

The Westminster Larger Catechism – The Covenant of Life or Works

Q21. Did man continue in that estate wherein God at first created him?

A. Our first parents being left to the freedom of their own will, through the temptation of Satan, transgressed the commandment of God in eating the forbidden fruit; and thereby fell from the estate of innocency wherein they were created.



(The historical account of the fall of the human race)

Genesis 3:6-8, 13: ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. ⁸ And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

(Mankind created upright, but later fell into sin)

Ecclesiastes 7:29: ²⁹ See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.

(The fall took place through the temptation of Satan)

2 Corinthians 11:3: ³ But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

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(The fall was a definite event involving one particular agent)

Romans 5:12: ¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—

(Eve was deceived, but Adam sinned without being deceived)

1 Timothy 2:14: ¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

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Q22. Did all mankind fall in that first transgression?

A. The covenant being made with Adam as a public person, not for himself only, but for his posterity, all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him in that first transgression.



(The organic unity of the human race; all made “of one blood,” therefore all the children of Adam)

Acts 17:26: ²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,

(Adam constituted by God the federal head or representative of the human race, so that his act was determinative for all)

Genesis 2:16-17: ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

Compared with

Romans 5:12-21: ¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— ¹³ for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. ¹⁴ Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. ¹⁶ And the free gift is not like the result of that one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. ¹⁷ For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹ For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous. ²⁰ Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹ so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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(Adam, like Christ, a federal head or “public person.”)

1 Corinthians 15:21-22: ²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

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Q23. Into what estate did the fall bring mankind?

A. The fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery.



(Death the consequence of sin)

Romans 5:12: ¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—

(Death the penalty of sin)

Romans 6:23: ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Sin is universal in the human race)

Romans 3:23: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

(The curse on the world of nature because of human sin)

Genesis 3:17-19: ¹⁷ And to Adam he said,
“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife
and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,
‘You shall not eat of it,’
cursed is the ground because of you;
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;

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- ¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
- ¹⁹ By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread,
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
for you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.”

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Q24. What is sin?

A. Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of any law of God, given as a rule to the reasonable creature.



(Sin is defined as transgression of the law)

1 John 3:4: ⁴ Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.

(Want of conformity is sin, as well as positive transgression)

Galatians 3:10, 12: ¹⁰ For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”

¹² But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.”

(Sin impressed on the mind and conscience by the law of God)

Romans 3:20: ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

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(Apart from the law there could be no sin imputed to man)

Romans 5:13: ¹³ for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but ^xsin is not counted where there is no law.

(The mere failure to do good is sin)

James 4:17: ¹⁷ So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

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Q25. Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell?

A. The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell consisteth in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of that righteousness wherein he was created, and the corruption of his nature, whereby he is utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite unto all that is spiritually good, and wholly inclined to all evil, and that continually; which is commonly called original sin, and from which do proceed all actual transgressions.



(The guilt of Adam's first sin imputed to all mankind)

Romans 5:12, 19: ¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—

¹⁹ For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

(Mankind universally and totally depraved in sin)

Romans 3:10-19:

¹⁰ as it is written:

“None is righteous, no, not one;

¹¹ no one understands;

no one seeks for God.

¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;

no one does good,

not even one.”

¹³ “Their throat is an open grave;

they use their tongues to deceive.”

“The venom of asps is under their lips.”

¹⁴ “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”

¹⁵ “Their feet are swift to shed blood;

¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery,

¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known.”

¹⁸ “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

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(Mankind dead in sin and therefore unable to please God)

Ephesians 2:1-3: ¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

(Mankind spiritually without strength and ungodly)

Romans 5:6: ⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

(Mankind at enmity with God and cannot please God)

Romans 8:7-8: ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

(Mankind sinful in imagination and thoughts as well as in deeds)

Genesis 6:5: ⁵ The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

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(Original sin the source of actual transgressions)

James 1:14-15: ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

(Sinful deeds proceed from a corrupt and sinful heart)

Matthew 15:19 ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

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Q26. How is original sin conveyed from our first parents unto their posterity?

A. Original sin conveyed from our first parents unto their posterity by natural generation, so as all that proceed from them in that way are conceived and born in sin.



(We are conceived and born in a sinful condition)

Psalm 51:5: ⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.

(Our first parents being sinful, their posterity must be sinful too)

Job 14:4: ⁴ Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?
There is not one.

(All mankind are born with a sinful nature)

Job 15:14: ⁴ But you are doing away with the fear of God
and hindering meditation before God.

(Natural generation produces only sinful human nature; the new birth produces a new nature)

John 3:6: ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

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Q27. What misery did the fall bring upon mankind?

A. The fall brought upon mankind the loss of communion with God, his displeasure and curse; so as we are by nature children of wrath, bond slaves to Satan, and justly liable to all punishments in this world, and that which is to come.



(By the fall mankind lost communion with God)

Genesis 3:8-10, 24: ⁸ And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” ¹⁰ And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.”

²⁴ He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

(By nature we are all the children of wrath)

Ephesians 2:2-3: ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

(By nature we are bond slaves of Satan)

2 Timothy 2:26: ²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

(Because of the fall we are liable to God’s punishments in this world)

Genesis 2:17: ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

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Lamentations 3:39: ³⁹ Why should a living man complain,
a man, about the punishment of his sins?

Romans 6:23: ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Because of the fall we are liable to God’s punishments in the world to come)

Matthew 25:41, 46: ⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Jude 7: ⁷ just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

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Q28. What are the punishments of sin in this world?

A. The punishments of sin in this world are either inward, as blindness of mind, a reprobate sense, strong delusions, hardness of heart, horror of conscience, and vile affections; or outward, as the curse of God upon the creatures for our sakes, and all other evils that befall us in our bodies, names, estates, relations, and employments; together with death itself.



(Blindness of heart and mind as a punishment for sin)

Ephesians 4:18: ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.

(A reprobate mind a punishment for sin)

Romas 1:28: ²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

(Strong delusions sent by God as a punishment for sin)

2 Thessalonians 2:11: ¹¹ Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false,

(Hardness and an impenitent heart)

Romans 2:5: ⁵ But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

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(Horrors of conscience one of God’s ways of punishing sin)

Isaiah 33:14: ¹⁴ The sinners in Zion are afraid;
trembling has seized the godless:

“Who among us can dwell ^zwith the consuming fire?
Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?”

Genesis 4:13: ¹³ Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is greater than I can bear.

Matthew 27:4: ⁴ saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” They said, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.”

(Sinners punished by being given over to vile passions)

Romans 1:26: ²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature;

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(God’s curse upon the world of nature a penalty for human sin)

Genesis 3:17: ¹⁷ And to Adam he said,

“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife
and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,
‘You shall not eat of it,’
cursed is the ground because of you;
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;

(All calamities, sufferings, and evils are punishments for sin)

Deuteronomy 28:15-68:

¹⁵ “But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. ¹⁶ Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field. ¹⁷ Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. ¹⁸ Cursed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. ¹⁹ Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out.

²⁰ “The LORD will send on you curses, confusion, and frustration in all that you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and perish quickly on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken me. ²¹ The LORD will make the pestilence stick to you until he has consumed you off the land that you are entering to take possession of it. ²² The LORD will strike you with wasting disease and with fever, inflammation and fiery heat, and with drought and with blight and with mildew. They shall pursue you until you perish. ²³ And the heavens over your head shall be bronze, and the earth under you shall be iron. ²⁴ The LORD will make the rain of your land powder. From heaven dust shall come down on you until you are destroyed.

²⁵ “The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them. And you shall be a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. ²⁶ And your dead body shall be food for all birds of the air and for the beasts of the earth, and there shall be no one to frighten them away. ²⁷ The LORD will strike you with the boils of Egypt, and with tumors and scabs and itch, of which you cannot be healed. ²⁸ The LORD will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of mind, ²⁹ and you shall grope at noonday, as the blind grope in darkness, and you shall not prosper in your ways. And you shall be only oppressed and robbed continually, and there shall be no one to help you. ³⁰ You shall betroth a wife, but another man shall ravish her. You shall build a house, but you shall not dwell in it. You shall plant a vineyard, but you shall not enjoy its fruit. ³¹ Your ox shall be slaughtered before your eyes, but you shall not eat any of it. Your donkey shall be seized before your face, but shall not be restored to you. Your sheep shall be given to your enemies, but there shall be no one to help you. ³² Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people, while your eyes look on and fail with longing for them all day long, but you shall be helpless.

³³ A nation that you have not known shall eat up the fruit of your ground and of all your labors, and you shall be only oppressed and crushed continually, ³⁴ so that you are driven mad by the sights that your eyes see. ³⁵ The LORD will strike you on the knees and on the legs with grievous boils of which you cannot be healed, from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head.

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³⁶ “The LORD will bring you and your king whom you set over you to a nation that neither you nor your fathers have known. And there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone. ³⁷ And you shall become a horror, a proverb, and a byword among all the peoples where the LORD will lead you away. ³⁸ You shall carry much seed into the field and shall gather in little, for the locust shall consume it. ³⁹ You shall plant vineyards and dress them, but you shall neither drink of the wine nor gather the grapes, for the worm shall eat them. ⁴⁰ You shall have olive trees throughout all your territory, but you shall not anoint yourself with the oil, for your olives shall drop off. ⁴¹ You shall father sons and daughters, but they shall not be yours, for they shall go into captivity. ⁴² The cricket shall possess all your trees and the fruit of your ground. ⁴³ The sojourner who is among you shall rise higher and higher above you, and you shall come down lower and lower. ⁴⁴ He shall lend to you, and you shall not lend to him. He shall be the head, and you shall be the tail.

⁴⁵ “All these curses shall come upon you and pursue you and overtake you till you are destroyed, because you did not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that he commanded you. ⁴⁶ They shall be a sign and a wonder against you and your offspring forever. ⁴⁷ Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things, ⁴⁸ therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness, and lacking everything. And he will put a yoke of iron on your neck until he has destroyed you. ⁴⁹ The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand, ⁵⁰ a hard-faced nation who shall not respect the old or show mercy to the young. ⁵¹ It shall eat the offspring of your cattle and the fruit of your ground, until you are destroyed; it also shall not leave you grain, wine, or oil, the increase of your herds or the young of your flock, until they have caused you to perish.

⁵² “They shall besiege you in all your towns, until your high and fortified walls, in which you trusted, come down throughout all your land. And they shall besiege you in all your towns throughout all your land, which the LORD your God has given you. ⁵³ And you shall eat the fruit of your womb, the flesh of your sons and daughters, whom the LORD your God has given you, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemies shall distress you. ⁵⁴ The man who is the most tender and refined among you will begrudge food to his brother, to the wife he embraces, and to the last of the children whom he has left, ⁵⁵ so that he will not give to any of them any of the flesh of his children whom he is eating, because he has nothing else left, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemy shall distress you in all your towns. ⁵⁶ The most tender and refined woman among you, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground because she is so delicate and tender, will begrudge to the husband she embraces, to her son and to her daughter, ⁵⁷ her afterbirth that comes out from between her feet and her children whom she bears, because lacking everything she will eat them secretly, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemy shall distress you in your towns.

⁵⁸ “If you are not careful to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, the LORD your God, ⁵⁹ then the LORD will bring on you and your offspring extraordinary afflictions, afflictions severe and lasting, and sicknesses grievous and lasting. ⁶⁰ And he will bring upon you again all the diseases of Egypt, of which you were afraid, and they shall cling to you. ⁶¹ Every sickness also and every affliction that is not recorded in the book of this law, the LORD will bring upon you, until you are destroyed. ⁶² Whereas you were as numerous as the stars of heaven, you shall be left few in number, because you did not obey the voice of the LORD your God. ⁶³ And as the LORD took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so the LORD will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you. And you shall be plucked off the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

⁶⁴ “And the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known. ⁶⁵ And among these nations you shall find no respite, and there shall be no resting place for the sole of your foot, but the LORD will give you there a trembling heart and failing eyes and a languishing soul. ⁶⁶ Your life shall hang in doubt before you. Night and day you shall be in dread and have no assurance of your life. ⁶⁷ In the morning you shall say, ‘If only it were evening!’ and at evening you shall say, ‘If only it were morning!’ because of the dread that your heart shall feel, and the sights that your eyes shall see.

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⁶⁸ And the LORD will bring you back in ships to Egypt, a journey that I promised that you should never make again; and there you shall offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but there will be no buyer.”

(Death itself is the wages, or penalty, of sin)

Romans 6:21, 23: ²¹ But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.

²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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Q29. What are the punishments of sin in the world to come?

A. The punishments of sin in the world to come, are everlasting separation from the comfortable presence of God, and most grievous torments in soul and body, without intermission, in hell-fire forever.



(Everlasting separation from the presence of God)

2 Thessalonians 1:9: ⁹ They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,

(Grievous torments in soul and body)

Mark 9:44-48 (note-most modern translations remove verses 44 and 46, which are identical to verse 48. Since this is ESV, it appears as it does in the ESV): ⁴⁵ 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. ⁴⁷ 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, ⁴⁸ where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.'

(The torment of hell-fire)

Luke 16:24: ²⁴ And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.'

(The torments of hell without intermission)

Revelation 14:9-12: ⁹ And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, ¹⁰ he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy

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angels and in the presence of the Lamb. ¹¹ And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.”

¹² Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

(Hell involves bodily suffering)

Matthew 5:29-30: ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

(The punishments of hell equally eternal with the bliss of heaven)

Matthew 25:41, 46: ⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”