

(14) TO HELL & BACK: The Assassination of God

After Adolf Hitler and his Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933 they set up Jewish concentration camps in Germany in such places as Buchenwald. Usually after death, the bodies were disposed of in the fires of the crematoriums. With the generally held view of hell in which God tortures billions of people in the fires of hell forever, one wonders if God will one day not have to apologize to Hitler, because such torture is far worse than all of the evil Hitler did to millions of Jews.

The subject of hell has given God very bad press and had some tragic undesired results. Robert Ingersoll, one of the world's best known agnostics, was only a child when his minister father told him about hell, informing him that there were babies in hell not more than a few inches long, who were destined to burn there throughout eternity. Little Robert grew up to say, "If that is what God does, I HATE HIM." His logical mind simply could not handle or grasp such grotesque injustice, and so that gifted intellect veered into doubt and unbelief and rejected God, spending the rest of his life decrying Christianity and the God of Christianity – "I HATE GOD!" Organized religion has been touting the doctrine of hell in one form or another for centuries. Does hell exist? Are the preachers correct in their descriptions?

THE ULTIMATE MEANING OF HELL - To discover the answers to this extremely vital question we need to consider three interlocking components, without which no rational, logical response to the teaching of hell can be made. The first is SIN. Death is not a punishment of sin, inflicted on us by God, but rather it is the wage of sin – something we earn (Romans 6:23). And note that the wage is eternal death, as seen by the fact that it is contrasted with the gift of eternal life (Romans 6:23). This eternal death is known in scripture as the SECOND DEATH (Revelation 2:11). All human beings die the first death as in disease and old age. God promises to raise His friends to life when Jesus comes. Death for them is but a sleep, from which they are awakened at his return. Tragically those who reject God's offer of friendship and life are destroyed in what is called the second death (Revelation 20:9,14,15). This second death is an eternal death – an eternal sleep – because there is no resurrection. This is part of Hell!

Which is why 1 John 5:11,12 is such a significant Bible statement. Eternal life is wrapped up in a relationship with God through His Son Jesus. No Son means no eternal life! Jesus Christ is indeed our LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEM. Disconnect yourself from the source of eternal life, and eternal death will be the

inevitable result. Eternal death therefore is not the punishment of God against sin, but rather the wage or result of our choice either not to connect to Jesus, or to DISCONNECT from Jesus, our eternal life support system! Note it carefully; the one who cuts the cord is NOT the Son but the sinner.

The second critical component in an understanding of hell is PARENTHOOD (Matthew 7:9,10). There's just no way any loving parent would treat their children the way Jesus has just mentioned in these verses. And now Jesus' punch line is this – "If we who are evil still know how to give your children only what is good for them, HOW MUCH MORE will our FATHER IN HEAVEN give you what is good"? (Matthew 7:11) And what is our Heavenly Father like? Over and over, in many ways Jesus said it and demonstrated it: "If you have seen Me, you have seen My Father also." "For the Father and I are one." "If you knew Me you would know Him." Could there ever have been given a more compelling portrait of what our heavenly Father is like than was revealed in the dynamic, selfless, caring, compassionate life and death of Jesus. Now, let me ask you: "Do fathers and mothers punish or discipline their children?" Of course! They discipline their children in order to protect them in life. But thinking people believe hell is about an angry divine parent punishing his children FOREVER in flames because they rebelled against him. Is there any parent who would choose to douse a rebellious child with petrol, ignite it, and then administer intravenous injections every 24 hours to keep that burning child alive forever? "If we who are evil wouldn't do it," then how about a good and loving Father God?

Finally, the third component to arrive at the truth about hell is CALVARY! At the cross of Jesus we discover the ultimate demonstration of sin's ultimate consequence - "God made Him who had no sin, TO BE SIN FOR US, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21). That awful lonely wail from the center cross on Good Friday, captures the depth of that terrible sacrifice the Son of God was making: "My God, why have you FORSAKEN Me" (Mark 15:34). He was being abandoned, forsaken as a consequence of bearing the sins of the human race. The word for "forsaken" in Christ's death cry on the cross is the very same word used for a very opposite action by God in Hebrews 13:5 – "For God has said, 'I will never leave you nor FORSAKE you.'" What God promises NOT to do to us, he does to Jesus in Mark 15!

What's happening on that centre cross? What is happening is another dimension of what the Bible

calls hell – total separation from God on account of sin – yours and mine!...that's what's happening! The hellish, horrible separation that sin causes between man and God is now happening between Christ and the Father. Voluntarily, Jesus made the choice to go through with this dark horror of sin's separation - "God made Him who had no sin, TO BE SIN FOR US." Out of love for us - our choice of sin became his choice in order that we might never be forsaken. – JESUS DIES THE SECOND DEATH, EXPERIENCING THE ETERNAL SEPARATION. Disconnecting from the divine life support system. He who had shared an unbroken relationship with the Father for eternity now dies with that awful separation apparent to his heart: "My God, My God WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" He does not cry out, "WHY HAVE YOU KILLED ME?" Death, the second death, to the suffering Christ is portrayed in all its horror - it is the full and final separation from the Father. Not by choice of the Father, but by the choice of the child - His son. And so there on Calvary Jesus lives and dies the horrible reality of sin's second death.

HELL IS UGLY. Not because it is fire, for it is NOT ultimately about fire. What hell and the second death are all about is the tragic but inevitable consequence of disconnecting from our divine life support system. Jesus wept in the awful darkness surrounding his cross, his broken heart crying out for the one whom he was willing to be separated from for eternity. And all because he loved you! Jesus experienced the anguish of feeling eternally forsaken by God, just as the sinner will experience it at the moment of the second death.

HELL FIRE - These three – SIN, PARENTHOOD and CALVARY tell the truth about hell, which is not ultimately about fire. But doesn't the Bible speak of hell fire? Of course it does. But according to Peter, hell is the whole world on fire, which occurs at the end of the world, called the day of the Lord (2 Peter 3:9-12). But then this place of hell fire becomes a brand new world (2 Peter 3:13). Which is exactly the same description given by John in the true Bible prophecy of hell (Revelation 20:9,14,15). But just like Peter, the next thing John describes is a brand new world (Revelation 21:1). In other words the Bible teaches that this planet earth is to be the site of God's cleansing fires, that we and the Scriptures have called HELL. Hell is not some distant place in the universe or some fiery place underground, where the wicked go to roast and toast forever – Hell is that moment in time, at the end of the world, when the fires of cleansing will dissolve this entire planet and all those who have chosen to disconnect themselves from God's life support system - all who have wilfully rejected the salvation Christ has offered us as Saviour of the world. Hell is the final separation from God as the source of all life - the awful annihilation of all who freely choose to live apart from God (which is of course an anomaly - since no one can live apart from God). The fires of hell are what burn up and

cleanse away every trace of sin and sinner in the end. Hell simply cannot be forever by virtue of the fact that the fires burn on this very planet, and when they have completed their destruction, they are extinguished, and God creates a brand new earth, a brand new Eden!

Questions About Hell

1. Eternal Fire - But doesn't the Bible say that the fires burn forever?" Matthew 25:41 certainly mentions "eternal" or "everlasting" fire. But look carefully at how the Bible uses that word "forever" or "eternal." Jude verse 7 says Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed with "eternal fire." Does that mean that we can go there today and find the fires burning? No, because Peter tells us Sodom and Gomorrah were burnt to ashes (2 Peter 2:6). These cities can't still be burning if they were burnt to ashes. Obviously, eternal fire in the Bible means the results of the fire will be ETERNAL, not the process of the burning itself!

2. Unquenchable Fire - But didn't Jesus say the fire could not be quenched or would never go out? Yes, in Mark 9:43. But notice how Christ is using the word quenched by turning to Jeremiah 17:27, which says that the Babylonians would destroy Jerusalem (in 586 BC) with unquenchable fire. Obviously, the fires of Jerusalem were eventually extinguished after Nebuchadnezzar sacked the city. Therefore, "not be quenched or never goes out" means that nothing could put it out until the fire had completed its task.

3. Tormented Day & Night Forever & Ever - Doesn't the Bible say those who reject God's offer of life in Jesus will be tormented day and night for ever and ever? Absolutely, in Revelation 20:10. But be careful again that we don't impose our idea of forever and ever on the Bible. What does the Bible mean by forever and ever? We must let the Bible explain itself. Come to the stories of Jonah and Samuel to see how the Bible uses the word forever. When Jonah prayed from the belly of the whale he said he was there "forever" (Jonah 2:6). Yet Jonah 1:17 says he was in the whale's belly for just 3 days and 3 nights! The child Samuel was to abide at the temple forever (1 Samuel 1:22). Yet of course Samuel died and was not buried at the temple but at Ramah (1 Samuel 25:1). Obviously Jonah's being in the fish's belly forever, and Samuel's abiding forever at the temple, meant as long as they were there. It is imperative that you realize that the word "forever" does not always mean forever and ever, as we understand it - but forever means the duration until something is completed or has run its course. Which is what is meant by the fires of hell being forever – they will burn until they are burned up completely – until the fires have run their course and completed their purpose with results that will last for eternity. There is NO SECOND CHANCE after hell - and hell is not a purgatory-like CLEANSING in preparation for another life. Hell means TOTAL AND FINAL ANNIHILATION INTO NON-EXISTENCE - severed from the life

support system forever!

4. Eternal Punishment - Doesn't the Bible talk about eternal punishment in Matthew 25:46. Yes it does, but notice it is the punishment that is eternal NOT the punishing. The effects of the punishing - the punishment - are eternal, but NOT THE ACT of punishing. Mark it clearly, nobody will burn forever and ever - the consequence of their being burned up will be forever and ever but not the process! That's why Malachi 4:1-3 is so clear! It couldn't be clearer - those who reject God's forever friendship are turned to ashes. In fact Ezekiel 28:18,19 informs us that the eternal fate of Lucifer, who plunged the universe and God and all of us into this awful, awful dilemma, will be exactly the same. Just as John said the Devil would be thrown in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10), so Ezekiel says that same fire will consume him until he is ASHES and SHALL BE NO MORE FOREVER.

The current non-Biblical concept of Hell, as a never-ending place of fiery punishment, SHATTERS GOD'S PORTRAIT. God's character has been assassinated by such a monstrous fabrication. God gets no delight when his children reject his forever love for them. Like a mother weeping over her rebellious child, God and Jesus weep and sob over anyone who rejects their offer of a forever friendship and grace (Matthew 23:37-39). God is love!

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