

'Hell - The Facts'

Matthew 25 v 46

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment:
but the righteous into life eternal.



I. Where is Hell?

II. Why is there a Hell?

III. What Happens in Hell?

IV. Is Hell Eternal?

V. Who will be in Hell?

(March , 2011)

(Updated August , 2020)

Sermon & Article by

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Jesus spoke much about the place of Hell and its punishment and eternity! Yet today Hell is rarely preached or taught. Today most funerals have everyone going to Heaven or ‘resting in peace’. Yet several Scriptures state clearly that *most* people will end up in Hell.

I’m not saying we should preach Hell every week. But recently someone said to me that the ‘warning’ to repent has been taken out of the Gospel and the seriousness of Hell taken out of today’s Bible teaching. One of the biggest revivals in history was given great impetus by a sermon by Jonathan Edwards ‘*Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*’. The teaching Jesus gave on Hell surely has its time and place.

This article is an attempt to cover the main tenants of what Jesus taught on Hell. It also refutes some of the false teaching increasingly being adopted by *Christians* from the cults. A.W. Pink once said ‘*What is needed today is a scriptural setting forth of the nature of that punishment which awaits the lost - the awfulness of it, the hopelessness of it, the unendurableness of it, the endlessness of it*’.

JC Ryle, an Anglican bishop (1816-1900) wrote: ‘*I can find no scriptural foundation for that smooth talking theology that pleases so many in these days, and according to which everybody will get to heaven at last. I believe that there is a real devil. I believe that there is a real Hell. I believe that it is not love to keep back from men that they may be lost. Love shall I call it?...if you saw a blind man tottering towards a precipice, would you not cry out, ‘Stop!’ Away with such false notions of love...It is the highest love to warn them plainly, when they are in danger. It is love to impress upon them that they may lose their own souls forever in Hell...*’

I. Where is Hell?

In the New Testament there are three places referred to as ‘Hell’.

1. ‘*Gehenna*’ (12 times ‘*Hell*’) - In the NT it is the *final* Hell after the judgement, commonly referred to as the ‘*Lake of fire*’, a place of unquenchable fire (Mk.9:45,48). The word came from the ‘Valley of Hinnon Hehenna’, a rubbish dump, where day and night there was a stench, smoke from fires, and worms. Jesus used the name of this place to describe a place for the unsaved in the end.

2. ‘Hades’ (11 times ‘Hell’) - This is now an *intermediate* place of darkness containing the spirits of the unsaved. ‘Hades’ is cast into ‘Gehenna’ in the end, (Rev.20:14).

3. ‘Tartaros’ (translated ‘Hell’ in 2Pet.2:4) - Peter used it as a dungeon where angels are kept bound.

Hell is a place:

Hell is called a ‘place of torment’ (Lk.16:28). The Greek word ‘*topos*’ is where we get the English word ‘topography’. Judas went to his own ‘place’ (Acts 1:25).

Hell is also described as a place of ‘outer darkness’ and where there is ‘weeping and gnashing of teeth’ (Matt.8:12; 22:13; 25:30); it is place ‘without’ (outside of) the gates of the New Jerusalem (Rev.22:15); a place where ‘the worm dies not’ and the ‘fire is not quenched’, (3 times in Mark 9:44,46,48). In Jude 13 false teachers are said to be assigned to a ‘blackness of darkness for ever’.

Hell is not ‘soul sleep’ :

On the day of judgement bodies of unbelievers are raised from the grave, united with their souls and cast into the Lake of Fire. Souls that have left bodies are either ‘with the Lord’ or in ‘Hades’.

Some confuse the Old Testament (OT) ‘Hades’ (‘*Sheol*’) with the ‘grave’ (‘*Qever*’) and thus cult groups (such as SDA) teach the soul ‘sleeps’ until the resurrection. They quote OT Scriptures such as Ecclesiastes 9:5 which speak of ‘sleeping in the dust’. However, this scripture is about the body, not the soul. If one reads on to chapter 12:7 any difficulty is sorted: ‘*Then shall the dust [the body] return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it*’.

In the OT Hell is always ‘Sheol’ which corresponds to ‘Hades’ in the NT. The misunderstanding of ‘soul sleep’ occurs when, depending on the context, ‘*sheol*’ is translated either as ‘Hell’ or ‘grave’. But the difficulty is sorted when one studies the word for ‘grave’ (‘*qever*’). ‘Qever’ is only used for the grave, never for Hell (Sheol). In Job 17 we have in vs.1 the body in the ‘grave’ (‘qever’); and in vs.13 the ‘grave’ is ‘sheol’ referring to the soul. The two

Hebrew words are different: *‘My breath is corrupt, my days are extinct, the graves (‘qever’) are ready for me...¹³ If I wait, the grave (‘sheol’) is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness’*. Further proof against ‘soul sleep’ is found in many OT verses that refer to consciousness in hell (‘sheol’): Ezek.32:21 *‘The strong among the mighty shall speak to him out of the midst of hell [‘sheol’]’* (See also Is.14:9,10; Ps.16:10).

There is actually little ‘doctrine’ of Hell in the OT. But in the NT Hell is taught clearly and ‘soul sleep’ is refuted. In the NT in Matthew 17 Moses and Elijah are speaking (not asleep); in Luke 16 a *‘certain rich man’* in Hades *speaks and feels*; in Luke 23:43 the penitent thief was told *‘this day’* he would be ‘with’ Jesus; and Paul spoke of being *‘...absent from the body, and present with the Lord’* (2Cor.5:6-8).

II. Why is there a Hell?

Hell was prepared for the devil and His angels (demons):

‘Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels’ (Matt.25:41). Eventually, the devil and his *‘false prophet’* will be thrown into Hell (Rev.20:10).

Hell is punishment :

Hell is not remedial. Sin is not paid for in Hell, (as taught by the Seventh Day Adventist). Sin can only be paid for on the cross and by Jesus Christ. ***‘...but now once in the end of the world has he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself... Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many...’*** (Heb.9:26-28).

Hell Exists to show God’s wrath and for the glory of God :

This is ‘tough’ for people to understand if human logic or emotions cloud the fact that God created Hell and foreknew that ‘many’ people would go there. Christ has the ‘keys’ to Heaven and Hell (Rev.20:3). The Puritans and the Reformers taught that in Hell God’s authority, holiness and justice will be exhibited.

Hell is a place where God's wrath will be demonstrated. '***What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory***' (Rom.9:22,23). Because of sin God is '***willing***' to show his anger. He will '***make His power known***' to show his authority and justice. By punishing people in Hell He will show the *contrast* of his '***riches of His glory on the vessels of honour***' which he predestined (vs.23 '***afore prepared unto glory***').

III. What Happens in Hell?

Separation From God

Perhaps this is the worst of punishments - total *separation* from God. There will be total deprivation, no comfort, no hope. There is no Holy Spirit to restrain evil.

It is arguable there are degrees of punishment. Those that had more opportunities to repent of sin could suffer more judgement (Matt.11:21-24). It does appear that some will be '***beaten with many stripes***' and some with '***few stripes***' (Lk.12:47,48).

Punishment

The punishment will be just and unchallenged.

The Bible says the '***worm does not die***' (mentioned 3 times and with the same phrase '***the fire is not quenched***': Mk.9:44,46,48). '***And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh***' (Is.66:24). People will have immortal bodies (some believe the 'worm' also refers to memory).

There will be '***wailing***' and '***weeping and gnashing of teeth***' (mentioned 6 times: Matt.8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Lk.13:28)

There will be *‘Torment’*. In the end times people who take the *‘mark of the beast’* shall *‘drink of the wine of the wrath of God...and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascends up forever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night...’* (Rev.14:10,11).

Jesus also said a certain rich man in Hades *‘...being in torments...’* begged Abraham to have mercy *‘that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame...’* (Lk.16:23-25). The pain here too is that the rich man sees Lazarus being *‘comforted’* but is told of the *‘great gulf’* between them and is reminded that Lazarus *‘is comforted while you are tormented’* (vs.23).

Finally, the Devil, the anti-christ and the false prophet are all found in the *‘lake of fire’* being *‘tormented day and night forever and ever’* (Rev.20:10).

Calvin wrote of the punishment in Hell: *‘By such expressions the Holy Spirit certainly intended to confound all our senses with dread’*. (1) Edward Payson (1783-1827) a Congregational preacher in USA, wrote: *‘There the sinner will see what a God he has offended, what a saviour he has neglected, what a heaven he has lost, and into what a hell he has plunged himself’*. (2)

IV. Is Hell Eternal?

Hell is spoken of as being *‘everlasting’*, *‘eternal’* and *‘forever and ever’*. The Bible clearly teaches that those who do not ‘know Jesus Christ’ and ‘obey the Gospel’ *‘shall be punished with everlasting destruction...’* (2Thess.1:9). The fire that destroys is *‘everlasting fire’* (Matt.25:41). If this is not proof enough of Hell being eternal and never ending, then the following verse is irrefutable: *‘And these shall go away into everlasting (‘aionion’) punishment: but the righteous into life eternal (‘aionion’)’* (Matt.25:46). The words here for *‘everlasting’* and *‘eternal’* are the same in Greek (‘aionion’). The structure of the sentence means that if Hell is not ‘eternal’, then heaven is also not ‘eternal’! The Greek *‘aionios’* clearly is showing

a state that is perpetual, abiding, endless in duration. This same word is used of the punishment of the wicked and of fire (Matt.18:8; 25:41,46; Mk.3:29; 2Thess.1:9; Heb.6:2; Jude 1:7). If the punishment in Matthew 25:46 was not truly eternal and instead ‘annihilation’, other Greek words could have been used. The word eternal (*‘aionios’*) is also used of the Holy Spirit (Heb.9:14), salvation (Heb.5:9), the Gospel (Rev.14:6), the new covenant (Heb.13:20) and the resurrected body (2Cor.5:1). If the eternal punishment in Hell is not unending than the above things are also not eternal!

Yet still some cult groups teach that Hell is ‘annihilation’ because of the words such as *‘perish’* or *‘destruction’*. But these words do not mean annihilation. The Greek here *‘appollumi’* is also translated *‘lose’*, *‘die’*, *‘destroyed’*, *‘marred’*, etc. The various contexts where *‘appollumi’* is used will quickly show that it does not mean annihilation: In Matthew 9:17 a wine bottle is *‘lost’* (*‘appollumi’*), not *‘annihilated’*; there are *‘the lost’* (*‘appollumi’*) *sheep of the house of Israel’* (Matt.10:6), *‘the son of man comes to seek and save that which was lost’* (*‘appollumi’*) - not annihilated (Matt.18:11). The parables also speak of things that were *‘lost’* (*‘appollumi’*) yet *are found again* (not annihilated); the demons plead not to be *‘destroyed’* (*‘appollumi’*) - they are not *‘annihilated’*, but later put in Hell (Mk.1:24); we are told not to *‘destroy’* (*‘appollumi’*) a brother by being a *‘stumblingblock’* (Rom.14:15; 1Cor.8:11) - the brother is not *‘annihilated’*; and the *‘world...perished’* (*‘appollumi’*) *in the flood’* (2Pet.3:6) - the world was not *‘annihilated’*.

There is simply no changing the meaning of the words *‘everlasting’*, *‘eternal’* and *‘forever and ever’*. How clear does the Bible have to be if people will not accept that *‘forever and ever...no rest day nor night...’* means what it says? (Rev.14:10,11).

Jonathan Edwards wrote: *‘Be entreated to consider attentively how great and awful a thing eternity is...Do but consider what it is to suffer extreme torment forever and ever; to suffer it day and night, from one year to another, from one age to another, from one thousand ages to another, and so adding age to age and thousands to thousands, in pain, in wailing and lamenting, groaning and*

shrieking, and gnashing your teeth; with your souls full of dreadful grief and amazement, with your bodies and every member full of racking (pain) without any possibility of getting ease; without any possibility of moving God to pity by your cries; without any possibility of hiding yourselves from Him; without any possibility of diverting your thought away from your pain; without any possibility of obtaining any manner of mitigation, help, or change for the better.’ (3)

Emotionally and logically our finite minds may not be able to comprehend or accept an eternal Hell of punishment. But Scripturally the fact of eternal Hell remains .

V. Who will be in Hell?

Certainly Satan, his Demons, the antichrist and his false prophet will all be in the Lake of Fire. But in Hell also will be those who do **‘not know God’** and have not **‘obeyed the Gospel’** and thus received Jesus Christ as saviour and Lord (2Thess.1:8). We are to **‘fear him, which after he has killed has power to cast into hell...’** (Lk.12:5). *We are responsible* if we end in Hell, because we are sinners and are warned to repent.

But what about those who have never heard the Gospel (and there are many in ages gone)? *All* have sinned and all deserve justice and separation from God in Hell. Some people believe that if any simply believed in God they will be somehow saved, but this is contrary to Scripture and the historic faith. Romans chapter 1 speaks of people having no excuse to see that there is a creator, but *that does not save them*. The passage goes on to damn all, not save. No one can be saved unless they come through Jesus Christ and His Gospel (Acts 4:12; 16:30,31; Rom.10:9-11).

Conclusion :

Hell is there to show the Gospel as urgent! To the Christian it is for them to see what they have been saved from and to praise, thank him, and fear God. Christians should thank him that He quickened them to believe and to live a Godly life.

*How people view Hell is often how people fashion God to their own moulding. Many cannot stomach a God that sends people to punishment and torment in Hell for eternity. But by this they fashion to themselves a God that is not the God of the Bible! The same error occurs with the doctrine of predestination and election, which are Biblical doctrines created by God, even though they do not fit human, logical or emotional understanding. The God of the Bible is the God who has chosen *some* ‘**before the foundation of the world**’ (Eph.1:4) and will send *many* to a fiery torment in Hell forever. It is not something I understand with human logic or emotion! But this is the God who has saved me and this is the God I trust, who says: ‘**For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts**’ (Is.55:8,9).*

All will either be ruled by perfect justice in Hell or unfathomable mercy in Heaven !

But God commends his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him’
{Romans 5: 8,9}

‘God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us...’ ‘Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another...’
{1 Thessalonians 5: 9-11}

Jesus came as God (Deity) in the flesh to die (a substitute) in our place as a *sinless, perfect, and finished* sacrifice. Through His *blood* He paid the penalty of *sin*. If you truly believe in Jesus Christ as *Lord* and *Saviour*, God promises to credit your sin to Christ and credit His righteousness to you. Because He has risen from the dead He conquered sin. Trust him as Saviour and Lord, turn from sins and He promises to give eternal life, not eternal Hell.

Recommended reading: ‘*Free Grace Broadcaster*’ Issue 211 on ‘Hell’. (This is a series of articles by the Puritans on Hell).

- (1) *Institutes of Christian Religion* III, XXV.12)
- (2) ‘*The Punishment of the wicked Dreadful and Interminable*’ in *The Works of Edward Payson*, Vol.3 (Sprinkle Publications)
- (3) ‘*The Eternity of Hell Torments*’ in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol.2 (Banner of Truth).

About the Author and the Ministry

Terry Arnold holds a Doctorate in Theology (Dth), a Masters degree (MABS) and several diplomas. He was founder and president of *South Pacific Bible Institute*, a Bible college training and equipping people for ministry. In addition he was the founder of Hervey Bay Bible Church in Queensland, Australia. He has for 25 years served as an elder and then pastor.

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TA Ministries is a non-denominational and non-profit faith ministry founded in 1989 when the book '*To Catholics Whom I Love*' was written by Terry Arnold. This book went through several re-prints and served as a fruitful outreach to Roman Catholics.

In 1996 the ministry became a full-time operation with the introduction of a free newsletter, later named '*Diakrisis (Australia)*'.

Diakrisis is published bi-monthly to *teach, inform* and *equip* the church of Biblical truths and to warn of false teaching. It has also been a valuable reference aid to hundreds of pastors/elders.