

## Hell

- I. **Introduction:** The doctrine of Hell is essential to the understanding of the Christian faith. It is the destiny which every person has earned through his own sin (Rom. 6:23a) and it is the destiny from which Jesus Christ has rescued the elect (Rom. 6:23b; Col. 1:13; I Thes. 1:10). Without the doctrine of Hell, Jesus is not “our Great God and Savior” (Tit. 2:13). As Tim Barnett and Greg Koukl wrote, “The good news is only as good as the bad news is bad, and in Scripture eternal happiness and everlasting joy are balanced against the alternative—eternal misery and everlasting anguish.”<sup>1</sup>
- II. **Doctrinal Statement:** Grace Church of Orange is committed to the historic Christian faith “once for all handed to the saints” (Jude 3). As a result, GCO holds that Hell is a place of eternal conscious torment for those who reject God’s offer of eternal life through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. Evaluating the evidence for the alternative views discussed in the appendix, we find no compelling reason for abandoning this doctrine which the Church of Jesus Christ has confessed for almost 2,000 years.
- III. **Definitions**
  - A. Hell – The term “Hell” (*Geenna* in Greek) is spoken of exclusively as the final abode of the fallen angels and the unrighteous dead (Matt. 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 23:33) that is characterized by eternal conscious punishment (Matt. 8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Mark 9:47-48; Luke 13:28; Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 14-15). This view has been the almost universal position of the church throughout its history and expounded by such theologians as Tertullian, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, & Spurgeon.
  - B. Sheol (Hebrew) or Hades (Greek) is used in two different ways in Scripture – either as a reference simply to the grave (Ps. 16:10) or as the intermediate destination of the dead (both of the righteous until the coming of Christ and of the unrighteous throughout human history) until their final destiny (Luke 16:19-31; Luke 23:43; II Cor. 5:6-10; Phil. 1:21-26 & Rev. 20:11-15). Therefore, in one sense, all humans will experience Sheol/Hades in that all humans will experience physical death (i.e., the grave). In another sense, since the death and resurrection of Jesus, only the unregenerate experience Sheol/Hades until judgment. By contrast, believers are ushered immediately into the presence of Jesus upon their deaths.
- IV. **Descriptions of Hell**
  - A. Hell is described in the Bible as a place of fire (Mark 9:43, Jude 1:7, Matt. 13:42, 52). Fire is often used in the Bible to represent God’s judgment (Dan. 7:9-10, Rev. 19:11-16).
  - B. Hell is also described as a place of outer darkness (2 Pet. 2:4, Matt. 25:30). God’s glory and presence are often described in terms of light (Matt. 17:1-2, Rev. 21:22-24). Therefore, outer darkness would represent a place where the presence of God is absent. Hell, in its very essence, means existing completely apart from the presence of God (2 Thess. 1:9).
- V. **The Reality of Hell**
  - A. The Bible declares the reality of hell. – Matt. 5:22 & 29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15 & 33; Mark 9:43 & 45; Luke 12:5; Jas. 3:6; II Pet. 2:4. It can be stated that the Bible clearly speaks of a “second death” (Rev. 2:11; 20:6; 20:14; & 21:8). Therefore, physical death is not the only consequence of man’s sin. In

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Barnett & Greg Koukl, “Hell Interrupted – Part I”, Stand to Reason, <http://www.str.org>

addition, Sheol/Hades and Hell are distinct concepts in the Bible and Luke 16:19-31 clearly teaches that there is consciousness after death. Finally, the punishment of evil-doers is the definition of justice, not a violation of it; and love is not the only emotion God feels toward His fallen creatures (Ps. 5:5; Mal. 1:3; Rom. 9:13).

B. Two un-biblical positions that challenge the position of the reality of hell are:

- “There is no hell.”- The concept of hell is simply a myth.<sup>2</sup>
- “Annihilationism” – Upon death, the unregenerate will completely and eternally cease to exist.<sup>3</sup>

## VI. The Eternality of Hell

A. The Bible clearly states that hell lasts for all eternity. – Dan. 12:1-2; Matt. 25:31-46; Rev 20:10-15. “Eternity of hell” is defined as lasting forever, that there is no end to the physical reality of hell or to the conscious punishment of the individual.

B. Why are people punished infinitely for finite crimes?

- It is the consequences of our sins. To some, it may seem like an overly harsh punishment, but that’s because we do not see sin in its proper light (Mark 9:43-48).
- Even while suffering in hell, the Bible indicates that those who are there never come to the point where they desire a relationship with God or want to be in His presence. In the story of Lazarus and the Rich Man, the Rich Man expresses only a desire for relief from punishment while he’s in hell (Luke 16:24).
- Jesus describes those in hell as gnashing their teeth. J.P. Moreland states that this is not a reaction to torture but a state of anger <sup>4</sup> (Compare Matt. 8:12 with Acts 7:54). This again indicates that there is a lack of true repentance even in hell.

C. Some un-biblical positions that challenge the position of the eternity of hell are:

- “Universalism or Ultimate Reconciliation” – This position states that all mankind will eventually be reconciled to God and experience salvation.<sup>5</sup>
- “Conditional Immortality or Terminal Punishment” – This position states that after death, and after an appropriate period of punishment, the unregenerate completely cease to exist.<sup>6</sup>
- “Purgatory” – This position states that those ultimately destined for heaven will undergo suffering in a hell-like place to purge away all remaining vestiges of sin before entering heaven.<sup>7</sup>

## VII. After Death:

- The Bible teaches the conscious existence of the dead (Philippians 1:21-23; Luke 16:19-31),
- Believers are in God’s presence upon death (II Corinthians 5:8),
- Believers who are in heaven prior to the second coming are awaiting:
  - The resurrection of the body (John 5:28-29),
  - The judgment and reward of believers (Romans 14:10-12; II Corinthians 5:9-10),
  - The judgment and condemnation of unbelievers (Revelation 20:11-15),
  - The eternal life of the saved (John 3:16, 5:24),
  - The eternal punishment of the lost (Matthew 25:46; Revelation 20:15).

<sup>2</sup> For further information on the position of “No Hell” see Appendix A

<sup>3</sup> For further information on the position of “Annihilationism” see Appendix B

<sup>4</sup> Strobel, Lee, *The Case for Faith*, Harper Collins, 2000, page 246.

<sup>5</sup> For further information on the position of “Universalism” see Appendix C

<sup>6</sup> For further information on the position of “Conditional Immortality” see Appendix D

<sup>7</sup> For further information on the position of “Purgatory” see Appendix E

## APPENDIX

### Appendix A – There Is No Hell –

- This position states that the existence of hell is a myth that was a widely-held view in first century Judaism, imported perhaps from Babylon, but it does not actually exist. This view is a direct assault on the person and character of Jesus Christ. As most of the verses above clearly demonstrate, Jesus frequently taught on the topic of Hell. Someone who encourages the belief in a “mythical” afterlife and yet is described as the personal embodiment of truth (John 1:17; 14:6; 18:37; Eph. 4:21) is either a liar or a lunatic. Neither a liar nor a lunatic could die a substitutionary death as the payment for the sins of mankind (1 John 2:1-2). This view reduces Jesus to a fallible human being and the Gospel to self-help advice. By definition, a real savior delivers real people from a real tragedy.

### Appendix B - Annihilationism (of the Jehovah’s Witnesses type)

- This position states that upon death, the unregenerate will completely and eternally cease to exist. In short, Jehovah’s Witnesses teach that physical death is the only penalty for sin (Gen. 3:19; Rom. 6:7 & 23a), that righteous people go to hell (Gen. 37:35 & Job 14:13 – demonstrating confusion between Sheol/Hades and Hell), that there is no consciousness after death (Eccl. 9:10 – again confusing Sheol/Hades with Hell), and that eternal punishment would violate God’s justice and love (Deut. 32:4 & 1 John 4:8).
- The Bible clearly speaks of a “second death” (Rev. 2:11; 20:6; 20:14; & 21:8). Therefore, physical death is not the only consequence of man’s sin. In addition, Sheol/Hades and Hell are distinct concepts in the Bible and Luke 16:19-31 clearly teaches that there is consciousness after death.

### Appendix C - Universalism or Ultimate Reconciliation –

- This position states that all sinful mankind will eventually repent, be reconciled to God, and experience salvation because the death of Jesus Christ is so mighty and powerful that it can vanquish all sin in the universe – in this world and the next. Therefore, Hell will really be fully experienced only by Satan and the other fallen angels (Matt. 25:41; II Pet. 2:4) but only temporarily by mankind. This argument is supported by an appeal to the experience of Israel in the Old Testament. After a period of punishment (e.g., the Babylonian captivity), the nation repented of their sin and was restored to fellowship with God. Likewise, it is argued, individuals who experience a period of God’s punishment for sin after death in Hell will be granted repentance and restored to fellowship with God in heaven. In addition, Rom. 5:18, clearly states that Jesus’ sacrificial death “resulted [in] justification of life to **all** men” (emphasis added).
- Importantly, arguing against this view in no way denigrates or lessens the might and power of Jesus’ sacrificial death. His sacrifice is of infinite worth and efficacy. However, it must be observed that even the proponents of Ultimate Reconciliation admit that an opportunity for repentance being offered after death is taught nowhere in Scripture. Therefore, drawing a parallelism between Israel’s experience and the postmortem experience of unrepentant sinners is problematic at best. Israel’s sins were earthly and temporal, her punishment (i.e., exile) was earthly and temporal, and her restoration (i.e., returning to her land) was earthly and temporal. Lacking any clear application of this process to the heavenly and eternal, this parallelism fails. In addition, Rom. 5:18 must be interpreted in its context (Rom. 5:12-21). In that passage, Paul also states that, “through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners” (verse 19). The proponents of Universalism would not agree that Adam’s fall affected not all, but only many. Therefore, in this passage, Paul seems to be using “many” and “all” not in an absolute sense, but in a synonymous sense.

**Appendix D – Conditional Immortality or Terminal Punishment**

- This position states that after death and an appropriate period of punishment, the unregenerate completely cease to exist. This view is based on several assumptions. First, it is argued that the words “punish” and “destroy”, that are used to describe what God does to the unregenerate (John 3:16; Phil. 3:19; II Thes. 1:9), must mean a cessation of existence. Second, when punishment is spoken of as being “eternal” (Matt. 25:46), the reference is to the duration of its consequences (i.e., the damned will cease to exist forever). Third, it is stated that an infinite period of punishment for a finite amount of sin is inconsistent with God’s justice and goodness. Fourth, the proponents assert that immortality is a gift that God gives only to His children (Rom. 2:7; I Cor. 15:53-54; II Tim. 1:10) and therefore unbelievers are not immortal.
- It is understandable that this view seems to be growing in popularity, since it appeals directly to the human desire for fairness. In addition, arguing for eternal conscious punishment can sound almost sadistic. However, one must draw conclusions from scripture and not seek justification for views that are more comfortable. For example, the Greek words translated as “punish” and “destroy” **can** mean a cessation of existence, but that meaning is not required, and in many instances it is impossible, and must be determined by the context (Matt. 26:8 – translated “waste”; Rev. 17:8 [Cf. Rev. 20:10]; Matt. 9:17; John 2:19). Also, Jesus concludes the Olivet discourse (Matt. 24:1-25:46) by stating, “These [the unrighteous] will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” Both punishment and life are spoken of here as “eternal” with the exact same structure (preposition + adjective + noun) using the exact same preposition (Greek *eis* meaning into/unto) and the exact same adjective (Greek *aionion* meaning forever/eternal/throughout the ages to come). Therefore, both phrases should be interpreted in the same way – either the righteous experience life for a period of time **and** the unrighteous experience punishment for a period of time, or the righteous experience life for eternity **and** the unrighteous experience punishment for eternity. Regarding the complaint that an infinite period of punishment violates God’s justice and goodness, one of the determiners of a judicial sentence is the majesty of the One offended. [Stringing toilet paper on one of the pastors’ houses would result in a lesser punishment than stringing toilet paper on the house at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington DC, even though the action is the same.] Justice is defined by God, not by His creatures.

**Appendix E - Purgatory**

- This position states that those ultimately destined for heaven will undergo suffering in a hell-like place to purge away all remaining vestiges of sin before entering heaven. This may not be the Catholic version of Purgatory (making personal payment for sin by being punished for sins not covered by the death of Christ), but a sanctification view whereby all the elect will be made completely holy by a holy God before entering His holy presence (I Thes. 5:23). The non-elect, however, will experience Hell for eternity.
- Like Universalism, the proponents of this view readily admit that it is taught explicitly nowhere in the Bible. It also suffers from a misunderstanding of the doctrine of the imputation. Jesus lived a human life completely free from sin (Heb. 4:15) and His perfect righteousness is credited to the believer’s account (II Cor. 5:16-21). Therefore, salvation is based both on His substitutionary death as payment for our sin (Rom. 5:9-10a) and His life of perfect righteousness imputed to His followers (Rom. 5:10b). It is true that God will not allow anyone into His presence who has less than perfect righteousness, but everyone in Christ has His perfect righteousness imputed to him. In addition, Luke 23:43; II Cor. 5:6-10; and Phil. 1:21-26 do not have the slightest suggestion of a period of further

sanctification between the believer's death and the believer being ushered into the presence of God.

**References**

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