

What are "Eternal Life" and "Eternal Punishment"?

The Bible is clear that there are only two possible final destinies for every person. The first is the gift of "eternal life" while the second is called "eternal punishment" (Matt. 25). The key to understanding the *biblical* meaning of these terms is to grasp the proper meaning of the Greek word "aionios" which is usually translated into the English as "eternal". Literally, the adjective "aionios" means "of," or "pertaining to, the (coming) age." The word "aionios" does not *of itself* mean "everlasting." Instead, "it is a statement of 'quality' rather than 'duration' " (*New Bible Commentary*, p. 938, Note 34, IVP)

Following on this understanding of "aionios" the term "eternal life" literally means "life of the coming age". The "coming age" refers to the age of the kingdom of

God which will be established in a renewed earth after Christ's second coming (I Cor. 15:50). Some of the qualities of the life of this coming age are "glory, honor, and immortality" (Rom. 2:7-10). Since the coming age of the kingdom of God will "never end" (Luke 1:33) and since those who *live* within it will have the quality of "immortality" (i.e. deathlessness), eternal life is also "everlasting" life.

However, when it comes to the fate of the ungodly it must be recognized that the term "eternal punishment" does not include the qualities of "life" or "immortality." Instead, it is simply "punishment pertaining to the coming age."

This punishment will be according to one's deeds and will culminate in a final destruction (II Thess. 1:9) of being "burned up" like chaff. There is simply no NT basis for the idea that "eternal punishment" is everlasting torment in hell

[For more information on final punishment see the excellent book *The Fire that Consumes* by Edward Fudge, Providential Press