

The Four Views of Hell

WHAT IS GOD'S JUDGEMENT LIKE?

THE JUDGEMENT OF GOD

1. God's judgement's are absolutely righteous, perfectly just, and based in truth. Rom 2:2, 5
2. God's judgment will be intensely personal and individual. Rom 2:6-8
3. God's judgement leaves men and women "without excuse". Rom 1:20

FOUR VIEWS OF HELL

1. The Literal View
2. The Annihilationist View
3. The Purgatory View
4. The Universalist View

THE LITERAL VIEW

1. Hell is everlasting conscious torment (both physical and mental).
2. Hell fire is literal fire:
 - ▶ Mentioned frequently in Scripture.
(e.g. Matt 5:22, 18:8-9, 25:41; Mark 9:43, 48; Luke 16:24; James 3:6; Rev 21:8, etc.)
 - ▶ Parable of Lazarus and rich man in Luke 16:19-31 has rich man saying, "I am in agony in this fire."
3. Infinite sin against infinite God deserves infinite punishment of infinite intensity.
4. Utter horror of hell acts as motivation to preaching the gospel, praying for the lost, and sharing about Jesus with others.
5. Objections against literal fire are derived from humanist sentiment and based more on philosophy and theology instead of Scripture.

Key Problems with the Literal View

1. Doesn't adequately address symbolic nature of verses.
2. Doesn't adequately address verses suggesting total destruction (as with the 'annihilationist' view).
3. Everlasting vindictive punishment of horrendous intensity seems inconsistent with notions of love and justice and raises serious questions about God's character.

THE ANNIHILATIONIST VIEW

1. Unrepentant souls are destroyed by God and cease to exist. (i.e. annihilated)
2. Some Biblical verses suggest utter destruction (as opposed to everlasting suffering):
 - ▶ Obadiah 16, Nahum 1:10, Psalm 1:4, Psalm 37:10, 20, 36, Matthew 3:12, Hebrews 10:27, Philippians 3:18-19, 1 Corinthians 3:17.
3. Immortality and incorruption are promised only to the righteous (1 Cor 15:42-44); immortality thus may be refused to the unrepentant, reflecting God's judgment on them.
4. Victory of God is truly final and ultimate: heaven and hell don't have to "eternally co-exist" in eternity (as in the traditional view).

Key Problems with the Annihilationist View

1. Doesn't adequately address passages suggesting conscious punishment in hell.
2. Difficult to prove that ancient Jews during Paul's time held to an annihilationist view, especially given their view of the immortality of the soul.

THE PURGATORIAL VIEW

1. Purgatory is a kind of 'outer court' of heaven in which people are placed until they are more fully prepared for entrance into God's presence.
 - ▶ Most people die as flawed people, still incapable of unconditional heavenly love, not as giants of faith and thus it seems unlikely that they will immediately share in destiny of heroic martyrs.
 - ▶ It is the intermediate purification state necessary to bring about complete openness to and love of God (i.e. spiritual growth involving cooperation of human freedom and responsibility continues after death).
 - ▶ Purgatory bridges the gap between imperfect sanctification at death and perfect life in heaven.
2. Our good works on earth and our prayers for the departed can help in the 'healing of the dead'.
 - ▶ Ancient Christians prayed for the dead.
 - ▶ Human solidarity transcends death and praying for the dead is a reflection of human relationality beyond the grave.
3. Some Scriptural support:
 - ▶ Matthew 12:31-32, "Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come." (Sins can be forgiven in the next world).
 - ▶ 1 Corinthians 3:11-15, "(Fire) will test the quality of each man's work" (Fire spoken of here is purgatorial fire before the final judgment)
4. Some Apocryphal support:
 - ▶ 2 Maccabees 12:41-46, (Judas made atonement for the dead that they might be freed from sin).
 - ▶ 2 Maccabees 12:46 "It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins."
5. Roman Catholic theology analogously compares doctrines and Scripture to a plant and its seed (i.e. intrinsic relation exists but an oak tree will still look different from an acorn).

Key Problems with the Purgatorial View

1. The questionable exegesis of supporting verses plus the overall lack of Biblical support.

THE UNIVERSALIST VIEW

There are multiple views within the Universalist View.

1. Secular Universalism
2. Pluralist Universalism
3. Postmortem Universalism

Secular Universalism

1. Contends that the destination everyone will share after they have died is not conceived in any way from the biblical descriptions about the afterlife.
2. Corresponds with the popular notion of a happy future for all who have died.
3. This view often claims “they’re in a better place”, or “they are at peace now.”

Pluralist Universalism

1. A range of thoughts, beliefs, ideas, and points of view on a subject is good and all have validity.
2. All are equally good and the best course of action is to blend them together as fully as one can.
3. The premise that God has revealed himself in any unique or definitive sense in Jesus Christ is rejected.
4. Jesus is simply one of many great religious leaders who have been used by God to provide guidance to mankind.
5. This view often claims “as all rivers lead to the ocean, so all religions lead to God.”

Postmortem Universalism

1. After death, God will deal savingly with all who, for whatever reason, left this world without faith in Christ.
2. He will confront them with their sin and give them countless opportunities to choose to turn to Christ in repentance and faith.
3. After placing their faith in Jesus, they will then be allowed to join the rest of the believers already in the presence of God and His angels.
4. How God does this is explained differently by proponents of this view, but the main point is that God will indeed do it somehow.
5. They work with a fully Christian idea of final salvation through Christ and Christ alone.
6. In the end “Love Wins” and God will get what He wants; all men to be saved (1 Tim 2:1-4).

Key Problems with the Universalist View

1. Universalism substitutes logical speculation for biblical revelation; man-made reasoning from a biblical principle for biblical exegesis of biblical texts.
2. Universalism diminishes the need to believe the gospel.
3. Universalism undermines evangelism and the call to repentance.
4. Universalism undermines the finished work of Christ on the cross.

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

1. *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*. Rob Bell.
This is the book on hell that got everybody talking/rethinking their view of hell.
2. *Erasing Hell: What God Said about Eternity, and the Things We’ve Made Up*. Francis Chan, Preston Sprinkle
This was written in response to ‘Love Wins’ by Rob Bell and defends the literal view of hell.
3. *4 Views on Hell*. Denny Burk, John G. Stackhouse Jr., Robin A. Parry, Jerry L. Walls, ed. Preston Sprinkle.
Presents four of the most popular views on hell.
4. *Hell Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment*. Christopher W. Morgan, Robert A. Peterson, Gregory K. Beale and Daniel I. Block.
This book seeks to defend the traditional-literal view of hell and addresses alternative views as being unbiblical.