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The Immorality of Worshipping A Devilish God: Examining the Ethics of Eternal Punishment¹

Most Christians, like myself, were raised with the impression that in the end, everyone would end up either in heaven or hell. The saved would receive their reward in an eternal place of bliss and happiness in the presence of God and everyone else would be punished in the everlasting fires of hell. The mental, psychological, spiritual, and physical pain, suffering, torment, agony, anguish, and torture would not last just seconds, a couple of minutes, a few hours, days, months, years, or decades, nor centuries, millennia, or even millions, billions, or trillions of years, but for all eternity! The thought is terrifying and frightening enough to scare and subdue the toughest of us, but imagine the effect it has on little children when their Sunday school teachers descriptively elaborate on the heinous details. The following excerpt is from a tract written by clergy for small children,

The little child is in this red-hot oven. Hear how it screams to come out. See how it turns and twists itself about in the fire. It beats its head against the roof of the oven and stamps its little feet upon the floor. God was very good to this little child. Very

¹ I had initially set out to write a paper addressing why eternal torment could not be true if Nancy Murphy's physicalist account of man is accurate. See Nancy Murphy, "Theology and Human Nature" (paper presented at Westminster College, Cambridge, 14 June 2006). If humans do not have an immortal soul, the only way God could punish a human being for all eternity is by supernaturally keeping them alive, and that is obviously cruel and unusual. I also desired to answer Biblical arguments surrounding hell. For example, many have taken phrases like "weeping and gnashing of teeth" to mean that some will experience torment, agony and red, hot pain for all eternity in the flames of hell, whereas the context and other biblical data would tell a different story. Mainly, that some Jews will be *angry* (gnashing of teeth) when they are excluded from the kingdom while the Gentiles are welcomed to the messianic banquet. For background and context of this Hebraism, see Job 16:9; Psalms 35:16; 37:12; 112:10; Lam 2:16 and Acts 7:54. Although I desired to research and explore these kinds of objections, I was compelled by my conscience to write about the ethics of worshipping a God who tortures forever. My first intensions will be explored in a forthcoming project.

likely God saw that it would get worse and worse and never repent, so it would have been punished more severely. So God in his mercy called it out of the world in early childhood.²

This is mortifying! God killed this child only to put the child into a furnace since God would have to do something much worse had the child lived longer. If this is not an atrocious, despicable, sick deity, what is? Abhorrent conceptions, depictions, and descriptions of God like this are not uncommon to Christians. In fact, people of faith have propagated these kinds of ideas about God since religion began. It should be obvious to all that a God this vindictive, this bloodthirsty, this hideous so as to place a child into a furnace is utterly wicked. It is my contention, albeit much less recognized, that it is immoral to honor, worship, and serve a God who eternally tortures people, in hell or any other place of misery, period. If such a God existed, moral, upright, noble, and righteous people would naturally be compelled to overthrow such a beastly Creator. Humans have stood up, rebelled against and overthrown evil authorities like Stalin, Hitler, and Mussolini in the past, continue to do so today, and are morally obligated to do so in the future when others arise.³

Eradicating Excuses

Virtuous, principled, fair-minded and sympathetic people should denounce, defame, and fight against terrorist Gods who have no regard for justice and righteousness. Might does not make right. Regardless of the amount of power, strength, or authority, a deity possesses,

² John Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?* (Durham: Evangelical Press, 1993), 124.

³ Some may object that it would be futile to try to overthrow an immortal evil Creator. My response is that we are morally obliged to die trying. Submitting to the dictates of an evil, monstrous deity is complicit participation; those who sit quietly and watch crime take place without *any* attempt to help the victim share some of the responsibility. This is especially true if a person decides to actually respect, honor, and show loyalty to an eternal hell fire breathing God.

this does not, nor will ever make their desires, plans, decisions, or actions good, loving, or righteous. The amount of time a God has been around also has nothing to do with the morality of the deity's character. If God never had a beginning, or an end, it has no bearing whatsoever in determining the goodness or rottenness of the divinity's policies. Lastly, regardless of the number of times or how loud God or anyone else says eternal torment is loving, merciful, righteous, just and good, the words will never make it so. It is time that people wake from their slumber and speak out against ghastly depictions of God. For too long people have been lulled to sleep with euphemisms like "an eternity without Christ," "a Christ-less eternity," "an eternal separation from God," and with cliché remarks like, "if people don't want God now, they will not want to be with God in heaven then." At the heart of all these miserable, logically absurd, childish, ad hoc notions are people who have fearfully submitted to a terrifying, devilish, wicked God who *thinks* its loving to torment eternally, young and old alike in a lake of fire.

Devotion to Devils

Fundamentalists, conservatives, and Evangelicals, every sect, denomination, and religion that reveres, pays homage to, and extols a God who tortures mortals in fire without end are morally inept, corrupt and immoral. If a person is unable to determine that torturing a flesh and blood human being without end is cruel, unusual, appalling, and inexcusably debauched, that person has the capacity and potential to bring hell to earth. History is replete with such examples. The worst atrocities imaginable can, have, and do take place by their hands, their feet, from their minds partly because of their dedicated, resolute and unbending commitment to a morally bankrupt God. These kinds of God conceptions have led the faithful to commit countless horrors including but certainly not limited to genocide, pillage,

plunder, rape, murder, war, thumb screws, racks, crusades, inquisitions, burnings, lynching, slavery, suicide bombing etc... ad infinitum. Even if every supposed holy text in the world said that God was going to eternally torture anyone, for any reason, it would be no less horribly unjust, cruel, and despicable. Therefore, those who continue to worship God/gods after finding their Scriptures proclaim that God is so hateful, angry and violent so as to torment human beings in fiery flames forever and ever without end are inevitably immoral. If God is going to everlastingly burn human beings, God must be viewed with contempt and denounced as a sadomasochist. There are no good reasons to keep a person alive, screaming in pain as flames singe and melt their flesh, while agonizing and pleading for relief for not just hundreds, or thousands, or millions, or billions of years but with no end, ever. This is inconceivable. It is so dark, grotesque, grisly and repugnant, that many in the civilized world see the idea as ludicrous, hardly worth entertaining. It goes without saying that that *worshipping* this kind of God is unthinkable, entirely out of the question. However, myriads of people have bowed the knee, pledged their allegiance, and conceive themselves as servants of the God of eternal punishment.

Propagating and Pandering Preposterous Proposals

This ferocious doctrine, vicious dogma, and gory conviction has primarily been espoused and propagated by Christians. The *Apocalypse of Peter*, written just after the NT describes blasphemers hanging by their tongues while unquenchable fire torments them from beneath (7). Adulterous women hang by their neck or hair over a fire and women who have had abortions are forced into a deep pit until flowing “torment, foulness, and excrement” swallow them up to their necks and torment them with “great pain” (*Apoc. Pet.* 8). Furthermore, little children representing the aborted will send lightening bolts into the eyes

of the women (*Apoc. Pet.* 8), while men are hung by their genitals, roasting over a blazing fire (*Apoc. Pet.* 7). Liars “shall have their lips cut off; and fire enters into their mouth and their entrails” (*Apoc. Pet.* 9), and parents will stand naked while the women’s breast milk becomes devouring beasts that eternally eats their flesh. (*Apoc. Pet.* 8). Murderers are cast into a fire full of venomous beasts while their victims stood by and watched, glorifying God (*Apoc. Pet.* 7). The *Apocalypse of Paul* also written by the early church describes people begging for mercy while being pushed by evil angels into a river of fire (32). Ministers who did not perform their ministry well have their bowels ripped open with hooks, old ministers that did not pity widows have rocks smashed against their face like a violent storm so that they are unable to ask for pity (*Apoc. Paul* 35.) Others have worms crawling out of their mouth and nostrils while growning, weeping and crying for mercy (*Apoc Paul* 36). Others have their tongues and lips cut off by a fiery razor (*Apoc Paul* 36), girls have burning chains placed around their necks (*Apoc Paul* 39), both men and women are hung by their eyebrows over the fiery river (*Apoc Paul* 39), and still others have their naked hands and feet placed in the ice cold snow while they are eaten by worms (*Apoc. Paul* 39).

Middle Age Madness

During the Middle Ages the language is also vile and revolting. Bishop of Hexham Venerable Bede (673-735) portrayed a vision he had in which he saw a man suffering such torments in hell that “the flames of fire gushed out from his eyes and nostrils and at every pore.”⁴ Others during this time spoke of demons blowing trumpets into the ears of those

⁴ Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?*, 124.

who used music for evil purposes.⁵ The most well known is the Italian poet Dante Alighiere (1265-1321), author of *The Divine Comedy* in which he described “enormous herds of naked souls...lamenting till their eyes were burned of tears.”⁶ He speaks of “infinite wailings,” and of souls being battered by an “infernal hurricane.”⁷ He proceeds to mention victims shrieking and moaning, and tearing each other piecemeal with their teeth.⁸

The Not So Great Awakening

The modern age and the Enlightenment didn't stop Reformed theologians like Jonathon Edwards from spewing forth more foul, nauseating, repulsive descriptions of the deity. In his infamous sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” he pronounced,

The wrath of God burns against them, their damnation does not slumber; the pit is prepared, the fire is made ready, the furnace is now hot, ready to receive them; the flames do now rage and glow. The glittering sword is whet, and held over them, and the pit hath opened its mouth under them.⁹

The Reformed theologians like Edwards took this base, depraved, despicable view of God to a whole new level. They not only swallowed the dreadful doctrine wholesale but then proudly added that God is the one who chose people to burn forever and ever without end.

⁵ Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?*, 124.

⁶ Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?*, 125.

⁷ Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?*, 125.

⁸ See Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?*, 125.

⁹ *Select Works of Jonathan Edwards* (vols. 2.; London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1959), 2:183-99.

¹⁰ God decided to bring people into existence who never asked to live in the first place, only to torment their pre-destined souls perpetually, never to relent. No choice of theirs could stop the inevitable. If they were chosen by God to burn in hell, they could do nothing to thwart God's desire and plan. Edward preached, "You cannot save yourself,"¹¹ and proclaimed, "your own care and...all your righteousness, would have no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell, than a spider's web would have to stop a fallen rock."¹² Freakishly, Edwards taught that the people in hell would not only hate, curse and torment each other, but also torture, hate and punish themselves!¹³ Edwards belabored that the parents, relatives, the closest friends and even the most loving spouses of those sent to hell will not care at all when God sends devils like "roaring lions" and "hell-hounds" to continually tear them to pieces.¹⁴

You will have none to pity you. Look which way you will, before or behind, on the right hand or left, look up to heaven, or look about you in hell, and you will see none to condole your case, or to exercise any pity towards you, in your dreadful condition. You must bear these flames, you must bear that torment and amazement, day and night, for ever, and never have the comfort of considering, that there is so much as one that pities your case; never will one tear be dropped for you.¹⁵

¹⁰ Edwards explicitly says that those in heaven are "of the same species, and have deserved no worse of God than they," referring to those being tormented by God's wrath in hell. The only thing that separates the heavenly from hell is that God *chose* one group of humans to watch God exhibit his furious wrath on another. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, (2 vols.; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), 2:127.

¹¹ Edwards' words seem to directly contradict Peter's sermon at Pentecost who is remembered as saying, "*Save yourselves* from this corrupt generation" (Acts 2:40 NIV Emphasis mine).

¹² Edwards, *Select Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 183-99.

¹³ *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2:211.

¹⁴ *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2:211.

¹⁵ *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2:210.

As decadent as this is, it gets worse. Edwards thinks watching our unbelieving loved ones suffer God's furious wrath in hell will bring about blissful, jubilant, happiness, and joyful songs.

When the saints in heaven shall look upon the damned in hell, it will serve to give them a greater sense of their own happiness. When they shall see how dreadful the anger of God is, it will make them the more prize his love...they will rejoice and sing.¹⁶

How a person can be so heartless, so numb, so callous so as to not only not care, but actually cheer on God's eternal fury against loved ones is savagely chilling. Edwards reminds those in hell, "If you shall look to them [those in heaven], you will see them all *rejoicing* at the sight of the glory of God's justice, power, and terrible majesty, manifested in your torment."¹⁷ These statements are so bizarre and outlandish, it is simply astounding that people took them seriously. But what is truly frightening is that Edwards and the many converted under his preaching did not despise, loathe, and deride the evil monster Edwards described, but cowardly submitted to his tyrannical fiend. It should be abundantly clear that any and all who serve, honor and obey such inexcusable dictators become nothing more than henchmen in Hitler's army.

Edwards is not alone, but shares this immoral worship of despicable deities with many others, including 19th century evangelist Charles Haddon Spurgeon who decried,

There is a real fire in hell, as truly as you have a real body – a fire exactly like that which we have on this earth, except this: that it will not consume through it will

¹⁶ *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2:127.

¹⁷ *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2:210. Emphasis mine.

torture you. You have seen asbestos lying amid red hot coals, but not consumed. So your body will be prepared by God in such a way that it will burn for ever without being desensitized for all its raging fury...the acrid smoke of the sulphurous flames searing your lungs and choking your breath...¹⁸

Repulsive Religions

Other religions traditions are no less grotesque, in fact, many shovel more mire onto the mountains of horror. Muslims who hold the Koran as the Word of God ascribe to the idea that punishment for rejecting their Lord involves the skin of humans being roasted off and replaced, just to be burnt off again (Sura 4:56). Other passages describe people being forced to drink boiling hot fluid and having scorching hot water poured over their heads to only then be beaten with iron maces (Sura 22:19-22; 38:55-58). Classical Buddhist teaching has “hot hells,” each surrounded by torture chambers which have blazing fiery pits and quagmires.¹⁹ Some Chinese Buddhists teach that devils in human form inflict all kinds of barbaric torture, including pulling out slanderers’ tongues with red-hot wires and pouring molten lead down liars’ throats.²⁰ Hinduism has twenty-one hells, each one tailor-made for specific behaviors, “If you failed to feed the hungry while you were living, you might be chained to a rock where birds come to eat your stomach.”²¹ An adulterer may be forced to embrace an attractive woman whose temperature is white hot, while the worst offenders are incarcerated where they are scorched in hot sand, boiled in jars or eaten by ravens.²²

¹⁸ Cited by Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?*, 127-8.

¹⁹ Cited by Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?*, 123.

²⁰ Cited by Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?*, 123.

²¹ Cited by Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?*, 123.

²² Cited by Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?*, 123.

Top That!

Apparently, John Blanchard, an Evangelical Christian evangelist, thinks that all of these inconceivably debased, despicable, horrid conceptions are not what hell will be like; according to him, they will be infinitely *worse!* He says, “God’s anger will be poured out ‘full strength’, in all its uninhibited fury, something *infinitely* greater than *anything* that *any* human being has *ever* experienced or could *possibly* imagine.”²³ And he wants humans to love, adore, extol, honor, praise, and *worship* this God? The immorality of such an act of homage is mind-boggling. J.I. Packer says, “[Hell] is as bad and terrifying as it could *possibly* be, and everyone needs to be told so.”²⁴ Why? So we can all have contempt for, denounce and conspire to overthrow this devilish Deity; a God that is so cruel that no man can possibly think of anything more terrifying; a God that designs places of eternal torture worse than *anything* and *everything ever* thought, spoken or written in the history of the world? No, on the contrary, Packer has in mind *recruiting* people to sign up for the this hellish militia. Who wants to join the ranks of those who must sear their conscience and terribly compromise their moral fabric, any and all sensibility in order to *worship* an admittedly unspeakably vengeful, repugnant God who tortures human beings without the hope of death, ever?

Will The Real Men and Women Please Stand Up

Where are the sensible, reasonable and noble-minded people to speak out against this mind-crippling, life eradicating, egregious doctrine of eternal torment. Where are the real

²³ Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?*, 165. Emphasis mine.

²⁴ J.I. Packer, forward to *Whatever Happened to Hell?*, by John Blanchard (Durham: Evangelical Press, 1993), 9. Emphasis mine.

reformers, like Robert Ingersoll who clearly understood that it is immoral to honor a God who torments people in hell for all eternity. He pronounced,

I have no respect for any human being who believes in it. I have no respect for any man who preaches it. I have no respect for the man who will pollute the imagination of childhood with that infamous lie. I have no respect for the man who will add to the sorrows of this world with the frightful dogma. I have no respect for any man who endeavors to put that infinite cloud, that infinite shadow, over the heart of humanity. I want to be frank with you. I dislike this doctrine, I hate it, I despise it, I defy this doctrine.²⁵

Christians ought to follow the example of Clark Pinnock who utilizes his God given moral compass. He exclaims,

Everlasting torment is intolerable from a moral point of view because it makes God into a bloodthirsty monster who maintains an everlasting Auschwitz for victims whom He does not even allow to die. How is one to worship or imitate such a cruel and merciless God? The idea of everlasting torment (especially if it is linked to soteriological predestination) raises the problem of evil to impossible dimensions.²⁶

What If?

What if the true God is using these dastardly conceptions of God as a test? What if the truly just, righteous, holy and loving God is finding out whom God wants in and out of God's kingdom? What if all those who honor the devilish God of eternal torment will be completely destroyed, annihilated and reduced to dust for their immorality? What if those who refuse to bow the knee, denounce and are willing to fight the shameful God of eternal torment will be given eternal life? What if?

²⁵ Robert G. Ingersoll, *44 Complete Lectures*, (Chicago: Regan Publishing), 48.

²⁶ Clark H. Pinnock, "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," *CTR* 4.2 (1990): 243-259; repr. in *JRR* (Fall 1992): 15.

Clearly Drawing the Line in the Sand

It is high time that people from every tribe, tongue, people and nation renounce their allegiance to any God who torments people forever. It is high time that fundamentalists, conservatives and liberals of every faith rise up with one mind, one heart, and one voice to denounce the God of eternal torment as a devil. It is incumbent on every moral man, woman and child to pledge only to honor those who are *deserving* of honor and *worthy* of worship. Let us stand up together in the spirit of Abraham who courageously challenged God when he thought God was going to do something that was obviously not right.²⁷ May we be inspired to once and for all call as spade a spade; the God of eternal torture Devilish and those who worship him, immoral.

“I want God to write next to my name that I denied that lie for him.”

– Robert Ingersoll

²⁷ Abraham thought God was going to destroy the righteous with the wicked, obviously something that is not right. How much more would he have stood up and raised his voice if he thought that God who is said to take no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ez 18:23, 32), was planning on torturing people for all of eternity.

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