

HELL - Man's Opinions ~ God's Word

For centuries, mankind has struggled with the biblical doctrine of Hell. Many diverse opinions have been put forward in an attempt to establish the true nature of this abode of the wicked dead. But too often these views have served only to muddy the waters, obscuring the truths taught in the Bible. Let's examine some commonly held opinions on this issue.

"There is no such place as a literal, burning Hell."

Despite man's determined efforts to douse the fires of Hell with the waters of unbelief and denial, he will never succeed in quenching its flames. One survey of churchgoers found that thirty-three percent do not believe in Hell'. To assert that there is no Hell is to destroy the credibility of the Bible. How can we believe that anything it teaches is true if the many vivid references to Hell are actually unreliable? We can't. But if we accept the Word of God as just that, we will believe there is indeed a very real place called Hell.

In the account of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus pulled back the veil to let us hear the rich man's pitiful cry from Hell, "I am tormented in this flame." What kind of monstrous misrepresentation would this be if there were no such place of torment and suffering? Again, how could we place any faith in any of Jesus' words if we knew He was deceiving us in this area?

To profess faith in God and to place our lives in His hands is to trust Him completely. And along with this trust must come the conviction that His knowledge and understanding far exceeds our own. So if we find ourselves wrestling with the thought of a literal, burning Hell, we need to lay it down and say, "Lord, I may not understand how or why such a horrible place could exist, but it is in Your Word. You know best, so I am just going to believe it as it reads." Rest in the knowledge that He has provided a way of escape from this awful place, and let your belief in Hell move you to help others find that way.

If you are an unbeliever who is scoffing at Hell, you need to realize that your unbelief has no effect on the truth. You can stand in the darkness of midnight and say you don't believe in the sun, but in the morning the light will expose your misconceptions and leave you amazed and ashamed. Don't risk finding out too late that God was right and that you were deceived.

"A loving God would never send anyone to Hell."

This is very likely the most common grievance expressed against the doctrine of Hell. And sadly enough, it is probably heard more from professing Christians than from unbelievers. Why? Because professing Christians know God as a God of mercy and forgiveness, so they begin to imagine that He couldn't possibly cast anyone, no matter how wicked, into the searing flames of a lost eternity. The fact is that God doesn't send anyone to Hell. Now that doesn't mean everyone is going to Heaven—not by any means. But every person that enters Hell does so by his own choice, and against the will of God.

The Bible tells us that God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). It also tells us that Hell was "prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). It was never God's intention that man should follow Satan into Hell. So instead of picturing a vindictive God casting poor unfortunates into the lake of fire, we need to see a weeping Father suffering while man, the crowning glory of His creation, stubbornly steps over the shed Blood of Jesus Christ and falls headlong into the abyss.

Some may say, "No one in his right mind would choose Hell, no matter how wicked he might be. God must be forcing him to go." When sinners stand at the Judgment, face to face with a holy God, they will be horribly aware of the darkness of their own hearts. It will be painfully clear that they could never dwell in the presence of the God they have spurned. At that point, be assured that they will be speechless, and will entertain no hope of receiving anything other than what their sins have purchased for them.

"Eventually the sinners who end up in Hell will be reclaimed and transferred to Heaven."

Search the Bible from cover to cover and you will never find even a ray of hope for the dead who have chosen to miss Heaven. There is no intermediate place called purgatory where sinners can purge away their sins and finally ascend to Heaven. Nor will the fires of Hell ever cleanse the soul that refused to be cleansed by the Blood of Jesus.

Paul tells us in 2 Thessalonians 1:9 that those who do not obey the Gospel will be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." Something that is everlasting by definition cannot have an end.

There can be no preparation for eternity in eternity. God has ordained that while we are alive we make our choice for Heaven or Hell. He promises to enlighten all individuals at some point in their lives, but if they "love darkness more than light," then darkness they shall have.

"The sufferings of Hell are not eternal. The souls there will be annihilated."

This one is a favorite of the devil. If he can convince us that there is no Hell, or that a soul is instantly destroyed upon entering there, where does that leave us? If we make it to Heaven, great! If not, don't worry, we'll never know the difference. Oh, what a terrible shock awaits those who comfort themselves that they will never suffer for their unrepented iniquity!

In referring to the never-ending punishment of Hell, Jesus emphasized the phrase, "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched," by using it three times in the ninth chapter of Mark. It would be absurd to speak of the unquenched fires of Hell if the inhabitants had long since been annihilated. No, we are told that "the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night" (Revelation 14:11).

Some people are very glad to believe in an eternal Heaven, but loathe to accept the thought of an everlasting Hell. The Bible was not given to us so we could choose what sounds good and throw out what strikes us as distasteful. When Jesus said, "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Matthew 25:46), He was letting us know that the eternal soul of man will dwell in one place or the other. To deny either is to deny Him who spoke the words. Dangerous ground indeed!

"Hell is everything the Bible says it is."

Amen. What it comes down to is that there is great danger in applying our emotions and limited understanding to issues that far surpass our ability to comprehend. Yes, it hurts to think of those we have known suffering forever in Hell. It stretches our imaginations to the breaking point trying to conceive of the stark horror of total and irreversible separation from God. We are aghast at the thought of everlasting torment in a lake of fire. We recoil at the realization that perhaps the worst torture of Hell will be that one's memory will be intact. The recollection of having trifled with God's offer of eternal life in Heaven will relentlessly haunt the sinner throughout the ages of eternity. "Why, why, why didn't I listen? Why didn't I respond when I felt His love and mercy drawing me? Why did I think I knew better? And now I am lost! Lost forever!" Again and again it will replay.

Yes, it is unimaginably awful to contemplate. But read the entire account of the rich man and Lazarus. Notice that the rich man never says anything about the unjustness of his punishment. He didn't plead with Abraham to redress the wrong done to him. No, the Bible tells us that when we leave this life we will know as we are known. All will be in proper perspective. The souls in Heaven and the souls in Hell will be fully convinced that justice was done.

Be sure you're prepared for the right destination today.