

Harvest Christian Fellowship
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Theology @ 9 Handout
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HELL

The Wicked Will Be Banished into Endless Misery

Hell is a place of eternal conscious punishment for the wicked.

The sentimental secularism of modern Western culture, with its exalted optimism about human nature, its shrunken idea of God, and its skepticism as to whether personal morality really matters—in other words, its decay of conscience—makes it hard for Christians to take the reality of hell seriously. The revelation of hell in Scripture assures a depth of insight into divine holiness and human and demonic sinfulness that most of us do not have. However, the doctrine of hell appears in the New Testament as a Christian essential, and we are called to try to understand it as Jesus and his apostles did.

The New Testament views hell as the final abode of those consigned to eternal punishment at the Last Judgment. Hell is a place.

Matthew 25:41-46

41 *"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' 44 "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' 45 "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' 46 "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life. "*

Revelation 20:11-15

11 *Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead that were in it,*

*and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. **14** Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. **15** If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

Jesus calls this place *Gehenna*, the place of incineration.

Matthew 5:22

***22** But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.*

Matthew 18:9

***9** And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.*

It is thought of as a place of fire and darkness (Jude 7,13), of weeping and grinding of teeth (Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30), of destruction (2Thessalonians 1:7-9; 2 Peter 3:7; 1 Thessalonians 5:3), and of torment (Revelation 20:10; Luke 16:23)—in other words, of total distress and misery.

If, as it seems, these terms are symbolic rather than literal (fire and darkness would be mutually exclusive in literal terms), we may be sure that the reality, which is beyond our imagining, exceeds the symbol in dreadfulness. New Testament teaching about hell is meant to appall us and strike us dumb with horror, assuring us that, as heaven will be better than we could dream, so hell will be worse than we can conceive. Such are the issues of eternity, which need now to be realistically faced.

The concept of hell is of a negative relationship to God, an experience not of his absence so much as of his presence in wrath and displeasure. The experience of God's anger as a consuming fire, his righteous condemnation for defying him and clinging to the sins he loathes, and the deprivation of all that is valuable, pleasant, and worthwhile will be the shape of the experience of hell.

The concept is formed by systematically negating every element in the experience of God's goodness as believers know it through grace and as all mankind knows it through kindly providences.

Acts 14:16-17

16 *In the past, he let all nations go their own way. 17 Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy."*

Romans 2:4

4 *Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?*

The reality of hell, as was stated above, will be more terrible than the concept; no one can imagine how bad it will be. The continued existence of the wicked will be marked by:

- (a) A total absence of the favor of God.
- (b) An endless disturbance of life as a result of the complete domination of sin.
- (c) Positive pains and sufferings in body and soul.
- (d) Such subjective punishments as pangs of conscience, anguish, despair, weeping, and gnashing of teeth.

Millard J. Erickson writes, "There are other aspects of the situation of the lost individual that contribute to its misery. One is a sense of loneliness, of having seen the glory and greatness of God, of having realized that he is the Lord of all, and then of being cut off. There is the realization that this separation is permanent. Similarly, the condition of one's moral and spiritual self is permanent. Whatever one is at the end of life will continue for all eternity. There is no basis for expecting change for the better. Thus, hopelessness comes over the individual."

C.S. Lewis taught that we are all on our way to becoming either a heavenly creature or a hellish creature and agreed that whatever one is at the end of life will continue for all eternity.

Scripture envisages hell as unending and speculations about a "second chance" after death, or personal annihilation of the ungodly at some stage, have no biblical warrant. In present day theology there is an evident tendency in some circles to rule out the idea of eternal punishment. The Annihilationists deny the continued existence of the wicked, and thereby render a place of eternal punishment unnecessary.

But there can be no reasonable doubt as to the fact that the Bible teaches the continued existence of the wicked, an eternal existence of conscious punishment.

As to its duration...

Jude 1:13

13 *They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.*

Revelation 14:9-11

9 *A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, **10** he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. **11** And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name."*

Revelation 20:10

10 *And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*

Consider **Matthew 25:46**:

46 *"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life. "*

In this verse, the same word describes the duration of both, the bliss of the saints and the penalty of the wicked. If the latter is not, properly speaking, unending, neither is the former; and yet many of those who doubt eternal punishment, do not doubt everlasting bliss.

As to conscious punishment...

Luke 16:22-24

22 *"The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. **23** In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. **24** So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'*

Further, there will be a gulf that will separate saints and sinners in the future which is said to be fixed and impassable.

Luke 16:26

26 *And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'*

Scripture sees hell as self-chosen; those in hell will realize that they sentenced themselves to it by loving darkness rather than light, choosing not to have their Creator as their Lord, preferring self-indulgent sin to self-denying righteousness, and (if they encountered the gospel) rejecting Jesus rather than coming to him.

John 3:18-21

18 *Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. **19** This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. **20** Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. **21** But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."*

2 Thessalonians 2:9-11

9 *The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders,*

10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. **11** For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie

General revelation confronts all mankind with this issue, and from this standpoint hell appears as God's gesture of respect for human choice. All receive what they actually chose, either to be with God forever, worshiping him, or without God forever, worshiping themselves. Those who are in hell will know not only that for their doings they deserve it but also that in their hearts they chose it.

The purpose of Bible teaching about hell is to make us appreciate, thankfully embrace, and rationally prefer the grace of Christ that saves us from it.

Matthew 5:29-30

29 *If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. **30** And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.*

Matthew 13:48-50

48 *When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. **49** This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous **50** and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

It is really a mercy to mankind that God in Scripture is so explicit about hell. We cannot now say that we have not been warned.

*Most of the foregoing material was taken from "Concise Theology" by J.I. Packer, "Systematic Theology" by Wayne Grudem, "Systematic Theology" by Louis Berkhof, and "Christian Theology" by Millard J. Erickson.