

THE SINNER'S PART IN THE SALVATION PROCESS (Realization of Judgment)

INTRODUCTION

It is impossible to deal with the subject of salvation and evangelism without touching on the topic of judgment. A person must see his lostness because of sin and the fact that he is under judgment before salvation in Christ takes on meaning. The whole concept of future judgment should strike terror into the human heart. Yet the unsaved man, blinded by sin, scoffs at the idea of a future judgment for wicked men. NOTE: One of the clever tricks of the Devil is to get men to either deny or water down the Biblical teachings on future judgment and a literal hell. Whether man believes it or not, the Bible does teach future judgment.

Men have been brainwashed with a false view of God, presenting Him as so much love that He would not judge anyone. But the same Bible that states that God is love (1 John 4:7) also states many more times that God is wrath (Heb. 10:31). NOTE: Some say that God was presented as wrath in the Old Testament but in the New Testament Jesus Christ represents love to all mankind. This is a perversion of the truth, for Jesus Christ had more to say about judgment and hell than any other prophet in the Bible (Matt. 5:29—30).

The doctrine of judgment and hell is not popular in today's world, but it is Biblical and God's Word never changes. Christians must be faithful to preach on judgment because the scriptures teach it and the historic Church has declared it (Rom. 1:18; Heb. 9:27; Rev. 19:15-16).

WHY THE NEED FOR HELL?

The doctrine of future punishment contends that men exist forever and must, because of God's divine judgment against sin, be forever separated from God in a state of conscious punishment.

The reason man goes to a place call Hell is because of sin. If any law is to have authority, there must be punishment and enforcement of the punishment. All men have broken God's law because of sin, and sin must be punished or God's law has no authority. NOTE: While judgment is certain for man, God takes no pleasure in the eternal death of the unsaved (Ezk. 33:11), and God, in grace and mercy, has made a provision in the death of Christ to save men from their sins. God's solution to the sin problem is found in Jesus Christ. Any person who trusts in Christ as Lord and Savior need never fear the terribleness of Hell (John 3:36; Rom. 5:9; 1 Thess. 1:10).

God never made Hell for men, but for the Devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41). The only people who are in Hell are those who choose to cast their lot, life and destiny with the Devil and his angels. God has appointed Christ as the one way for the sinner to escape Hell. NOTE: In eternity men will then know that they willfully chose their own destiny when suffering the pangs of hell. They will never be able to accuse God of injustice or forcing them to choose against Christ.

WHAT IS HELL LIKE?

Hell is a Real Place. Actually, there is no word “hell” in the Greek New Testament. There are several words used to describe the future place of punishment and the English Bible has translated these words as “hell.”

Names show hell is a real place.

1. Hades: Sometimes the word Hades refers to the grave or the state of death, but it often refers to the place of the departed wicked dead. Hades is a real place and does have punishment (Luke 16:19-31). NOTE: Apparently Hades is the temporary abode of all those who have rejected Jesus Christ as personal Savior. At the end of the world, Hades will be cast into the Lake of Fire and this will be the eternal abode of wicked men (Rev. 20:14-15).
2. Gehenna (Matt. 23:33): The name was originally applied to a valley southwest of Jerusalem. Before Israel was in her land, it was a place where wicked idolaters sacrificed their children to Moloch by causing them to pass through fire. Hence it was considered impure and was called the “valley of spit.” It was an utterly despised region. Later it became a dump and fires were continually burning there to consume the refuse of Jerusalem. As a result, it became a symbol of the place of eternal torment.
3. Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:15): A symbol to tell us about the punishment of hell.
4. Tartarus (2 Pet. 2:4): A part of hell for angels who had sinned.
5. Abyss (Rev. 9:1-2, 11): Abode of wicked angels.
6. Prison (1 Pet. 3:19)

Expressions show hell is a real place: The Bible speaks of being cast into Gehenna (Matt. 5:29), or “cast into the Lake of Fire” (Rev. 20:15), or being “in Gehenna” (Matt. 10:28). NOTE: Hell is a place where people are sent. It may not be “down” in the sense of being in the middle of the earth. It may be another dimension of the spiritual world.

Parable of the rich man and Lazarus indicates Hell is a real place (Luke 16:19-31): This parable definitely shows local relationships.

Hell is a place of punishment

Descriptions: God describes the punishment of Hell in very descriptive terms. It is called eternal fire (Matt. 25:41), outer darkness (Matt. 8:12), torment (Rev. 14:10-11), eternal punishment (Matt. 25:46), wrath of God (Rom. 1:18), second death (Rev. 21:8), eternal destruction (2 Thess. 1:9), damnation (Mark 3:29) and perdition (1 Tim. 6:9). NOTE: It is also described as a place where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 9:12; 13:42; 22:13).

Symbolic Language: God described Hell for us in figurative language in order that we might understand what Hell is really like. Yet, all figurative language is pointing to a literal truth. We know Hell will be (1) total absence of the favor of God; (2) total separation from God; (3) an endless disturbance of life because of sin; and (4) suffering in body and soul. NOTE: All the descriptions tell us that hell will be a place of separation and punishment.

Hell's Punishment is Eternal (2 Thess. 1:7-9): The Bible states that Hell is eternal. Seven times the Bible says Hell's punishment is eternal in character. The same word "eternal" is also used to describe the character of God, and God is eternal with no end.

Hell Will Have Degrees of Punishment (Matt. 11:22-24; Luke 12:47-48; 20:17; Rom. 2:5-6; Rev. 20:12-13).

The teaching of scripture is very clear that all who have rejected Christ will pass into eternal death, or separation from God.

Yet there are indications that there will be degrees of punishment in Hell, for men ultimately will be judged according to their works. Their works could not and will not save them (Eph. 2:8-9), but works will determine the degree of punishment in Hell.

NOTE: What is meant by degrees of punishment, we cannot be sure. The only thing of which we can definitely be sure is that a righteous God will deal righteously and justly with all men, even at the final judgment.

THE PRACTICALITY OF THE DOCTRINE OF JUDGMENT

Shakes the Sinner: Sometimes only the doctrine of eternal judgment brings an unsaved person around for Christ.

Gives Leverage in Witnessing: A Christian witness should never dodge the issue of future punishment. It may not be too well liked but it is Biblical. The teaching of judgment will often get the unsaved person stirred enough to talk about Christ. NOTE: Christians must be careful about using the back door approach to evangelism; that is, always presenting the happy side of the gospel without presenting the dark side. It would be tragic for a person to make some kind of profession for Christ under the delusion that it was unnecessary to believe in eternal judgment and a literal hell. The best policy is to be honest. NOTE: Be careful about preaching judgment at people in an emotional way. It is better just to state it as a fact and the logical consequence of rejecting Christ.

Only Alternative: With some folks judgment needs to be mentioned very little and with others it must be spoken very clearly. When our Lord dealt with Nicodemus (John 3) and the woman at the well (John 4), he said nothing about judgment. Yet often when Christ dealt with the religious people and the "do-gooders" he drove judgment home loud and clear (Matt. 23:33), for only judgment would shake these moralists to reality.

"A true fear of hell has sent many a soul to heaven."