

DEATH AND AFTER

The Unbeliever and Death

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Death for a sinner outside of Christ is a very unpleasant subject. Men outside of Christ will experience the second death which is eternal separation from God. Death brings the non-Christian before the judgment bar of Almighty God.
- B. The Bible teaches that there is a final judgment coming for all men after death. The wicked will stand before a final court and be judged by an infinitely wise, just and holy God.
- C. Judgment springs from the person of God and the sinfulness of man. Judgment and the punishment of hell flow out from the justice, holiness and omniscience of God. The Almighty knows all about the sins of men. His wrath is stirred against sin because He is perfect holiness (Rom. 1:18). His justice demands that sin be judged, and because all men are sinners, God must judge men. NOTE: God is love, but judgment and retribution do not stem from God's love. God's love, mercy and grace are the basis for salvation and not damnation.
- D. Eternal judgment was taught by the prophets of old (Ezk. 33:11), by Jesus Christ (Matt. 5:29, 30) and by the Apostles (II Cor. 5:11). NOTE: True Christians believe and teach judgment because they know "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. For God is a consuming fire." (Heb. 10:31; 12:29).
- E. The doctrine of judgment and hell is not popular in the twentieth century, but it is Biblical and God's Word never changes. NOTE: One of the clever tricks of the devil is to get men to either deny or water down the Biblical teaching of future judgment and a literal hell.

II. THE BIBLICAL TEACHING OF FINAL JUDGMENT FOR ALL MEN

- A. Introduction: Future judgment for all men is a fundamental concept of Biblical Christianity. The Greek word "to judge" (krino) means (to divide, to separate, to make a distinction," and thus, "to come to a decision." God will make a decision as to the fitness or non-fitness of all men for entrance into heaven.
- B. There is a Future Appointed Day of Judgment (Acts 17:31; Matt. 11:22; 12:36; John 5:28, 29; Rom. 2:5; II Pet. 2:9; 3:7; I John 4:17): This judgment day is certain because it is part of God's eternal plan.
- C. The Judgment is for All Men (Heb. 9:27): There is one life, one death and one judgment for all men. Judgment is inescapable.
- D. The Judgment Will be by a Righteous God (Gen. 18:25; Psa. 9:8; 50:6; 96:13; cf. Psa. 119:137-144): The God of all the earth always does right. What God does may not always seem right to the human mind but man's best sense of justice is corrupted by sin. God's judgment will be perfect.
- E. The Judgment Will Have Christ as the Agent (John 5:22, 23, 27; cf. Acts 17:31): The authority to judge will be placed into the hands of Christ.
- F. The Judgment Will Include the Secrets of Men (Eccl. 12:14; Rom. 2:16): An omniscient God knows all things and secret sin on earth is open scandal in heaven.

- G. The Judgment Will be According to Works (Rev. 20:11-14): All human works at the final judgment will be inadequate to save a man, for the best of human works are sinful before a holy God (Isa. 64:6). The works of the unsaved could not save them (Eph. 2:8, 9) but the works may determine the degree of punishment one will experience in hell (Matt. 11:22-24; Luke 12:47, 48; 20:17; Rom. 2:5, 6). NOTE: What is meant by degrees of punishment we cannot be sure. The only thing we can be sure of is that a righteous God will deal righteously and justly with all men. NOTE: If there are degrees of punishment, then this may explain somewhat the heathen problem. God will certainly judge the man who has heard the gospel and rejected it more than the man who has not heard it. Both are eternally lost because they are sinners. Nevertheless, God's justice will most likely come forth in degrees of punishment for those who have not heard the gospel and those who have rejected it.
- H. The Judgment Will Only be Escaped by Those Who Have Trusted Christ (John 3:18; 5:24; 12:48; 3:36; I Cor. 16:22): The special ground of condemnation under the gospel is unbelief – a failure to receive Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Saviour. Only those who have the righteousness of Christ are acceptable to the Father, and only those who have believed in Christ have the righteousness of Christ (II Cor. 5:21).

III. THE BIBLICAL TEACHING OF HELL

A. Why the Need for Hell?

1. 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.
2. The reason man goes to a place called hell is because of sin. If any law is to have authority, there must be punishment and enforcement of that punishment. All men have broken God's law because of sin, and sin must be punished or God's law has no authority.
3. God never made hell for men, but for the devil and his angels (Matt. 24:41). 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 of forcing them to choose against Christ. God does not choose men to go to hell. They go there by their own choice and hell was prepared for the devil and his angels. However, God has prepared heaven for His elect who rightfully deserve hell (Matt. 25:34).
4. APPLICATION: I wonder how many will say in the torments of hell, "Oh, I felt the tug of the Holy Spirit of God, I felt the call of my conscience turning me to Jesus, I felt the call of the preacher when he made an appeal for Christ; but I gave up Christ for the bottle; I gave up Christ for a few sexual thrills; I gave up Christ for the needle; I gave up Christ for the pleasures of the world; I gave up Christ for easy money; I gave up Christ for my profession and my job." Man will know with certainty that he has chosen his own destiny when toiling in the punishments of hell.

B. Where is Hell?

1. Hell is a real place. Actually there is no word “hell” in the whole Bible. The English word “hell” is related to the Old English helan, meaning “to hide or cover.” There are several words used to describe the future place of punishment and the English Bible has translated these words as “hell.”
2. Names to show hell is a real place:
 - a. 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 (Lk. 16:19-31). NOTE: Apparently Hades is the temporary abode of all those who have no personal Saviour for their sins. At the final judgment, Hades will be cast into the Lake of Fire and this will be the eternal abode of wicked men (Rev. 20:14, 15).
 - b. 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. Every Jew understood the symbolic meaning of Gehenna.
 - c. Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:15): A symbol to tell us about the punishment of hell.
 - d. Tartarus (II Pet. 2:4): A part of hell for angels who had sinned.
 - e. Abyss (Rev. 9:1-2, 11): Abode of wicked angels.
 - f. Prison (I Pet. 3:19).
3. Expressions to 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.
4. The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus Indicates Hell is a Real Place (Lk. 16:19-31): This parable definitely shows local relationships.

C. What is Hell?

1. Descriptions: Hell is described in figurative terms, so as to give the reader the impact of a real hell. NOTE: 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.
 - a. Hell is separation. Hell is described as “outer darkness” (Matt. 8:12), “black darkness” (Jude 13), “second death” (Rev. 21:8), and a state of being departed from Christ outside of His knowledge (Matt. 7:22, 23).
 - b. Hell is punishment. The descriptions of hell as a state of punishment are numerous – “punishment” (Matt. 25:41), “wrath” (Rom. 1:18), “destruction” (II Thess. 1:9), “damnation” (Mark 3:29), “perdition” (I Tim. 6:9) and “torment” (Rev. 14:11). It is also stated that hell is a place where there is “wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 9:12; 13:42; 22:13).

- c. Hell is eternal. The Bible uses the adjective “eternal” many times to describe the duration of hell – “eternal fire” (Matt. 25:41), “eternal punishment” (Matt. 25:46), “eternal destruction” (II Thess. 1:7-9), “eternal chains” (Jude 6), “smoke of torment forever and ever” (Rev. 14:11), “blackness of darkness forever” (Jude 13), “everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2). In Mark 9:43-48, hell is described as a place of unquenchable fire (never goes out) and where “the worm never dies.” John 3:36 says, “And he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth (is abiding) on him.” The tense of “abideth” in the Greek is present and could be translated “is constantly and forever abiding on him.”
2. Conclusion: We know that 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: Could there be anything worse than this?

IV. THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR HELL

- A. A study of church history will show that the true church has always held to the idea of hell. NOTE: In the Apostle’s Creed, which was the first creed of the Christian Church, it says of Christ, “he descended into hell.” The whole concept of a real hell has only been challenged seriously in the last hundred years.
- B. To show the sternness the early church had on the concept of hell, one needs only to turn to the example of Origen, a great scholar around the early third century. Origen believed in a temporary judgment of the wicked (short hell) but that ultimately all men would be saved. In the end, after sufficient purging, even the devil himself will be saved and God will be “all in all.” To show their disdain for Origen’s concept of future judgment, the early church, at the second Council of Constantinople (A.D. 553), condemned Origen’s teachings as heresy. Up until recently, the concept of a literal hell has been the teaching of the Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox and the Protestants.

V. QUOTATIONS BY MEN WHO REJECTED CHRIST AND THE CONCEPT OF HELL

- A. Voltaire: This French infidel, who did much to destroy Christ in the minds of many, cried out on his death bed, “Oh Lord Jesus! I must die – abandoned by God and of man! I shall go to hell! O Christ, O Jesus Christ!” After he passed away, his nurse said, “For all the wealth of Europe, I would never see another infidel die.”
- B. Thomas Paine: This atheist who wrote Age of Reason mocked Christ while living but when dying he said, “I would give worlds, if I had them, if the Age of Reason had never been published, O Lord, help me! Christ help me! Stay with me! It is hell to be left alone!”
- C. Sir Thomas Scott: This rejecter upon his death bed said, “Until this moment I thought there was neither God nor a hell; now I know and feel that there are both, and I am doomed to perdition by the just judgment of the Almighty!”

The moral man came to the judgment,
 But his self-righteous rags would not do;
 The men who had crucified Jesus
 Had passed off as moral men, too;
 The soul that had put off salvation –

“Not tonight, I’ll get saved by and by;
No time now to think of religion!”
At last, he had found time to die.

And oh, what a weeping and wailing,
As the lost were told of their fate;
They cried for the rocks and the mountains,
They prayed, but their prayer was too late.