

THE DOCTRINE OF HELL – PART 3

Introduction

Many American Don't Believe in Hell, But What About Pastors?

Posted 8/1/2009 By Greg Garrison, Religion News Service

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — Just when it seemed to have cooled off, the topic of hell is back on the front burner — at least for pastors learning to preach about a topic most Americans would rather not talk about. Only 59% of Americans believe in hell, compared with 74% who believe in heaven, according to the recent surveys from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. "I think it's such a difficult and important biblical topic," said Kurt Selles, director of the Global Center at Samford University's Beeson Divinity School. "There's a big change that's taken place as far as evangelicals not wanting to be as exclusive." At the recent annual Beeson Pastors School, Selles led two workshops to discuss "Whatever happened to hell?" He asked how many of the pastors had ever preached a sermon on hell. Nobody had, he said. "I think it's something people want to avoid," he said. "I understand why. It's a difficult topic." The Rev. Fred Johns, pastor of Brookview Wesleyan Church in Irondale, Ala., said after a workshop discussion of hell that pastors do shy away from the topic of everlasting damnation. "It's out of fear we'll not appear relevant," he said. "It's pressure from the culture to not speak anything negative. I think we've begun to deny hell. There's an assumption that everybody's going to make it to heaven somehow." The soft sell on hell reflects an increasingly market-conscious approach, Selles said. "When you're trying to market Jesus, sometimes there's a tendency to mute traditional Christian symbols," he said. "Difficult doctrines are left by the wayside. Hell is a morally repugnant doctrine. People wonder why God would send people to eternal punishment

John's View of Hell

- In the book of Revelation, it becomes clear that the apostle John's view of hell is in complete harmony with that of Jesus and Paul

Hell is a Place of Wrath

Revelation 14:9-10 ~ Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger"

- The context of this passage is the Tribulation, when the Antichrist ("the beast") requires a mark to engage in daily commerce, including the purchase of food and other necessities (see Rev 13:16-17)
- Those who are loyal to Antichrist will suffer the outpouring of God's wrath by personally having to endure His fierce anger
- Notice the words John used to describe this: "wrath...anger"
- There is an interesting relationship between the two words "wrath" and "anger"
 - Wrath (*thumos*) means "a vehement fury, hot anger, fierce outbursts of wrath, more sudden in its rise, but which does not last as long"
 - Anger (*orge*) means "a settled indignation, settled anger, less sudden in its rise, but more lasting in its nature"
- When used together, these words intensify the reality of God's anger
- He will unleash the white heat of His wrath that has been restrained for so long

- It will be a purposeful, settled, deliberate anger/wrath poured out on those who reject Him
- The angel says that this wrath and anger will be in the form of “wine” and drunk from a “cup”
- The angel is using figurative language here and not referring to a literal cup or wine
- To “drink from the cup of God’s wrath” is an OT way of picturing the awfulness of future judgment
- Psalm 75:8 ~ For in the hand of the LORD *there is* a cup, And the wine is red; It is fully mixed, and He pours it out; Surely its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth Drain *and* drink down
- Isaiah 51:17 ~ Rouse yourself! Rouse yourself! Arise, O Jerusalem, You who have drunk from the LORD’S hand the cup of His anger; The chalice of reeling you have drained to the dregs
- Jeremiah 25:15-17 ~ For thus the Lord, the God of Israel, says to me, “Take this cup of the wine of wrath from My hand and cause all the nations to whom I send you to drink it. They will drink and stagger and go mad because of the sword that I will send among them.” Then I took the cup from the Lord’s hand and made all the nations to whom the Lord sent me drink it
- The “wine of wrath” is a symbol of divine judgment
- Revelation 14:10 indicates that this wine of God’s wrath will be “mixed in full strength”
- Literally it refers to what is “mixed undiluted”
- The angel is referring to God’s wrath being poured out in its greatest concentration
- The common practice in that culture was to mix wine with water to weaken its concentration
- But God’s wrath in hell will not be like that...John is saying that the wrath of God poured out in hell will be in full strength, in its fullest concentration...not mixed with any grace, or mercy, or compassion
- It will be undiluted vengeance, wrath, and anger...So when the angel uses words like “wrath, full strength, anger,” he is emphasizing the terror of falling into the hands of the living God
- Those who fail to embrace Christ in this life will be forced to drink the cup of God’s anger in the next because of His holy hatred against sin and the fact that He cannot allow sin to go unpunished
- Thus, God’s wrath poured out in hell is not remedial (i.e. purgatory) – it is not one last attempt to motivate love for God
- Rather, God’s wrath in hell is retributive in that it points to a just recompense for deeds done and decisions made this side of the grave
- In this sense, God “pays back” the wicked with eternal ruin...eschatological wrath does not reform
- This expresses the utter hopelessness of the wicked in the face of an angry God...this eschatological wrath is genuine anger devoid of love

The message of judgment and hellfire may very well be preventative, and in that sense might be spoken of as remedial. Change could always occur before death, but when the time comes to be actually part of the reality proclaimed, then the experience will only be retributive. Never does the Scripture suggest that hell is some kind of anteroom or a temporary school from which the unbeliever might eventually graduate and pass from death to life.

Trevor Craigen, *Eternal Punishment in John’s Revelation*, TMSJ, Fall 1998, 196.

- Compare this with the fact that as Christians, we will never experience God’s wrath
- 1 Thess 1:10 ~ and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come
- 1 Thess 5:9 ~ For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ

Hell is a Place of Pain

- One of the difficult things about studying hell is the graphic language that is used to portray its terrors
- It is a place of unmatched pain...the pain is so real and horrible that human language cannot even communicate it....It is impossible to exaggerate the horrors of hell
- It is a place of “torment” = *basanizo* = torture, torment, severe distress, severe pain...in the passive voice it means to be harassed, distressed
- The noun form of this word is used in vs. 11 ~ and the smoke of their torment
- Those in hell are in genuine distress, real pain and suffering
- The angel says that this torment will come in the form of “fire and brimstone”
- “Fire” may be literal fire, but more likely symbolizes the horrible suffering of the unrighteous in hell
- “Brimstone” is a fiery sulfur, usually associated with divine judgment in Scripture
- God used both fire and brimstone to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24) in His judgment
- Likewise, hell, and the final hell known as the lake of fire, are described with fire and brimstone as the place of God’s judgment:
- Revelation 19:20 ~ And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone
- Revelation 20:10 ~ And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever
- Revelation 21:8 ~ But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part *will be* in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.
- God is driving home the fact that hell is a place of untold grief, agony, pain
- It’s described throughout Scriptures as:
 - The outer darkness – Matthew 8:12
 - The place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth – Matthew 22:13; 25:30
 - Eternal fire, Place where fire is not quenched, fiery furnace – Matthew 13:42; 18:8
 - Place where worm does not die – Mark 9:48
- In fact, Jesus used the parable of Lazarus and the rich man to illustrate the torments of hell in Luke 16:23-24 ~ In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried out and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.’
- Hell’s torments will be worse than anyone could imagine and the language used to describe hell cannot accurately communicate its pain
- The terms “fire, brimstone, darkness, weeping, gnashing of teeth” are intended to confound all our senses with dread
- Such terms do not speak of extinction and they refute the annihilationist’s claim that the main purpose of fire in judgment is to destroy
- To the contrary, its main purpose is to inflict pain

Hell is in the Presence of Christ

Revelation 14:10 ~ in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb

- Many presume hell to be a place away from God’s presence which is ruled by the devil

- Many tend to think of hell as Satan’s kingdom over which he rules
- But that’s what this verse says...it says that hell is in the presence of God and that hell is ruled by Christ and not Satan
- Notice Revelation 14:10 indicates that hell is “in the presence of the holy angels” and “in the presence of the Lamb”
- Both the holy angels and the Lamb (who is Christ) are in the presence of God
- Thus, this verse says that hell is in the presence of God and those who are in hell experience God’s wrath and punishment in His very presence....God is present in hell!
- But isn’t hell being separated from God?
- That is true...those in hell are separated from the presence of the Lord
- 2 Thessalonians 1:9 ~ And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power
- Those in hell are separated from God, banished from His presence relationally, barred from His love and grace and mercy
- But hey ARE in the very presence of God’s wrath, justice, and hatred against sin
- Although hell is separation from God’s grace and mercy, it is also a place of His holiness and wrath
- How do we know that Satan is not the ruler of hell?
- Matthew 25:41 ~ Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.’
- Revelation 20:10 ~ And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever
- Those verses say, that, instead of reigning over hell, Satan will suffer the worst punishment there
- There is an eternal fire prepared for Satan and all those who do not submit to Christ
- Rather than being cast in the role of hell’s master, Satan is portrayed as one who will suffer eternally alongside wicked angels and wicked people at the hands of hell’s true Master – Almighty God
- So, in one sense hell is so terrible because it entails separation from God and His grace
- Yet, in another sense, it is God’s very presence that makes hell so dreadful
- God will be the hell of the one and the heaven of the other

[It is not] as though the ungodly see God and His appearance as the godly will see Him; but they will feel the power of His presence, which they will not be able to bear, and yet will be forced to bear.

Martin Luther

Hell is Eternal

Revelation 14:11 ~ And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night

- Smoke means fire and this fire is an eternal fire...it never goes out...their torment is endless
- “forever and ever” means literally “unto the ages of ages” (Gr. αἰῶνας αἰώνων)
- This is the strongest expression of eternity of which Greek is capable
- This is not a momentary torment, but one that continues forever...Hell never ends!
- The angel reinforces this true by saying “and they have no rest day and night”
- This emphasizes the idea of continual suffering...The wicked enjoy no relief from the unrelenting wrath of God...their punishment is eternal...Day will turn into night and night into day...day after day after day...forever and ever and there will be no end; they will have no rest

- This is reinforced over and over in the New Testament:
- Mark 9:47-48 ~ “And if your eye causes you to stumble, cast it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell, where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED”
- 2 Thessalonians 1:9 ~ And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power
- Jude 7 ~ Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example, in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire
- Jude 13 ~ wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever
- The witness of the New Testament is that hell is forever and it entails eternal conscious torment for the lost
- Some today find it so difficult to believe that the torments of hell will last forever, they look for ways to get around it

Let me say at the outset that I consider the concept of hell as endless torment in body and mind an outrageous doctrine, a theological and moral enormity, a bad doctrine of the tradition which needs to be changed. How can Christians possibly project a deity of such cruelty and vindictiveness whose ways include inflicting everlasting torture upon his creatures, however sinful they may have been?

Clark Pinnock

- This has led many to conclude that the perpetually rising smoke testifies to God’s complete destruction of the wicked...that John does not say that the fire endures forever but that the smoke does (i.e. annihilationism)
- How do we respond to this argument?
- First, how could smoke rise forever if the fire had used up its fuel? Would not the smoke cease if the fire went out?
- Second, the end of vs. 11 affirms the continual suffering of the lost when it says “they have no rest day or night”...this implies their ongoing existence
- Thus, the thrust of the Bible is eternal torment in hell not obliteration or annihilation of the wicked

The fiery oven is ignited merely by the unbearable appearance of God and endure eternally. For the day of judgment will not last for a moment only but will stand throughout eternity and will thereafter never come to an end. Constantly the damned will be judged, constantly they will suffer pain, and constantly they will be a fiery oven, that is, they will be tortured within by supreme distress and tribulation

Martin Luther

We can conceive but little of the matter, but to help your conception, imagine yourself to be cast into a fiery oven or a great furnace where your pain would be as much greater than that occasioned by accidentally touching a coal of fire as the heat is greater. Imagine also that your body were to lie there for a quarter of an hour full of fire. What horror would you feel at the entrance of such furnace? How long would that quarter of an hour seem to you? And after you had endured it for one minute, how overbearing would it be to think that you had to endure another 14? But what would be the effect on your soul if you knew you must lie there enduring that torment to the full for 24 hours, for a whole year, for 1000 years? Oh then would not your heart sink if you knew that you must bear it forever and ever? That there would be no end? That after millions and millions of ages your torment would be no nearer to an end and that you never, never should be delivered? But your torment in hell will be immensely greater than this illustration represents.

Jonathan Edwards

Consider what it is to suffer extreme torment forever and ever: to suffer it day and night from one year to another, from one age to another, and from one thousand ages to another (and so adding age to age, and thousands to thousands), in pain, in wailing

and lamenting, groaning and shrieking, and gnashing your teeth - with your souls full of dreadful grief and amazement, [and] with your bodies and every member full of racking torture; without any possibility of getting ease; without any possibility of moving God to pity by your cries; without any possibility of hiding yourselves from him; without any possibility of diverting your thoughts from your pain; without any possibility of obtaining any manner of mitigation, or help, or change for the better. Consider how dreadful despair will be in such torment. How dismal will it be, when you are under these racking torments, to know assuredly that you never, never shall be delivered from them. To have no hope: when you shall wish that you might be turned into nothing, but shall have no hope of it; when you shall wish that you might be turned into a toad or a serpent, but shall have no hope of it; when you would rejoice if you might but have any relief; after you shall have endured these torments millions of ages, but shall have no hope of it. After you shall have worn out the age of the sun, moon, and stars, in your dolorous groans and lamentations, without rest day and night, or one minute's ease, yet you shall have no hope of ever being delivered. After you shall have worn a thousand more such ages, you shall have no hope, but shall know that you are not one whit nearer to the end of your torments. But that still there are the same groans, the same shrieks, the same doleful cries, incessantly to be made by you, and that the smoke of your torment shall still ascend up forever and ever. The more the damned in hell think of the eternity of their torments, the more amazing will it appear to them. And alas, they will not be able to keep it out of their minds! Their tortures will not divert them from it, but will fix their attention to it. O how dreadful will eternity appear to them after they shall have been thinking on it for ages together, and shall have so long an experience of their torments! The damned in hell will have two infinites perpetually to amaze them, and swallow them up: one is an infinite God, whose wrath they will bear, and in whom they will behold their perfect and irreconcilable enemy. The other is the infinite duration of their torment.

Jonathan Edwards

Hell is Eternally Experienced in the Lake of Fire

Revelation 20:10-15 ~ And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

- Here John describes the events that will occur at the end of the Millennial reign of Christ upon the earth
- The devil, the beast, and the false prophet will be thrown into the lake of fire after the final rebellion where they will endure eternal torment
- After speaking of Satan's doom, John sees God seated on a "great white throne" and standing before Him are "the dead, the great and the small"
- This is a reference to all unbelievers who are resurrected at the end of the Millennium (see Rev 20:5)
- We know that these people who come before God are resurrected because John writes of the sea, death, and Hades giving up the dead (Rev 20:13)
- "sea, death, Hades" - All the places that have held the bodies of the unrighteous dead will yield up those bodies to be judged
- Scripture says that those who die without Christ immediately go into hell but a day is coming when their bodies will be raised and they are cast into the lake of fire
- The unsaved of all time will be resurrected in new bodies in order to face the Lord Jesus Christ whom they rejected in this life
- Their bodies will be raised and they will be given new bodies fit especially for experiencing the horrors of hell forever
- This Great White Throne Judgment is the judgment of unbelievers that have died and are being sentenced to eternal punishment
- The "great white throne" is the throne upon which Christ himself sits
- The dead, all those who died without Christ, are raised so they are "standing before the throne" – as if to be sentenced

- Two categories of books:
 - Book (singular) – book of life – contains names of the redeemed; this book will not contain the name of anyone who will be at this judgment
 - Books (plural) – book of works; contains a record of all the sinful words, thoughts, and deeds done by sinful men; men will be condemned on the basis of these books; judged “according to their deeds”
- All those not found in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire, the final, eternal hell
- John speaks of hell from the perspective of divine sovereignty and human responsibility
- In terms of divine sovereignty, “If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (vs. 15)...this is a reference to the elect
- In terms of human responsibility, “The dead were judged according to what they had done...each person was judged according to what he had done (vs. 12-13)...this is a reference to the wicked
- When John says that “death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire” (vs. 14), he indicates that the intermediate state gives way to the final one, the lake of fire, the second death
- “second death” - The first death is spiritual and physical, the second is eternal in the lake of fire, the final, eternal hell
- As death means the separation of the soul from the body, so the second death denotes the ultimate separation of the ungodly from their Creator’s love....this is the eternal hell
- This eternal lake of fire and second death are affirmed in Revelation 21:8 ~ But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part *will be* in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.
- The wicked do not cease to exist; rather, they will exist in perpetual separation from God’s eternal life and in conscious torment
- It is also affirmed in Revelation 22:14-15 ~ Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying
- The wicked are not exterminated; they continue to exist, cut off from the gracious presence of God

