

Hell: A Necessary Truth

Rejection of Hell

No Christian doctrine is more universally rejected than the truth about Hell. It seems almost impossible for people in this culture to think in terms of divine punishment that will last forever. For many, it is just too much to swallow.

I understand why people want to believe that there is no Hell. I wish there were no Hell. I would like for there to be a Heaven, but not a Hell. The thought of someone that I know spending an eternity in a place like Hell is troubling.

I don't like the fact that there is a Hell. My human sensibilities push back against it. If I could do away with it, I probably would. Right now, in my imperfect reasoning, I think, if **I were God, I would find a way to have an eternity without Hell.**

But, I am not God and do not have the ability to think like God. So, any adjustments that I think I would make, even regarding Hell, would probably not happen if I were God. ***My wish that Hell did not exist is a reflection of human compassion, not divine reasoning.*** And, by the way, divine reasoning does not negate divine compassion. They co-exist.

The problem with any discussion on Hell is that it quickly becomes emotional. In fact it may be impossible to have a serious discussion about Hell without it being emotional. If it is real, and if it really is like the Bible describes it, none of us want to go there. And if it is real, we certainly do not want anyone we love to go there.

But we must be true to the Scriptures. It is our authority. Our most important question on any subject is ***What does the Bible say about it?*** And on the subject of **Hell** the answer is plain and certain. Hell is just as real as when Jesus taught on it.

This is not a pleasant series to share. But telling you the truth is more important than making you feel good.

The late, great R. G. Lee, who was the pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church once said this,

I know some people call a preacher who stands squarely upon the teaching of Christ and his apostles, narrow, harsh, cruel. Then he said,

*As to being narrow, I have no desire to be any broader than was Jesus.
As to being cruel, is it cruel to tell a man the truth?*

Is cruel to warn a man of danger?

Is it cruel to arouse sleeping people to the fact that the house is on fire?

Is it cruel to jerk a blind man away from the rattlesnake in the coil?

I had rather be called cruel for being kind, than to be called kind for being cruel.

This is not just a warning to people who are not yet believers in Jesus. It is also a wake-up call to believers who are ignoring the fact that they have friends and family members are on a fast-track to Hell and they are doing very little to help them.

And it is a wakeup call to believers who minimized the magnitude of the mercy of **God** which has delivered us from that fate.

I have never devoted an entire series to the topic of Hell. It is long overdue. So, we are going to take four or five weeks and dive deeply into this topic. Today I want to introduce the topic and series under three headings.

1. The Problem with Hell

As I made clear in my introduction, people generally have trouble with notion of a place of eternal punishment, which the Bible calls Hell. I think there are **two main reasons people reject the doctrine of Hell** either implicitly or explicitly.

A. Hell Makes God Look Bad

Hell makes God look bad, especially in the eyes of people who do not know God and who are unfamiliar with the Bible. But even among many who are believers and who are actively involved in following Christ, we shy away from talking about Hell because we think it makes God look bad. We are embarrassed for God.

If there is a place of eternal punishment, then God must not be morally good. How could a God who is truly good create such a place. Let's be honest, those of us who are Christ followers struggle at times to defend the morality of Hell. We think that God would look a lot better off if Hell did not exist.

I know the parallel will not hold up under scrutiny, but there are some who argue that the **U.S. looks bad because we put terrorists in prison**. They feel that it is a black eye on our morality to keep some of them in prison so long.

It would be much easier to defend the reality of God if we could only talk about His love, grace, mercy and goodness. He has all of those in full, but He also is righteous, holy, just and pure.

B. Hell Makes Us Feel Bad

The second reason for rejecting the truth about Hell is that it makes us feel bad. No one wants to live his or her life under the sentence of an eternity of suffering in a place called Hell. Therefore, we simply determine that Hell is not real. Therefore we can live freely and without fear. Willful ignorance!

Like closing your eyes or hiding under the covers when you feel threatened by some bad person. Just because you don't see the danger does not minimize its reality.

But as with many dangers, ignorance is not bliss. We may deny the reality that there are penalties for sin, but those penalties remain.

2. The Alternatives to Hell

If there is no Hell, what then? What happens when a person dies? There are as many views as there are religions, plus some. For the sake of simplicity I only want to deal with two prominent views that are found in our culture. And a third for those who feel compelled to believe in a Hell, but with their own guidelines.

A. There is No Heaven or Hell

Some would be honest enough to deny the existence of Hell and Heaven. Not everyone who denies the existence of both believe the same things. Some believe there is no afterlife at all. What happens in this life is it. When you die, your whole person dies. Body, soul and spirit. **Annihilation**

Some who would not subscribe to Heaven or Hell, but who believe in some kind of afterlife that could involve **Reincarnation** or some other kind of existence. But they do not believe there are two permanent destinations.

B. There is a Heaven but not a Hell

Many are unwilling to believe in Hell, but are not willing to give up belief in Heaven. They don't want to buy into notion of divine punishment or judgment for sin, but very much believe there is a wonderful place called Heaven. Oh, they may believe there is a Hell, but it would only for Satan and demons.

They believe that all people will ultimately make it to Heaven. **Universalism.** Regardless of what you have done in this life, regardless of what you think of God, regardless of how you lived, God's love will make sure that you make it.

This is the most popular and the easiest for most people to buy into. Who would not want to live your life with the knowledge that no matter how you live, there is a paradise waiting for you when you die. No accountability.

C. There is a Hell for Really (Really) Bad People

There are some people, if you press them, will say there must surely be a Hell, but only for the really, really bad people. This comes not from any serious theological thought, but from a sense of justice. And a realization that the really bad people will surely not be welcomed in Heaven.

3. The Necessity of Hell

Let me offer three reasons to consider believing in a real place called Hell where sin is judged in the people who go there.

A. Human Logic Defends It

When a person commits a heinous crime, like rape, kidnapping or murder, we say that he should suffer punishment. He does not deserve to enjoy the freedom that others enjoy. He has forfeited his rights to freedom. He deserves to be punished because he has broken the law and is a criminal.

All people are spiritual criminals. We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. Logic says we should be punished. God has reserved a place for our punishment. The Bible says “**Judas went to his own place.**” Reference to Hell. If sin is not ultimately punished then **justice has been forfeited.**

B. Jesus Death Demands It

If there no Hell, then Jesus’ death would have died in vain. If everyone is going to make it to Heaven anyway, then His death was unnecessary. His great sacrifice would have been unwarranted and foolish.

The fact that He suffered so greatly for those who would accept Him demands a punishment for those who reject Him.

C. The Bible Declares It

Survey of some of the verses that mention Hell, either directly or indirectly.

Matthew 5:29 (ESV)

If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.

Matthew 10:28 (ESV)

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Matthew 13:50 (ESV)

and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. New and Old Treasures

Matthew 16:18 (ESV)

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Matthew 25:41 (ESV)

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

Matthew 25:46 (ESV)

And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Luke 16:23 (ESV)

and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.

2 Thessalonians 1:9 (ESV)

They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,

2 Peter 2:4 (ESV)

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment;

Revelation 20:15 (ESV)

And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire

So, you have to decide what you believe. Is there a Hell? If not, then what? How did you come to that conclusion? What are you basing your decision on? Remember a very important truth that is undisputable.

Your belief does not change reality. If there is a Hell and you do not believe it, there will still be a Hell.