

The Doctrine of Hell²¹

One of the most disturbing concepts for one to think about is a family member, friend, loved one, or anybody for that matter, suffering eternal torment in Hell. This has led many to question the justice, morality, goodness, and motives of an All-loving God. If these stumbling blocks are to be removed, a clear understanding of eternal punishment in light of God's loving nature is essential. Many objections to the doctrine of hell seem formidable when first encountered, however, a closer examination will illumine several flaws in the objector's reasoning. Further, it is important that one approaches this subject with *humility* not standing as judge or jury over one's eternal destiny.

1. What the Bible Says About Hell
2. Five Views on Hell
3. Doctrine of Hell

1. What the Bible Says about Hell

A. Words used in regards to life after death for the unsaved

1. *Sheol*- Old testament word for the grave, hell, pit or the abode of the dead (7585)
2. *Hades*- The place of departed souls, grave, hell (86)
3. *Gehenna*- A place or state of everlasting punishment (1067)
4. *Tartaros*- To *incarcerate* in eternal torment (5020)

In the New Testament three different words are used in regards to life after death for the unsaved. The Greek word *hades* is transliterated "Hades" in the NIV in five instances (Matt 16:18; Rev. 1:18; 6:8; 20:13,14); twice it is translated as "in the depths" (Matt 11:23; Luke 10:15), once as "hell" (Luke 16:23), and twice as "the grave" (Acts 2:27, 31). In general, the Greek word

²¹The Doctrine of Hell, Joseph Holden Class Notes from CCBC Fall 2004.

hades is equivalent to the Old Testament work *sheol* (Acts 2:31 cf. Ps 16:10; used 65 time in the Old Testament).

It is clear that *hades* is used of the temporary place (Rev. 20:14) of the unsaved after death. The most definitive term in the New Testament is *gehenna*, uniformly translated “hell” and refers to everlasting punishment (Matt 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15;, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6). This word is derived from the *Valley of Hinnom* (located south of Jerusalem, Joshua 15:8; 18:16; Jer 7:30-33), traditionally considered by Jews to be the place of final punishment of the ungodly. All references to *gehenna* are given by Christ Himself with the exception of James 3:6. One instance of the Greek word *tartaros* is found in 2 Peter 2:4; This word is translated “hell” and considered equivalent to *gehenna* (John Walvoord, “The Literal View” in William Crocket, ed. *Four Views on Hell* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, p.19)

B. Scriptural references to Hell

Matthew 10:28

“But fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell”

Matthew 13:40

“He will also say....departed from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels.”

Luke 16:23

“And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom”

Revelation 20:13-14

“The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged....Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire”

C. Definition of Hell

Hell can be defined as that place where unbelievers are eternally *separated from God in accord with their own free choice*. The real torment of Hell seems to be characterized by three elements: *privation, punishment, and pain*, (Luke 13:28; 16:23, 26)

II. Five Views on Hell

A. The literal view

The literal view holds that Hell is a place of eternal torment with literal smoke and flames (John Walvoord, Dallas Theological Seminary).

B. The metaphorical view

The metaphorical view holds that Hell is a place of eternal conscious punishment but not necessarily as being a literal fire (William V. Crockett, Alliance Theological Society).

C. The purgatorial view

The purgatorial view holds that there is a place of temporal purification for all those who die at peace with the church but are not yet purified. These people will eventually inherit heaven after their purification. Those who die in mortal sin, go directly to eternal punishment after death (hell). (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1030, 1031, 1032, 1035)

D. The conditional view

The conditional view holds that the wicked begin in Hell, but eventually, God destroys the soul rather than punish them endlessly (Clark Pinnock). This is conditional annihilationism.

E. The annihilation view

This view says that after death one is immediately annihilated, destroyed, snuffed out of existence. This view has ancient Greek roots in Aristotle and has found in modern Atheistic movements and cults such as the Jehovah's Witnesses.

III. Doctrine of Hell ²²

A. Hell exists

1. Yes. *Justice* makes hell a necessity because not every evil act is justly punished in this life (e.g. Adolf Eichmann).
2. God would be *unjust* if there was not a hell. To force one to enter heaven against their will violates man's free choice to do otherwise.
3. God's *love* makes hell a necessity. He loves man so much He respects their decision regardless of the outcome.
4. Jesus taught there was a Hell (Matthew 10:28; Mark 9:43)
5. Bible teaches there is a Hell (Heb. 9:27; Rev. 20:11-15)

B. Location Hell

1. "Outer darkness" (Mt. 8:12)
2. "Under the earth" (Phil 2:10)
3. "Outside" (Rev. 22:15)
4. Away from the "presence of the Lord" (Matt 25:41; 2 Thess 1:7,9)

Note: It is important to understand that "up", "down", "outside", "inside", "under", and "over" are *relational* terms not necessarily spatial ones. In other words, Hell is away from God. If one takes these terms literally, he risks making God a finite being that is localized in certain areas (see Ps 139:8-10).

²² William Crockett, ed., *Four Views on Hell* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); N.L. Geisler, *Questions About Hell* (Taped lecture).

C. Bible describes the nature of Hell

1. Like being left out in the dark forever (Matt 8:12)
2. Like a perpetual burning dump (Mark 9:44-48)
3. Like a bottomless pit (Rev. 20:1,3)
4. Like everlasting life imprisonment (1 Peter 3:19)
5. Like everlasting anguish and regret for what could have been (Luke 16:28)
6. Like a divorce or separation (2 Thess 1:7-9)

Note: Hell is place of “torment”, not a place of “torture”. *Torture* is inflicted by another from without against their will, *torment* is self-inflicted from within in accordance with their will.

D. The fire of Hell

1. Some say the fire of Hell is real but not necessarily *physical* as we understand physically. For example, values, numbers, thoughts, God, angels, demons, and spoken words are real but not material or physical. Others say it is real physical flames, but not able to consume the body.
2. People in hell (*gehenna*) will be in their imperishable resurrected bodies (John 5:28-29) which cannot be effected by fire.
3. Angels (who will be in Hell, Rev. 20; Matt 13:40), who are spirits without flesh and bone (Luke 24:39), cannot be burned or tormented by literal flames.

William Crockett of *Alliance Theological Seminary* asserts,

“Physical fire works on the physical bodies with physical nerve endings, not on spirit beings. We see in Matthew 25:41 that the eternal fire was created for spirit beings like the Devil and his angels. The fire in some sense must be a spiritual fire which is another way of acknowledging it as a metaphor for God’s punishment of the wicked,” (Crockett, *Four Views on Hell*, p.30)

4. Those people who have died and gone to *hades* are without physical bodies (their bodies are still in the grave, Rev. 6:9; 1 Cor 15:51-53; 1 Thess 4:15-16; John 19:30; Luke 23:46; Acts 2:31-32), immateriality cannot be burned in a material way.
5. Everything in the Bible is *literally true*, but not always *true literally*. For example, Jesus said, “I am the door,” (John 10:7) if taken literally, Jesus is a wood plank that swings on hinges (not to mention the pantheistic overtones of Jesus’ statement).
6. Some say (Peter Kreeft, Boston College) the question as to whether literal flames exist in Hell is not important because the external physical pain of fire cannot be compared to the internal spiritual pain which is far worse (e.g. when our soul is in pain, we may hit our head on the wall).

E. The duration of Hell

1. It lasts as long as heaven does since the same word (“everlasting” – *aionion*, Matt 25:41 cf 2 Thess 1:7; Rev. 20:10; Jn 5:24 – “eternal life”) is used of both.
2. It will endure as long as God does since by His nature He must banish evil from His presence (Isa 6:1; Heb 1:3).

F. No exit from Hell

1. No. There is a gulf fixed so no can leave (Luke 16:26).
2. There are some decisions in life that are irreversible (e.g. suicide).
3. Judgement begins immediately after death (Heb 9:27) and is everlasting (Matt 25:41; 2 Thess 1:7-9).

G. Consciousness in Hell

1. Yes. The rich man was conscious and full awareness of his own condition and the predicament of his five brothers at the time (Luke 16:26-28). The rich man was conscious:

- a. he could have had (Abraham's bosom) (v 23-24)
 - b. his need for "mercy" (Lk 16:24)
 - c. his "torment" (v 24)
 - d. his memories of life while on earth (v 25)
 - e. his "five brothers" (v 28)
 - f. his wrong decision (v 30)
2. The beast was still conscious after one thousand years (Rev 19:20; 20:10).
 3. People are conscious in heaven (2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:23; Rev 6:9-11)

H. Why doesn't God just annihilate the wicked and put them out of their misery?

1. Because a loving God doesn't snuff out His enemies (image of God, indirect attack against His own nature)
2. For the same reason parents don't kill their children because they didn't meet their expectations
3. God doesn't annihilate the wicked for the same reason we don't kill people who are suffering, in pain, and miserable
4. Because God would hinder and deprive man of the consequences (whether good or bad) of free decisions. God would have to violate their free choice in order to bring them to heaven.
5. People would rather will nothingness than not to will at all (e.g. Nietzsche – *Genealogy of Morals*).

I. Reform or punishment in Hell

1. God did try and *reform* them, this period is called "life," (2 Pet 3:9). After this is the time of *reckoning* (Heb 9:27)

2. Hell is only for the unrepentant, reprobate, and the *unreformable* (cf 2 Pet 2:1f)
3. Forced reformation is worse than punishment and is inhumane (circus animals, imbeciles, hospital patients)
4. Punishment says we respect justice, and elevates the nature of man since he/she ought to have known better.

J. How can God allow one to go to Hell eternally for temporal sins, isn't this overkill?

1. The one who asks this question forgets that temporal sins are against an *eternal* God. Only eternal punishment can suffice for sins against an eternal God.
2. Without an eternal separation there can be no eternal heaven, evil is corruptive and must be quarantined (1 Cor 5:6-7; Rev 21:4,8)

K. It's not fair to send people to Hell who have not heard

1. Yes, it would be unfair, however, there are no such persons. God has revealed Himself to everyone (Jn 1:9; Ps 19:1-4; Acts 14:15-17) by:
 - a. *physical nature* “so they are without excuse” (Rom 1:19-20)
 - b. their *inner conscience* (right and wrong) (Rom 2:12-15).
 - c. *Jesus*
 - d. The *Scripture* (Bible)

Note: If someone responds to the light of nature, the light of conscience, or the light of Scripture, they will be given more light (Heb 11:6 – He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him). It is important to note that

nature and conscience can show you *that* God exists, however, faith *that* God exists is not saving faith (James 2:19), only faith *in* will save.

2. Man is *responsible* for his own decisions.

L. Why do people go to Hell?

1. We are all born on the path that leads to hell (Ps 51:4)
2. Not heeding the warning signs along the way to turn from Hell (Luke 13:3; 2 Peter 3:9)
3. Because they *will* Hell by their actions even though they don't want to go there. For example, the alcoholic and drug addict may not *want* to be that way, but they *will* it by their decisions to continue in that lifestyle.

M. Who will be in Hell?

1. The Devil and his angels (Matt 25:41; Rev 12:9)
2. The Beast and the False Prophet (Rev 19:20; 20:10)
3. Judas (the son of perdition), the one who betrayed Christ (Jn 17:12)
4. All those who choose to reject God's grace in offering us His Son (Jn 3:16) and who are not found written in the book of life (Rev 20:14-15)
5. All those who refuse to be in God's fold (Matt 23:37)

N. Why did God even create man if He knew some would go to Hell?

1. Because to share and experience life with all its freedoms and risks is good. It's better to have loved and lost than not to have loved at all.
2. This question implies nothing is better than something. Nothing cannot be compared with something because it's nothing. It is an indirect attack on God's very nature of being.

3. This question also presupposes a moral standard, namely, it would be “morally better” to not have created people. This implies that one’s moral standard exceeds God’s standard.
4. Because some in heaven and some in Hell is better than no people in heaven and no people in Hell.

O. How can God of justice, love, and compassion send people to hell?

1. Because God would be unjust if he did not allow man to have free choice in choosing where he wants to spend eternity. In other words, God would be unjust if there *wasn't* a Hell. Should God force man to live with Him for eternity against their will? No.
2. This question presupposes an ultimate standard of justice, love, and compassion. In other words, someone cannot say something is unjust without some sort of knowledge of ultimate justice. Therefore, this objection indirectly affirms the existence of an ultimate (God).
3. God doesn’t *send* people to Hell. Man *decides* to send himself to Hell and God honors and confirms that decision.

P. How can we be happy in heaven knowing a loved one is in hell?

1. The same way we can be happy eating while knowing others are starving, namely, if we have tried to feed the starving and they refuse food.
2. The same way God can be happy there, and yet He is more merciful and compassionate than we are.
3. Just as we have healing of bad memories here, God will wipe away all tears in heaven (Rev 21:4)

Q. What about babies and children?

1. “Where the Bible hath no tongue I giveth no ear.” –Puritan Father
2. Jesus teaching on the fact we need to become like little children in order enter the Kingdom of God for such are those who are in it. (Matt 18:3-5; Luke 18:16-17)
3. David made reference to going to his child. (2 Samuel 12:1-23)
4. We don’t have definitive answers, but we do know the perfect character of God.

IV. Conclusion

The question of Hell is certainly a difficult one for some. However, it would not be correct to say that the Bible does not speak of a place of eternal punishment. Instead of the doctrine of Hell being a stumbling block, it should reveal the justice, the love, and the compassion of a God who will not violate one’s free choice to live separated from Him forever. God’s supreme love for mankind was demonstrated on the cross (Romans 5:8) in order that we might have the opportunity for eternal life.^{23 15}

Sources and Books on the Doctrine of Hell:

Crockett, William, gen. ed., *Four Views on Hell* (Zondervan)

Enns, Paul, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Moody)

Geisler, N.L., *Questions About Hell* (audio tape by Impact Ministries)

Shedd, W.G.T., *Dogmatic Theology* (Zondervan)

_____. *Eternal Punishment*

Walls, Jerry, *Hell: The Logic of Damnation*

²³ Eternal life is not only a duration of life (for even those condemned to eternal punishment receive “eternal life”), it is a quality of life that begins as the moment of salvation (Jn 5:24; 17:3).