

Does Hell Exist?

Introduction. Why do some people who claim to follow the Bible not believe in the existence of eternal punishment? We do not have to guess about this because some have plainly told us their reasons.

For example, the tract *Let God Be True*, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, says, "The doctrine of a burning hell where the wicked are tortured eternally after death cannot be true, mainly for four reasons: (1) It is wholly unscriptural; (2) it is unreasonable; (3) it is contrary to God's love; and (4) it is repugnant to justice" (p. 99).

Searching for truth demands that we investigate each of these points and then you must examine yourself to see if you are living with eternity in mind.

I. **"Because It Is Wholly Unscriptural"**

A. Consider these three passages.

1. Matthew 25:41-46.

- a) The doctrine of everlasting punishment existed back in the Old Testament (Psalm 9:17; Isaiah 33:14; 66:24).
- b) The words "everlasting" and "eternal" are the same Greek word. Therefore, however long heaven lasts, the length of punishment is the same.

2. Mark 9:43-48.

- a) The expression, "where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched," teaches two points: eternity and torment.
- b) Jesus used the term "Gehenna" lit., "Valley of Hinnom" to describe the place of eternal punishment.
 - (1) Hinnom was the valley along the south side of the city of Jerusalem, which was used in Old Testament times for human sacrifices to the pagan god Molech (cf. 2 Chronicles 28:3; 33:6; Jeremiah 7:31; 19:5-6; 32:35). King Josiah put a stop to this dreadful practice (2 Kings 23:10).
 - (2) The Valley of Hinnom came to be used as a place where human excrement and rubbish were disposed of and burned, so it came to be symbolically used as the place of divine punishment.
- c) Some try to explain away hell by saying that Jesus was only referring to the city dump (cf. *Let God Be True*, pp. 95-96).
 - (1) This could not be true, because the worm has died there and the fire has been quenched there today. Unless Jesus meant the example for just those living at that time, and the Jehovah's Witnesses will not even affirm this, then Gehenna

must be what it is, the symbol of eternal separation in conscious torment by a flame which is unquenchable.

(2) "Some commentators endeavor to make this third punishment a temporal one, and assert that fires were kept burning in the Valley of Hinnom, and that as an extreme punishment the bodies of criminals were cast into these fires. But there is not the slightest authentic evidence that any fire was kept burning there; nor is there any evidence at all that casting a criminal into the fire there was ever employed by the Jews as a punishment" (*The Fourfold Gospel*, J. W. McGarvey, p. 238).

3. Revelation 20:10.

a) The term "for ever and ever" means "perpetually, without end" (cf. 2 Peter 2:17; Jude 13).

b) It is used also of the existence of God and of the saints reigning in heaven (Revelation 4:9; 22:5).

B. From this relatively small amount of evidence we see that hell is most certainly established and taught in the scriptures.

II. **"Because It Is Unreasonable"**

A. The writer of *Let God Be True* said on p. 98, "Imperfect man does not torture even a mad dog, but kills it. And yet the clergymen attribute to God, who is love, the wicked crime of torturing human creatures merely because they had the misfortune to be born sinners."

1. Man's "wicked crime" is not that he was born a sinner, but that he chooses to sin in rebellion against God.

2. The Bible shows that we are born righteous, but are soon turned away into sin (Genesis 8:21; Psalm 58:3; Ecclesiastes 7:29; Isaiah 48:8).

B. To some, "eternal" torment seems unreasonable.

1. However, even mortal man punishes with respect to the crime.

a) Someone who murders another is punished, not in duration to the time it took to commit the crime, but in accord with the crime itself.

b) For example, it may have taken only one minute to commit murder. Should we then imprison the murderer for only one minute?

2. Man's problem is that he does not understand the seriousness of sin against God (Hebrews 10:26-31).

C. The fact that eternal punishment seems unreasonable to some does not prove that it does not exist (Isaiah 55:8-9).

1. Charles Smith, president of the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism, said, "The whole scheme of redemption is

- foolishness to me. Because our parents and forefathers disobeyed God, he would not be on good terms with us until his son was nailed on a cross. This is not reasonable" (Oliphant-Smith Debate, p. 61).
- a) Thus, the plan of redemption is foolishness and unreasonable to some (1 Corinthians 1:21). Does this make it so?
 - b) Also, some have decided that hell is only for extremely wicked people, but not for good, ordinary people like you and me. We should let God decide!
2. Our faith is founded on the word of God, and not on human reason or emotion (Romans 10:17; Proverbs 14:12).

III. **"Because It Is Contrary To God's Love"**

- A. This fails to consider the dual character of God (Romans 11:22).
 1. Man has a tendency to reshape God into his own image (Psalm 50:21).
 2. Hell is not contrary to God's love, but in perfect unity with His wrath.
- B. God punishing those who sin does not display a lack of love on His part, but a lack of love on man's part.
 1. If a man loves God, he will keep His commandments (John 14:23-24). We must either repent or perish (Luke 13:3). Therefore, if we love Him, we will repent!
 2. The same word for "perish" is used in Matthew 10:28 where it is translated "destroy."
 - a) Luke shows in his parallel account that Jesus is referring to being "cast into hell" when He said, "destroy both body and soul in hell" (Luke 12:4-5).
 - b) The writer of *Let God Be True* says on Matthew 10:28, "Since God destroys soul and body in Gehenna, this is conclusive proof that Gehenna, or the Valley of the son of Hinnom, is a picture or symbol of complete annihilation, and not of eternal torment" (p. 97).
 - c) However, Vine says that "destroy" means "to destroy utterly ... The idea is not extinction but ruin, loss, not of being, but of well-being" (Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, p. 164).
 - (1) This is further demonstrated in Matthew 17:1-3 where Moses and Elijah talked with Christ. Moses' body was dead, and his soul was dead according to Jehovah's Witnesses.
 - (2) This being the case, what or who was talking to Christ? Moses was a living soul (cf. John 11:25). Death is only the separation between, not the extinction of, personalities.

- d) We learn from other passages about the nature of everlasting destruction.
- (1) Romans 2:8-9 states that the wicked will be punished with tribulation and anguish (cf. Revelation 14:10).
 - (2) Revelation 14:11 and 20:10 says that punishment will be torment (Revelation 14:11; 20:10; cf. Matthew 8:11-12; 13:42, 50; 22:13).
 - (a) "Torment" means "to be harassed," "to torture" or "to vex with grievous pains" and is used throughout the New Testament to denote great pain and conscious misery, not annihilation, cessation of consciousness or extinction (cf. Matthew 8:6, 29; Luke 8:28; 16:24).
 - (b) That which does not exist (because it has been annihilated) cannot be tormented or have tribulation!

IV. **"Because It Is Repugnant To Justice"**

- A. Webster's Dictionary says "repugnant" means "contradictory, inconsistent; opposed; antagonistic." "Justice" means "the quality of being righteous; impartiality; fairness; reward or penalty as deserved."
- B. So the writers of the Watchtower Society are saying that eternal punishment is wrong because it is contradictory or inconsistent to the quality of being righteous or impartial!
 1. Who can believe that eternal punishment inflicted by an all-wise God on those who do not obey Him is not justice, or that the penalty is not deserved?
 - a) An atheist may ask, "Would you take your own child and throw it into a burning fire?" What we would or would not do does not change God's will in the matter. God says He will do it and we need to fear and respect Him!
 - b) God is both love and justice and it is not He who condemns man, but man who condemns himself (Matthew 12:37; John 3:18).
 2. He is the potter and we are the clay; therefore, God has the right to do whatever He wants (Romans 9:20-21).

Conclusion. There are four reasons to believe that God will eternally punish or torment those who do not obey Him: (1) It is based on solid, biblical teaching; (2) it is reasonable, according to God's revealed will; (3) it is in accord with God's love and righteousness; and (4) it is according to God's justice. Death is not extinction, hell is not an illusion and everlasting conscious punishment is a terrifying reality of God's justice upon unbelieving men. What decision will you make?

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