



Conducted by
James Gardiner

“If Jesus (as is admitted) paid the penalty for sin by His death on the cross, why does the ‘church of Christ’ affirm that eternal torment in hell is the penalty for sin? If it is, then surely in order to pay that penalty Jesus must have suffered torment for all eternity whereas the scriptures are clear: ‘Christ died (not is eternally tormented) for our sins’ (1 Cor. 15:3); ‘He poured out his soul unto death’ (Isa. 53:12); ‘By the grace of God He tasted death for every man’ (Heb. 2:9) and so on. How do you reconcile these apparently contradictory viewpoints?”

Jesus was, of course, without sin and so the questioner does not mean that Jesus paid the penalty of his own sins, but the penalty of the sinfulness of a guilty world. Both the Old Testament and New recognise a penal code, but nowhere do I find the word “penalty” employed. However we know what the questioner is meaning. Perhaps a better word to use in this connection would be ‘price’—*i.e.* Jesus paid the *price for man’s redemption* from sin, rather than the *penalty for sin*. I do not think we can use the reasoning in the question—that Jesus paid the penalty for sin (death): therefore the penalty for sin is death (not torment). We must use great care in the way in which we use the word “death,” as it is not always possible to use the term interchangeably with itself, as used in the question.

Why Did Jesus Die ?

What was involved in the “death” of Jesus, and what is involved in the spiritual death of the individual? There is a physical death and there is a spiritual one. In John 8:51 Jesus said “Verily, Verily I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.” Clearly Jesus was not referring to physical death. In John 11:26 Jesus says “And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” Again, not physical death but spiritual; and I hope to show that spiritual death *carries with it* punishment and torment.

Christ’s death, by contrast, was a death on a cross. Phil. 2:8: “And [Jesus] being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” The “death of the cross” was a very special way in which to die, and was a sacrifice for sins. By the same token and by the same logic used by the questioner, we might as easily say that because Christ was crucified as the penalty for sin, the penalty for sin is crucifixion. Surely this is just not so. Christ could have died in several ways: he could have been strangled or poisoned for instance, but this would have availed sinful man nothing. Christ’s blood had to be shed—he had to be hanged on a tree to be a curse for the nations and so remove the curse hanging over mankind. Gal. 3:13: “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.” Read the previous verses as well. The penalty for sin was not simply “death” but an accursed death on a tree, and the shedding of innocent blood, as a lamb without spot and without blemish. I don’t think we can switch the term in the manner of the question and say that this is the death which is the penalty awaiting the enemies of God. The death of Christ was a unique atoning sacrifice for sins; the punishment of the incorrigibly wicked will be something quite different. Lev. 17:11: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.” Heb. 9:22: “And almost all things are by the law purged with blood: and without shedding of blood is no remission.” 1 John

1:7: "But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." (Note the employment of the words "but" and "if" in the latter quotation—indication that if we *don't* walk in Christ's light His blood *will not* cleanse us from all sin).

Mention is made in the question of 1 Cor. 15, and this chapter is very relevant indeed, and a wonderful comment on the matter in hand. It points out that not only the *death* of Christ was important to procuring salvation from sins but the *resurrection* as well: in v. 17 Paul says "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain: ye are yet in your sins." If sin could be regarded merely as a debt, then God could forgive it without difficulty; but sin is a crime against God, and expiation possible only by the sacrifice and shedding of innocent blood. Christ's death was as respects God a propitiation; as respects sinners a reconciliation; as respects sin an expiation and respecting the saved, redemption. God receives the atonement (at-one-ment with man) and man receives the reconciliation, bringing offended and offender together. There is more, therefore, to the death of Christ than we shall ever be able to comprehend, and it can never be used by us as being analogous of any other death. It is quite unique.

Application of Christ's Death

The physician can provide the remedial medicine for the sick but can he be held responsible for the consequences if the sick question his abilities and credentials and refuse to take the medicine? The atonement certainly has universal application and was made "for all men"; the reconciliation has but limited appropriation and is of necessity confined to those who believe and obey. Christ is not only prophet, priest and king, but also the sacrifice. Those who would avail themselves of the benefits accruing through His sacrifice must also confess Him to be their prophet, priest and king. This thought introduces us to the part of the question dealing with the punishment of the unbelievers. Man is largely a free agent, capable of completely exercising free-will in his actions and movements. A problem has always been for God to forgive sin without at the same time encouraging further disobedience: Rom. 6:1: "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid." A government which extends no forgiveness to offenders would cause hopeless despair to the guilty (doubtless this is why the "life-sentence" is down to about fifteen years now); a government which does not punish offenders is a contradiction. Not to punish the guilty is to dissolve authority and dispense with law; to punish without mercy is to destroy. God preserves His authority and restrains evil by a penal code, and encourages obedience by favour, blessings and hope. This has always been so and the O.T. constantly places the choice before the people—blessing or cursing: blessing for obedience and cursing for vindictive disregard. If there is no law there is licence, and if there is no penalty the law is pointless. Why should we stumble therefore at the acceptance of the doctrine of retribution for conscious rejection of the sacrifice of the Son of God?

The "Church of Christ" of course has no body of teaching for the world, but the members merely try and determine what *the N.T. teaches* and, like others, to implement what they believe to be enjoined. We believe that the N.T. does indicate a fearful looking forward to the day of judgement on the part of those who will die not "in the Lord" but in their sins.

In Heb. 10:28-29 we read, "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden underfoot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" With great respect I would pass this question on to my questioner for an answer. The writer says that swift merciless *death* (physical death) was inflicted on the guilty in O.T. times; but "a much sorer punishment" (*worse than death*) is reserved for those who spurn Christ in the way described.

In Luke 12:5 Jesus tells us not to fear *death* but rather fear hell: "But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear; fear him which after he hath killed hath power to cast

into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him." Don't fear death but fear hell more. This is strange language if there is nothing in hell to fear and if *death* is the penalty for our sins.

Everlasting Punishment

Not only does the N.T. teach that death (physical) is not the penalty for sin, but rather, as in John 5:28-29, Jesus teaches that the then dead will be *resurrected to receive their condemnation*: "Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." One will last as long as the other—eternally.

Mark 9:43-44: "And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter into life [eternal life] maimed than, having two hands, to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched, where their warm dieth not and the fire is not quenched." May I respectfully remind readers that these are words from Jesus himself—not in any sense "Church of Christ" teaching. Charles Saze Russell was supposed to have put the hose on hell and extinguished it but Jesus seemed to have had the impression that these fires would not be quenched.

We have also the case of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) which cannot be ignored or passed off as virtually meaningless by any serious and honest student of God's word. This portion of scripture alone would surely convince us of our present proposition; but when taken with the many other relevant portions, some of which we have quoted, it must rank as truly incontrovertible evidence.

In the parable of the stewards in Matt. 25: Jesus sums up in verse 46 and says, "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."

Mark 3:29: "But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation."

There are other portions of scripture, of course, which one might advance in support of the belief that unrepentant unbelievers will incur the wrath of God, but these may suffice to prompt further investigation and honest study.

The odiousness of sin in the eyes of God and the terrible state in the hereafter of the incorrigibly wicked is surely measured by *the immensity of the sacrifice*, God's only Son. No one would accuse God of the folly of paying a greater price than was necessary to save man from the consequences of his sins, nor I trust would accuse Jesus of a pointless excursion to the grave. No, Jesus died to save us from something too awful to contemplate—that place "where the warm dieth not and the fire is not quenched" (be it figurative or not).

The price of man's salvation was paid by the death of God's only Son (and "not by incorruptible things such as silver and gold"). This is one thing, but the penalty for sins in the case of unrepentant unbelievers is quite another and the two admit of no comparison.

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The design of trial is to perfect the grace of patience. This is the finishing touch in Christian character, and, like the polishing of a fine marble statue, it cannot be done suddenly or quickly. It takes a thousand delicate touches and a slow process. Therefore "let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." *A. B. Simpson*

WORD OR DEEDS?

... Until we manifest some unity and love among ourselves, the principalities and powers in heavenly places and the good folks on earth will not be much impressed by our declared intentions of restoration.—Lee Carter Maynard, "Re-structure," *Christian Standard* (April 23rd, 1966), 6.