

Hell

Why is there a place called 'Hell'? People wonder why a "loving" God would send His "children" to Hell to roast for all eternity. Just to clarify those two things, God's love is not an emotional feeling but a self-sacrificing commitment. To what, exactly, did His love commit Him? Sending His beloved Son to die for us. He wasn't compelled to do this, but instead of wiping us out of existence—which He had every right to do—He "manned up," to use a mortal phrase, and provided a way out of our dilemma.

Secondly, just because we walk this planet doesn't make us God's "children." Until you turn away from your sins and turn to Christ, you will remain a child of the devil. (Eph 2:1-4)

While not exhaustive, this article should answer most questions on Hell.

Biblical Authority

First of all, the Bible is the only reliable source of information on this or any other subject connected with God. Without the inspired Word of God, you'll never know the truth, forever struggling with man-made myths and fabrications. Everything I'm about to tell you is based on scripture. Why? Because I'm not eternal, I'm finite. Anything dealing with whatever is on the other side of death's pale is beyond my or anyone else's experience. Therefore, it's arrogant to assume having some secret knowledge of what goes on beyond this life.

The bible has been tested historically, scientifically, etc, and has always passed the tests many sought to use to rule out its authority. The idea that it was written in some cave by religious fanatics has been pooh-poohed away long ago. Besides, if it was a bogus document, why do most of the world hate it so much? Why is so much effort being spent on trying to destroy it and its adherents? *Because it tells people what they don't want to hear*—they want to silence it forever.

What is Hell?

Described in the book of Revelation as the Lake of Fire (20:10-15), Hell is the place of God's Final Judgment of all things opposed to His will and purpose. It can be seen as a *place*, but it is more accurately described as a *condition*. Revelation 20:14 says that "death and Hell were thrown into the lake of fire." Death and Hell are not *things*; they are *conditions*. You cannot throw graves or death into a physical location. It only means that they will be utterly done away at some future time.

In the same way, those who go into what's called the Second Death, are utterly and finally judged. (Rev. 21:8) There will be no recourse, no appeals process, and absolutely no hope. It is the *permanent* separation of unrepentant sinners from God. Some cults twist 1 Peter 3:19-20 into saying that folks will have the gospel preached to them in Hell, effectively giving them one Last Chance. That is not to what Peter was referring. Common sense tells us that if this were, in fact, true, everyone would grab at any chance of getting out of such a terrible place. Think about it: If you were in Hell, and someone came along and said, "This is your last chance—you stay and suffer here for all eternity, or you can be exiled to the frozen planet, Pluto." What would you pick? The doctrine is bogus and is what ultimately caused me to leave the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Total and complete separation from God is something most folks don't think ponder. Paul said that God "gives to all mankind life and breath and everything...In him we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17:25-28) When people consider what Hell is like, many have this picture of activity taking place there—tormented souls shuffling about, enduring various levels of suffering. If we are completely separated from God, that means even our ability to move will be taken away. You won't have a body, no vehicle of substance that allows movement or interaction, at least on a physical level.

Light also comes from God. Complete and utter separation means that light (God's gift) will also be removed from us. In fact, the bible refers to Hell as "the blackness of darkness forever." (Jude 13) Imagine being within a darkness so complete that it will seem being entombed in solid black tar that extends out forever and ever.

Why did God create Hell?

Jesus reveals the fate of the wicked in a story concerning the Great Judgment. Note:

Then (the King) will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire **prepared for the devil and his angels.**" (Matthew 25:41) (emphasis mine)

Hell was intended for Satan and his demons. Why are humans destined to go there? Because they followed the devil. They swallowed his lies and chose his ways.

This is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. (John 3:19)

Why do folks love darkness? They are doing evil works and don't want to be seen. The light—the truth of God's word (Psalms 119:105; 130)—reveals their wrongdoing and so they hate it. This is why everyone hated Jesus. They didn't want to hear what He had to say because it condemned their actions as despicable before the Father.

Why should I be eternally tormented for committing temporal sins?

In other words, folks wonder why sins committed in this mortal life should merit never-ending punishment. Part of this can be answered by a multiple part question that you can answer on your own. What is the consequence for lying to someone you don't know? What is the result of lying to your wife? How about lying to your boss at work? What happens when you lie to the Federal Government? Keep going, all the way up to the Throne in heaven, and you get the idea. The punishments get more severe the greater the authority you transgress against.

As far as the concept of eternal suffering, let's look at two verses:

The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, those who worship the Beast and his image, and anyone who receives the mark of his name. (Revelation 14:11)

And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone where also the Beast and the False Prophet are. And they shall be tormented day and night forever and ever. (Revelation 20:10)

These and other verses serve to describe the permanence of those who are eternally damned. However, Jesus said something that deserves mention:

Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to **destroy both the soul and the body in Hell.** (Matt 10:28)

This suggests that a person's soul is destroyed, just as the body is reduced to nothing. If that's true, the idea of eternal torment is a moot point. While some preachers rub their hands and lick their lips in anticipation of some immortal inquisitor inflicting untold misery upon sinners, the verse hints at a more merciful doom. This is one of those areas where the bible doesn't paint a clear picture. God wants us to understand that it is a terrible place that we need to avoid (and help others avoid) at all costs.

I've heard and read comments by preachers who stridently claim, "if a person is going to enjoy the eternal reward of heaven, then the sinner must suffer the eternal punishment of Hell! If there is not an eternal Hell, neither can there be an eternal heaven!" To which I ask, why would someone else's fate determine my eternal happiness? After all, the fate of those sent to Hell is sealed—there is no appeals process. Once there, there is no further hope. The cessation of conscious suffering may sound like heresy to some, but let's keep in mind that we don't have all the facts. In His wise way, God doesn't provide a lot of detail nor does He explain the mechanics of how Hell works.

How can fire hurt a spirit? Besides, isn't Hell a place of darkness?

People see fire as something physical and souls as non-corporeal. So why would fire even affect them? Close on the heels of this question is trying to reconcile fire (which produces light) with Hell's attribute of being a place of eternal darkness. Jude speaks of sinners, calling them "wandering stars, to whom is reserved the **blackness of darkness** for ever." (Jude 1:13)

Understand that the bible was written so that even simple fishers and shepherds could understand it. Everyone knows that being roasted in a fire pit would be an indescribable horror. God used the symbol of fire to get the idea into our heads that Hell is something we want to avoid. In fact, it is so bad, that He sent His Son to rescue us from that terrible fate. (John 3:16) Not all fire sheds light. Being tossed into a vat of hydrofluoric acid would be a fire. No light but plenty of burning going on.

Jesus also used a term to describe the horror of Hell. He called it a place "where the worm does not die." (Mark 9:48) Are there physical worms in Hell, drilling through your dead body as you lie there in frozen misery? Didn't you leave your body on earth, to decay into dust? Again, this is poetic language used to describe the unspeakable suffering waiting for those destined for Hell. Even though we can't be dogmatic, the state of those consigned to Hell is one of untold misery, whether the worms are real or symbolic.

Why would God want to torture sinners for eternity?

First of all, God doesn't torture anyone. Everything He does is perfect, and that includes punishment of sinners. It is part of God's nature not to be burdened by conflicting emotions. He offered mankind a way to avoid Hell by sending His Son as a sacrifice for our sins. *There is no other name under heaven which has been given among men by which we must be saved.* (Acts 4:12) Do not reject God's methods by pursuing the latest pop culture nonsense. That stuff may be on the New York Times best seller list

today, but it will disappear in a short time, replaced by the next Big Thing. Many are on the broad road that leads to destruction (Matt. 7:13), and these best-selling books are advertising signs pointing the way.

Justice demands punishment, and eternal justice—the kind that God deals with—merits an eternal fate. Once you breathe your last and you eventually come into God’s presence, there won’t be an opportunity to make a case for yourself, as so many foolishly believe.

He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe **has been condemned already** because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:18)

The only thing that matters in this life and the one to come is whether or not you embraced Jesus Christ to have your sins forgiven. Your liberal or conservative political views won’t matter; giving blood once a month won’t count; none of the good you did will make one bit of difference. Why? Because none of it was done *in* or *for* Jesus Christ’s name’s sake. (Matt 25:40)

Like a lot of folks, my oldest son has decided that he is not going to accept the Bible’s council, but instead, fully expects to sit down with God on the Day of Judgment, to ask Him why certain things happened and so forth. My son couldn’t talk his way out of a traffic ticket, yet fully expects the Almighty to consider his point of view seriously. Utterly foolish. The fact that he’s my son makes it even harder to bear. I told him, “You are already guilty before God. An earthly judge doesn’t abide by the council of a proven criminal. Why would the Eternal Judge listen to you?”

Are there different levels of punishment in Hell?

Jesus answers this question in a parable:

That servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, **shall be beaten with many stripes**. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, **shall be beaten with few stripes**. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. (Luke 12:47-48)

If I were to be sent to Hell, I would rather do so under God’s hand rather than by some council of men. He is merciful and will punish folks according to their sins. For those who had an opportunity to obey the gospel and chose to ignore the Good News, little mercy will be shown.

Summary

We don’t need to understand the physics and laws of what’s involved when we challenge a railroad crossing and get hit by a speeding train. The warning lights and horn blasts can be understood by any of us. In the same way, we may not understand the mechanics concerning Hell, nor do we need to. We have a bible that warns us about it, and that should be sufficient. The rich man begged to have someone from the grave go and warn his brothers of “this place.” He was told, “They have the Word of God; if they won’t listen to it, neither will they listen to anything else.” (Luke 16:31)

You don’t want to go there, even if you think you will wink out of existence once you’re tossed into the

molten lava. Why miss out on an eternal life in Paradise, where we will live to our greatest potential, and do it with a God who loved us enough to rescue us from that horror we call Hell? The axiom, *it is better to reign in Hell than serve in heaven*¹, is pure hogwash. No one rules in Hell. The place was created for Satan's punishment. There is no throne for him there, and there certainly won't be one for anyone else.

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¹ Line 256, from *Paradise Lost*, by John Milton