

Essay on the Destiny of the Unsaved

The doctrine of Hell is a touchy subject. Many cannot grasp the concept of a God of eternal love coexisting with a place of eternal punishment. "I don't believe God would send anyone to Hell," many people object. Hell is the final abode of Satan and his angels. It is also the eternal home of those that die unsaved. Hell is a place where the wrath of God is manifest. Jesus said in hell there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matt. 13.42)

Differing views abound of hell. One concept is one of eternal punishment. Eternal punishment is a never-ending pain and torment. On the other hand, annihilation is the theory that "hell is a form of instantaneous destruction."¹ This view says after an unsaved person dies they enter a place where they are completely destroyed. Annihilationism is also applied, according to some, to the unsaved immediately after death. People that hold this view say that the soul ceases to exist after their physical death.

Universalism is the theory that there is a heaven and hell but, that God would not allow anyone to go to hell.² This may be one of the most believable and positive theories for those who misunderstand the character of God and the atonement of Christ's work. "In a universe of love there can be no heaven which tolerates a chamber of horrors."³ This view has many adherents. There are even some popular pastors who have recently come out in support of universalism. While they believe that some do go to hell, they believe that no one *stays* there because love wins in the end.

According to the Bible, hell is known by many names. The Old Testament name for the place of afterlife is Sheol. According to Scripture, Sheol has no distinction for the eternal home of the righteous or unrighteous. The noncanonical Book of Enoch has different compartments for those who loved God and those who didn't. (Enoch 17.1-14)

The Greek word for Sheol is translated Hades. Because of its direct translation it is also believed that Hades also made no distinction of paradise for the righteous or punishment for the unrighteous. However as Sheol often meant "grave", Hades is never used in this way.

Gehenna is perhaps the best term used to describe the concept we know of called hell. It is the most severe term. Almost any time we see the word gehenna used it is by Jesus Christ Himself.⁴⁽⁸²¹⁾ Gehenna's etymology comes from the Hebrew for "Valley of Hinnom." This valley had a horrendous reputation. During Old Testament times the Valley of Hinnom was a place of human sacrifice (2 Chronicles 28.3) and during the time of Jesus, a waste site.

I believe hell to be a place of eternal punishment. Jesus speaks of a separation of those that are saved and those that aren't. In Matthew 25, verse 46 He says, "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." Jesus here is speaking of a place where the punishment does not end. He does not mince words. The Greek for "everlasting" is *anionios* which, in this sense, means eternal. The punishment will not cease. The unrepentant soul will have no relief for all of eternity.

This is a painful reality. Yet, it is a reality. God is a God of love, but He is also a just God. If God is good then He must punish that which is evil. He is the ultimate Judge. A good judge cannot let the wicked go unpunished. Since God is the ultimate good then even the "smallest" sin is an ultimate offence. Our human understanding says that some wrongdoings outweigh others. In our eyes some sins are worse than others but not in God's eyes. God's Word in James 2:10 says that being guilty of breaking one command is being guilty of breaking them all. Therefore, the person who uses the Lord's name in vain is just as guilty of offending God as the murderer.

Some people say that it is unfair for a loving God to send anyone to heaven. If we want to speak in terms of fairness, then it would only be fair for our God to send *everyone* to hell. All have sinned and fallen short of God's glory.⁵ As I've stated, a good judge must punish wrongdoing. Yet, He provided a way out. Jesus' work on the cross was necessary because of "everlasting punishment." He knew that because of God's justice mankind needed to be saved. He gave us the only way to escape the eternal death penalty. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes will not perish but have everlasting life."⁶ This is the foundation for the need of evangelism. Without hell, there would be no need to "preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16.15)

Bibliography

¹ Towns, Elmer, *Theology for Today* (Mason, Ohio: Cengage Learning, 2008), 838

² Ibid.; 839

³ Ibid.; 839

⁴ Ibid.; 821

⁵ New King James Version, Romans 3.23

⁶ New King James Version, John 3.16