

Introduction

“The soul partakes of life only because God wills it to live.” - Justin Martyr

(SCREEN)

- This quote **suggests**, contrary to most beliefs, that the soul **is not** immortal.
- Justin Martyr was the first Christian Apologist we have a **solid record** of.
- He was influenced heavily by Greek philosophy.
 - I don't have time to dive deep into the **evolution** of his views on the nature of the soul, a subject that was evolving within philosophy, and was extremely important to the Christian church and discussion of hell.
 - It is without question, his views (and almost every Christian's views) on the soul was **influenced** by philosophy.
 - This may seem **irrelevant** but it is anything but as the doctrine of hell is about the substance and duration of the **final state of the soul**.
 - Justin Martyr wrote two major Apologies, the 2nd addressed to Marcus Aurelius, under whom he died as a martyr in Rome after eventually **evolving** into an Annihilationist (conditionalist).
- Having covered ECT, today I'll share the 2nd main stream view of hell, Conditional Immortality / Annihilationism.
 - This view has gained renewed attention in the last century, but it has roots stretching back into the early church age.
 - To reiterate what I said in each message is that all three main stream views are found all the way back to the early church.

“**Conditional Immortality / Annihilationism** posits that immortality is a gift **only** for believers in Christ; the unsaved, being inherently mortal, face judgment in hell as a final, irreversible "second death," resulting in complete cessation of existence, not eternal conscious torment.” (SCREEN)

- This view teaches that the human soul **is not** inherently immortal, and that eternal life is given as a gift to those who receive Christ and in contrast, those who do not receive Christ do not receive the gift of eternal life.

Text

Romans 6:23 ESV (SCREEN)

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

- Therefore, the ultimate punishment for the sin of refusing Christ's grace, is death — which is complete, total **eradication** of existence — not everlasting conscious torment ... which to an annihilationist is a **contradiction** in terms ... being a "death" that never "dies."
- The lost will be raised to judgment, face divine justice, and ultimately cease to exist, rather than live forever in separation from God.
 - Thus "eternal punishment" is understood as a punishment with eternal effect—**finality**—irreversible extinction—but not ongoing torment.

Transition

- Annihilationism sees —ECT— requiring the soul to be immortal in itself, as a belief the **conditionalists** believe the Bible never explicitly affirms.
 - As with all three views on hell, the early church had those who affirmed it, others who strongly rejected it, and many who chose to acknowledge the biblical tensions but never came to a conclusion about hell.
 - As with all three views, I'll consider this view against the motif of God's Character, the Scope of Redemption, and the Text.
- **God's Character**
 - Conditionalists claim annihilation best fits God's **character** regarding justice and mercy for many reasons:
 - God's mercy **does not delight** in endless suffering.

1 Timothy 2:4 ESV (SCREEN)

"Who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

2 Peter 3:9 ESV (SCREEN)

"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."

- Just to be **clear**, these verses don't say God saves everyone but it makes clear God's character is mercy that **desires** everyone be saved and He does not delight in endless suffering.
- God's **justice** requires that evil be judged.
- God does not allow **rebellion** to continue eternally.
 - It should be **made clear** that Justin Martyr, like many conditionalists, did not believe annihilation was **immediate** at death—but that hell was a long desperate terrible judgment but that it did eventually end.
 - The **rebellion** against God was judged, punished, but then erased for finality, not continually endless suffering.
- It is a perspective that protects God's character of goodness and justice.
- **The Scope of Redemption**
 - Conditionalists argue that destroying evil—rather than sustaining it forever—better fits the New Testament scope of redemption:
 - Redemption portrays a cosmic reconciled creation.

Colossians 1:19-20 ESV (SCREEN)

“19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether **on earth or in heaven**, making peace by the blood of his cross.”

- Redemption portrays the removal of all tears.

Revelation 21:4 ESV (SCREEN)

“He will wipe away **every** tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

- Redemption posits that **all things** will be made **new**.

Revelation 21:5 ESV (SCREEN)

“And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making **all things new**.”

- To follow the logic of conditional immortality **forces** the question:

“If evil people from the old world suffer punishment eternally in hell, is the universe truly “made new”? (SCREEN)

- In this view, for the redeemed to experience harmony but yet the lost to experience continual un-ending exclusion, there remains that part of creation **existing outside** of all things being made new.
 - The key issue for conditionalists is the literal view of **finality** for the lost.
- **The Text**
 - In the same regard as last week’s message about the “text” and ECT, much of the debate in conditional immortality hinges on the Greek word *aionios*.
 - For a deeper explanation, listen to/read that message in our app.
 - For Conditionalists, *aionios* means “pertaining to the age to come,” referring to the **result**, not the **duration**, of **punishment**.
 - Ignatius of Antioch (early 2nd century) spoke of the lost as those who “die,” “perish,” and “are deprived of life,” **literally**, not metaphorically.
 - Barnabas (late 1st - early 2nd centuries) contrasted the ways of “life” and “death” so the lost, who chose the way of “death” are utterly **destroyed**.
 - Another issue regarding the text, already noted, is whether **all souls** are **immortal** or **only the saved** who received immortality as a gift from God.
 - Very similar to Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons (2nd century) emphasized that the soul is not naturally immortal, but is only as a gift from God.

1 Timothy 6:16 ESV (SCREEN)

“... who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.”

- Irenaeus taught that those who reject God “deprive themselves of continuance forever,” and “incur just punishment of death.”
- To be clear, annihilationism has a broad range of views so I’m not suggesting these fathers were uniform about everything, but it is clear that they held a **conditional nature** of the soul’s immortality.

- And as I said in the last message, many fathers rejected conditional immortality in favor of ECT, for references and more details check out last week's message and notes in our app.
- To clarify concerning the text regarding annihilationism: Scripture's language of destruction is **taken literally** by annihilationists.
- Words describing judgment like death, perish, destruction, etc., speak of **finality, not continuance** in their view.

1 Corinthians 15:26 ESV (SCREEN)

“The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”

- Thus consequence of sin—which is death—must be taken seriously and with finality in that it will be destroyed and not exist eternally.

Transition

- It is not as simple as this statement sounds but the conditional immortality / annihilation view of hell is somewhat of a middle ground between ECT and Universalism regarding the motif elements of God's character and the text.
 - In my view, both Annihilationism and Universalism better fill the element of the scope of redemption than ECT so I'll leave that element out in the conversation about the middle ground, but everyone has to determine that for themselves, **not just accept my view** on that.
- Annihilationism falls between ECT and universalism in that it can be argued that ECT struggles to reconcile God's character and universalism (next Sunday's message) struggles to satisfy the full view of Scripture:
 - Annihilationists claim this view satisfies **God's character** in that those who choose Christ are gifted with immortality and those who reject Christ are punished for their sins but then (at whatever point that is) are gifted with eradication—by not being gifted immortality—as opposed to ECT.
 - Annihilationists claim this view takes the **text** terminology of the final state of the lost literally and final instead of figuratively ... aka “second death” actually not meaning a final and literal “death” to ECT proponents.
 - Eternal immortality **is** gifted to the redeemed.
 - Immortality **is not** gifted to the lost.

- The result of a **mortal** soul—that does not receive the gift of immortality —is eventual final, irreversible cessation of existence, but not ECT.
- In this, God does not allow evil to exist forever.

Conclusion

- I've concluded each message by reminding us that the Christian hope and life **does not** rest on a doctrine of hell but on Jesus Christ, who conquered death, bore our judgment, and offers eternal life.

2 Timothy 1:10 NLT (SCREEN)

“And now he has made all of this plain to us by the appearing of Christ Jesus, our Savior. He broke the power of death and illuminated the way to life and immortality through the Good News.”

- Regardless of which view of hell we settle on, our calling is to respond to the love offered to us by Jesus.
 - This is the only way to awaken true love for God, others, and ourselves.
 - When we truly behold the love of Jesus, we can then know pure love, and that **love** is the **only thing** that will radically transform us.
- So even though God's warnings of judgment are real, serious, and something we should take personally (the reason for this series), we should **never do** these things because of it:
 - Believe the lie that fear of punishment can produce true life change.
 - Stay captive in the ignorance and bondage of performance based religion that leads to dysfunctional anxiety that permeates every area of our lives and bleeds over into how we treat ourselves and others.
 - Weaponize the Bible to generate fear, create division, erect barriers between people and Jesus, convince ourselves of the lie of elitism - that everyone who believes differently than me about the doctrine of hell is wrong.

“The great thing to remember is that, though our feelings come and go, His love for us does not. It is not wearied by our sins, or our indifference; and, therefore, it is quite relentless in its determination that we shall be cured of those sins, at whatever cost to us, at whatever cost to Him.”—C.S. Lewis (SCREEN)

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References:

For more on Justin Martyr's spiritual evolution, see <https://www.afterlife.co.nz/articles/justin-martyr-immortality-soul/>

For more on Ignatius, see his Letter to the Ephesians 16 and Letter to the Magnesians 10.

For more on Barnabas, see The Epistle of Barnabas.

For more on Irenaeus, see Against Heresies 2.34.3–4.

For more on Basil, see Longer Rules, Q7.