



## Is eternal punishment fair?

Say someone lived until they were 73 years old. They did not trust Jesus to take the punishment for the things they did wrong in their life so they had to suffer the punishment themselves.

The Bible teaches that everyone who does not trust in Jesus' death for sins and in his resurrection will be eternally punished, but how can a person do enough wrong in 73 years to deserve being punished forever?

**Flick through these pages to find out.**

© Crazy blue door publications, 2010.  
[www.crazybluedoor.com](http://www.crazybluedoor.com)



## Isn't eternal punishment unfair?

How can finite people committing finite sins during a finite period of time deserve eternal punishment?

**FANSFAQ**  
Frequently And  
Not So Frequently  
Asked Questions.



Crazy Blue Door Publications

[www.crazybluedoor.com](http://www.crazybluedoor.com)

© Crazy Blue Door, 2010.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of Crazy Blue Door Publications.

First published 2010



## The Question:

It's not unusual for people, including Christians, to struggle with the idea that what we do in our lives could reap agonising punishment for eternity future. How could we, with all our limitations, possibly do anything that would mean we deserve such a harsh penalty?

*We are finite.* We can only travel a certain number of miles, will only say a certain number of words, do a certain number of things, hurt a certain number of people...there is an end to us and our ability to sin.

*We commit finite sins.* We are limited in what we can do wrong. We cannot eternally rob a bank, or lie, or cheat, or forever commit each sin. We do things wrong, yes, but then they are finished.

*We sin during a finite period of time.* Our opportunities to sin are not only limited by our own finitude, they are limited the finite number of years we live. We live, sin and then die.

All of which leads to **The Question:**

**How can finite people committing finite sins during a finite period of time deserve eternal punishment?**

In the next few pages, we'll see that there are problems not just with the question but with the three assumptions underlying it and along the way we'll answer the question *Is eternal punishment fair?* with a trembling "Yes!"



## Are we really finite?

Human beings last forever. Yes, we have finite understanding, finite abilities, and finite potential, but we will exist for an infinite amount of time. In other words, humans are eternal.

[Hebrews 9:27](#) ...it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment...

...when...

[Matthew 25:46](#) [the wicked] will go away into *eternal* punishment, but the righteous into *eternal* life.

Now, if people want to argue that finite understanding, abilities and potential can only reap a *finite level of severity* of punishment, the Bible itself teaches exactly that.

[Luke 12:47-48](#) And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.

[Revelation 20:12-13](#) And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.

Humans will be punished with a level of severity that matches their actions. In other words, you can argue that the *severity* should be finite because our capabilities are finite, but you cannot argue that the *period* of punishment should be finite because we ourselves will exist forever.

Now, we get confused about this because of our justice system. Say two men killed their wives: one committed murder and the other committed manslaughter. In our system, the murderer might be sentenced to twenty years imprisonment and the man who committed manslaughter to ten years imprisonment i.e. the length of the prison sentence is how we measure the severity of the punishment.

However, if a judge chose to sentence the murderer to ten years in solitary confinement and the man who committed manslaughter to ten years in a medium security prison, no one could say, "It's unfair to punish both for the same amount of time," as long as the severity of the punishment is less for the one who committed manslaughter than for the murderer.

(Note: none of the justice in this situation is to scale!)

God has chosen the second option - the length of time people are punished is the same for all who are punished, but the severity of their punishment is different according to what they have done.

So, the first part of the answer is:

***Humans are not completely finite.***



## When do we stop sinning?

Most people forget that sin is not just what we do, but also how we feel or where our heart is at.

For example, if a husband remained married to his wife for forty years but for his entire marriage his heart was captured by another woman, most people would consider him to be wronging his wife. Jesus agrees and explained that it's not just what we do and say that we'll be judged on, but also our heart and motivations.

[Matthew 5:21-22](#) "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire."

[Matthew 5:27-28](#) "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

The thing about sinful attitudes is that they don't always have an expiry date. It is possible to carry a sinful attitude for your entire life...and beyond.

Jesus tells the story of a rich man who ignored the plight of a starving, ill and destitute man called Lazarus. Both of them died, and the rich man went to Hades where he was punished with fire, and Lazarus went to paradise to be with Abraham. Astonishingly, the rich man continued in his arrogance and feelings of entitlement by calling out to Abraham, asking him to send Lazarus to him to act as a servant and give him a little bit of comfort, and this despite the fact that such attitudes had him there in the first place

(see [Luke 16:19-31](#)).

If we don't know Jesus, not only do our hearts carry sin with us after death, but we are also capable of committing new sins after we die, even while we are being punished !

So, the second part of the answer is:

***Sins are not necessarily finite.***



## How long does our sin stay sin?

Think about a guest at a party. If he seriously assaults another guest, the matter is not over when the party finishes! The police will be called and the consequences of his actions will carry beyond the time-frame in which his actions were done. The person he assaulted is still injured, and so the assaulter is still guilty.

In the same way, Jesus says that people will carry what happens to on earth with them after death:

[Mark 9:43, 45, 47](#) And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled 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, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell.

The resurrected Jesus himself even carries the scars of his crucifixion to this day:

[John 20:24-27](#) Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."

Our lives and characters are shaped by our experiences. This includes sins committed against us. Therefore, because humans exist forever, the results of those sins also last

forever in one form or another.

So, the third part of the answer is:

***The results of sin are not limited to this finite life.***



## It's only fair, isn't it?

*How can finite people committing finite sins during a finite period of time deserve eternal punishment?*

I think most people would agree that justice demands that punishment be equal to the sin. The Old Testament tells us this is God's understanding of justice, also.

**Leviticus 24:17-22** Whoever takes a human life shall surely be put to death. Whoever takes an animal's life shall make it good, life for life. If anyone injures his neighbour, as he has done it shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him. Whoever kills an animal shall make it good, and whoever kills a person shall be put to death. You shall have the same rule for the sojourner and for the native, for I am the Lord your God.

Therefore,

- 1) since human beings exist forever, it is fair to punish us forever as long as the severity of the punishment is equal to the severity of our sin;
- 2) since sin is not necessarily finite (nor committed only before death), it is fair to punish us for our sin for as long as our sin exists;
- 3) since the victims of our sins exist forever, the results of our sin against them lasts forever, and it is fair to punish us with an equivalent severity for as long as the results last i.e. forever.

Now, someone might protest about No. 3, and say, "For some people, being sinned against actually helps them, it works out to their benefit (see **Romans 5:3-5**). So we shouldn't be punished for those sins."

But that won't work.

Say, for example, someone burns down another person's house and the owners of the house are very happy about it because the insurance money means they can buy a far better house. Is the arsonist let off the hook? No, he is still liable to be punished because the original action was wrong. In the same way, sins that bring about positive results also need punishing.

The really frightening thing, though, is this: If we only sinned against other human beings, eternal punishment would be fair. But when you think of our sins against God and the consequences he suffers, equivalent punishment becomes an even more horrific thought!

**2 Corinthians 5:10** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

So, the answer to the original question is this:

*We deserve eternal punishment because we exist forever, carry sin and commit sin forever and our sinful acts produce results that last forever.*

*Therefore we will be punished forever because justice says we should experience the equivalent amount of suffering that we inflict on others.*

It's only fair. But, thankfully, that's not the end...



## Only one can save us!

Back at the beginning, I used the example of a judge sentencing a man who committed manslaughter to 10 years in a medium security prison and a murderer for 10 years in solitary confinement, and I argued the sentences would be fair even though they both last 10 years because the level of severity was different.

But the judge has another option. The man who committed manslaughter could also be sentenced to solitary confinement, but for 5 years instead of 10. Both men's sentences would be equal in severity but the difference in time would make the punishment fair.

If this is the case, *why doesn't God increase the level of human punishment and reduce the length of time they will be punished from infinite to finite?*

Basically because we can't afford it.

In order for God to reduce infinite time to finite time, he would have to increase finite severity to infinite severity. We are unable to endure infinite severity, and so this is just not possible. But there is one human who can.

As a human and God, Jesus took the punishment we deserve. He died on the cross, absorbed a punishment of infinite severity and so reduced the infinite punishment we deserve to a finite time. As man and God, he alone was able to endure the infinite severity of God's justice because, as God himself, he is infinite in every way.

This means that he has paid our penalty without having to endure it forever.

In all of this we can see the terrifying justice and wonderful grace of God.

In his terrifying justice, God will punish humans forever because ever-existing humans forever carry sin, forever commit sin and bring about results from sin that last forever. God is not unfair.

But in his wonderful grace he provided the one human who was able to take the punishment of those who join themselves to him and suffer it on their behalf. Jesus Christ, because he is both God and man and eternal in every way, was able to endure the eternal punishment we deserve through his death on the cross, after which God raised him from the dead to give us life. If we can see that he has taken our sin, and has risen to give us life, then we are able to say that we have escaped the eternal punishment that we deserve.

### [1 John 1:9](#)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

### [John 3:16](#)

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.