**A Trichotomy of Eternity – Existence, Life, and Death**

**Introduction**

1. Trichotomy – a division into three categories.
2. Eternity is a subject that is too vast for us to understand in entirety, but God has revealed what we need to know.
3. There are false concepts of eternity we must be careful to avoid, and only take the scripture as truth.
4. Eternity can be divided into three parts – existence, life, and death.
5. Eternal Existence for All
6. The Question at Hand
   1. Does the soul of anyone ever cease to exist at the end of time?
   2. Materialist – there is no existence after physical death.
   3. Annihilationist – man is created with immortality, but only recipients of salvation continue in eternity, when the reprobates cease to exist by the hand of God.
      1. Annihilate – Latin – “from ad- ‘to’ + nihil ‘nothing’”
      2. Implication of “eternal life” – it is continuing in immortality. Eternal life, really, is simply eternal existence.
      3. Implication of “eternal death” – it is annihilation, or an end of existence.
   4. Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses and others.
   5. Even some members of the church have taught that the wicked are cast into hell where they are annihilated, i.e. cease to exist.
7. God and Eternity
   1. **Genesis 1:1** – God was present in the beginning, which indicates His eternal nature.
      1. **Psalm 90:2** – everlasting to everlasting.
      2. God has no beginning, but the beginning came from God.
   2. How can God be described? – **John 4:24** – Jesus said God is spirit.
      1. It stands to reason that “spirit” is an eternal concept.
      2. God is eternal, and God is spirit, so spirit is eternal.
      3. If something is “spirit” in the sense that God is “spirit” then such is eternal.
8. Man and Eternity
   1. **Genesis 1:26** – created in the image of God.
      1. What is God’s image?
      2. God is not physical. God is spirit **(cf. John 4:24).**
      3. The image of God man was created in is the fact that man is a spiritual being.
   2. While man has a beginning, he has no end as God is without end:
      1. **Ecclesiastes 12:6-7** – figurative language describing death.
      2. Return to God for judgment – **Ecclesiastes 11:9; 12:13-14**
      3. NOTE: This is comprehensive of mankind. There is no distinction between the kind of life lived. Man lives in the flesh, and when the flesh returns to the dust, that spirit returns to God’s control.
9. It is established that God is eternal, that God created man in His eternal image, thus, man is created and has a beginning, but is an eternal spirit. What about that eternal existence? What happens after the end of the physical?
   1. Judgment – **Hebrews 9:27** – after death.
   2. Judgment of all things, good or evil – **Ecclesiastes 12:14**
   3. Rewards for either – **Romans 2:6-10** – eternal life, or indignation, wrath, tribulation, anguish – which being opposite of eternal life is eternal death.
   4. Do those who do not receive eternal life, receiving eternal death cease to exist?
10. Eternal Life for the Faithful
11. What is eternal life?
    1. A future hope:
       1. **Mark 10:29-30** – in the age to come – i.e. not in this present age.
       2. **Titus 1:2; 3:7** – God promised, and we hope for it. (Future – **Romans 8:24** – hope that is not seen)
       3. **Romans 6:22-23** – everlasting life in the end – context speaking of a life devoted to God in holiness resulting in everlasting life.
    2. A present reality:
       1. **1 John 5:13** – John wrote to give them confidence of a present possession of eternal life. (“have” – verb, present, active)
       2. Note the related reason for writing his gospel – **John 20:30-31** – that they can obtain life by believing.
          1. Believe WHEN you read of the signs and are convicted.
          2. And believing (while you are believing) HAVE life. (“believing” and “have” – verb, present, active)
       3. A present possession – **John 3:36; 5:24; 6:47, 54** – when one does what is said in these verses, he presently possesses eternal life.
       4. How? Eternal life is fellowship with God:
          1. **John 17:2-3** – to know God, and His Son.
          2. Know God through Jesus – **John 14:6-7**
          3. Knowing Jesus by keeping His commandments – **1 John 2:3**
          4. Knowing Jesus through such to be in fellowship with the Father – **1 John 1:1-3**
    3. With Him in the sense of fellowship/relationship, thus, have eternal life – but the obvious prospective view of eternal life speaks to the finality of such in the resurrection and judgment – **2 Corinthians 5:6-10; John 14:1-3**
12. Who has eternal life?
    1. Those who believe in Jesus – **John 3:36** – comprehensive term regarding obedient faith.
    2. Those who endure to the end in faithfulness – **Romans 2:7**
13. Eternal Death for the Disobedient
14. What is eternal death?
    1. A present reality:
       1. Eternal death can be understood by the opposite eternal life – **1 John 1:1-3** – Word of life, eternal life, fellowship with the Father and Son.
       2. If eternal life (spiritual) is fellowship with God, then eternal death (spiritual) is separation from God:
          1. Death is separation – **James 2:26; Ecclesiastes 12:7**
          2. Spiritual death is separation from the source of life, which is God:
             1. **Genesis 2:16-17** – consequence for disobeying God’s command – IN THE DAY YOU EAT OF IT.
             2. How did they die? Spiritually! They’re sins separated them from God – **Isaiah 59:1-2**
       3. Those who are not in fellowship with God now are spiritually dead now – **Ephesians 2:1**
    2. A future state:
       1. **James 1:13-15** – when sin is FULL GROWN.
          1. Not suggesting that death does not occur as soon as we sin.
          2. ***“full-grown”*** – apoteleō – to bring an activity to an end, bring to completion, finish. (BDAG)
          3. Looking to the progressive nature of sin, and the consummate end of sin in eternal death.
       2. **Romans 6:20-21, 23** – end of those things…wages are death.
       3. Some teach that this death is an annihilation:
          1. This cannot be so in part because it is experienced in the present existence.
          2. Proposed proof text – **Matthew 10:28** – destroy body and soul in hell.
             1. Parallel – **Luke 12:5** – cast into hell.
             2. ***“kill the soul” (Matthew 10:28) = “cast into hell” (Luke 12:5)***
             3. Destroy – *apollymi* – used as a synonym for kill:

**Matthew 2:13** – Herod sought to destroy Jesus.

**Matthew 12:14** – Pharisees sought how to destroy Jesus.

* + - * 1. Body – what is the nature of the body?

Physical – return to dust – **Ecclesiastes 12:7** – melted – **2 Peter 3:10**

Since all physical ceases to be, raised a spiritual body. (Not given description like the body of the righteous, but we understand its nature.)

* + - 1. Proposed proof text – **Jude 7** – Sodom and Gomorrah example of suffering vengeance of eternal fire.
         1. Argument – destruction left nothing to the extent that the exact location of the city is unknown. If it serves as an example, then it means annihilation.

**2 Peter 2:6** – turned to ashes.

**Genesis 19:24-25, 27-28** – All Abraham observed was smoke ascending from where the cities used to be.

* + - * 1. Problem – if the parallel is taken literal, then the “eternal fire” cannot be eternal, for the literal fire of Sodom and Gomorrah burned out.
        2. Also, consider the language of the flood – **Genesis 6:7, 13** – destroy.

**2 Peter 2:5-6** – an example right along with Sodom and Gomorrah.

But those souls were not annihilated – **1 Peter 3:19-20** – spirits in prison.

* + 1. Eternal death is not annihilation and loss of consciousness, but eternal torment:
       1. **Matthew 13:41-42** – wailing and gnashing of teeth in the furnace – not annihilation – anguish, thus consciousness.
       2. **Revelation 14:9-11** – smoke of torment forever and ever – torment, thus consciousness. (No rest – annihilation would be a release.)

1. Who has eternal death?
   1. Those who are in sin now – **Isaiah 59:1-2** – separated from God.
   2. Those who are unfaithful, and disobedient to the gospel, and separated from God in finality – **2 Thessalonians 1:8-9** – (NOTE: “do not know God” – **cf. John 17:3** – to know God is eternal life.)

**Conclusion**

1. God has been very clear about eternity. He has revealed what we need to know, and as He has revealed we can understand.
2. Every soul is eternal, and will never cease to be.
3. Those who are in fellowship with God in the end will be in fellowship with Him for eternity – eternal life.
4. Those who are not in fellowship with God in the end will never be in fellowship with Him for eternity – eternal death – such are recipients of eternal anguish and torture.