

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

40.3 Is Hell a Reality or a Myth?

Part III

Scripture: Matthew 25:1-30

Again, we turn our attention to the most solemn of subjects. Once more we have sought the Holy Spirit's leading that we might be preserved from error. Our approach is fourfold. We have considered the views which are held, and examined the words which are used. Today we will investigate deductions drawn from certain passages and answer objections which are raised.

III. WE MAY CONCLUDE THERE IS AN EXPERIENCE CALLED HELL:

1. Hell Is a Place Prepared for the Devil:

Matthew 25:41 reads, *"Then shall the king say unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."* The impact of this passage seems to be that hell was prepared for the devil, not for people. By choosing to follow Satan one thereby chooses to go where he goes. It is a tragic thing to prefer darkness to light but this is exactly what many do. (John 3:19)

2. Hell Is a Place of Punishment:

I am mindful that evangelists and preachers have overemphasized the matter of punishment in hell. They have played unfairly upon the emotions of people. Sometimes the impression is given that a certain pleasure is derived in knowing that the wicked will be punished someday. We have no interest in this kind of manipulation. However, I would quickly point out that the unbelieving person has much more to fear than fear itself. There is much to fear for such a one. Hell is seen in Scripture as the experience of being totally without God's favor, See II Thessalonians 1:7-9 and Matthew 25:41. Note the use of the words, *"everlasting fire."* If you elect to think of this language as figurative, you may do so. What we need to remember is that it is **not imaginative** language. It is **figurative**. Through figurative language, then, the Bible describes Hell as a terrible place. I take no pleasure in asking you to turn to Matthew 8:12; Matthew 13:49-50; Luke 16:23, 28; and Isaiah 66:24.

How much worse could be the worm of conscience which does not die and the fire of memory which is not quenched.

3. It Is God's Word Which Is the Judge:

Sometimes the feeling is that a capricious god arbitrarily consigns people either to heaven or hell. This is not the case. We understand that people will be judged by God's Word, rather than by God. The picture is that of being judged by the objective standards which have been openly declared. In John 12:48 we read, *"He that rejecteth Me and receiveth not my words hath one that judgeth him; the Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."*

4. Everlasting Hell Has Always Been the Orthodox View:

In Matthew 25:34 we read, *"And these shall go into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."* It is important to note that the same Greek word in this verse used for punishment is also used to modify life. Therefore, if we believe that believers go into eternal life according to this verse, we must also believe that unbelievers go into an eternal state. Other important verses in this regard are Mark 9:43, 48; Luke 16:26; II Thessalonians 1:9; I Peter 3:18-19 and 4:6; Jude 13; Matthew 25:10-13, 46; II Corinthians 6:2.

5. One May Avoid the Experience of Hell:

In Matthew 25:34 we read, *"Then shall the king say unto them on his right hand, 'Come, ye blessed in my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you.'" The ones on his right hand were the sheep. The sheep, we learn from John 10:27 are those who hear his voice and follow Him. No one has to go to hell because God has elected such a thing to happen. The Scriptures teach both the sovereignty of God and the free will of man. This is an antinomy in our theology. An antinomy is a contradiction between conclusions which seem equally logical, reasonable, or necessary. It is an apparent incompatibility between two apparent truths. At this point we say that man is a divinely controlled creature, though he also is a responsible moral agent. Man is a responsible moral agent, though he is divinely controlled. God's sovereignty is a reality and man's responsibility is a reality. The Scriptures teach both. Thus, God is not willing that any should perish and whosoever will may come. (II Peter 3:9)*

6. The Essence of Hell is Separation from God:

Essentially, people who choose to be independent of God will persist in that way. Such people may well be less miserable in hell than they would be in heaven. In time they lived apart from God and according to II Thessalonians 1:9 in eternity will continue to seek their own. It is not unreasonable to assume that such a person desiring to be independent of God, would be miserable in heaven. The mercy of God can be seen even in the existence of hell where people will exist the way they chose. L. A. King has well written, "God could not remove the inherent pain of evil being, but he could and did provide a refuge from a greater pain. And so justice and love built hell, the painful refuge." (Eternity; January, 1979; Hell, **The Painful Refuge**) The thinking here is that God has provided a refuge, an asylum from his presence. God's unending love for all his creatures was involved in the creation of hell. John Milton, in his immortal work **Paradise Lost**, places these words in the mouth of Satan, "all good to me becomes bane; and in heaven much worse would be my state. It is better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven." The thought applies not only to Satan, but to all who follow him. In hell men will have the horrible freedom they demanded in this life.

IV. THERE ARE ANSWERS FOR OBJECTIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN RAISED:

People quickly point out that God is **love**, therefore Hell is impossible. The answer lies in the fact that love does not exclude wrath moved against what refuses that love. Jesus was the embodiment of love, but He spoke many times of hell. Secondly, **God is the revealer** and some say that he does not teach there is a hell to shun. The answer is one that we all will have to decide for ourselves. What does the Bible really say? Another objection cites the belief that **God is omnipotent** and would not allow Satan to have in his grip those for whom Christ died. The response is that God will not compel anyone to go to His heaven who has no mind to go. Heaven is an experience as much as it is a place. (Revelation 22:3-4) Heaven would be hell for those who have no mind to serve God. Still another objection is that **God is righteous**. He would not visit temporal sin with eternal result. The answer is that the number of our sins is not the important thing. The nature of our sins is that people have decided to live in God's world without Him. Christ has been sent to woo a prodigal mankind. The time question only blurs the true issue. One other objection is that God is wise. He is aware that punishment which does not correct is without value. True as that may be, even on the human level, we do not set free offenders who are not reformed.

What matters is that justice is done. It was justice that nailed Jesus to a cross. God remained God and his attributes were maintained. Retribution is necessary if justice is to be done apart from reform.

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