

The Existence Of Hell

Introduction. Perhaps no generation of people has been less scared of hell or frightened in regard to the prospects of eternal punishment than is ours. Felix was an extremely evil man, but he was frightened at the prospect of hell (Acts 24:25).

The Bible's emphasis on hell is largely an understated theme today. Only 71% believe there is such a thing as hell. Four out of ten adults believe that hell is "a state of eternal separation from God's presence" (39%) and one-third (32%) says it is "an actual place of torment and suffering where people's souls go after death." A third perspective that one in eight adults believe is that "hell is just a symbol of an unknown bad outcome after death" (13%). Just one-half of 1% expect to go to hell upon their death.

Most people are not very comfortable hearing about hell today. It has gotten to the point where "hell, fire, and brimstone" preachers are caricatured as idiots, but hell is real! When I obeyed the gospel, I knew I did not want to go to hell. Many people cast aside the thought of hell as a joke, but when I consider that I have but one life to live, and after that the judgment (Hebrews 9:27), and that the judgment is final, the thought of hell is more than I can bear.

I. ***Uses Of The Word "Hell" In The Scriptures***

A. Sheol.

1. This term appears sixty-five times in the Old Testament and has been variously translated as "hell" (31 times); "grave" (31 times); and "pit" (3 times).
2. It corresponds with the New Testament word "Hades" and essentially means the realm of the dead although the context can alter the meaning slightly.

B. Hades.

1. This term occurs eleven times in the New Testament and indicates a realm of the dead. This is not the grave, nor is it the permanent region of the lost.
2. Hades is the intermediate region between death and the doom of Gehenna. After we die, our spirit resides in Hades, although there are two separate parts; one for the righteous and one for the wicked.

C. Gehenna.

1. This term occurs twelve times in the New Testament and is the meaning of hell according to our modern understanding (i.e., a place of eternal punishment). Gehenna was the Valley of the

Son of Hinnom, south of Jerusalem. Ahaz and Manasseh, two wicked kings of Judah, sacrificed their sons there to the heathen god Moloch (2 Chronicles 28:3; 33:6 Jeremiah 32:35). King Josiah defiled the place (2 Kings 23:10) and it became the city dump, with fires continually burning in it.

2. The Jews then made "Gehenna" the name for the final judgment and the place of eternal punishment. Possibly no word was more repulsive and descriptive of horror than "Gehenna."

D. Tartarus.

1. This name only occurs once in the New Testament (2 Peter 2:4). Tartarus was the name in classical mythology for the subterranean abyss in which rebellious gods and other such beings as the Titans were punished.
2. The word was, however, taken over into Hellenistic Judaism and used in connection with fallen angels. This is not Sheol, Hades, nor Gehenna, but the place where those angels who sinned are confined to "pits of darkness" to be "reserved for judgment."

II. ***Characteristics Of Hell***

A. Hell is a place of intense suffering.

1. In Luke 16:23-24, the word for "torment" means torture which was used in examination of criminals. "Agony" means intense anguish, or distress.
2. I avoid suffering as much as I can. In fact, I do not know of anyone who does not seek to avoid pain. When in severe pain, it becomes the obsession of my mind. Time seems to stand still when you are in pain.
3. We seek relief from the blazing heat of summer by seeking shade or by longing for the cool of the evening. But in hell, there is no relief. There is only the torment and anguish that is pictured by pain and intense heat (Revelation 20:10; 21:8).
4. "Outer darkness" is the farthest darkness from the lighted palace (Matthew 22:13). The Lord uses this phrase three times in Matthew (8:12; 25:30) to emphasize the separation, suffering, and despair.
5. The idea of hopelessly suffering in darkness surrounded by wailing, howling, screaming, moaning, groaning, and the gnashing of teeth of others who are hopelessly lost and seeking death frightens me beyond belief.

B. Hell is a place of memory.

1. Hell might be more bearable if you could forget the opportunities you had in life. But when you realize that you

have arrived in hell because of the opportunities which you neglected because you sought your own fleshly desires, you followed after the world, you were proud and would not obey the gospel, and because you wanted your own way, it will add immeasurably to the suffering (Luke 16:25).

2. In Luke 12:45-48 and 2 Peter 2:20-21, responsibility is contingent upon knowledge and actions. There are so many people out there who know to do better, but they do not. Our greater privilege allows us greater responsibility, but we must use it!
 3. If only the thought of the failures in one's life could perish, perhaps hell might be more endurable. But there is no return to take advantage of wasted opportunities.
 4. A thought that is equally bad is that in hell I would be helpless to change the course of those who were near to me in life, those who were no doubt following my example. Soon, they too will arrive to suffer intensely, eternally, and hopelessly; and I would have helped to bring them to hell.
- C. Hell is a place of despair.
1. Life's most severe trials are punctuated by anticipation for some relief, for something better. In fact, anticipation of some pleasure is one of Satan's most potent tools to lure men into sin.
 2. There is no anticipation in hell. There is nothing to look forward to except more intense suffering, hopelessness, haunting memories, and endless despair.
- D. Hell is a place of no escape.
1. There will be no rest, ever (Revelation 14:11). The thought of no escape is as bad as the suffering itself. Suffering in our lifetime is made better by the hope of relief; but this is not so in hell.
 2. Jesus Christ took hell so seriously that He could say without the slightest hesitation to remove your eye or cut off your hand or foot if that would keep you out of hell (Mark 9:47-48). The worm mentioned here is one which preys upon dead bodies. It is used metaphorically to signify the exclusion of the hope of restoration.
 3. Once we are in hell, we are there to stay for all eternity (Luke 16:26). To suffer in hell immeasurably without hope of an escape is more than the mind can fathom. There is no hope of escape through death or any other means (Matthew 25:41).

III. *Hell Is Prepared For Those Who Are Disobedient To God's Will*

- A. Those who practice iniquity will be in hell.
 - 1. Earth has always been full of the immoral and hell will be no different (Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Ephesians 5:3-5; Revelation 21:8). These passages positively prove that we will sow what we reap (Galatians 6:7-8).
 - 2. Sowing the seeds of adultery, fornication, uncleanness, worldliness, jealousy, and strife will never produce a harvest of eternal life. Heaven will contain nothing unclean or that which practices abomination (Revelation 21:27; Matthew 13:40-42).
- B. Those who do not obey the gospel will be in hell.
 - 1. The apostle Paul's teaching is clear on this point (2 Thessalonians 1:6-9). The strongly secular age in which we live is becoming more and more forgetful of God. Millions of Americans know more about Hollywood and movie stars than they do about Jesus Christ and His church. They know more about sports than salvation.
 - 2. So many people could not fill five minutes with intelligent talk about God's character or His mission of man's redemption. These people "know not God" in the truest sense of the expression. Responsible people cannot go to heaven unless they obey the gospel by heeding the commandments given by God.
 - 3. Many preachers who think they are preaching the same gospel Paul did either deny the reality of hell or promise people immunity from it upon partial obedience. Such preachers are enemies to the souls of the very people who look to them for religious guidance and proper direction for the future.
- C. Those who are religiously wrong will be in hell.
 - 1. Jesus will come to save His body of people which is the church (Ephesians 5:23). One can be a Christian without being a Catholic, Protestant, or Jew. The believers in Antioch were just called Christians (Acts 11:26). We can be everything God wants us to be by following His commandments (Matthew 7:21-23).
 - 2. Unfaithful members of the Lord's church will also be in hell. Fifty percent of the virgins were lost. All ten were awaiting the bridegroom's coming (Matthew 25:1-13). One out of three of the Lord's servants (Matthew 25:14-30) failed to prepare and was consigned to outer darkness. In John 15:6, Jesus affirmed that unfruitful branches (Christians) will be gathered and burned.
 - 3. Revelation 3:16-17 teaches that lukewarm members will be spewed out of the Lord's mouth. One of the tragedies of

lukewarmness is the complacent feeling of spiritual security. The church was headed for hell and did not even know it. Going to hell is as far removed from the mind of the lukewarm church member as the most distant star from our solar system.

Conclusion. Hell is a sphere that no sane and sober individual would desire to experience. Even one minute in eternal hell would be sixty seconds too long. It has been correctly stated that if every lost sinner on earth could be take to hell for a one minute preview of coming eternal horrors and then returned to this life, that every one of them would immediately obey the gospel and become a Christian upon their return. No mere words can truly delineate its horrors, the tormenting anguish, or the endless duration.

Relative to hell we should believe everything God has told us. We should believe its reality because He said it is a real place. The God of heaven cannot lie and be true to His own perfect characteristic of honesty (Acts 27:25). It is with the same degree of surety that we can view the horrors of hell as real and awful. These horrors shall be as God told us.

If you are serious about escaping hell, the time to act is now. Repent of your sins and turn to Jesus Christ. God sent Christ into the world to die for our sins. Do not harden your heart or suppose that some other day would be more convenient. Few people intend to arrive in hell, but many arrive there because they failed to act in the hour of opportunity. Now is your opportunity. Obey the gospel, for "it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31).