

“Is Hell Going Out of Business?”

A. Why Don't We Talk About Hell?

1. Polite Apologies

- a) Ignore it altogether (tacit apology). If it is mentioned, then the focus is quickly changed to the positive notions of God's love, grace, etc. All some want is to be “TOUCHED BY AN ANGEL.”
- b) Typically, we want to elicit a positive response so we emphasize “eternal life” not “eternal death” when presenting the Gospel.
- c) Avoid the difficult issues associated with the fate of those who never hear the Gospel and we appeal to “mystery” or “ignorance” (i.e., “we can't really know”).

2. Formal/Sophisticated Apologies

a) Annihilation: After a period of suffering, the judged cease to exist

1. A pseudo spiritual euthanasia.
2. Some who hold to annihilationism suggest there is a second chance to repent after death and before the final Judgment (a misreading of 1 Pt. 3:19-20).
 - (a) Heaven has no backdoors. This can be an attempt to usher in some kind of universalism, (everyone eventually gets into heaven).
 - (b) As the parable of the rich man and Lazarus teaches us, there may be a plea for relief but there is no hint of possible repentance (Lk. 16:19-31).
 - (c) If repentance is a gift of God (and I believe that it is) and not some latent ability within every human, then there is no Scriptural warrant to suppose that God will grant it after death.
3. Does not deal fairly with the biblical language describing the nature of Hell

b) Symbolical/Metaphorical:

4. Ignores the fact that behind the metaphor/symbol is a corresponding reality (American Flag as an example).
5. Regardless, there is a horrible existence portrayed in the language.

c) Universalism

3. Jesus' spoke more about Hell than any other biblical writer. Jesus is not embarrassed by the reality of Hell, but profoundly saddened by the hardness of people's hearts. If we call Jesus Lord of our lives, we cannot lay aside a significant element of His teaching.
4. God does not need nor expect our apologies! We must not make excuses for God.
5. Yet we need a proper reserve when speaking about Hell. We are not the final arbitrator of who gets in to heaven or hell. That role is reserved for Jesus Christ. Moreover, Jesus warns *all* of us that there will be many surprises on Judgment Day (Mt. 7:21-23; 25:37-46).

B. Hell: A Necessary Presupposition of the Gospel Message

1. When we long to see people come to Christ by faith, are we not assuming, with some degree of certainty, that they are going to Hell? And, if we are not assuming there is a Hell, then why evangelize?
2. We're not only being *saved for* heaven, but being *saved from* Hell. Given God's absolute moral perfection and our utter and total corruption and depravity, then Hell is not only logically necessary but morally necessary as well.

II. Our Condition: The Sin Nature

A. Quotables

“It is only as we acknowledge the tragedy and feel the misery of our personal ruination through original sin that we shall properly value the Good News of the Savior.”

J. I. Packer, *Telling the Truth*, p. 44

“The doctrine of original sin is the only philosophy empirically validated.”

G. K. Chesterton

B. *A Day in the Life of a Sinner (Gen. 3:1-19)*

1. The very basis for all of truth and knowledge is set into orbit (“What is truth?”)
 - a) Whereas God said that Adam and Eve would die if they ate from the tree (Gen. 2:17), the serpent said, “You will not die” (Gen. 3:4).
 - b) The result is that we doubt the veracity of God and trust our own wisdom to discern truth (*intellectual relativism*).
2. The foundation for all of moral standards is suspect (“What is right?”)
 - a) By actually eating the fruit, Adam and Eve trusted their own sense of what is right and wrong rather than allowing God’s words to define right and wrong (Gen. 3:6).
 - b) The result: We rely upon our own pleasures and comfort to define what is good and right for us rather than listen to our Father who knows what is best (*moral relativism*).
3. The true nature of humanity is put into question (“Who am I?”)
 - a) Adam and Eve succumbed to the temptation to be “like God” (Gen. 3:5).
 - b) The result: We deify ourselves and displace God rather than see ourselves as fully dependent and subordinate creatures (*relentless denial*).
4. These stages are logically connected. That is, *intellectual relativism* leads naturally to *moral relativism*, which leads to *psychosis*. When we claim there is no truth, we are justified in living however we choose (there is no basis for knowing right or wrong).

C. *Sinners by Nature and by Choice*

1. Our nature and choices include a bent toward sin/evil:
 - a) Ps. 51:5 “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”
 - b) Ps. 58:3 “Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward.”
 - c) Jer. 17:9 “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure.”
 - d) Eph. 2:3 “All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.”
 - e) Rom 7:18 “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.”
 - f) Tit. 1:15 “to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted.”
 - g) Is. 64:6 “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.”
 - h) Rom. 3:23 “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
 - i) Ps. 14:3 “All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.”
2. Consequently, we inherit the guilt of our parentage (legal guilt).
 - a) Rom. 5:12 “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.”
 - b) Rom. 5:18-19 “the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men . . . through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners.” As the representative of humanity, God counted all of Adam’s progeny as guilty. *Original guilt, not original sin.*
6. Is it fair that we are guilty because of what someone else has done? I will deal with the fairness issues later and shed some additional light on this question. But suffice it to say that this question has a certain notion of human “freedom” behind it. It presupposes that all humans are born in a morally neutral state and, if genuinely free, are able not to sin. PELAGIAN!

7. But, in my unregenerate, unbelieving, unrepentant state the only freedom I have I got from my parents! (C. S. Lewis: “Like begets like” or Jesus: “Flesh gives birth to flesh.”) Sin leaves no stone unturned and touches every aspect, every property of our human existence; ESPECIALLY “free” will!
8. A freedom that suggests moral neutrality simply does not exist. God clearly tells us in Rom. 6 that, prior to salvation, we are “slaves to sin” (6:6). Only by the power of the Holy Spirit are able not to sin (Rom. 8:3-4).

3. The Verdict: Guilty!

- a) The Garden resulted in alienation from God. We are removed from God relationally, not geographically. Consequently, *this relational distance from our Creator has spawned severe malevolence and dysfunction into the human race and into every human soul.*

D. Implications of our Sinful Nature: Unbelief is not the only basis of condemnation.

1. While it is true that people are accountable for what they know (Jesus said: “to him who has, much will be required,” Lk. 12:48), *people do not go to Hell because they choose to but because they deserve to (contra C. S. Lewis’ “the doors of Hell are locked from the inside.”)*
2. God does not arbitrarily consign people to heaven or hell irrespective of their moral nature. Men and women are not morally neutral before Him.
3. What about those who never hear? Scripture repeatedly depicts people as under condemnation and in need of salvation *before they hear the Gospel* (Rom. 1:18-3:21). Therefore, if no one ever heard the gracious Good News, God would still be just in sending everyone to Hell. Carson: “Had he saved only one, it would have been an act of grace; that he saves a vast host affirms still more unmistakably the uncharted reaches of that grace.”

III. Our Consequences

A. Quotables

“There is one very serious defect to my mind in Christ’s moral character, and that is that He believed in hell. I do not myself feel that any person who is really profoundly humane can believe in everlasting punishment.”

Bertrand Russell, *Why I am Not a Christian*, p. 17

“Is he not a God of boundless mercy? How then can we project a deity of such cruelty and vindictiveness? Torturing people without end is not the sort of thing the ‘Abba’ Father of Jesus would do . . . What human crimes could possibly deserve everlasting conscious torture?”

Clark Pinnock, *Four Views of Hell*, p. 140

“Hell stands as a horrible witness to human defiance in the face of great grace” and “I doubt if any of us is equipped to assess what is an ‘appropriate’ punishment for defiance of the holy and sovereign God, save God himself.”

D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord*, p. 103

“The infinite horrors of hell are intended by God to be a vivid demonstration of the infinite value of his glory which sinners have belittled.”

John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad*, p. 127

“Hell will be the place of the eternal ‘I told you so’”

John Gerstner, *Heaven and Hell*, p. 69

B. Is Hell for Real?

1. Which “Hell” are we talking about?

- a) *Hades* (OT = *Sheol* = *LXX* = *Hades*) is the intermediate place where the ungodly await final judgment. Hades, most likely, receives only the soul (Acts. 2:27, 31).
- b) *Gehenna* — occurs 12xs in the NT. Known also as the valley of Hinnom, it was famous for pagan rites, especially child sacrifice (2 Kgs. 23:10; 2 Cr. 28:3; 33:6). Located on the south side of Jerusalem, the area literally became the city’s garbage dump after the Babylonian captivity and earned the symbolic representation of the damned. Gehenna is the place for final judgment. Death and Hades are cast into Gehenna (Rev. 20:14), which receives both body and soul (Matt. 10:28; Lk. 12:5).

2. Significant Biblical references to Hell:

- a) Is: 66:22-24 “As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,’ declares the LORD, ‘so will your name and descendants endure. From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all [redeemed] mankind will come and bow down before me,’ says the LORD. ‘And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all [redeemed] mankind.”
 - b) Dan. 12:2 “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.”
 - c) Matt. 5:22 “But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”
 - d) Matt. 8:12 “But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”
 - e) Matt. 10:28 “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell (= Gehenna).”
 - f) Matt. 25:46 “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”
 - g) Mk. 9:47 “And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell.”
 - h) 2 Thess. 1:8-9 “He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.”
 - i) 2 Pt. 2:4 “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment.”
 - j) Jude 6 “And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home-- these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.”
 - k) Rev. 1:18 “I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.”
 - l) Rev. 14:9-11 “A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.’”
 - m) Rev. 20:10-15 “And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”
3. Observations from biblical passages on Hell:
- a) FIRST: The Devil, his demons, and every unbeliever share the same destiny.
 - b) SECOND: It is God who consigns people to Hell (Mt. 10:28; Rev. 1:18).
 - c) References to “weeping and gnashing of teeth” indicate that the punishment will be conscious (Mt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; cf. also, Rev. 14:9-11).
 - d) The contrast between eternal punishment and eternal life indicates that both states will be without end (Mt. 25:46). No rehab!
 - e) Reuniting of the body with the soul reveals that Hell (and heaven) is a spatial place (cf., Mt. 10:28; Jn. 5:28-29).

- f) Mt. 10:15; 11:22, 24 (note Jesus' "more bearable") and Lk. 12:47-48 strongly suggest there are degrees of torment in hell. The punishment will fit the crime.
9. Rationale: Jonathan Edwards: "Though all men partake equally of original sin, not all partake equally of actual sins."
 10. If there are degrees of torment Jonathan Edwards' statement is painfully true that "the damned in hell would give the world to have the number of their sins one less."
 11. (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia2ae. 87, 4.) "The magnitude of the punishment matches the magnitude of the sin. Now a sin that is against God is infinite; the higher the person against whom it is committed, the graver the sin—it is more criminal to strike a head of state than a private citizen—and God is of infinite greatness. Therefore an infinite punishment is deserved for a sin committed against Him"

IV. The Rationale of Hell

A. *Twofold:*

1. The price of salvation was of infinite worth and to casually dismiss it in unbelief and disobedience requires nothing less than infinite condemnation (cf., Heb. 10:26-31).
2. Justice entails getting what is deserved. Even the thief on the cross understood this much (Lk. 23:41). GOD DOES NOT GRADE ON A CURVE! Being sinners by nature and by choice, we deserve nothing less than hell. The justice of God is the holiness of God in action. Hell is the logical expression of God's holiness, majesty, and glory. It is to God's glory that hell be the habitation of the impenitent.

B. *Is Hell Fair? Is it fair that before we were even born, we are counted guilty by God?*

1. All who protest have also voluntarily committed many sins for which God also holds him/her guilty (Rom. 2:6; Col. 3:25). The pot calling the kettle black?
2. Should punishment always be remedial and not retributive? Put differently, must punishment always rehabilitate, restore, and reconcile? In God's economy THERE IS A POINT OF NO RETURN. Take Hitler, for instance. Should he have a chance at rehabilitation? Must human life be venerated at all costs?
3. If it's unfair for us to be represented by Adam's guilt, then it is also unfair for us to be represented by Christ's righteousness. The entire human race is an organic unity (metaphysically, psychologically, relationally, intellectually, biologically). We are all from the same "common stock," as it were, and are represented by the first human (Adam, cf., Acts 17:26). By God's marvelous mercy those who have believed on Christ are represented by His righteous life (Rom. 5:19).
4. In a world where absolute justice and moral imperfection coexist there could be no grace and no mercy. Therefore, I'd rather live in an unjust world and experience grace and mercy than a world where I get what I deserve. In God's current economy He has chosen to permit injustices in order that the praises of His glorious grace may abound (Rom. 9:22-24).

"What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath--prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory--even us, whom he also called."

5. If, as Scripture suggests, the impenitent continually sin in Hell, then they always get what they always deserve, viz., eternal torment (Rev. 16:21; 22:11).
 - a) Much like Pharaoh, the "seven last plagues" delivered by God in Revelation do not bring repentance but continual defiance, just like what Israel experienced and what we see today (cf., Is. 42:24-25).
 - b) At least, the inmates of Hell consciously and continually break the first and second of the Ten Commandments.

V. Our Reaction to Hell: What Difference Does Hell Make?

- *Because of God's great grace and mercy to us, every waking moment should be governed by unceasing gratitude and admiration for the God of our salvation who has saved us from the wrath to come (Eph. 2:1-10; 1 Thess. 5:9-10).*
- Knowing our just end should prompt us to live holy lives with great patience and endurance. We must maintain a forward focus (2 Pt. 3:11-13; Rev. 14:12).
- We must maintain a biblical view of God's holiness and the enormity and severity of our sinfulness.

“The essential thing is that degrees of blameworthiness come not from how long you offend dignity, but from how high the dignity is that you offend” (Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, p. 127).

- Hell should drive us to uncompromising evangelism and passionate prayer for the lost. Not only should we be motivated by the amazing love of God for sinners (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8), but also by the terrible judgment of God (cf., Acts 17:31; 24:25).
 - God poured out his wrath in human history twice so far and the third time will not be a “charm.”
 - (1) At the flood (Gen. 6-9), (2) At the cross, (3) in final judgment
- None of the biblical passages on judgment are without compassion and genuine pity for the lost.
 - Jer. 9:1 (Jeremiah’s bitter weeping over the destruction of his people)
 - Rom. 9:1-4 (Paul’s anguish over Israel)
 - Mt. 23:37-38 (Jesus’ weeping over Jerusalem)
 - *Though Scripture speaks plainly and boldly of Hell’s fury, it never does so without tears* (Carson, *How Long*, p. 104). Should we feel any less?
- Evangelism must never be reduced to meeting felt needs. Sin does not fall in the domain of the psychiatrist, social worker, financial counselor, or politician; it falls under the domain of our Savior. It is only when we come to the Savior confessing our sinfulness and desperation that we find genuine peace and eternal health for our souls.
- If the love of God is the heartbeat of evangelism, then surely the imminent judgment of God is the reason for evangelism (Jn. 3:16).