

Excursus on Hell – Part II

- **Introduction:** Last week, we discussed the reality of Hell. This week, I would like to take up the subject of the nature and consequences of Hell. Reviewed main points from last week.
- **What is Hell?**
 - The word most often translated in the NT as Hell is the Greek word, *Gehenna*. Gehenna comes from the Hebrew word, Hinnom, which means "lamentation."
 - Gehenna was a deep valley outside Jerusalem where king Solomon built an altar to the false god, Molech. Kings Ahaz and Manasseh and the idolatrous Israelites offered their children there as live burnt sacrifices to Molech. Drums are supposed to have been used to drown the cries of the victims. Later, during the time of Christ, the carcasses of dead animals (roadkill) were dumped there. It became the trash heap for the Jerusalem metropolitan area. Carcasses and refuse were burned there continually. Fires could be seen there day and night. The putrid stench of rotting garbage mixed with the acrid smoke of burning carcasses boiled up from the dreadful place and could be smelled for miles. It was the most unholy place in all of Israel.
 - Jer 32:35 "They built the high places of Baal that are in the valley of Ben-hinnom to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I had not commanded them nor had it entered my mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin."
- **Where is Hell?**
 - In ancient Israel, on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest made a sin offering of a bull and a goat. God instructed the priests that the carcasses of the bull and the goat were to be burned outside the camp of Israel. The reason for this was that spiritually speaking, the sins of the people had been transferred to the bull and the goat, thus making the animals' carcasses ceremonially "unclean." Anything considered ceremonially unclean had to be removed from the camp of Israel because God was in the midst of the camp. God's holiness demands that uncleanness be removed from his presence. God cannot sustain fellowship with uncleanness.
 - Le 16:27 "But the bull of the sin offering and the goat of the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place, shall be taken outside the camp, and they shall burn their hides, their flesh, and their refuse in the fire."
 - Scripture teaches that we will spend eternity with God in the New Jerusalem. Hell is outside the heavenly city, away from the presence of the Lord.
 - Re 22:14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. Re 22:15 Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.
 - 2Th 1:7 and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, 2Th 1:8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 2Th 1:9 These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power.

- C. S. Lewis called Hell the "Great Divorce" in his book of the same title. Hell divorces the wicked from God and from the righteous. Jesus explained that there is a great chasm fixed between Paradise (Abraham's Bosom) and Hell.
 - Lu 16:19 "Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. Lu 16:20 "And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, Lu 16:21 and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. Lu 16:22 "Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. Lu 16:23 "In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. Lu 16:24 "And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' Lu 16:25 "But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. Lu 16:26 'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.' Lu 16:27 "And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house Lu 16:28 for I have five brothers in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' Lu 16:29 "But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' Lu 16:30 "But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' Lu 16:31 "But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'"
- **Is God cruel?** Some imagine that Hell is a torture chamber where God exacts his revenge on the wicked. While Hell is a place of torment, it is not a place of torture. A torture chamber is a place where people are forced into torture against their will. But, Hell is the choice of those who will spend eternity there. The torment the wicked will experience will come from the realization that they are guilty and are receiving what they deserve.
 - The French Nobel Laureate and atheist who developed the philosophy of existentialism, Jean Paul Sartre, even noted that "the door of Hell is locked from the inside." We are all victims of our own decisions. We have no one else to blame.
 - Some argue that a loving God would not allow the suffering that Hell suggests. But, God allows suffering in the world even now. Remember, suffering is not the result of God's decisions, but man's. Man sinned in the Garden by rejecting God when he ate of the forbidden fruit. He was cast out of Paradise and lost the presence and fellowship of God by his own choice. This Fall of Man brought suffering and pain into the world. Man chose suffering and man has a choice to choose eternal bliss. Man now has a way back to Paradise by partaking of the fruit of another tree, the Cross. If man rejects that fruit, he is choosing suffering in Hell for eternity.

- **Is Hell permanent?** Some hold a view of Hell which is known as *Annihilationism*. This view of Hell argues that people only suffer in Hell for a period of time, and then they simply cease to exist. But annihilation would not be punishment, but rather the relief from punishment. However, this view of Hell is not supported in Scripture. The Bible states that Hell is an eternal condition without relief.
 - Da 12:2 "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.
 - Mt 18:8 "If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire.
 - 2Th 1:9 These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power,
 - Heb 6:2 "...the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment."
 - Jude 1:7 just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.
 - Since God is eternal, and the purpose of Hell is to provide a place that is away from the presence of God, Hell must necessarily exist for all eternity.
- **What about Purgatory?** The concept of a Purgatory is not biblical. The concept suggests that people who are not good enough to enter heaven when they die are instead sent to a place called "Purgatory" to be "purged" (or purified) of their sins. They receive punishment for a period of time and then they enter heaven. There 4 problems with this concept:
 - First, the concept of a Purgatory implies that people fall short of heaven because of their sin. But, the Bible teaches that it is not the sin per se that disqualifies a person from entering Heaven, but rather the person's failure to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. God has made provision for our sin, but it is up to us to embrace his provision (Christ the Lord).
 - Joh 12:48 "He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.
 - Matt 10:32-33 "Therefore everyone who confesses me before men, I will also confess him before my Father who is in heaven. "But whoever denies me before men, I will also deny him before my Father who is in heaven.
 - Luke 9:23-26 And he was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels."
 - Second, the Bible teaches only two departments, Heaven and Hell. Jesus explained that a person in one department may not transfer to the other. This argues against a Purgatory.
 - Lu 16:26 'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.'

- Third, the Bible teaches that there is no repentance in Hell.
 - Repentance and salvation are gifts and requires the active operation of the Holy Spirit in regeneration.
 - Ac 5:31 "He is the one whom God exalted to his right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.
 - 2Ti 2:25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, 2Ti 2:26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.
 - Eph 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.
 - Joh 16:8 "And he [the Spirit of Truth], when he comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment;
 - Tit 3:5 he saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to his mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,
 - Yet, Hell is "away from the presence of the Lord."
 - 2Th 1:9 These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power,
 - God's presence is unknown in Hell, his Spirit is not active there. He does not redeem there. The account of Lazarus and the rich man shows that the rich man is only experiencing carnal regret for his circumstances; not spiritual repentance for his sin against God. He wants deliverance, but he doesn't want God. There is no regeneration, repentance, faith, or salvation in Hell.
- Fourth, if Hell could convert sinners, then we could be saved apart from faith in Christ. If this were true, then the crucifixion would have been meaningless. But Jesus said:
 - Joh 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me.
- **How can I have joy in Heaven when my loved ones are in Hell?** There are 3 responses to this question:
 - First, we are not more merciful than God are we? When we ask this question, we are really questioning God's mercy. We are suggesting that we are more merciful than God. We indict God and place ourselves in the judgment seat against him. But, the Bible presents this picture of God:
 - Lam 3:21-25 But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him.
 - Ex 34:6-7 Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet he will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.

- Second, we can certainly enjoy a meal, even when we know others are starving, if we have tried to give them something to eat but they refused. Those in Hell were offered Heaven but have rejected God and His salvation. They received what they requested.
 - Ro 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- Third, in eternity God will heal our broken-heartedness by opening our eyes to the full truth. We will understand sin and its consequences and our part in choosing our destiny far better than we do now. We will know all things and he will remove our pain.
 - 1Co 13:9-12 For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.
 - Re 21:4 and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."