

into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. For every one will be salted with fire” (Mark 9:43-49). “They,” says Saint Paul, “*shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might*” (2 Thess. 1:9). The eternity of the pains of Gehenna is not opposed to divine justice. For as an eternal recompense is in no way contrary to the remunerative justice of God, so an eternal chastisement is not contrary to His avenging justice. For God only inflicts this punishment on those who die in mortal sin, which they have committed of their own free will. By committing mortal sin the sinner renounces God, and makes pride and selfishness his last end, consenting, for their sake, to become the enemy of God, and to be separated from Him forever. If he dies in this disposition of will, at enmity with God, he must remain so eternally, because the time for conversion and grace is past. He will therefore remain the enemy of God for all eternity, and will be forever treated as such; in other words, he will himself be the cause of his eternal punishment.

Of course, sinners may convert at their last moments of life. Wouldn't it be much safer and more sensible to take Christ at His word? For those of us who fear Gehenna, it is best that we call out in the words of the disciples in the storm tossed boat: “*Lord save us! We are perishing.*”

No person goes to Gehenna unless he wants to. Put your love and trust in God, serve Him and you have nothing to fear.

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Gehenna

There are certain individuals and religious groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Seventh-Day Adventists that deny the existence of Hell or Gehenna.

Hell is the state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed, reserved for those who refuse by their own free choice to believe and be converted from sin, even to the end of their lives (See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §1033).

Jesus sometimes used the word “*Gehenna*” rather than the word “*Hell*,” when describing the final abode of the hardened sinner. Regardless, of how it is called, it is a place of eternal damnation.

Rarely, do we hear preaching about hell. There is a tendency to turn away from something, which many might find disturbing. Hell or Gehenna does exist, of that we can be quite certain. The pressing question should not be, “Does hell exist”, but “how can I avoid going there when I die.

There is possibly no subject more distasteful and unpleasant than the subject of Gehenna. Yet, Jesus spoke of Gehenna frequently. Throughout his preaching, he maintained that there are two and only two final possibilities for human existence: the one being everlasting happiness in the presence of God, the other everlasting torment in the absence of God.

In the parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus indicates that some will be condemned (Matt 25.31).

Faith teaches that Gehenna exists and that it is a place of suffering prepared for sinners; that the souls of those who die in mortal sin are sent there immediately after death; that the pains of Gehenna are eternal. These, our Lord said, in speaking of the sinner, shall go into eternal punishment, and the just into eternal life. He describes the fate of the damned under a great variety of metaphors: everlasting fire, outer darkness, and tormenting thirst. He calls Gehenna the fire that is never extinguished, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, and *“here the gnawing worm shall not die.”* Jesus Christ repeats in the Gospel as often as fifteen times that there is a Gehenna.

The sinner will suffer a double kind of anguish, called the pain of loss and the pain of sense. The first consists in the privation of the sight of God, the Supreme Good, and the last end of man’s existence. This privation is accompanied by the most desperate anguish. The second pain consists in the suffering caused by the avenging flames, as well as all the other torments, which are part of Gehenna. Instead of the company of God and His angels and Saints, the damned will have for their eternal companions, Satan and his demons, murderers, adulterers, thieves and liars.

Though the nature of the fire of Gehenna is not defined by faith, nevertheless the language of Scripture and of the Fathers of

the Church leaves no doubt that it is a material fire, but endowed, by the power of God, with especial properties, in order to be the instrument of His justice. It acts directly on the lost souls, and makes them experience, without the medium of their bodies, sensible sufferings which, naturally speaking, they could only suffer through the organs of the senses. Gehenna surpasses in horror all that can be said of it, as it is a place of pure hatred and evil. There, one minute of torment would far surpass the rigor of a hundred years spent on earth in the most rigorous penance.

The nature of the pains is the same for all sinners, but the intensity differs; for each one suffers in proportion to his sins. The nature even of the suffering corresponds to the nature of the sins, which have provoked them. Those things by which they have sinned torment them.

The sinner retains their natural faculties of memory, understanding, and will. After the resurrection they will possess their bodies with all their members and senses, but only that they may expiate the abuse of them of which they have been guilty.

Their memory will keep the remembrance of their sins, and they will have them unceasingly before their eyes as the cause of their misfortune. From them they will derive frightful remorse, and the gnawing worm of conscience spoken of by Jesus Christ. They will recollect also the miserable pleasures of this life, for which they have bartered their immortal souls. Their understanding will

know the blessings and goods of paradise that they might so easily have obtained, like many others and they will ever think of them with inexpressible regret.

All the while two words will echo in his soul: *“forever”* and *“never.”* *“How long will I stay here?”* *“Forever”* is the answer. *“When will I get out of here?”* *“Never”* is the answer.

Their will, irrevocably given to evil, will have only perverse and criminal tendencies, though their malice cannot further aggravate their punishment, because they no longer possess the necessary liberty to do evil; but their evil will, will form part of their suffering, as the good will of the elect will be part of their happiness.

What adds to the torments of Gehenna all the horrors of despair is their eternity, their interminable eternity. No dogma is more forcibly affirmed in Scripture and Tradition than the eternity of suffering. At the last day Jesus Christ will pronounce this sentence against the sinner: *“Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels”* (Mt. 24: 41). *“And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown*