

False Concepts Of Hell

Introduction. If we believe there is a hell, as most of us do, have you ever stopped to consider why we take so many chances in doing wrong when we know full well that it could mean eternal condemnation? We disregard our eternal destiny when we are reckless with the time we have to serve God. We have such a short time to know what He wants us to know and what He wants us to be (2 Timothy 2:15).

If we were allowed to take just a short glimpse at what will be in hell, we would never want to go! In all, 76% believe that heaven exists, while nearly the same proportion said that there is such a thing as hell (71%). Four out of ten adults believe that hell is "a state of eternal separation from God's presence" (39%) and one-third (32%) says it is "an actual place of torment and suffering where people's souls go after death." Nearly two-thirds of Americans (64%) believe they will go to heaven, and only .5% expect to go to hell upon their death.

It is tempting to avoid topics like hell in our preaching. But neglecting the unpleasant doctrines of faith will bring about counterintuitive consequences. There is an ecological balance to scriptural truth that must not be disturbed.

If an area is rid of its predatory or undesirable animals, the balance of that environment may be so upset that the desirable plants and animals are lost -- through overbreeding with a limited food supply. The nasty predator that was eliminated actually kept in balance the number of other animals and plants necessary to that particular ecosystem. In the same way, if we play down "bad" or harsh doctrines within the gospel, we will find, to our shock, that we have gutted all our pleasant and comfortable beliefs, too.

The loss of the doctrine of hell and the holiness of God does irreparable damage to our deepest comforts -- our understanding of God's grace and love and our human dignity and value to Him. To preach the good news, we must preach the bad. By examining and refuting these false concepts, hopefully the word of God will convince you as to why you do not want to go there.

I. ***Hell Is Only for Really Bad People***

- A. This is one of the biggest and worst misconceptions of hell.
 1. There is no indication that God sees sin in various levels (1 John 3:4-8).
 2. No matter what you think, the Bible says that sin results in spiritual death (Romans 6:23). All spiritual death has the same consequences.

- B. Was Jesus referring to only the most wicked of people (Matthew 7:13-14)? Because they do not obey, the majority will be lost (Matthew 7:21-23).
- C. It is not just those who commit a particular sin who deserve to go to hell; it is those who have sinned -- period -- and have not received forgiveness (cf. Matthew 15:19).

II. ***God Loves Us Too Much To Punish Sin***

- A. How do you know for certain that this statement is true? Perhaps most people say that because they hope it is true.
- B. Considering the scriptures that speak of the punishment of God (Romans 11:22; Hebrews 10:26-31; 12:28-29; Revelation 14:19-20), this is man sadly trying to reshape God in his own image.
- C. When God must punish those who have purposely disregarded His will, it does not show a lack of love on His part (Romans 5:8). On the contrary, it shows a lack of love on man's part (John 14:15).

III. ***I Am Experiencing Hell On Earth***

- A. If you think you are experiencing hell now, then you are sadly mistaken. Do you realize how the Bible describes hell?
 1. Outer darkness with weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12).
 2. Furnace of fire with wailing and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:42, 50).
 3. Everlasting fire and everlasting punishment (Matthew 25:41, 46).
 4. The worm does not die and the fire is not quenched (Mark 9:44, 48).
 5. Place of torment (Luke 16:28; Revelation 14:11).
 6. Chains of darkness (2 Peter 2:4).
 7. Blackness of darkness (Jude 13).
 8. Lake which burns with fire and brimstone and second death (Revelation 21:8).
- B. Hell will be eternal while this life is only like a vapor (James 4:14). There is no way that any problem or discomfort will equal what will be in hell.

IV. ***Hell Is Annihilation***

- A. Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists believe this position. This position is now found among God's children too.
- B. Matthew 25:46 says that hell is going to last as long as life. The spin that these organizations put on this verse is that they say the punishment is annihilation.

- C. However, as we have seen, hell is a "furnace of fire," indicating existence beyond this life (Matthew 13:42-50). "Tribulation and anguish" speaks of something ongoing, not an annihilation (Romans 2:8-9).
- D. In Matthew 10:28, the term "destroy" does not mean "annihilate" (cf. Luke 5:37). This passage is discussing the loss of well being. Death is a separation (Luke 16:26).

V. ***Ignore It And Live For The Present***

- A. The scoffers and the atheists say that they will not be any worse off than the rest. But God will sadly change their minds about hell after it is too late to do anything about it.
- B. This is Satan's way of deceiving men in trying to get around hell, when in fact they ought to be getting ready for the judgment to come and eternity. Satan is the father of lies, and he is sure going to lie about hell (John 8:44).
- C. Some people who believe in the passages in the Bible about heaven, utterly reject the references to hell.
 - 1. Robert Ingersoll, a famous lawyer and atheist in the latter part of the nineteenth century, once delivered a blistering lecture on hell.
 - 2. He called hell the "scarecrow of religion" and told his audience how unscientific it was, and how all intelligent people had decided that there was no such place.
 - 3. A drunk in the audience came up to him later and said, "Bob, I liked your lecture; I liked what you said about hell. But, Bob, I want you to be sure about it, because I'm depending upon you." Are you depending on someone who has told you there is no hell? Is someone depending on you because of the way you are living?

Conclusion. Since 1962, a fire has been burning deep within the earth of Centralia, a small community in the heart of Pennsylvania's anthracite coal fields. Multiple federal, state, and local agencies have spent millions of dollars to extinguish the fire without success. Persons can touch the earth and feel the heat. Deep holes and crevices vent hot, smoky air and noxious gases. Government officials have indicated that they are no longer willing to attempt to put out the fire; it is a futile task. In 1986, David DeKok described the area as, "... a world where no human could live, hotter than the planet Mercury, its atmosphere as poisonous as Saturn's. At the heart of the fire, temperatures easily exceeded 1,000 degrees [Fahrenheit]. Lethal clouds of carbon monoxide and other gases swirled through the rock chambers.

I wonder how many will be moaning in the last judgment, "I wish I had lived my life differently. I never planned to be eternally lost!" No one, to my knowledge, is planning on eternally existing in a place of torment. It is a sad fact that many people make more extensive plans for their next vacation

than they do for their retirement. Most of us plan very poorly for the future in this life let alone for the life beyond. The only way we can guarantee that we escape outer darkness is to completely obey the Lord's commandments.

Perhaps we do not talk about hell enough, otherwise people would be acting better! There is a well-known preacher that ends every meeting with the statement, "If you miss heaven, you've missed it all!" But this is not even half the story, because you do not just miss heaven, you gain hell!