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We must always be on guard against two perils: the Scyllia of legalism and rigorism and Charbydis of antinomianism. An ethics of the divine commandment, by uniting law and grace, the imperative and the indicative, shows how we can live the authentic Christian life in obedience to the highest, which is not a law but a person, not an ideal but the reality of the New being, the power of crucified love, as we see this in Jesus Christ.

Donald G. Bloesch

The ethical precepts of the gospels serve two purposes. On the one hand, they help towards an intelligent and realistic “act of repentance,” because they offer an objective standard of judgment upon our conduct On the other hand, they are intended to offer positive moral guidance for action, to those who have received the Kingdom of God.

C. H. Dodd

The Morality of Everlasting Punishment

Mark R. Talbot

At the Last Judgment will those whose sins remain uncovered by the blood of Christ depart from His presence to suffer unending conscious torment? Recently, this doctrine of everlasting punishment has been questioned even by so thoroughly Reformed a theologian as Philip Edgcumbe Hughes and so staunchly evangelical a churchman as John R.W. Stott. In its place they propose putting the doctrine that the wicked will ultimately be annihilated—that Scripture’s remarks about the “second death” are properly interpreted as meaning that those not saved through Christ will ultimately cease to exist. They, along with a growing number of others, hold that this alternative to the traditional doctrine is scripturally defensible. As Stott puts it, while he holds his position tentatively, he believes that “the ultimate annihilation of the wicked should at least be accepted as a legitimate, biblically founded alternative to [the traditional evangelical belief in] eternal conscious torment.”¹

Virtually everyone concedes that the doctrine of unending torment has been the orthodox consensus of the church.² That consensus arose from what seems to be the plain meaning of the Scriptures. For instance, our Lord declared that after He returns in His glory to judge the living and the dead the righteous will go to “eternal life” and the unrighteous to “eternal punishment” (Matt. 25:46), where the latter’s “worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:48); and in Revelation it is said that the Beast and his worshipers “will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb,” with “the smoke of their torment” arising “forever and ever,” and where they will have “no rest day or night” (Rev. 14:10-12).

In the face of Scriptures like these, attempts to argue against the traditional doctrine can seem like—and, indeed, are—a kind of special pleading; they are based on considerations that go beyond the scriptural texts. For Stott, the

thought that the final destiny of the impenitent will be eternal conscious torment is emotionally unbearable. Recognizing, however, that “our emotions are a fluctuating, unreliable guide to truth and must not be exalted to the place of supreme authority in determining it,” he surveys the biblical material afresh to see if it can be taken as pointing toward annihilationism.³ Hughes’s reasons for questioning the orthodox consensus include a doubt about what purpose “the never-ending torment of finite creatures” might serve.⁴ Both Stott and Hughes believe that God’s punishment of the wicked will be just. So, Stott asks, Could everlasting conscious torment be just, given the limitedness of sins committed in time?⁵

Theologically, a lot hangs on whether our sins merit everlasting punishment, including part of the answer to the question why only God incarnate could make adequate atonement for our sins. Yet the exegetical considerations advanced by Stott, Hughes, and others against the traditional doctrine are not so far-fetched that they can be rejected out of hand.⁶ A convincing defense of the traditional doctrine needs, then, to address the sorts of wider considerations that have prompted sincere believers like Stott and Hughes to depart from the plain meaning of the biblical texts. I do that here by arguing that the never-ending torment of the impenitent is moral in the sense of serving a just and proper end.

Justice and Punishment

The world, as it stands, is not a just place. Each of us has felt the sting of injustice at others’ hands—someone has said something about us, or done something to us, that was manifestly untrue or unfair. And others have felt the sting of injustice at our hands, sometimes even when we have been too obtuse to realize we have inflicted it.

Whenever we feel or observe injustice, we judge that the

world is not the way it is supposed to be. For feeling or observing injustice involves feeling or observing a wrong being done that needs righting. And, in general, we know what it would take for the wrong to be righted, for the world to become what it should be: The perpetrator of the injustice should be called to account, and, at the very least, he or she should somehow be made to feel and acknowledge the wrong done, and to feel and acknowledge it in the appropriate degree.⁷

Feeling and acknowledging these wrongs is inevitably painful, for it puts the perpetrator in the victim’s seat. The *lex talionis* of the Old Testament—“If a man injures his neighbor, just as he has done so shall it be done to him: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth” (Lev. 24:19-20)⁸—was intended, so far as it is possible to do so in this life, to foster this sort of exact exchange. Occasionally, we willingly put ourselves in our victim’s place. As part of being properly sorry for having mistreated her, I may want to feel as closely as possible my wife’s pain. More often, however, we must be forced to take our victims’ seats. Mommy wants Billy to know what his little sister Annie felt like when he ate her piece of cake, and so as just retribution she gives Annie his next piece. Billy doesn’t like this. If he could he would not put up with it, and so would not learn what he should. As he watches Annie eat, Billy feels like he is being punished; and indeed he is, for punishment consists in being compelled to suffer as just recompense for some offense.

An unjust world, where offenders were never called to account and where no one ever felt the wrongness of what he or she had done, would be a terrible place. Sometimes an injustice is so small that its going unrequited doesn’t seem to matter much in the whole scheme of things: It is unjust of me to refuse to return a small favor you have done for me, but nothing earthshaking may seem to follow from my not being called to account for my offense. At other times, however,

injustices cry out to be righted and their perpetrators brought to justice for doing them. Hitler, as the ultimate perpetrator of the Nazi Holocaust, ought not to be able to escape being brought to account for his crimes against humanity by just blowing out his brains. Death, and then oblivion, is not the appropriate denouement for such crimes. Indeed, something would be profoundly wrong with a world where its Hitlers could, when the time of reckoning drew near, just step off into nescience.

My wanting to understand and feel my wife's pain, your approval of Billy's mother's disciplining him by putting him in Annie's place, and virtually everyone's being troubled about how easily Hitler seems to have gotten off for his crimes, suggest that our concern that justice be done is not simply some inappropriate thirst for revenge. For we can be concerned that injustice be righted even when it either opposes or doesn't touch our own self-interest. Of course, many in our culture claim that it is better not to require retribution and nobler just to forgive. Some even appeal to the Gospel to back up their claims (e.g., Mark 11:25). But we must be careful here. In Scripture, forgiveness involves the "covering" or "blotting out" or "forgetting" of sin (cf. Ps. 32:1; 51:1, 9 with Acts 3:19 and Isa. 43:25). As such, it involves the forgiver withdrawing his or her judgment, and pardoning the one forgiven from the just penalty for his sins. Biblical forgiveness does not deny that there is a just penalty for sin. In fact, the central "problem" of the Scriptures is how God *can* forgive. For He is the One who must by His very nature call all offenders to account for their sins (Hab. 1:13; Ps. 5:4-6). For Christians who have soaked up the reality of God's holiness and righteousness from Scripture, the Good News that God's forgiveness has been made available through the work of Christ is marvelous precisely because of the seriousness of sin (2 Thess. 1:5-10). But many in our culture say it is better not to require retribution and nobler just to forgive only because they do not

acknowledge sin's seriousness. Unless they identify with the victims, they do not agree that it is crucial for the person being forgiven to have an adequate sense of what he or she has done and why it needs forgiving. In any case where someone's wrongdoing does not affect them more or less directly, they make light of injustice, wrongdoing, and sin.

In contrast to this, Scripture claims it is part of God's glory to requite every wrong (Rev. 16:1-7; 19:1-6; Ps. 82:1, 8). The just Judge of all the earth will finally, at the Last Judgment, call every human being to full account for his or her life (Matt. 25:31-46; 12:36; Ps. 31:23). No one, not even by drastic expedients like Hitler's, will then escape being brought to account for whatever he has done (Acts 17:30f.; Isa. 29:15f.; Eccl. 12:14). Then, when God unveils what is now hidden and exposes the secret motives of every human heart (1 Cor. 4:5; Rom. 2:16), the wicked will know the depth of their wrongdoing with an exactness that earthly attempts at justice can only poorly emulate (Col. 3:25; 2 Thess. 1:6; Jer. 50:15, 29).⁹ This alone will restore the balance of justice; it alone will set things right. The penitent and the impenitent alike will see exactly what they have done and receive the proper reward for their lives (Ps. 62:12; 2 Chron. 6:23; Jer. 17:10). Each, in his own way, will feel and acknowledge the seriousness of his sins. The penitent—knowing his sins are covered by Christ's blood—will view the full depth of his sinfulness through the lens of Christ's sacrifice and thus be moved to unending adoration and praise. For the impenitent, however, for him who has not trusted in God's forgiveness proffered through Christ's work, this restoration of the balances, this awareness of the full depth of his wrongdoing, will be forced upon him and experienced as the torment of just punishment for his sins.

Why Must Just Punishment Be Everlasting?

The first step toward recognizing the morality of everlasting punishment is to recognize the morality—the justness or

rightness or fittingness—of our being called to account for our evildoing. Evangelical annihilationists like Stott and Hughes don't deny this; indeed, they insist on it. John Wenham, for instance, declares that to hold that biological death "is the end and that there is no Day of Judgment . . . [when] we are . . . judged according to our works . . . is plainly unscriptural and not the view of any conditionalist" he knows.¹⁰

So evangelical annihilationists agree that it is moral or just or right or fitting for God to call the wicked to account for their sins. They agree that the Day of Judgment will be a day of torment for the wicked, and they even agree that the period of conscious torment following it serves a just and proper end. What they doubt is that human wickedness merits a period of *unending* conscious torment. How, John Wenham asks, could endless punishment be either loving or just? He speaks for many when he says, "Unending torment speaks to me of sadism, not justice."¹¹

In order to show that this is not so, we need to think more about the nature of punishment and about God's purposes at the Last Judgment and beyond.

Punishment, as I have said, consists in being compelled to suffer as just recompense for some offense. The suffering arises from being held responsible for personal wrongdoing in a way that requires us to feel and acknowledge the wrongs we have done, and to feel and acknowledge their wrongness to the appropriate degree. So such suffering has a purpose—two purposes, in fact: first, the narrower purpose of causing perpetrators to feel and acknowledge the full seriousness of their injustices, of compelling transgressors to see their sinfulness and wrongdoing for what it really is; and, second, the wider purpose of thereby righting—or of at least beginning to right—the moral imbalance caused by their particular acts of injustice, wrongdoing, and sin. For the persons undergoing it, such suffering is experienced as punishment; and so

just punishment has an end or *telos*, the end or *telos* of producing a true apprehension of his or her own wrongdoing as wrong (and as being as wrong as it really is) in an unrepentant being.

So just punishment has nothing arbitrary about it. It is neither motivated nor guided by the pleasures of revenge. It has nothing of sadism in it, for it does not delight in inflicting pain. It aims to produce a kind of "truth in the innermost being" (Ps. 51:6)¹² that has, as its inevitable and indeed just by-product, what can only be properly described as "the sorrows of sin." Yet these sorrows, as Henri Blocher correctly observes, have not generally been thought of by Christian theologians as adding any evil to the world of conscious beings, but as "the balancing cancellation of evil, the moral order repaired, the good vindicated."¹³ Just punishment, properly administered, is a good that quiets the anguish that wrongdoing inflicts (or at least should inflict) on our moral sense.¹⁴

On the Day of Judgment God will be glorified as the Repairer of the moral order and as the Vindicator of the good. He will then set about the task of requiting every wrong. In Scripture, God's righting the moral balances is portrayed as part of His active agency; it is not, with all due respect to C. H. Dodd and many others, some impersonal outworking of the natural consequences of sin.¹⁵ Much of the beauty of God's character is the fact that He takes injustice so seriously; He "upholds the cause of the oppressed" (Ps. 146:7) and defends widows and orphans (Deut. 10:18; Ps. 68:5). Indeed, as Calvin observed, because He has made us in His own image, God takes the violence we do to each other as violence against Himself.¹⁶ God merits our adoration and praise in large part because He manifests "a continuous, settled antagonism" against all evildoing.¹⁷

This aspect of God's glory is hard for us, in our relativistic and pluralistic culture, to appreciate. But think about Billy

and Annie and their mother again. Most of us, no matter what our theories are about childrearing, would be uneasy if Billy regularly got away with wronging Annie. So we appreciate Billy's mother disciplining him; indeed, we would think less, and not more, of her if she allowed his injustices against Annie to go unchecked. The world would be a worse, and not a better, place—it would contain more evil and not less—if Billy's mother allowed him to persist in his ways. It is part of the glory of her character to hold him responsible for his misdeeds by insisting that he sit in Annie's place.

God's personal involvement in requiting all injustice, wrongdoing, and sin is pictured in Scripture as His making the impenitent to drink to the dregs "the wine of the wrath of God, is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger" (Rev. 14:10; Ps. 75:8). It is another part of His glory—a manifestation of His unmeritable patience, kindness, and mercy—to stay His hand of wrath until the Judgment Day (Rom. 2:3ff.; 2 Peter 3:3-9). But on that Day, He will call every human being to a full accounting for his or her life. And because His purposes at the Last Judgment and beyond include bringing each of us—repentant and unrepentant alike—to feel and acknowledge the full seriousness of our sins, He must make both the joys of heaven and the pains of hell to be everlasting.

For the whole tenor of Scripture is to portray sin as incalculably serious. There is nothing about ourselves (Matt. 5:27-30; 18:6-9) or the world (Matt. 16:24-28), no honors (1 Cor. 4:9-13; 2 Cor. 6:4-10) or riches (Ps. 84:10; 1 Tim. 6:6-10), and no pleasures (Heb. 11:24-26; 1 Tim. 5:6; Luke 8:14), that are worth getting or keeping if they cause us to sin. Scripture takes even our most minor transgressions against God's law, if they remain unatoned for, as altering our relationship with God in a qualitative and not just in a quantitative way (James 2:10; Matt. 5:17f.; Gal. 3:10). For the desires of the sinful nature are contrary to the desires of the Spirit, and as such

they cannot coexist (Gal. 5:17). The way of sin is the way of death (Rom. 6:16, 21, 23; Gen. 2:16f.; James 1:15), while the way of righteousness is the way of life (Rom. 6:22; Matt. 25:46; Deut. 30:15-20). Righteousness and wickedness have nothing in common (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1); they are as opposed as light and darkness (Eph. 5:3-12; 1 John 1:5f.). This contrariety between sin and righteousness is exceedingly hard for a sinful mind to grasp (Ps. 36:1-4; Deut. 29:18f.). Indeed, it is precisely because sin is incalculably serious that no finite mind can grasp all at once the utter heinousness of sin. For our minds can take in only so much at once: they cannot comprehend all at once either God's infinite goodness or sin's immeasurable badness. A finite mind can only begin to comprehend the infinitely good or the immeasurably bad over an infinite length of time. So only an everlastingly long experience of the riches of Christ's forgiving grace or of the depths of God's righteous wrath can bring us to feel and acknowledge sin's full seriousness (Dan. 12:2).

Is Human Sin Really So Serious?

Here someone may say, "Granted: *if* even the smallest sin is incalculably serious and thus alters our relationship with God in a qualitative and not merely in a quantitative way, and *if* it is therefore impossible for us to grasp all at once the utter heinousness of our sins, then God's aim of bringing each of us to feel and acknowledge the full seriousness of our sins means that the pains of hell must indeed be everlasting. But why think our sins are so serious? We commit them in time, which limits the wrongness of each. So everlasting conscious torment cannot be just, since our sins aren't as serious as you have made them seem."

So can we, acting in time, do anything that requires the just Judge to punish us everlastingly?

At the Last Judgment, God will judge not merely what we have actually done but also, and indeed primarily, what we

have intended—the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts (Heb. 4:12ff.). Scripture assumes that our sinfulness has depths and breadths we do not now comprehend (Jer. 17:9; Ps. 19:12; 139:23f.). The Last Judgment will begin to bring the depth and breadth of our sins to light (Jer. 17:10; 1 Cor. 4:5; Rom. 2:1-16). Even now, the Lord Almighty is testing our hearts and minds (Jer. 11:20; 12:3). He alone—and not we ourselves—sees us for what we really are. But on the Day when He judges all secrets (Rom. 2:5, 16) what we really are will begin to be unveiled to us. We shall begin to know ourselves as we are known (1 Cor. 13:12).

After Christ's return, no unrepentant sinner will be allowed to evade a full apprehension of his wickedness and sin. Even now God displays His eternal power and divine nature through creation, so that no one has an excuse for sin (Rom. 1:18-20).¹⁸ Yet although we know that sin deserves death (Rom. 1:32; 6:15-23), we suppress that truth until our hearts become darkened to the full heinousness of sin (Rom. 1:18, 21f.). Here, in this world, we can avoid God's truth. Even the repentant are often distracted from apprehending reality as it really is (Matt. 13:22; Luke 10:38-42). There, at the Last Judgment and beyond, nothing will be suppressed or evaded; there will be no more distractions to veil reality from us, and God will guarantee we see ourselves as we are seen.

If, starting on that Day, each sin will be revealed in all its depth, then at least some sinners will suffer everlastingly, for at least some sins are unfathomably deep. Hitler's hatred of the Jews presumably knew no bounds, for true hatred takes nothing to be too bad for the one we hate. It involves wanting and even willing someone's endless suffering. Hitler's actual atrocities can probably be quantified, for they were bounded by the limits that nature and nature's God has put on what an evil man can actually do. But God, looking upon Hitler's heart, saw him willing on the Jews a quantitatively endless world of grief. God must make Hitler feel and

acknowledge the wickedness of that desire if He is to show him his culpability's full depth. Only then will Hitler apprehend himself truthfully. And so only that will begin to repair the moral order and quiet the anguish his unrequited wrongdoing stirs in our hearts. Yet Hitler cannot grasp the limitlessness of his evil intentions all at once, even after death; and so he will have to endure drinking the dregs of God's righteous wrath everlastingly.

"But," our interlocutor may retort, "even if hating someone involves wanting and willing a limitless evil, not every sinful thought or intention is unlimited in the same way. Someone may indulge in a lascivious thought without intending to follow it up with immoral behavior, and he may not act immorally even if he gets the chance. He may limit his lustfulness to indulging these thoughts, and surely they aren't as bad as actually acting immorally. So his lasciviousness would seem to be a 'limited' sin."

Acting immorally no doubt compounds a lascivious person's culpability. But to admit that acting immorally compounds a lascivious person's culpability is not to concede that a lascivious thought itself does not deserve everlasting punishment.

For lasciviousness that does not bear the fruit of sexually immoral behavior may only seem to be a "limited" sin. Sexual temptation for men, at least, often consists in just thinking about achieving physical intimacy with someone new.¹⁹ The prospect of sex outside the bounds of lawful wedlock can be exciting, in other words, precisely because of its novelty. But if the prospect of illicit sex is attractive for its newness, then lasciviousness is driven by a sinful impulse that is unfathomably deep. For the lascivious person is always thinking about new sexual conquests; when the novelty of thinking about sexual congress with any particular person wears off, he moves on to lust after someone new. So the "logic" of lasciviousness is to want an endless array of new partners; the

lascivious person hankers after strange flesh. The lascivious person, no matter what he actually does, is guilty of wanting to break the bonds of lawful wedlock again and again and again. It is the wrongness of that desire—the hideousness of that thought and that attitude of the lascivious person’s heart—which God must drive home if a lascivious person is to be convinced of the true depth of his sin. And that will require his feeling and acknowledging the wickedness of his lasciviousness endlessly.

As attitudes of the heart, many sins are less “limited” than they first appear to be. For example, the covetous person wants more than she should have, for covetousness by definition involves *inordinate* desire, desire that exceeds its proper limits. She is never long satisfied with what she now possesses. No matter how much she has, she wants just a little more. So to succumb to covetousness is to succumb to chasing the idol of “just-a-little-more” everlastingly. Since sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4), and since laws set limits on what we are supposed to do, *any* sin, in intention, has an element of limitlessness to it—an element of refusing to be bounded by the limits God has set on what we should be or do.

Why Must We Preach the Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment?

There is yet another and more profound reason why even the smallest sin requires endless punishment. As Montaigne said, “It is the proper office of a rational soul to obey.” Human beings were made for obedience. We are creation’s special ornaments because God has given us the capacity to rule over the rest of His works by freely conforming our wills to His (Ps. 8:3-8; Gen. 1:26ff.). Our task is to do so gladly and completely. We fail to do so whenever we sin. For sin transgresses God’s will. And to sin by disobeying God even once is to repudiate the end for which we were made. It is to refuse to take our proper place in God’s scheme for things. It

is to abandon being the kind of creature we know God made us to be.

For we know we ought to obey God perfectly. We know our wills were made to follow His will as shadows follow the bodies that cast them, moving as and when they do, step for step. Yet we, unlike shadows, are to follow freely, willingly, and swiftly. To do so is to love God and His righteousness for God and His righteousness’ own sake. Scriptures such as Romans 1:18-2:16 make it clear that, on one level or another, all of us know that we are responsible to God and that we shall one day be called to render an account to Christ for our lives (Rom. 14:9-12; Heb. 4:13). We, indeed, in some sense know that to allow our wills to deviate from His will even in the slightest degree is to forsake the very roots of human personality.²⁰

We know, then, that to commit even the smallest of sins is incalculably serious because it involves repudiating our proper relationship with God—it involves deciding to alter our relationship with God in a qualitative way. We know that to sin is to toss away the pearl of perfect obedience. We know that to sin is to make ourselves God’s enemies (Col. 1:21; Rom. 5:10; Ps. 5:4-6). This is why the Scriptures are full of dire warnings against sin (Gen. 18:16-19:29; Prov. 14:9, 11f.; Luke 3:1-18; 2 Tim. 2:22; 1 Cor. 6:18; 10:14). They portray it as so serious that only the death of God’s own infinitely perfect Son can free us from the doom of everlasting punishment.

In fact, it is only when we understand that our sins deserve everlasting punishment that we can see why only God incarnate could make adequate atonement for our sins: only an incalculably serious offense can require the sacrifice of an infinitely perfect Being. “[T]he cross,” as Timothy R. Phillips says, “reveals the specific penalty required for sin.”²¹ In Christ, the just God Himself paid the price for our sins. This is unanticipatable grace. It is the secret of the Gospel, the revelation of God’s provision for our sinfulness that the

Old Testament saints and prophets longed to see. Yet if we do not grasp the full heinousness of our sins, we cannot see why only God in Christ could reconcile us to Himself. "It is no accident," then, as Phillips observes, "that, historically, annihilationism has gone hand in hand with a denial of Jesus' deity."²² It is only when we understand the infinite heinousness of sin that we apprehend the essence of God's Good News. So if we are to preserve the Gospel, if we are to help each other to appreciate adequately what God in Christ has done for us, we must preach the doctrine of everlasting punishment.

Scripture urges us to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). Much of this growth involves coming increasingly to see that we shall never—even in eternity—fully fathom the riches offered to us in Christ (Eph. 3:8). The depth of His love for us is past fully finding out (Eph. 3:18), and eternity with Christ will be but never-ending fresh discoveries of the depths of God's grace. Yet truths like these come home to us only with our increasing recognition of the utter heinousness of our sins. The greatest saints have the deepest sense of their sin, which is itself a chief sign of their spiritual maturity (Ps. 51; Job 42:1-6; 1 Tim. 1:15ff.).

So we must not shy away from preaching the doctrine of everlasting punishment, for coming to believe that our sins deserve God's everlasting wrath is part of the process of growth in godliness. It is only when I realize that my sin deserves everlasting punishment that I begin to appreciate adequately the full glory of the peace that God has bought for me and brought to me through the Person and Work of His Son, Jesus Christ, my Lord.

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Endnotes

- 1 David L. Edwards and John Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 320.
- 2 See Stott, *ibid.*, 314; and especially John W. Wenham, *The Goodness of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1974; a new edition titled *The Enigma of Evil* was published in 1985), 28ff., for the concession. See Wenham's later "The Case for Conditional Immortality," in Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed., *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992) 181ff., for some qualifications on that concession.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 314ff.
- 4 Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 406.
- 5 *Op. cit.*, 318ff. Stott speculates that such torment could be justified if the wicked continue sinning throughout eternity. The Christian philosopher Marilyn McCord Adams has argued that everlasting conscious torment would be unjust in especially compelling ways. See her "Hell and the God of Justice," *Religious Studies* 11 (1974), 433-47, and her "The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians," in Eleonore Stump, ed., *Reasoned Faith: Essays in Philosophical Theology in Honor of Norman Kretzmann* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1993). What I say in this article answers the difficulties she raised in her earlier article.

- 6 In my judgment, the exegetical considerations supporting the traditional doctrine are somewhat better than those against it. See, for instance, Kendall S. Harmon, "The Case Against Conditionalism: A response to Edward William Fudge," in Cameron, ed., op. cit.
- 7 "At the very least," for this assumes that the victim has not been harmed in a way requiring restitution. For simplicity's sake I shall ignore the question of restitution in this paper.
- 8 Rather than being vengeful or vindictive, this law was meant to exclude undue retaliation or punishment by proportioning the penalty as exactly as humanly possible to the crime.
- 9 As Adams points out in her "Hell and the God of Justice," 439-41, there are situations where the *lex talionis* cannot be equitably applied in this life. Those who believe in an all-powerful, all-wise, and completely good God can rest, however, in the expectation that He knows how to overcome these earthly inequities.
- 10 "The Case for Conditional Immortality," 189. Wenham's "conditionalism" is equivalent to my "annihilationism." For some clarification on the use of such terms, see Harmon, op. cit., 196-99.
- 11 Wenham, "The Case for Conditional Immortality," 189, and see 187. Wenham reports that F. F. Bruce also had doubts about everlasting torment (166).
- 12 The Hebrew's meaning here is uncertain, and what David meant by the phrase, even if we are translating it correctly, is contested. My own view is that David's adultery with Bathsheba, and his consequently putting Uriah in death's way, caused him (by the Spirit's illumination) to see the depth of his own sinfulness in a way unapparent to him before he committed those sins, and so produced "truth in his inner parts" about himself and his overwhelming need for God's grace.

- 13 Henri Blocher, "Everlasting Punishment and the Problem of Evil," in Cameron, ed., op. cit., 292.
- 14 See W. G. T. Shedd, *The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment* (Edinburgh & Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965; first published in 1885), 145. As I have attempted to show in my first section, Shedd claims that "the demand, even here upon earth, for the punishment of the intensely and incorrigibly wicked, proves that retribution is grounded in the human conscience" (ibid.). See also Edward John Carnell, *Christian Commitment: An Apologetic* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982; first published in 1957), 91ff., on the "judicial sentiment."
- 15 For a summary and evaluation of Dodd's position, see both John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 103-106, and especially Leon Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 154-57, 163, 166ff.
- 16 See Calvin's commentary on Genesis 9:6 in John Calvin, *Genesis* (Edinburgh & Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 295.
- 17 Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 106.
- 18 See my "On Christian Philosophy," *The Reformed Journal*, 34:9 (September, 1984), 18-22; and my "Is It Natural to Believe in God?" *Faith and Philosophy*, 6:2 (April 1989), 155-71.
- 19 I shall speak from a male's perspective and not presume to identify what tempts females sexually. I doubt the temptations are exactly the same, although I think illicit sex has its own temptations for women. But only a fool would try to speak from a perspective outside his experience!
- 20 For more on this, see John Baille, *Invitation to Pilgrimage* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), chapter 6, and my "Starting from Scripture," in Robert C. Roberts and

The Morality of Everlasting Punishment

Mark R. Talbot, eds., *Limning the Psyche: Explorations in Christian Psychology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, forthcoming).

- 21 Timothy R. Phillips, "Hell: A Christological Reflection," in William V. Crockett and James G. Sigountos, eds., *Through No Fault of Their Own?: The Fate of Those Who Have Never Heard* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 53.
- 22 *Ibid.*, note 17.