There are beliefs in the world which say there will be no eternal punishment for the wicked. There are even those who believe that all will receive the gift of salvation. But is this what the Bible says about life after death?

When it comes to the destiny of the unsaved there are three popular views. Eternal punishment holds that there is an "endless duration"\(^1\) of punishment for "whoever rejects the Son" (John 3:36, NIV). Annihilationism believes that some or all of mankind will simply cease

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to exist after death. This may mean all of humankind, or only those who are not redeemed.² A third popular view is known as universalism, which states that "all men will eventually be reconciled to God".³

While some may try to explain away what happens to our souls after death, there is no doubt that there is a place that our souls go after death. Upon death, all souls go to Sheol (Hebrew) or in the greek, Hades, which is an intermediate state, the grave. The wicked and righteous will be here after death (Gen. 37:35) but the righteous do not remain (Ps. 16:10; 49:15; 86:13). The ultimate destination of the wicked soul is Gehenna (Matt. 25:41; 2 Thess. 1:8). This is the "final and everlasting place of punishment for the wicked following the last judgment".⁴

This author holds to the view of eternal punishment. The Bible is very clear sin will be punished (Dan. 12:2; Matt. 10:15; John 5:28-29; Rom. 5:12-21). It is also clear that those who do not "believe...Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31, ESV) their punishment is eternal (Matt. 25:46). In Matthew 25:46, Jesus states that the punishment of the wicked is eternal, as is the reward for the righteous. This word, "eternal," conveys the idea of an "endless duration"⁵ that is given to those who go into "punishment" and "life" (v. 46).

There are two common objections to the view that this author holds to. A universalist will use 1 Tim. 2:4 or 2 Pet. 3:9 to say that God wants all people to be saved. They will also use John

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12:32 to say that Jesus' death on the cross "will draw all people to [himself]." An annihilationist will use 1 Tim. 1:17 and 6:16 to say that only God has immortality, not man.

To the universalist, this author would say it is important to understand that while God may "[desire] all people to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:4), and while the benefits of the death of Christ on the cross are available to all who will believe (John 1:12), God has said, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" (Rom. 9:15 cf. Ex. 33:19).

To the annihilationist: Scripture is clear that upon death God will "give" (Rom. 2:7b) either eternal punishment (Matt. 25:46; John 5:29) or eternal life (Matt. 25:46; Rom. 2:7; 5:21). In other words: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 6:23, emphasis added).

Some may ask how a loving God can allow eternal punishment. The answer is simple: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life...Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (John 3:16, 18). While God does choose to "[harden] whomever he wills" (Rom. 9:18; John 6:65) all have the choice to receive eternal life if they make the decision to believe. This is how it can be said that it is "fair" for God to allow people to suffer in hell. Just as Eve and Adam chose to disobey God in the garden (Gen. 3:6), so is all of mankind responsible for choosing whether or not to believe in Christ.

When it comes to evangelism, the view of hell as a real place of eternal punishment must be emphasized. People try to downplay the existence, or severity, of hell because no one wants to
believe that God would allow eternal punishment to take place. The reality, as shown above, is that God does allow it but that he also offers a "free gift of...eternal life" (Rom. 6:23) to those who believe. While this should not be the only part of an evangelistic conversation, it must be a part.

**Finished reading?** Get the discussion questions, points to remember, and further conversation on this topic here: [http://wp.me/pDfG0-Vk](http://wp.me/pDfG0-Vk)


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