

7,14,22 Rev. 20, The Lake of Fire

This will be the most controversial study we do in Revelation, because this has been a major controversy in Christianity for the last 2000 years. So, as we go through this part of Rev. 20, I would ask that you fight for objectivity and do what you can to, at least temporarily, set aside any theological grids you might have. *First*, make sure you can understand where different positions are coming from, *then* make your own decision.

Let's begin by reading Rev. 20:7-15;

"Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."

I struggled with how best to teach this, because as you can imagine, in 2000 years of hotly debated controversy a very large number of books have been written. There's no way to present every argument used on any side of this equation.

Let's start with some definitions. And I'm going to be a little repetitive with this because I want to make sure we're clear on what each position believes.

There are three predominate views on what the Lake of Fire represents.

- 1 Universalism
- 2 Eternal Conscious Torment (ECT)
- 3 Conditional Immortality (CI)

Another way to describe these would be;

- 1 Everyone is saved.
- 2 The punishment of the lost *never* ends.
- 3 The punishment of the lost definitely exists, but at some point, it ends in annihilation. Immortality is conditioned on receiving eternal life in Christ.

The first one is pretty weak in terms of Biblical justification. Based on my personal study of all three, the last two seem to me to have the most solid scriptural support. So, for sake of time and to be able to focus on the views that are *most likely* to describe the destiny of the lost, we will be looking at the last two.

The traditional view of Eternal Conscious Torment (ECT) is the view held by most conservative Biblical scholars. It's probably the one you've heard most often and likely believe. But there are also a large number of scholars who believe in Conditional Immortality (CI).

So, we need to take some time to look at each view. I'll begin by showing the 'supporting' passages for ECT, as well as the counter-arguments. I'll also share the names of some of the theologians who support each view, in case you recognize them.

Let's look at some slightly expanded definitions before we break them down, just to make sure we're clear on the differences;

- 1 Universalism: Universalists believe that all are lost through sin, but that eventually all will be saved.
- 2 Eternal Conscious Torment: All who die without believing in Christ will suffer forever in the Lake of Fire.
- 3 Conditional Immortality: Immortality is conditioned on faith in Christ. Those who do not believe in Christ, will eventually be destroyed.

As I mentioned earlier, we'll begin with Eternal Conscious Torment.

In the books I've read on this, there is a consistency in all of them to base this position on ten primary passages in the Bible. So, I think the best way to start our discussion would be to cite each passage, show why ECT adherents believe that these passages support their view and then give you the counter-interpretations by those who believe in Conditional Immortality.

To begin our examination of the ECT view, I need to start by demonstrating, rather graphically, what the implications are of what they believe.

It's easy to make a *theological* statement about eternal punishment; but we are dealing with the destiny of human beings, some of whom we may have known and loved – we aren't dealing simply with objects of theological interest or debate.

So, we'll start with some quotations by theologians who believe what most Christians probably already believe, but might not have thought it through. These are what I believe are the four foundation stones or pillars of the quotes I'm going to share in a minute;

- 1 The fire of Hell is material and its agonies are physical agonies
- 2 This eternal condemnation is the future of the majority of mankind.
- 3 They enter this eternity at death and there is no escape – it's irreversible.
- 4 The duration of these torments is endless.

Now, let's think about this for a few minutes.

We'll move through history to show how this developed among those who were ECT proponents;

Minucius Felix A.D. 230, "Nor to these torments will there be any measure or termination. There the sentient fire burns limbs and renews them, feeds on them and nourishes them."

St. Augustine A.D. 430, "That fire is more (painful) than any which man can suffer in this life."

St. Ignatius Loyola 1548, "Let us fancy we see hell and imagine what is there to behold – a horrible cavern full of black flames. Sulphur, devils, dragons, fire, and innumerable damned who roar in despair. Imagine the worst you can, and then say, 'All this is nothing compared to hell'."

Luis De Granada 1588, “There will the condemned in cruel rage and despair turn their fury against God and themselves, gnawing their flesh with their mouth, breaking their teeth with gnashing, furiously tearing themselves with their nails, and everlastingly blaspheming against their Judge.”

Baxter 1692, “Is it an intolerable thing to burn part of thy body by holding it in the fire? What then will it be to suffer ten thousand times more *forever* in hell?

Johnathan Edwards 1758, “Imagine yourself to be cast into a fiery oven, and imagine also that your body were to lie there for a quarter of an hour, full of fire, as full within and without as a bright coal, all the while full of pain; what horror would you feel at the entrance of such a furnace? Then how would your heart sink if you knew that after millions and millions of ages your torment would be no nearer to an end than ever it was. But your torment in hell will be immensely greater than this illustration represents.”

Charles Spurgeon 1892, “Thine heart beating high with fever, thy pulse rattling at an enormous rate in agony, thy limbs cracking like the martyrs in the fire and yet unburnt, thyself put in a vessel of hot oil, pained yet coming out undestroyed, all thy veins becoming a road for the hot feet of pain to travel on, every nerve a string on which the devil shall play his diabolical tune.”

I’d list *contemporary* theologians who also believe in ECT, like John Walvoord, Robert Peterson, etc. but that list is extremely long. So, here’s a summation;

“The historic Protestant view of hell is expressed in the Westminster Confession: ‘but the wicked, who know not God, and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.’ (Chapter XXXIII, Of the Last Judgment). According to the Alliance Commission on Unity & Truth among Evangelicals, the majority of Protestants have held that hell will be a place of perpetual conscious torment, both physical and spiritual.”

So, most of our conservative seminaries and Bible schools include something to this effect in their doctrinal statements. Although, Dallas’ descriptions are not nearly as graphic as many of their forefathers who apparently decided to tell it like

it is; men who didn't feel the need to sanitize the reality of what they believed. Here's how Dallas Theological Seminary words it;

"The spirits and souls of the unbelieving remain after death conscious of condemnation and in misery until the final judgment of the great white throne at the close of the millennium, when soul and body reunited shall be cast into the lake of fire, not to be annihilated, but to be punished with everlasting destruction."

Now, here are some of the theologians who believe (or believed when they were alive) in Conditional Immortality, or Annihilationism;

Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Dr. Isaac Watts, F.F. Bruce, Michael Green, Philip E. Hughes, Dale Moody, Dean Alford, Clark H. Pinnock, W. Graham Scroggie, John R.W Stott and John W. Wenham.

It might be good to consider John Stott's challenge to us;

"The hallmark of an authentic evangelicalism is not the uncritical repetition of traditions, but the willingness to submit every tradition, however ancient, to fresh biblical scrutiny and, if necessary, to reform."

So now, we'll examine the ten primary passages used by the ECT scholars to defend their position, and we'll also look at the counter-arguments (or counterpoints) from the Conditional Immortality theologians.

First passage;

(Isaiah 66:22-24) "For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain. From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the LORD. And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."

For the ECT adherents, the supporting section of this passage is "their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched." I'm sure you probably recognized that this passage is quoted by our Lord in Mk. 9:48 (which is the 5th of the ten passages – and we'll look at it when we get there.)

Here's the counterpoint to this by a CI adherent;

“This symbolic picture of the future anticipates the end of time. In this prophetic picture, the righteous view ‘the dead bodies’ of the wicked (Isa. 37:36). They see corpses, not living people. They view destruction, not conscious misery. Discarded corpses are fit only for worms and fire; both insatiable agents of disintegration and decomposition. Worms and fire signify complete destruction, for the maggot in this picture does not die but continues to feed as long as there is anything to eat. The fire which is not quenched or extinguished, burns until nothing is left of what it is burning. This passage says nothing about conscious suffering and certainly nothing about suffering forever.”

Second passage;

(Dan. 12:1-2) “At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awaken, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

The “shame and everlasting contempt” section in vs. 2 is the supporting phrase because it’s evident from the words, “many of those who sleep . . . shall awaken” that we aren’t dealing with corpses, but with living, conscious people, who will experience shame and contempt.

Here’s the counterpoint;

“Those who are raised to shame and everlasting contempt are raised for condemnation. They will be judged, expelled from God’s presence and cast into the Lake of Fire. The fact that their shame and contempt are everlasting does not mandate that they, themselves, are everlasting. Daniel simply tells us that the fate of the wicked is permanent; that their destruction will never be undone or reversed.”

Third passage;

(Matt. 18:6-9) “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to

the one by whom the temptation comes! And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.”

ECT proponents say that when Jesus speaks of “eternal fire”, He means that the torments of hell will never end.

Counterpoint;

“The Bible itself defines “eternal fire” as fire that destroys permanently; not fire that lasts forever. (Jude 7), *‘Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.’* Jude was basically saying, ‘If you want to know what God means by *eternal fire*, look at the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah.”

In addition, there are meanings of the word ‘eternal’ and ‘forever’ other than ‘lasting forever’. For example, in Ex. 21:6 we read, *‘Then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever.’* The service of this particular individual was a life-long commitment—lasting as long as either the servant or master lived.’ Another example, (2 Chron. 7:16) *‘For now I have chosen and sanctified this house, that My name may be there forever; and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually’*. However, because of the sins of Israel and then Judah, God caused this Temple to be destroyed (2 Chronicles 36:15-21).”

Also, in some instances the emphasis on the word ‘eternal’ when joined with ‘life’ is on the type or quality of life, not it’s duration. Those who receive eternal life will live forever, but this is because they possess an indestructible life – the life of their risen Lord.”

Forth passage;

(Matt. 25:31-46) “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then He will sit on his glorious throne. Before Him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a

shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And He will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, *'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'* . . . Then he will say to those on his left, *'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels . . . And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'*"

The support is that, as Robert Peterson puts it, "The destinies of the godly and ungodly are alike in this respect – they are both everlasting".

Counterpoint – Jesus warns of eternal punishment in this passage, but He doesn't tell us what that punishment consists of. In 2 Thess. 1:8-9 Paul tells us that they *"will be punished with everlasting destruction"*.

Fifth passage;

(Mark 9:47-48) "It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched."

We already covered this in part in the third passage in Matt. 18 that basically says the same thing as our passage in Mark 9. The only thing I would add is this addition;

"If we allow the Bible to interpret itself, we will find that the figure of 'unquenchable' fire stands throughout both Testaments for fire that cannot be *resisted*. It will burn up whatever is put in its way. The adjective 'unquenchable' does not mean that the fire never goes out."

That was easy to check out. It's true that this is an adjective, but technically, what it does is give a description of a fire that cannot be extinguished. For the ECT crowd, this means the fire itself lasts forever; for the CI crowd, it means it can't be extinguished from without – meaning that it is unquenchable until it finishes the work fires are designed to do.

Sixth passage;

(2 Thess. 1:8-9) ". . . in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting *destruction* from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power."

The support is “everlasting destruction”. And, again, the original language does not nail this down as well as I would have liked. It can be translated “ruin” as in 1 Tim. 6:9, “*But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction (ruin) and perdition.*” Context (and theological grids) seem to determine which meaning will be accepted.

Here’s the counterpoint – The word for destruction can be translated “destroy”. One example would be that in 1 Thess. 5:3 it means exactly what we think “destroy” would mean; “. . . when they say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.” The destruction in this passage is not said to be ‘forever’, but it speaking of the destruction that the Tribulation brings to the unbelievers in the judgments of Rev. chs. 6-19. In addition, Robert Peterson, in his book supporting ECT, admits that this word *could* mean annihilation. The ECT adherents say that this passage means, “*The wicked will endure never-ending ruin*”; the CI adherents say that it means the wicked will be destroyed.

Seventh passage; (Jude 7) “Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.”

We covered this in the counterpoint of the third passage in Matt. 18. I’ll repeat the counterpoint here;

“The Bible *itself* defines “eternal fire” as fire that destroys permanently; not fire that lasts forever. It’s as if Jude was saying, “If you want to know what God means by eternal fire, look at the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah.”

To finalize this seventh counterpoint, I’ll add a direct quote from a CI theologian;

“The position of Peterson on this is that Jude 7 does not mean that the wicked will suffer any fate remotely resembling the fate that befell Sodom and Gomorrah. Instead, he concludes that Jude is telling us that the fire that totally destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah prefigure the fire of hell that will forever torment the wicked. It is like Alice in Wonderland – destroyed means *never* destroyed and fire that totally consumes prefigures fire that *never* consumes but tortures throughout eternity instead. Why not simply allow the obvious meaning? Let’s not forget that 2 Pet. 2:6 tells us that God

condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly. Here's the verse in 2 Pet; ". . . *and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly.*" The RSV actually translates vs. 6, ". . . *by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction.*" If Peter could hear the conversation, he would probably scratch his head and wonder how he could have possibly written more plainly."

Eighth passage; (Jude 13) "[These people are] wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever."

The support is the consignment of the lost to "*utter darkness . . . forever.*"

Counterpoint – Literal fire and utter darkness cannot both exist at the same time. Fire and darkness are mutually exclusive terms. Also, we have to bring in 2 Pet. 2:17; "*These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.*" The parallels between Peter and Jude are obvious. As a CI author put it, "Like Peter's comparison with Sodom becoming ashes in 2 Pet. 2:6, this figure in Jude 13 *also* suggests and harmonizes with the idea of final, total extinction. A complete blackout of existence. To understand any one of these passages in 2 Peter and Jude, all must be harmonized."

Nineth passage; (Rev. 14:9-11) "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name."

The support is vs. 11, "The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night."

Counterpoint – I'm going to quote from another CI author for this;

"The origin of the image of rising smoke is in the aftermath of Sodom's fiery destruction. When Abraham went out the next morning to look on the scene, all he saw was '*dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a*

furnace' (Gen. 19:27-28). Nothing else remained. All was silent. But the rising smoke testified more eloquently than words that a city with all its inhabitants and vegetation had been wiped off the face of the earth. Isaiah uses the same picture of ascending smoke to describe Edom's total destruction. There is *'burning sulfur'* and a fire which *'will not be quenched night and day'* (Isa. 34:9-10). Smoke, not fire, will rise for the fire has completed its appointed destruction; and it rises *'forever'*, meaning that the destruction will never be reversed, only the smoke as reminder remains (Isa. 34:9-10) *'Its land shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night or day; its smoke shall ascend forever. From generation to generation, it shall lie waste.'* John's vision of the fall of Babylon, recorded in Rev. 18, also clarifies the meaning of this image. A voice calls out for divine vengeance against the wicked city (Rev. 18:6). God answers with plagues of death, mourning and famine, then destroys the city with a consuming fire (Rev. 18:8). Merchants and kings bewail the *'torment'* they see, but all they behold is the rising smoke of a destruction now completed (Rev. 18:9-10, 15). Rising smoke signifies destruction completed, not people suffering conscious agony. As to the *'day'* and *'night'*; John uses the genitive case to describe a *kind* or *type* of time. The people in John's vision have no guarantee of rest during the day, and there is no hope that relief will come at night. The statement is not meant to indicate a length or number of days and night. It requires only that we realize and understand that the sufferers are not immune to their torment at any time of the day or night so long as that torment may last. Smoke that goes up forever describes eternal destruction, not everlasting conscious torment."

I will add one *'counterpoint'* of my own – it's something we touched on in our study of Rev. 19. Listen to this verse (Rev. 19:2-3)

"He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her.' Again, they said, 'Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!'"

Heaven is rejoicing over the destruction of Babylon (which we looked at when we studied Rev. 18). The scriptures don't say that Babylon will be tormented forever; they say Babylon will be destroyed. Rev. 17 documented her loss of dominion and power, and Rev. 18 documented her complete destruction. The phrase, *"Her*

smoke rises forever and ever” is a symbolic representation of her eternal destruction not a description of her eternal torment.

Ok, tenth passage; (Rev. 20:10, 14-15) “The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. . . Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”

The support – The focus is on the nature of the Lake of Fire and the condition within it of its inhabitants.

Counterpoint – Again from a CI advocate; “A couple of parallel passages would be good to keep in mind; (Matt. 10:28) God is able to ‘*destroy both soul and body in hell*’, and (2 Thess. 1:9), the wicked ‘*will be punished with everlasting destruction*’. The wicked are raised to experience the Second Death. This image of a Lake of Fire is found nowhere else in the Bible. There is no specific example that sets a precedent for this final judgment. We cannot justify the use of the devil, the beast or the false prophet when discussion the eternal destiny of humans, for these characters are something other or more than human. They are the only ones who are said to be ‘tormented day and night forever and ever.’ Whatever the Lake of Fire is, the fact that death and Hades are cast in would seem to indicate their destruction or cessation. Two other passages confirm this; (Isa. 25:7-8) ‘*(God) will swallow up death forever*’, and (1 Cor. 15:26), ‘The last enemy to be destroyed is death.’ John is careful to point out that the Lake of Fire is the Second Death. What kind of death remains deathless? Unbelievers do not experience a deathless death.”

One final comment on this by John Locke;

“It seems a strange way of understanding a temporal law which says, ‘For felony thou shalt surely die,’ to mean, not that he will lose his life, but that he will be kept alive in perpetual torments.”

Now, on a personal note; I can’t be dogmatic because I still have questions, but at this point I believe the Conditional Immortality position is the stronger of the two.

With that in mind, I'll admit bias on my part in what we'll discuss now. I want to spend what time we have left looking at what we've considered through the lens of what we know of the character of God.

We know that God is just and that as such He must punish sin; we know He is holy so nothing that is unholy can live in His presence. But the one passage in the Bible that describes the core or center of His character, that from which all else springs, is in 1 Jn. 4:16 which simply says, "God is love . . ."

To protect His creation, God's love has moved Him to ultimately judge, remove or destroy anything that would harm those He loves. Love doesn't compromise (1 Cor. 13:6); so, God will *always* act in accordance with Who He is. Here's an example. This is a quote by Dr. John Young,

"With great reverence I venture to express the conviction that if God foreknew that eternal misery, conscious suffering, would be the destiny of even one single man, it is incredible to think that God would have given existence to him. To me, endless conscious suffering is inconceivable and unendurable by any sane conscience."

Young is basically saying that God knew there would come a time when He would have to judge man, but the idea that He would do so in a way that involved endless conscious torment, Young felt was "inconceivable" knowing what we know of God.

Judgment is necessary because God is righteous, but whatever punishment He determines is just, would not violate any of the attributes that make up His essential character. As David puts it in Psalm. 136:1, "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever." In my opinion, final destruction, following whatever time of punishment is determined, retains both God's justice as well as His mercy – both of which are eternal attributes that are unchanging.

This next quote is from T.P. Forsyth;

"Punish a man for his sins, that is just; punish him for ages, that may also be just; but make no end of punishing him for that sin, reduce him from a man to a devil, that is not just. The only justice to a sinner in a case like (this) is to make his punishment finite according to his works."

Forsyth's comments reminded me of part of our passage in Rev. 20:12, "*And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.*"

One objection I originally had to Forsyth's argument was that he appeared to be trying to impose a human sense or standard of justice upon a Divine Being. How would Forsyth know what God's sense of justice is?

Then I remembered that God *did* reveal His concept of justice in the commandments He gave through Moses. The ultimate penalty for the worst crime committed in Israel was capital punishment. It wasn't, *lock him in a cage and torture him for the rest of his life*. God *could* have had an earthly punishment like that for murder or for rebelling against the true God, and that would have given us at least a glimpse or a sense of what God's justice was like; but He didn't.

And as I said earlier, whatever judgement God executes would be likely to take into consideration His knowledge regarding how that judgement would affect those of us who are to live with Him in heaven – His justice has always been intended not only to punish sin, but also to protect the righteous.

Keeping that in mind, listen to these comments I found by Edward White;

"It is vain to deny that belief in the misery of the lost to be everlasting shakes the faith of every thoughtful Christian who accepts it."

Whether you believe White or not, I'm sure this thought has crossed your mind; "How can I be happy in heaven when my parents (you fill in the people) are tormented forever in hell?"

We'll have to stop there. I'll close today with this quote from the author of a book called "Mercy and Judgment, Last Words on Christian Eschatology" by Frederic Farrar written in 1881;

"It is necessary once more to show that there is cause openly to repudiate those hideous pictures which are due to the unlicensed reveling of human imagination, and not to the Word of God. Against the eternal pain of loss – against Christ's revelation that there will, in the life to come, be degrees of punishment in proportion to the degrees of guilt- these are doctrines neither unjust nor unmerciful. And these alone are doctrines of scripture, though they are often expressed in the metaphors of which all languages, and especially the literature and languages of the Semitic nations- are full. But that souls are to be plunged into a material fire, miraculously kept aflame, and to be tormented with excruciating physical pain during billions of ages, while saints and angels rejoice at their sufferings- these are the assertions which I wish to hear authoritatively repudiated."

As I said earlier, I wish I could be as dogmatic as Mr. Farrar is; maybe someday I will be, but for now I would just challenge you to be as Berean as possible on all we've looked at tonight.

And sometime, when you have a few minutes, I'd like you to think through the implications of the following verse in the light of what we've studied. Our Lord evidently believed that *this* verse was the *essential message of Christianity* regarding the ultimate intention of His Father. The word "perish" is in the verse I'll read. In the Greek, "perish" is apollymi (a pol' i mee) which means to "to kill, to be lost, to bring to ruin, to perish, to destroy utterly". Here's the verse.

"For God so loved *the world* that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."