

Doctrinal Outlines

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT HELL

I. Introduction

- A. When you die, you are going straight to hell!
- * B. Does that statement shock you? It shouldn't, or at least it wouldn't. It wouldn't, that is, if you knew that many times the word hell in the Bible means "the grave."
- C. But, sad to say, most people do not understand what the Bible says about this subject of hell. Millions live in fear of dying and going to an eternally burning, fiery hell where they will be tortured throughout all time.
- D. Others live with another type of fear -- the hideous worry that some departed loved one is right now suffering such a fate, and will continue to do so, throughout eternity.
- E. Still others are unable to accept that a good God would punish even the wicked in such a manner, and therefore reject God's existence altogether.
- F. Such states of mind need not afflict those who will look into God's Word for themselves. The biblical teaching about the topic is plain and reassuring.

II. The Basic Doctrine

Depending upon the Hebrew or Greek word from which the English word hell is translated, the word hell in the Bible means, simply, the grave, a place of restraint for demons (not man) or the place where the wicked mercifully shall be burned up and die (not live immortally in pain) if unrepentant.

III. The Usual Teachings of This World


- A. Most believe hell to be a hideous place of eternal torment -- perhaps even inside the center of the earth -- where the immortal souls of the wicked roast forever without burning up. Satan is pictured as in charge,

with him and his demons inflicting unbearable pain and laughing with glee all the while.

- B. Thankfully, this is not at all the picture of hell that the Bible paints for us. To the contrary, many popular conceptions about hell did not originate from the Bible at all, but from the imaginations of a writer during the Middle Ages named Dante Alighieri, and his classic work The Divine Comedy. His ideas were in great part based upon two pagan philosophers with whom he was enraptured -- Plato and Virgil.
- C. The fact is that much common thinking about hell is merely the thoughts of men and not the revelation of God.

IV. The Bible Teaching

- A. The place to start is to remind ourselves that the biblical writers did not write in English, but mostly in the ancient languages of Hebrew and Greek.
- B. The original idea behind the words translated "hell" in the Authorized or King James Version is not faithfully conveyed to us by the word hell today.
- C. Four words -- one from the Hebrew and three from the Greek -- are translated as "hell" in the Authorized Version, the one still in widest use among Christians.
 - 1. Two of these words, sheol in Hebrew and hades in the Greek, simply mean "the grave."
 - a. This is the meaning of the word from which the English "hell" was translated in Acts 2:27, which says, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [the grave], neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."
 - b. It is also used in Revelation 1:18, which says of Christ, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell [the grave] and of death."
 - 2. The Greek hades, which means the grave but is often translated hell, or its Old Testament Hebrew equivalent (sheol) is found in many other verses. See Matthew 11:23, Luke 10:15, Revelation 20:14, Proverbs 5:5, 7:27.

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3. In I Corinthians 15:55, the translators themselves rendered the Greek word hades as "grave" instead of hell. To make the true meaning more plain, many modern translations render these two words other ways, such as leaving the Greek as "hades" or saying "the grave."
- D. Of the other two words translated into English as "hell," one occurs only one time. It is the Greek word tartaroo, found only in II Peter 2:4.
1. The word actually means a place of restraint or incarceration, and it is used only of the fallen angels (demons) -- never of man.
 2. Further, it carries no implication of ever-burning fire. It requires no further discussion here.
- E. Yet, the final word translated "hell" in many English versions does indeed refer to a punishment for the wicked in fire.
1. Notice Mark 9:43, where Christ warns that the evil will go "into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched."
 2. See also verse 45, where He says one can be "cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched."
 3. See also other verses where the word translated "hell" does indeed refer to a fiery punishment for the wicked -- Matthew 18:9, 10:28, 5:22, James 3:6.
- F. In all of these places the word translated into the English "hell" is the Greek word gehenna.
1. It refers to a valley just outside Jerusalem, called the Valley of Hinnom, which at the time of Christ was the place where refuse and even dead bodies of animals and despised criminals were thrown to be burned up.
 2. Christ used this valley to describe, in type, a very real punishment by fire for the wicked and unrepentant.
- G. But the time, place and nature of that real hell fire is different indeed than the mythical hell of men's imaginations through the ages!

- H. For one, that hell is much hotter than the mythical hell fire, since it burns up and kills those who are thrown into it.
1. Malachi 4:1 says it will burn up the wicked, not torment them without end forever.
 2. Verse 3 says they will be ashes under the soles of the feet of the righteous.
- I. Actually, the reason many believe that hell fire torments one but does not kill him is that they believe the false doctrine of the immortality of the soul. But the Bible plainly says God will destroy -- not merely torture -- unrepentant souls in hell (Matthew 10:28).
1. This lake of fire will only be kindled at the end of this present age, when God resurrects from death, death being like a sleep with no consciousness or thought (Psalm 6:5, I Thessalonians 4:13-18).
 2. The wicked will then be burned up at one time. See Revelation 20:14-15, which shows this lake of fire will burn at the end time of God's plan of salvation for man. See also Matthew 13:30 and John 5:28-29.
- J. Finally, realize exactly where this hell fire will take place. II Peter 3:10 gives the answer: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."
- K. This earth will be burned up after the end of this age. This fire is the real hell fire, which will serve the same purpose as the gehenna fire Christ used to describe it.
1. It will burn up the wretched refuse of man's civilization gone sour.
 2. It is "the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone" described in Revelation 21:8 and 20:14-15.
- L. Although the fire will burn the wicked, it will kill them and burn them up. Our loving God will not torture the unrepentant for time immemorial! They will die in what amounts to a mercy killing, for the very attitudes

that demand their death would make them miserable if they were allowed to live. Truly, God is a good God of mercy and justice.

- M. Although the verses cited above make the subject of hell plain, some people cite certain scriptures to try to prove that hell is an ever-burning fire that tortures the wicked forever.
1. One such series of verses is Mark 9:43-48, which speaks of the hell fire that shall never be quenched. This means that the fire is not put out, but goes on until it burns up the wicked and dies out itself.
 2. Revelation 14:11 is also misunderstood. It says the smoke of the wicked's torment rises forever. This means that those who choose to follow the coming beast power will not be able to escape God's ultimate, final punishment on that satanic government.
 3. Some say Matthew 25:41-46 proves the punishing of the wicked is everlasting. But these verses rather show that this fire into which the wicked are cast was prepared for the demons.
 - a. When a man dies in this fire, he dies. His punishment is forever, although his punishing is over quickly.
 - b. For the demons, who are immortal, this is not so; they "shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Revelation 20:10).

V. Key Verses

Since this subject is so important, it would be helpful to remember a few of the main verses that clarify the truth:

- A. Acts 2:27, Revelation 1:18 -- examples of places where the word translated "hell" means "grave."
- B. II Peter 2:4 -- the word "hell" here means a place of incarceration; this is the only place in the Bible where the Greek word is used, and it refers to the demons.
- C. Mark 9:43-48, Matthew 18:9 -- there is a real hell fire punishment for the wicked.

- D. Matthew 10:28, Malachi 4:1-3 -- the fire burns up the wicked and they die.
- E. II Peter 3:10 -- hell fire is the destruction of this world by fire at the end of the age.
- F. Revelation 20:14-15 -- the lake of fire is kindled at the end of the age.

VI. Conclusion

The subject of hell is much misunderstood. The truth is sobering but reassuring, and gives much peace of mind to those who seek to know and obey the merciful God of love.