

## On Hell and Eternal Punishment By Clark Stone

In this article we will be considering the subject of hell and eternal punishment. I am not going to get into all the different names of hell in Greek, because hell is not just a name, but a real place. I also will not overly emphasize fire and brimstone, which is the common approach to this topic.

The Bible tells us that in the last days the love of many will grow cold; one of the many signs that warns us the end is near. People will put off natural affections and live to please only themselves and their lusts. They will in a consistent way try to stifle the voice of the Holy Spirit that wants to warn them of the coming judgement.

### A very different kind of funeral

The funeral was well prepared and all were present. The wife was crying and everybody had taken their place. The casket was well decorated with flowers. The pastor stepped forward and began:

"Here lies Joe Blow. And we are here to acknowledge his long and wicked life. Joe was an adulterer, a thief, and a liar. He was selfish. A tightwad. He abused alcohol and his family. I think we all agree old Joe has gone straight to hell! And that when he stands before Christ on that great day of judgment, he won't be surprised at all. Lets close the casket and sing a hymn."

Have you ever heard of a funeral like that? I don't think so. Have you noticed at funerals that the one who died always goes to heaven, and nobody ever seems to go to hell? In a survey in the USA people were asked if they felt they would go to hell. Only one out of one hundred and twenty five people said they felt they were going to hell. But didn't Jesus say the way to the Kingdom was straight, narrow, and only "few" would enter? Didn't Jesus say that the way to destruction was wide, and that many were on it? Why then, as someone has said, do people believe that hell is always a place *for someone else*? Others believe that before people die they surely make right their lives to escape this terrible place. Maybe this has been the thinking ever since Jesus preached on this horrendous subject?

### Why Talk about Hell?

So why talk about hell? The answer is simple: Because Jesus did. In fact Jesus spoke more about hell than anyone else in the Bible. His detailed description should make us all much more serious about our eternal future. But why talk about it to believers? The answer again is simple: Because Jesus spoke to those who believed. He warned and exhorted again and again on this subject. If it was so important for Jesus shouldn't it be also for us? Some may not agree, but I ask you to bear with me for a few minutes.

D.L. Moody said, the only man worthy to preach about hell is the one with a broken heart and tears. We should weep over hell but not deny it. I speak on this subject trembling, as I know that those of us who teach will be more strictly judged (James 3:1). But not to speak would be even worse.

C.S. Lewis said, If the one is real... heaven, so is the other... hell. If one is a myth, so is the other. The best reason in believing in hell is that Jesus said it exists. It isn't just what Jesus said about hell that matters; what should matter more to us is that it was HE who said it!

The Bible continually warns of a place called hell. There are over 162 references in the New Testament alone which explains, describes, and warns us about hell. And the Lord Jesus Christ Himself uttered over 70 of these references!

It's little wonder why this is the most offensive and least acceptable of all Christian doctrines. Some try to ignore the subject, but it just won't go away. We attempt to explain it away, but it keeps coming back. And I'm convinced that many hate the subject of hell because they do not hate evil; and yet others, because they know they deserve it.

It's better to face the truth, even if it hurts. There can only be false comfort in delusions. To ignore this important subject is a monumental error, as Jesus emphasized it for very important reasons.

The Bible teaches us that in hell the wicked will suffer terribly, remain conscious, and will retain their desires and memories. We are told that they long for relief, cannot find comfort, cannot leave their torment, and have no future hope (see Luke 16:19-31).

Enlightened men' have used all types of sophistry to put out the fires of hell. They have relegated hell to inventions used for priest-craft; they have changed the meaning through erroneous hermeneutics, or defanged the truth by denying the authority of Scripture itself. Yet, it is interesting to note, that whenever God has sent a bona-fide revival, all sophistry and argumentation fall before the very presence of God. In the awakenings and revivals under Edwards, Whitfield, Wesley, and Finney, people were convicted of the iniquity of their sins and knew they stood guilty before the judgment. Some would cry out in anguish, or faint under conviction. Some even felt as though they were sinking into the pit of hell. But again, 'enlightened men' will tell us that these people were caught up into a sort of psychosomatic emotionalism or some other mumbo-jumbo.

Today, we need the convicting power of the Holy Spirit more than ever! We can escape the truth through endless reasoning, or denial, but let the Holy Spirit breath on us one second and we are instantly compelled again to face the truth. Adam and Eve had made clothing for themselves of fig leaves. Everything was okay until God showed up; then they suddenly felt naked, exposed, and hid themselves. Even in the garden they lost their contentment.

Revivalist Charles Finney dealt with Universalists in his day; a denomination that believes in the universal salvation of mankind (including the Satan himself). They deny the doctrine of eternal judgment. Finney would preach that God has ascribed a just sanction to uphold moral law. Therefore, to deny eternal judgment is to say that sin does not have everlasting consequences. Others have denied the doctrine of the eternal soul of the sinner. This makes all warnings of a literal hell become purely *metaphorical*, and thus, much less concerning.

Robert Browning said, "There *may* be a heaven, but there *must* be a hell. It is a demand for a moral universe. If this life is all there is, then injustice reigns. But if there is a life beyond and it includes retribution for the evildoer, then it becomes possible to believe again that righteousness rules and that God is good."

If there isn't an eternal hell, then Jesus made a terrible mistake affirming there is. And if we cannot trust His teaching on hell, how can we trust anything He said? Including even His offer of salvation? We may think we are too loving to talk about this to others. But I would ask, are we more loving than Jesus? I don't think so.

## Is Hell Eternal?

In Matthew 25:46, Jesus uses the word "eternal" to describe heaven and hell. If some will experience heaven forever, then it follows that some will experience hell... forever. There is a popular notion (a doctrine) called "annihilation" that declares the lost will just cease to exist. But if such an important truth exists, would Jesus not have mentioned it at least one time? Why would he allow such descriptions of hell then, that describe is as "a fire that is never quenched, and where their worm never dies" (Rev.14:11)? Could it be stated any clearer? Could it be more graphic or emphatic that it is actually *forever*. Should we want to eliminate hell if Jesus determines it should exist? We should leave hell in God's hands, trust Him, and submit to His truth and His judgments.

I believe that when we realize that we deserve hell, we will praise God in a greater way for our salvation from it. Some said the ways of the Lord are not just. But God replies, is it not rather *your* ways that are unjust? And that all of you will die in your own sin? (see Ezek. 18:25). We need to always be in reverence and awe before God, and be very careful in what we think and say; and when He responds it is final.

The Bible teaches that Christ's redemptive work is so great that it delivers us from eternal hell. This should motivate us to our maximum of worship of the one who saved us from this terrible place.

God will not be in hell. His absence will be extremely evident. There can be no good where God is not present (see 2Thes. 1:9).

A motive for hell is hard for the human mind to comprehend. God desires our love, but He doesn't want it merely by forcing us to love Him. Imagine a woman is told she will be closed in a small box for the rest of her life if she does not marry and love you. Would you or any man want such a situation with a wife? Of course not. We want to be loved for what we are and not because someone was forced to under threat of punishment. God in His desire for us, and pure love for His children, is immensely more sensible than we are.

Suffering can help us fall out of love with this world. We can be more hopeful for our future with Him. The sufferings of this present age are a small taste of the horrors God has delivered us from, and that multitudes will be delivered to.

C.S. Lewis said, "The safest (or *surest*) road to hell is *the gradual one*, the gentle slope, and soft underfoot. Without sudden turnings, without milestones, and without signposts."

My spine runs cold when I read Matthew 24. This is one of Christ's most famous statements about hell. He said, "Do not fear those who can kill your body and after that have nothing more they can do; rather fear him who can destroy body and soul in hell." Who is He talking to? He is talking to the twelve young missionaries He is sending out to preach and declare the kingdom of God! He does not say merely that the fear of hell should be their message to other sinners; rather, that they should fear it themselves! For when they fear hell they won't fear any one or anything else, even martyrdom. Jesus taught us to be serious about this subject. To press on, to go on believing, and to go all the way with Jesus.

Jude, the little brother of Jesus, can really make the hair stand up on your neck. In his short letter he talks about the sexually immoral; and he reminds us not to forget Sodom. We know what sodomy is. Homosexuality was a predominant part of that fallen society; very much like our society today. Today we are increasingly being convinced to take it all very lightly, and have even renamed homosexuals as being "gay." But God says those who practice such things will suffer eternal fire. That is a very clear and direct statement. And for what will people take this punishment? For reveling a few short moments in fleshly lust! We need not look at these sins lightly, because God does not.

Hell is going to be a very lonely place. Those who have suffered loneliness know the pain and depression that accompanies loneliness. But, were you to multiply worldly loneliness a thousand times you would not come close to the loneliness that is in hell.

Many do not realize even though they are on their way to hell, and have rejected the Holy Spirit, that they still feel somewhat the presence of God in this life. Even though they may not realize it. God is here and His presence fills the world. The sun rises every day. The rain falls. Morning and evenings are lovely. Birds sing, crops grow, rivers flow. We hear laughter, and see smiles of children. But in hell, God won't be there in any way, shape or form! And a loneliness will prevail as has never been known among men. In hell there will still be sentiments and feelings. There will be depression, physiological and psychological pain... but to a degree that has never been known or observed among men, *and it will never end*.

We must come to realize that all of us will stand before Christ to answer for how we have conducted ourselves in reference to the knowledge we have received. Some to eternal damnation, and some to eternal life with Christ. This should be always on our mind. Some keep busy. Others keep the TV on at all waking hours. Others park themselves in front of the computer or computer games. Others have to constantly indulge in fleshly lusts or obsessive work to keep their minds occupied and distracted from the judgment they know is coming for how they have conducted themselves in this brief life. But the truth cries out louder than any diversion, because Christ doesn't want anyone going to hell. He knows better than anyone how horrendous it is. That is why He went to the cross to pay the ultimate price for salvation from hell and eternal judgment. The maximum demonstration of grace, mercy and love. That is my God. No one will be able to say God hasn't warned us, or that He did not do enough to save us.

My hope is only in Him and what He did to keep me until that fast approaching day of judgment upon this evil world. Please join with me.

With much love and tears.

Brother Clark