, said, “I am almost well,” as he was dying. But then, on the other hand, some men who were not Christians, Sir Thomas Scott said, “I'm doomed to perdition by the judgements of almighty God.” That was his conviction. Talleyrand, the bishop turned skeptic and finally political leader in the days of the French Revolution said as he was dying, “I'm suffering the pangs of the damned.” So even in life itself, in nature and the experiences of men, there are reflections of the two sides of the nature of God. The rational reasons follow as a result of thinking about the things that have to do with eternal judgement.

Now, reason, of course, is limited. It is fallen reason. We should remember that. And we cannot really think clearly unless we think in submission to the Holy Spirit of God. Revelation concerns that beyond natural human reason. So, we can never know naturally the things of God in our fallen state. We can never know them until the Holy Spirit reveals them to us. And so, we know that while God has given us reason, our reason is to be used in submission to the Holy Spirit.

One of the fatal blows to universalism is this simple thought. If God is ultimately to annihilate all who have not believed in Christ, well then, if he's to forcibly restrain sin and judgement as annihilation suggests, and those who are simply mortal and have

become immortal by faith in Christ, then why did he not do that before the experience in the Garden of Eden? It doesn't make any sense to have the history of the human race as it is if ultimately God is just going to annihilate all and bring everybody into an experience of the love of God. The experience of life would make no sense whatsoever.

But now thinking about hell itself, let me suggest some things that make me believe that hell is a very rational thing. And when I say hell, I mean, of course, eternal conscious punishment. Hell is rational because of the holiness of God. Isn't it striking that the one attribute of the Lord God which is tripled in the Old Testament and tripled in the New Testament is the attribute of holiness. Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up and he said, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts.” In the Book of Revelation in the 4th chapter we again have the angelic being speaking about God as holy, holy, holy. I don't know that we can say that holiness is the supreme attribute of God in the sense that holiness suggests the otherness of God. It certainly is a contender for that. And many orthodox theologians have insisted that it is not love that is the supreme attribute, but rather God's holiness. But at least we can say that the Bible stresses the fact that God is holy. And would it not be anarchy in his universe for him to be indifferent to those who by his grace choose holiness. God would then be strengthening the hands of the disobedient and the unholy if there is no ultimate divine distinction to be made, but that all are to stand before God in the same way.

In fact, Ezekiel chapter 13 and verse 22 is a magnificent text for Universalists. We don't have time to turn to it, but if you have a pencil you can note it down and when you get home take a look at it and see what it has to say with reference to universalism. A temporary hell does not deter anyone. And annihilation and even conditional immortality all qualify as temporary hells. So, the Psalmist words would be true, “All the foundations of the earth are out of course,” if God's holiness is not exercised as seen in holy Scripture. But secondly, hell is rational because it's a necessary motive to obedience. When Noah

was told about the flood, we read in the New Testament that he built that ark because he was moved by fear.

Now, fear is a legitimate motive for the doing of the will of God. There are lots of people who seem to think that if a person does obey God by reason of fear, that that's not the kind of obedience that God is interested in. Well, of course, God would love to have us obey him because it is right for us to obey him. In other words, right for right's sake is certainly a high motive for doing the will of God. But men are not angels. And, consequently, they are moved by other motives. Listen to what Jude says in the 23rd verse of his little epistle near the end of the New Testament. And Jude is giving some advice to his readers. He says, “Upon some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire.” So, the idea of being moved by fear and being saved by fear, that is the fear of divine judgement, is a perfectly good motive for doing the will of God. And it's perfectly alright for preachers to preach hellfire and damnation if that will be the means by which the fear of God is brought to their soul.

Hell, thirdly, is rational because of the endlessness of guilt. When a crime is committed, it's absurd to ask, “How long is the person guilty?” You see, when a crime is committed the guilt is endless. So, the very fact that a crime against God is still a crime next year, ten years from now, ten thousand years from now, a hundred thousand years. It's still a crime. Time does not do away with guilt. Guilt is endless. And if guilt is endless, it's reasonable to think that the punishment is endless. William G.T. Shedd says in - Dr. Shedd has probably done as much study as any orthodox man on this particular topic – he said, “The verdict ‘Guilty for ten days’ is Hibernian.”

Now, in the days in which Shedd wrote, everybody would know what Hibernian was, but in our day we don't take Latin any longer and so we've forgotten that Hibernia is a term for Ireland. And the term for Ireland suggests the Roman Catholic Church and the system of sin and guilt in their sacramental system which is part of their theology. And that there're different kinds of sins and some sins are sins that are forgivable and some

that are unforgivable and this whole series of evaluation of particular degrees of sin – some of it’s found in the Lutheran church too – is characteristic of that form of theology or Hibernia. So, guilty for ten days? No, when a person commits a sin against God, he’s guilty forever of that sin. So, the fact that time does not change guilt means that the punishment of it is logically an endless punishment.

Furthermore, we do not have any encouragement at all from Scripture to believe that there is such a thing as repentance in hell. As a matter of fact, it seems to be just the opposite from Luke chapter 16. We have remorse, but remorse is not a virtue. And so, consequently, the idea of repentance in hell is not taught. And, in fact, in the Book of Revelation we have all the great judgements being poured out upon the people who are on the earth and specific mention of the fact is made that they don’t repent unto those tremendous physical judgements that are poured out from heaven. The thing that they’re particularly angry over is the fact that they have to face God. And so they finally pray. And they pray to the mountains and to the hills to fall upon them to hide them from the face of the lamb. Everybody ultimately will be in a prayer meeting, Christians, of course, in prayer meetings before their death. But at the death of some, they will be in a prayer meeting, but it’s too late to pray. And they are rather praying for other things to prevent them from coming under the judgement of God. Passing through the door of death then is no reform agency.

And fourth, hell is rational because sin is an infinite evil. It is committed against an infinite person. If we were to torture a beast, well, we’re living in a society in which a man who tortured an animal, we would think that that was a heinous crime. Maybe he ought to be put in prison for a little while if he tortured a dog or a cat or a bird. I’ll say nothing about cats Ms. Ray. She gave me a lecture on cats at the end of the last lecture and I’m remorseful. I don’t know whether that’s a virtue or not, but I’m remorseful for those comments about cats that I made. But we would think it’d be very bad if a person should torture an animal. But it would be worse, of course, if we tortured a man. And

then if we tortured a person of higher dignity, we would be even more responsible to the laws of the land. A person who shoots at the president is guilty of a more heinous crime than one who shoots at another man because of the dignity of the office of president. But think of a person who sins against the Lord God, an infinite being.

So, hell is rational because sin is an infinite evil. And in order to be properly punished, we should have an infinite punishment. Robert Browning said once, “There may be a heaven, there must be a hell.” As he looked out over human experience, it seemed reasonable to him, more reasonable that there should be a hell than a heaven. And someone else has said, “If there is no hell, we’d be compelled to invent one.” And if you read your newspapers day after day and see the level of the crimes in the United States of America, the wickedness, the utter carelessness of human life, I often almost every time I open the paper, I often feel there has to be a hell, and the sooner the better for some of the crimes that are committed these days.

Now, turning to Scripture itself, I’d like for you to notice first of all the statements that directly demand it. And so, I’d like for you to take your Bibles now and turn with me to just a few passages. We won’t have time to read them all, but Matthew chapter 10 and verse 28. Matthew 10 and verse 28, Jesus says, “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” 10:28, there is a hell, Jesus says.

Chapter 18 and verse 8, Jesus says, “Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire,” everlasting fire.

Turn over to chapter 25 and verse 46 and this magnificent parable. Is it a parable? Well, some have called it that, but it rather seems to be a prophecy, doesn’t it? A prophecy of the judgement of the gentile nations. And we read in verse 31,

“When the Son of man shall come in glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on his left.”

And then, of course, he goes on to describe the way by which the division between the nations is made. Isn't it a magnificent testimony to the dignity that our Lord saw in himself that just a few days now before he is to hang on Calvary's cross he says that all of the nations shall one day be gathered before him and he will make a decision among them. That is an expression of his own deity. That all the nations would be gathered before him and he would exercise the judgement.

But the final verse is the verse that bears on our topic. He speaks about the goat nations and he says, “These shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life everlasting.” The adjective translated everlasting and the adjective translated eternal in the great text are the same adjective, the adjective *aionios*, which means eternal. Some have said, “Ah, but *aionios* comes from *aion*, which means an age.” And so, it's an age-long thing, it's a limited thing. Well, in the first place the Greek language used *aion* as that which had to do with eternity. *Eis ton aion*, for example was one of the Greek ways by which eternity was expressed. The usage of this word is that of everlasting or eternal.

Now, if a person has poor hermeneutical and exegetical principles and would like to insist on that, Jehovah's Witnesses like to do this. I'd like to ask a further question of them, then. If you're going to argue that way that we're going to argue on the root of a word and its derivation, poor hermeneutics, poor exegesis, poor philology, I'd like to ask you from what does *aion* come? And if you will look up the derivation of *aion*, you will discover that it comes from an adverb *aei*, found in the New Testament, which means always and on, denominative masculine present participle singular of the verb to be. So, that *aei* plus *on* is the Greek word *aion* and it comes from two words that mean always

being, so, always existing. That’s really the origin of aion. So, when we say life everlasting or life eternal, we’re talking about life that goes on and on.

Now, if this is eternal life, if what we’re talking about is everlasting life, everlasting conscious life incidently, then the same adjective used with the term punishment surely should be given the same force, everlasting conscious punishment. And that’s the way the Christian church has historically interpreted this.

There are other passages that we could look at. I see the clock is racing towards 8:15 and so I won’t have time to look at what Paul says, for example, in 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 and verse 9, and what John says in Revelation 14:11. Well, we’ll have to look at that one. Revelation 14:11. The Apostle John giving one of his vision says, speaking about some who are lost forever, we read, “And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receiveth the mark of his name.” Notice “ascendeth up for ever and for ever.”

So, the Scriptures seem to say very plainly that those who reject the gospel of the Lord Jesus are headed for eternal punishment. Isn't it striking that every time in the New Testament that the Greek word Gehenna, which is the Greek term for hellfire, it occurs about thirteen or fourteen times in the New Testament. I didn’t count them in the concordance before I came. Every occurrence but one is on the lips of our Lord in the New Testament. The one case in which it is not is James chapter 3 and verse 6, but every other place the person who refers to hellfire in its strictest sense is our Lord Jesus himself.

As Keble once wrote, “The Fount of Love His servants sins to tell Love’s deeds; Himself reveals the sinner’s Hell.” It’s almost as if our Lord reserved speaking about hellfire for himself because no one could question the fact that he spoke about hell out of a full heart of divine love.

There are some statements that indirectly demand hell. Think of the statement that our Lord spoke to Judas about Judas at the last supper, the first Lord’s Supper, the last

Passover, the first Lord's Supper. You remember he said that someone's going to betray him, finally referring to Judas he says, “The Son of man goes as it is written concerning him.” That's divine sovereign providence. “The Son of man goes as it has been written concerning him: but woe to that man through whom the Son of man is betrayed!”

Human responsibility, divine sovereignty, human responsibility side by side in the Bible, we don't believe in divine sovereignty and reject human responsibility. We reject human free will. That's an entirely different subject. We believe in human responsibility, but also divine sovereignty. But don't forget the last word Jesus said. He said, “Woe to that man through whom the Son of man is betrayed! it were good for that man if he had not been born.”

Now, I submit to you that if Judas is ultimately to find his way into the presence of the Lord after a period of time of punishment say, then our Lord could not say, “it were good for him if he had not been born,” because assuming that eternal life is eternal life. Eternal life in the light of any form of temporal punishment is like that. And if a person is going to enjoy eternal fellowship with the Lord God, it could never be said it were good for that man if he had not been born, but Jesus said it. Because when a person suffers eternal judgement, ah, that's something else. And if it's eternal conscious punishment, I understand how Jesus could say those words.

As someone has said referring to a person who was swimming toward the shore and managed finally to reach it after a long struggle, “Who counts the billows if the shore is one?” And Judas, if he's ultimately to be saved, then any form of punishment is nothing in comparison with the infinite felicity and joy of eternal communion with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, our time is up. We'll have to stop with this. I'd like to just read a statement made by a man who wrote a book on eternal punishment, not Shedd. He said, “The truth is, that one may close the Bible and blot out every word descriptive of God's severity; one may take the theological dogmas of Augustine and Tertullian and Calvin and Edwards and

the creeds of every orthodox Church in Christendom, and sink them in the sea, but after this is done, one still shall read blazoned in capital letters all through the physical universe, and in every human soul, and on every page of history, those three, not conflicting, but complementary announcements: ‘God is love;’ ‘God is a consuming fire;’ ‘Behold, therefore, the goodness and the severity of God.’” We believe in eternal punishment because it is taught by our Lord Jesus Christ and given to us in Scripture. But even if we did not have Scripture, one could make an eminently good case for eternal punishment.

Now, may God help us to remember that we do not speak about things like this simply for the doctrinal teaching alone. This is designed in holy Scripture to motivate us in our warning and preaching of the ultimate judgement of the lost. And may God help us as Christians to remember that we are responsible for these great truths that we have. And we’re responsible to warn our relatives and warn our friends and warn those with whom we come in contact that there is eternal judgement to come. May God help us to faithfully do it. Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for these very, very solemn words from holy Scripture. We confess, Lord, that we have so often failed. Forgive us our sin. To fail to warn those with whom we come in contact, what excuse can there be for that? For our family, for our friends, for those with whom we come in contact, Lord, help us, by Thy grace, to speak as before Thee. And if it should please Thee, Lord, use our words to turn many from the path of...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]