

RESPONSE TO ANNIHILATIONISM: (excerpt from Waging War with Hell p 147 – 149)

Are Souls Eternal?

“Some Protestant faiths choose to believe that the spirit is not eternal, that it dies at the same time as the body and is resurrected at the same time as the body, for judgment”.ⁱ This relieves their minds of the problem of the existence of Hell. It becomes unnecessary. With Hell out of the way, all that remains is to determine how a presentation of the gospel can be fit in to the plan of God revealed in the book of Revelations.

Their argument proceeds like this. At death, the human ceases (in limbo?) until the time of the Final Judgment. At this judgment, the gospel will be presented to the souls who have never heard it from the books that are openedⁱⁱ. Once judgment has been rendered, those who have chosen to reject reconciliation with God through the blood of Jesus will become the stubble of Malachi 4:1. “They will be burned up forever. They will cease to exist.”ⁱⁱⁱ

There is confusion in this line of reasoning. How can a human soul burn up forever *and* cease to exist? For that matter, if we are not eternal creations and eternal life is a gift of God^{iv} bestowed only upon the righteous at the time of their acceptance of Jesus, how could Adam have had a relationship with God prior to the Fall? They would not have been eternal beings capable of relating to an eternal God. They would not have been created in His image.

Certainly God did not create humanity to reject Him. If they were not eternal beings when created then it would be necessary for them to sin in order to create a situation that made judgment necessary so they could be granted eternal life at that Final Judgment. That would mean that, in order to have a relationship with God we had to sin! We would not have had the choice of obeying God and remaining in relationship with Him because we would not have become eternal beings without the judgment sin required. Sin would have been our only way to eternal salvation. That is not freedom of choice it is predetermination. Sin is only the factor to which salvation responds. Sin is not a necessary part of God’s plan for creation. We can have a relationship with God without sin because we were created as eternal beings.

Eternity of the Soul:

We are wholly eternal; spirit, soul and body.^v Hell holds our spirit and soul after death and prior to Final Judgment, while the earth holds the remains of our body. Eternal beings don’t just vanish. Time will vanish but we won’t. The concept of annihilation is not Biblical. Even Physics teaches us that nothing can be destroyed. God will never leave us or forsake us^{vi}. He could never forget us.

“Exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”^{vii} Only the living have ‘days’. Death passes between time and eternity. The day of salvation, the Today referred to, is passed into the night of death. In that night a special release of grace is required in order to present and receive the gospel. In life, Today, that grace is always available.

There is no daytime in Heaven because a day needs a night. It needs time. Jesus is the light of Heaven and there is no night there.^{viii} What is called the ‘day of judgment’ is really not a day but a *moed* (*Hebrew*), an appointed time or an appointment with God. The Hebrews passage quoted refers to the passing nature of time – it will pass away, be no more.

What is the necessity of acting on the proclamation of the gospel ‘today’? Today is the time when life holds the power of choice, the power of speech. The life we have partakes of that which remains of the powers granted to Adam and Eve, our covenant parents. This life is not identical to eternal life. That is a condition of our creation. Bodily life is a limited ‘essence’ whose powers are canceled at death. This ‘life’ is limited for the purpose of limiting our use of speech/words. This power is what defines us as being ‘in God’s image and after His likeness’.^{ix} God created all that is, with words, by speaking. We also create. We speak.

Why is the Power of Speech Revoked at Death?

If a rebel soul could continue to create/speak it would remain in God’s image without the possibility of separation from Him. They would remain of one nature with God and they could not choose to reject God. This would make free choice impossible. If it were possible for such speaking spirits to be separated from God into the Lake of Fire (place of separation) they would

become the Gods of that realm because they would still have the power to create just as God does. There could be nothing to separate them from God. They would have the creative power to change the Lake of Fire into a 'heaven'. If that were so, then Satan's words would come to pass. "I shall be like the Most High."^x

God watches over His own words, to bring them to pass but He does not empower the words of rebels. Satan was cast out of Heaven because he dared to speak his words in opposition to God's words. Creative power was denied to Satan. God's law limited the use of words in Heaven. "I will have no other gods before me (before My face)."^{xi}

God trusted His power (words) to Adam and Eve. They were given power and dominion, to order creation by their words.^{xii} But this gift was limited by the condition of obedience. Without obedience they would become subject to time, they would experience death, the limiting factor within time. They were limited to 'today'. Satan sought to take their power for himself just as he had tried to use God's power of words but death limited Satan's use of our power.

The Necessity of Eternal Spirit, Soul and Body.

If it can be argued that humans are not eternal and that eternal life is a gift God gives only to some, then the others can be annihilated making Hell and the Lake of Fire unnecessary. If the nature of eternal life is a gift imparted at Judgment then temporal beings (in time) can be terminated without prejudice to God's character. God, simply put, would not be guilty of our murder because we would cease to be of any value or significance.

But, we are created in God's image. God Himself has given us value and significance by choosing to relate to us. The words we speak effect eternal things; God Himself, our own destiny and the destiny of others. If we touch the eternal then we must, in some sense, be eternal ourselves. Even if we were annihilated, God would remember us. We cannot die from His memory. The words we speak are eternal therefore we cannot be solely temporal. God will never leave us or forsake us but He will allow us the choice to leave Him. Love bids Him do so.

ⁱ Beyond Death's Door p 119

ⁱⁱ Rev. 20:12

ⁱⁱⁱ Is This the Only Day of Salvation? p 8

^{iv} Romans 6:23

^v 1 Thessalonians 5:23

^{vi} Hebrews 13:5, Deuteronomy 4:31, 31:6-8, Joshua 1:5, Ps 37:25, Isaiah 41:10-17

^{vii} Hebrews 13:3

^{viii} Revelations 21:25, 22:5

^{ix} Genesis 1:26

^x Isaiah 14:14

^{xi} Exodus 20:3

^{xii} Genesis 2:19, 1:26