

THE DOCTRINE OF HELL – PART 2

Introduction

- On December 12, 1984 dense fog shrouded M25 near Godstone, in Surrey, a few miles south of London.
 - The hazard warning lights on the highway were on, but were ignored by most drivers.
 - At 6:15 am a lorry (truck) carrying huge rolls of paper was involved in an accident, and within minutes the highway was engulfed in carnage
 - The scene was one of mayhem...Dozens of cars were wrecked...ten people were killed
 - A police patrol car was soon on the scene, and two policeman, aware of the danger for those heading toward the wreckage on the highway, ran back up the motorway to stop oncoming traffic
 - They waved their arms and shouted as loud as they could, but most drivers took no notice and raced on towards the disaster that awaited them
 - Desperate to stop drivers, the policeman then picked up traffic cones and flung them at the car's windshields in a desperate attempt to warn drivers of their danger
 - Afterwards, one policeman told how tears streamed down his face as car after car went by and he waited for the sickening sound of impact as they hit the growing mass of wreckage farther down the road
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- If the Scriptures do teach the eternal punishment of the wicked, then it should radically impact our evangelism of them
 - Charles Spurgeon: "If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our dead bodies. And if they perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped about their knees, imploring them to stay. If Hell must be filled, let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go unwarned and unprayed for."
 - C.T. Studd: "Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell"

More on Jesus's View of Hell¹

Hell is Real

Matthew 5:21-22 ~ You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.

- Jesus is showing the deficiency in the righteousness of the Pharisees
- Though they may not have killed anyone, they displayed sinful anger and used hateful words
- Where do such hypocrites end up? → "the fiery hell".....Literally "the Gehenna of fire"
- This term occurs 12 times in the NT, taken from the Hebrew *gehinnom*, referring to the Valley of Hinnom that runs on the south and east side of Jerusalem
- The worship of Molech in which infants were sacrificed in fire to the god Molech occurred in this valley
- The valley also became the place where refuse and dead bodies of animals and criminals were burned
- As a result, Gehenna became synonymous with eternal punishment, the fire of hell

¹ Adapted from *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment*, Robert Peterson

Matthew 5:27-30 ~ 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 lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

- Again, Jesus is confronting the Pharisees in their hypocrisy
- He points out that, though they have not committed adultery, their lust betrays their true heart condition
- Thus, he urges them to take radical steps to remove this sin – not talking about literally gouging out eyes and cutting off hands – Jesus warns them, exhorting them to perform radical spiritual surgery
- Why? → the consequences are that their whole body would be thrown into hell
- Again, the term used here is Gehenna

Matthew 23:15, 33 ~ Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves... You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?

- Jesus warns that the leaders of God's people are heading for hell (literally Gehenna) and taking their converts with them
- Thus, Jesus concludes that hell is a real place – not extinction, not a state of existence

Hell is Ruled by God

Matthew 10:28 ~ Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

- Jesus prepares his 12 disciples to minister by warning them that they will suffer persecution
- But they don't need to fear because their enemies cannot kill the soul
- Rather than fear human beings, who can harm only their physical bodies, they should be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell
- Though this passage seems to refer to annihilationism, the parallel passage makes it clear that is not the case: Luke 12:5 ~ Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell
- Thus, the "destruction" mentioned in Matt 10:28 is equivalent to being "thrown into hell"
- The fact that God will destroy soul *and* body in hell, implies that there will be a resurrection from the dead... God will raise the wicked from the dead to receive new bodies which will be perfectly prepared to experience the ruin of their whole person
- Notice who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell → God Himself!

Matthew 25:41, 46 ~ 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... These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

- When Christ returns, he will sit as king on his throne and the entire human race will stand before him
- And he will separate the sheep from the goats – the righteous enter into their reward; the wicked enter into eternal fire
- This fire was originally prepared for the punishment of the devil and his evil angels; but because of their rejection of the Lord, the wicked will share their lot
- We know from Revelation 20:10 that the devil will be tormented day and night forever and ever... the devil's being cast into eternal fire means that he will be perpetually tormented
- Thus, when Jesus says that wicked human beings will share the devil's fate, he means that they too will suffer eternal torment

- Thus, it is clear that God rules hell...not Satan...the popular idea that hell is Satan's kingdom over which he rules is false
- Instead of reigning over hell, Satan will suffer the worst punishment there
- Hell is in the very presence of God Himself – see Revelation 14:9-10 – God alone rules over hell

Hell Involves Rejection

Matthew 7:23 ~ And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS

- Jesus here addresses the fate of false disciples
- On Judgment Day, many will insist that they belong to Christ, only to find out He never knew them at all
- The consequences of this are complete separation from His blissful presence

Matthew 8:11-12 ~ I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

- Jesus describes a feast that will take place in the future for God's people and those who come from the "east and west" are Gentiles
- Sadly, many Jewish people ("the sons of the kingdom") will not partake of the feast but will instead be thrown out into the outer darkness
- This speaks of separation and rejection...if sitting at the feast means belonging to God and enjoying his presence, then being excluded from the banquet means being rejected by God and cut off from His blessed presence

Matthew 25:30 ~ Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth

- In this parable, the wicked, lazy servant fails to use his resources for God...thus, he is excluded from the joy of God's gracious presence
- Thus, it is clear that hell involves rejection by God and separation from His presence

Hell Involves Pain

Matthew 13:30, 40-43 ~ Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn."...So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear

- In his parable of the weeds, Jesus uses fire imagery to describe hell
- This hell-fire cannot be taken to refer to annihilationism since, if Jesus wanted to teach that the fires of hell consume the wicked, he could have done so...he could have said: *and they will be no more*
- But he didn't say that...instead when he speaks of the burning of the weeds, he speaks of pain, not consumption
- Thus, Jesus clearly describes hell as a place of great sorrow and suffering

Matthew 13:47-50 ~ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind; and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away. So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

- In his parable of the net, Jesus again describes the pain and suffering of hell as a “furnace of fire” and “weeping and gnashing of teeth” – referring to hell as a place of untold grief and agony

Matthew 18:6-9 ~ but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes! If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire. If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell

- This is Jesus’ response to the disciples asking: Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?
- It is those who have a childlike humility
- And then Jesus addresses those who cause those with a “childlike humility” to stumble in sin...this person is headed for God’s judgment
- He describes this judgment as “the eternal fire” and “the fiery hell” – this is a warning of the pain and torments of hell that will have no end

Matthew 24:51 ~ and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth

- Jesus exhorts his hearers to be ready for his second coming
- The evil slave who thinks the master is not coming for a long time represents those who fail to live in light of Christ’s imminent return
- He will be punished in the place of torment and regret, a place involving terrible pain and suffering
- Hell’s torments will be worse than anyone could imagine and the language used to describe hell cannot accurately communicate its pain
- “Fire, brimstone, darkness, weeping, gnashing of teeth” are intended to confound all our senses with dread because it will be far worse than those terms describe

John Calvin: “Now, because no description can deal adequately with the gravity of God’s vengeance against the wicked, their torments and tortures are figuratively expressed to us by physical things, that is, by darkness, weeping, and gnashing of teeth, unquenchable fire, an undying worm gnawing at the heart. By such expressions the Holy Spirit certainly intended to confound all our senses with dread”

Martin Luther: “It is of little importance whether a person holds hell to be what now men paint or picture it to be. No doubt it now is, and will be, far worse than anyone is able to describe, picture, or think it to be.”

There is no way to describe hell. Nothing on earth can compare with it. No living person has any real idea of it. No madman in wildest flights of insanity ever beheld its horror. No man in delirium ever pictured a place so utterly terrible as this. No nightmare racing across a fevered mind ever produces a terror to match that of the mildest hell. No murder scene with splashed blood and oozing wound ever suggested a revulsion that could touch the border lands of hell.

Paul's View of Hell

- Paul did not deal in as much detail with eternal punishment as did Jesus in the Gospels and John in Revelation...but what he did write matches their descriptions of hell
- Clearly, Jesus is the author of hell...but his apostles bear important testimony to this doctrine

Romans 2:6-10

Romans 2:6-10 ~ who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek

- Paul's contrast in these verses is between the saved and unsaved, between blessing and blight
- Notice the 2 pairs of words Paul uses in this text to describe the fate of the unrighteous: 1) wrath and indignation (vs. 8); 2) tribulation and distress (vs. 9)
- The "wrath and indignation" of vs. 8 is set in contrast to "eternal life" of vs. 7
- This wrath of God will accumulate until Judgment Day – see vs. 5
- The other pair of words ("tribulation and distress") focuses on the painful ordeal of the unsaved
- In this passage, Paul clearly expects the unsaved to bear God's indignation, not experience annihilation...his focus is on their distress not on their deletion

Romans 9:22-23

Romans 9:22-23 ~ What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory

- Does God prepare both "vessels of mercy" and "vessels of wrath?" Or does God prepare "vessels of mercy" and allow others to prepare themselves as "vessels of wrath?"
- It could be that God prepares both: 1) God did harden Pharaoh's heart; 2) God is the potter to do what He wants to the clay (cf. vs. 21)
- But it could equally be that the unsaved prepare themselves for destruction: 1) Although vs. 23 says specifically that God "prepared" vessels of mercy, vs. 22 does NOT specifically say that God "prepared" vessels for destruction (predestination vs. double predestination); 2) God is described as "enduring" vessels, as if *they* were fitting themselves for destruction and He is bearing this
- The main question, though, surrounds the meaning of "destruction" in vs. 22
- This does not at all suggest that destruction is extinction...rather it speaks of ongoing duration and continuing existence...this refers to ongoing punishment in a state that continues on

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 ~ the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power

- At Christ's 2nd coming, he will punish those who "do not know God and those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus"

- Two phrases here demonstrate Paul’s understanding of eternal punishment: 1) dealing out retribution; 2) eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord
- Reasons we know this “eternal destruction” is not annihilation:
 1. The phrase “eternal destruction” is an unlikely way to denote the annihilation of the wicked – if destruction were meant, why not just say “destruction?”
 2. “Eternal destruction” should be taken to indicate the severity of the punishment awaiting God’s enemies
 3. God’s enemies will be “away from the presence of the Lord” – this cannot be annihilation since their separation presupposes their existence
- Thus, hell is at the same time “away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” AND “in the presence of the Lamb” (Rev 14:10)
- God is not present in hell in grace and blessing; HOWEVER, God is present in hell in holiness and wrath

Does Hell Have Degrees of Punishment?

- Yes, although hell is everlasting for all its inhabitants, some suffer worse than others since God’s justice demands that there be degrees of punishment

Matthew 11:21-24 ~ Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you. ”

- The cities of Israel that witnessed Jesus’ miracles and rejected his word will suffer greater punishment than pagan cities that did not experience such great revelation from God

Matthew 23:13-14 ~ But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. [“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation.]

Luke 12:42-48 ~ And the Lord said, “Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But if that slave says in his heart, ‘My master will be a long time in coming,’ and begins to beat the slaves, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk; the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and assign him a place with the unbelievers. And that slave who knew his master’s will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.

2 Peter 2:20-21 ~ For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them.

Revelation 20:12-13 ~ 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.

- God is just and He will punish the wicked exactly as they deserve...although hell will be terrible for all of its occupants, it will be more terrible for some and most terrible for others