

# The Nature of Hell

Lesson One: Paul R. Blake

Introduction:

- A. Ray Summers in *The Life Beyond*: "We would do well to remember that we are dealing with terms in an attempt to describe a condition that almost defies description."

## I. WHERE WILL SINNERS DWELL?

- A. We know they will be separated from God
  - 1. Matt. 7:21-23, 25:41-46; Eph. 5:5; Rev. 21:27, 22:15
- B. The eternal dwelling place is called hell
  - 1. The Greek word is "geenna" (gheh'-en-nah); it is a transliteration of the Hebrew word "Ge-Hinnom"
  - 2. B. W. Johnson comments: "The term Gehenna arose from the valley of Hinnom, south of Jerusalem, where the Canaanites burned human sacrifices to Moloch. After the return of the Jews from the Captivity they made it a place of defilement, where the refuse of the city was thrown and burned. The name was applied to the place of future punishment by the Jews. The word is often used in the New Testament, and always denotes a place of future punishment."
  - 3. Jesus used the term to describe the final place of punishment
    - a. In His sermon on the mount - Matt. 5:21-22, 29-30
    - b. Sending His disciples on the limited commission - Matt. 10:28
    - c. Warning against stumbling blocks - Matt. 18:8-9
    - d. Perhaps the most vivid use of this term is in Mark 9:43-48
  - 4. Hell was originally prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41), but will also serve as the place of punishment for all the wicked as well
- C. The eternal dwelling place is called the lake of fire
  - 1. Where the beast and false prophet of Revelation are sent - Rev. 19:20
  - 2. Where the Satan himself will one day be cast - Rev. 20:10
  - 3. The same is said for death and Hades, and all whose names are not written in the Lamb's book of life - Rev. 20:14-15
  - 4. The future residents of this place are listed in Rev. 21:8

## II. THE EXPERIENCES OF THE WICKED

- A. What such separation from God can be like, no one in this life can really know, for everyone in this life experiences a degree of God's presence - Acts 17:28
  - 1. Physical blessings are all manifestations of God's presence in our lives
    - a. Matt. 5:45
    - b. The physical universe testifies to God's presence - Rom. 1:20
  - 2. Perhaps Jesus experienced a sense of being forsaken by God, when He suffered that temporary separation from God while bearing the sins of the world on the cross - Matt. 27:46; Psalm 22:1
- B. The term commonly used to describe the experience of separation from God is eternal death
  - 1. The wages of sin is death - Rom. 6:23

2. In Rev. 2:11; 20:14 it is called the second death, so we know that the experience of the wicked is not simply physical death, or the first death
  3. Since physical death is a separation of body and spirit, it is reasonable to conclude that the second death is separation of one's soul from God
  4. Explanation:
    - a. God supplies the physical world; we orient and stabilize our lives to the laws and facts of the universe around us. Take away indicators of reality, completely isolate a mind from its sensory organs and madness will ensue
    - b. God supplies the laws and structures of human interaction; abandon those laws for a short time and pain, suffering, and chaos will follow
    - c. God gives purpose for existence; take it away and life becomes meaningless and empty, and despair and immobility sets in
    - d. Whether men believe and accept it or not, it is a fact that they depend on God's presence for their own continued existence
  5. Now remove all of those things: the physical world by which we orient ourselves, rules of peaceable interaction, and any reason to go on living, and what do you have left? Nothing.
    - a. Now add darkness, loneliness, terror, pain, and the knowledge that this condition will never end. What do you have? Hell.
    - b. Now inform that lost soul that he will never again have the opportunity to ask for help from the only Being powerful enough to save him from the indescribable horror of his state, and what do you have? Eternal death.
- C. The eternal destiny is described as destruction
1. An everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord - 2Thes. 1:9
  2. Whose end is destruction - Phil 3:19
  3. The concept of destruction does not demand annihilation
    - a. It can just as easily describe the condition of existing in a state of total ruin. Pompeii was destroyed by a volcano, but it exists to this day as a sad ruin of its former state
    - b. The sad state of a life in ruins in hell; a life that once held so much promise and enjoyed so many opportunities to go to heaven and to avoid hell, but chose to let ruin overtake it
- D. It is also described as everlasting punishment
1. The punishment for the wicked is as everlasting as the life given the righteous - Matt. 25:46
  2. The wicked will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord - 2Thes. 1:9
- E. It is spoken of as outer darkness
1. Matt. 25:30; 2Peter 2:17; Jude 13
- F. Other descriptions include weeping and gnashing of teeth
1. Matt. 25:30, 24:51, 22:13

2. When such terms as these are used, it is difficult to accept any view that suggests the wicked will simply cease to exist at death, or be raised for judgment and then annihilated, a la JWs

G. It is fire

1. The fires of Gehenna;
2. The lake of fire and sulfur
3. A fire that is never quenched - Mark 9:43-48
4. A fire of indignation that devours but does not consume - Heb. 10:26-27

Conclusion:

- A. Since we are dealing with a non-physical realm, it is evident that some of these terms are not meant to literally describe the place, but to illustrate it
  1. These are terms anyone can recognize which describe something we cannot possibly comprehend with the finite mind
  2. It is a place of punishment reserved for those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ - 2Thes. 1:8-9
  3. It is natural to revolt against or outright reject the Bible teaching on hell.
    - a. "How could a loving God send anyone there?!"
    - b. What hubris! Judging God by your standard of love and fairness
    - c. But you cannot dismiss hell without mocking the terrible nature of sin, or the holiness, wisdom, and justice of God

## **The Nature of Hell**

### Lesson Two

Introduction: "How Can a Loving God Send Anyone to Hell?"

- A. A difficult and challenging subject for believer and unbeliever alike; for many, a reason given to doubt God
  1. Many have their own concept of how God must be; hell and eternal punishment does not fit their view
  3. Their preconception leads to doubt

### **III. UNDERSTANDING "HELL" AND "LOVING"**

- A. Hell is described in different ways in Scripture
  1. Gehenna: the Valley of Hinnom near Jerusalem, place where garbage was burned; place where worm does not die, fire unquenched; demonstrates hell as unpleasant location
    - a. Matt. 5:22, 29, 10:28; Mark 9:43-49
  2. The Outer Darkness: demonstration of complete separation from God; place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, indicating great torture, misery
    - a. Matt. 8:12, 22:13
  3. Hell is vengeance upon unbelievers, those disobedient to Gospel, suffering eternal destruction away from God and His power
    - a. 2Thes. 1:8-9
  4. Hell is the second death, a lake of fire and sulfur, a place of perpetual torment - Rev. 20:10, 14-15

5. It is also clear who will be sent there: those who do not believe in God, do not obey Gospel of Jesus Christ; those who have done evil; those involved in sin without repentance
  - a. Rom. 2:5-10; Gal. 5:19-21; 2Thes. 1:6-9; Rev. 20:12-15
6. How could a loving God send anyone there?
- B. What does the questioner mean by "loving"?
  1. 1Cor. 13:6 - Love cannot rejoice with unrighteousness
  2. Heb. 12:5-11 - True love is demonstrated through discipline
  3. Love seeks the best interests of the one loved
- C. If God loves everyone, how could hell be in the best interest of anyone?

#### **IV. CONSIDER THE QUESTION**

- A. If we adjust the question slightly, perhaps the answer will be more evident
- B. How can a loving God send Adolf Hitler to hell? Joseph Stalin, Sadam Hussein, and Osama bin Laden?
  1. After all, God loves them too, right? - John 3:16
- C. For most people, the idea of terribly sinful people being in hell does not pose much difficulty. Why is that?

#### **V. A SENSE OF JUSTICE**

- A. The reason why people have little difficulty with the concept of Adolf Hitler being in hell is because everyone recognizes that he has sinned greatly
  1. After all, he caused the death of at least tens of millions of people and the suffering of countless more
  2. How could such a person be rewarded for that type of behavior? He deserves eternal punishment for what he has done
- B. Justice: "The virtue which consists in giving to everyone what is his due" (Webster's)
  1. If wrongdoing goes unpunished, it both cheapens doing what is right and encourages further wrongdoing
  2. Psalm 33:5; Isa. 61:8
- C. God cannot allow unrepentant sin to go unpunished and yet love justice
  1. Rom. 2:5-6, 11, 12:19
- D. A source of hope for the oppressed, downtrodden: God's righteous judgment against those who oppress
  1. 2Thes. 1:6; Rev. 6:9-11

#### **VI. HARMONIZING LOVE, JUSTICE, AND GRACE**

- A. Some believe that eternal punishment is too severe a penalty for temporal sin; in their minds; to them it is not really justice, because they appear to be getting more than their due
  1. Others have difficulty with the idea that God would save some who sinned rather grievously yet repented, while those who sinned less terribly without repentance would be condemned; a repentant serial killer being saved while one of his or her victims might be hell bound

2. Many more certainly can understand why hell would be for those really bad sinners, but cannot imagine themselves or their friends and associates who are not that bad going there
- B. Sin is sin; distinctions are generated by human opinion
1. Gal. 5:19-22; 1Cor. 6:9-10 - murder, adultery, stealing are on the same level as rivalries, sectarianism, outbursts of anger, lying
  2. Showing partiality, not doing the good seen as sin - James 2:9, 4:17
  3. Therefore, sin is transgression against God's purposes
    - a. James 2:9; 1John 3:4
  4. All sin is as much transgression as any other sin
  5. Any who sin fall under the same sentence of condemnation
    - a. Isa. 59:1-2; Rom. 3:9-23
  6. Thus, it does not matter if we murdered, raped, or lied, or had an outburst of anger, or simply failed to show proper love to one another; in so doing, we transgress God's will, and without repentance, will reap the eternal consequences
- C. God's Justice vs. God's Mercy
1. We also must remember that according to God's sense of justice, we all deserve condemnation for our sins - Rom. 6:23
  2. Yet God has shown us grace and mercy by providing the payment for our sin through the blood of Jesus Christ
    - a. Rom. 3:24, 5:6-9; Eph. 2:4-6; Titus 3:3-5
  3. That sacrifice satisfies God's justice, but only if we accept the terms of that sacrifice: obedience to the Son and to God's purposes
    - a. Rom. 6:17-22; 2Thes. 1:6-9; 1Peter 1:22
  4. Therefore, we must remember that the fact that anyone is redeemed from the sentence of hell is a sign of God's great grace and mercy toward us; we do not deserve it
  5. The question is not how can a loving God send anyone to hell; it is none of us deserves to go to heaven, so what has a loving God done to help us avoid hell and go to heaven?
- D. God's ways are greater than ours
1. It is also essential for us to remember that we are the creation, God is the Creator - Isa. 55:8-9; Rom. 9:19-21
  2. Thus, even if things may not seem right or just or fair to us, we must keep it in mind that God's perspective is greater than our own, and the creation is not going to have the understanding that the Creator has
- E. If God is a God of justice, and He declares it just, who are we to say that it is unjust? - Ez. 18:29-32
1. The question has radically changed: it is not why is a loving God sending sinners to hell; it is why are sinners choosing to go to hell? Is God going to oppose their choice to go there?
  2. Does anyone complain about the idea of receiving eternal blessings that are clearly over the top as a reward for earthly obedience?
    - a. Rom. 8:17-18 - Fellow heirs with Jesus. Has anything we have done in this world measured up to what He has done?

b. Rev. 21-22 - Have we worked enough and been righteous enough for such a place?

F. There is no sin beyond forgiveness - 1Tim. 1:12-16

1. All have received the chance to come to the knowledge of God and will be judged justly at the Judgment - Rom. 1:19-20
2. While this may offend your sense of fairness, you need to understand that no one promised life would be fair as judged by an arbitrary human standard of fairness

G. There is no passage of Scripture that gives the idea that everyone will be saved, that good people will be saved by their own merit, or that there is somehow some last-minute exemption clause for the majority of people

1. Jesus acknowledged that the majority will not be redeemed
  - a. Matt. 7:13-14
2. Let no one be deceived: hell is not just for terrible sinners; it is for every unrepentant sinner, believer or unbeliever
  - a. Matt. 7:19-21; 1Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Heb. 10:26-31
3. It is only thanks to His grace and mercy that any are saved!
4. Some will be saved, but not by their own merit, but because they believed in God and obeyed Him
5. Despite human definitions and opinions, God considers all unrighteousness (and the lack of doing righteousness) to be sin, and all who continue in such paths without repentance will be hell bound