



Apologetics Wednesdays

LESSON 3 – THE DOCTRINE OF HELL & ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

Noel R. Vincent
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Noel@NoelVincent.com
832-544-4644

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DEFENDING YOUR FAITH – OUTLINE OF LESSONS

Defending Your Faith with Noel R. Vincent, M.A. in Christian Apologetics			
<i>Week</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Issues & Questions Addressed</i>
1	23-Mar	Theodicy: The Problem of Evil Part I	Did God create evil?
			Understanding the Skeptic's #1 Argument
			Why does God allow evil?
2	30-Mar	Theodicy: The Problem of Evil Part II	Can any good come from pain and suffering?
			Why do bad things happen to good people?
			Why do we suffer for Adam's sin?
3	06-Apr	Doctrine of Hell & Eternal Punishment	What exactly is hell: Divine Principle or Brutal Reality?
			Can a good God really punish people forever?
			What about people who have never heard the Gospel?
4	13-Apr	Arguing for God's Existence	Big Bang Cosmology: Why does anything exist at all?
			C. S. Lewis's Moral Argument
			Intelligent Design: Theory or Evidence of a Divine Creator?
5	20-Apr	Doctrine of the Trinity	Can anyone really understand trinitarianism?
			Defending the Triune Godhead
			Defeating False Gods
6	27-Apr	Jesus: Historicity, Nature, & Existence	Hypostasis: Understanding the God-Man
			Refuting False Resurrection Hypotheses
			Do credible, non-biblical, historical accounts of Jesus exist?

LESSON 3: DOCTRINE OF HELL & ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

Introduction: Good evening, and welcome back. Thank you for joining us tonight for *Lesson 3: The Doctrine of Hell & Eternal Punishment*. We are recording these sessions and making the complete lesson notes available, so that you can review the materials at your leisure. Remember that repetition is the mother of learning, and knowledge builds over time. Re-listening to the audios and following along with the study notes can help drive these truths home, so they become ready tools at your disposal when God presents you with opportunities to share. I am happy to dialogue off-line, so feel free to email me at Noel@NoelVincent.com.

For the past two weeks, we have been examining *The Problem of Evil* and learning to formulate thoughtful responses. Tonight's topic is the Doctrine of Hell, but in actuality, it's *The Problem of Hell*. Hell seems to make God out to be the bad guy. This conundrum will drive our study this evening, as we not only seek to understand (theology = faith seeking understanding), but also to formulate reasonable responses for the skeptic and the seeker.

SESSION 3.1 – WHAT EXACTLY IS HELL?

A. Various Titles for Hell:

1. **Gehenna:** The word most often translated in the New Testament as “Hell” is the Greek word, *Gehenna*, a helenization of the Hebrew word, *Hinnom*, meaning “wailing, moaning, grieving”, or “lamentation”.
 - a. Hinnom: Hinnom is a deep valley just outside the city of Jerusalem (you can visit it today) where King Solomon built an altar to the false god, Molech. Kings Ahaz and Manasseh, and idolatrous Israelites, offered their children there as live burnt sacrifices to Molech. Drums are said to have been used to drown out the cries of victims.
 - b. Ancient Landfill: During Jesus' time, animal carcasses were dumped there. It became the trash heap for the Jerusalem metro area. Carcasses and refuse were burned continually, and flames could be seen day and night in the valley. The putrid stench of rotting garbage mixed with the acrid smoke of burning animal and human flesh boiled up from the dreadful place and could be smelled for miles. It was considered the most unholy place in all of Israel.

- c. Gehenna: Thus, “Gehenna” is an apt term and metaphor for Hell’s continuous fires, agony, and destruction. Its mouth hangs open ready to receive its multitudes of multitudes of souls.

2. Other Words for Hell:

- a. Synonyms: Abaddon, Abyss, Bottomless Pit, Eternal Fire, Furnace of Fire, Lake of Fire, Second Death, Tartarus (of Greek mythology).
- b. Incorrect Titles: Sheol (Heb.)/Hades (Gr.) – which refers to the grave (the temporary abode of unsaved the dead).

B. Nature of Hell:

1. A Place, Not A State:

- a. Hell is a Place: It is not, as many believe, the life we experience now on earth. It was created (as a place) to house after the Judgement – Satan (the dragon) and his demons (that one-third of all the angels that fell), the beast (the antichrist), the false prophet (the counterfeit Holy Spirit), Satan’s children (all unbelieving human beings through the ages), and Death and Hades:

1. **Matt 24:41** *“Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, you accursed people, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;”*
2. **Rev 20:10** *“And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”*
3. **Rev 20:14** *“Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.”*
4. **John 8:44** *“You belong to your father the devil and you willingly carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks in character, because he is a liar and the father of lies.”*

2. **Permanent Reality**: The Bible states that Hell exists now and is a place of eternal suffering without relief (“weeping and gnashing of teeth” **Matt 8:12, 13:42**). 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.

3. Compared/Contrasted with Evil:

- a. **Absence of God’s Presence** - Like evil, though a place, Hell will not enjoy God’s presence. It will be utterly saturated with God’s absence and goodness. Worse than a vile prison with no guards.

- b. **Not a State of Being** - Unlike evil, which is the state of a thing in the vacuum of the departure of God's goodness, Hell is not a state of existence, but rather a real place.

4. **Compared/Contrasted with Heaven:**

- a. Non-physical – It's just as real in the non-physical realm as Heaven, which is the throne room of God (Isa 6, Eze 10, Rev 4).
- b. Future of the Unsaved - As Heaven (a/k/a "Third Heaven" 2Co 12:2) is the present abode of God and His throne in the non-physical realm, Hell is the future abode of:
 - 1. All people whose sins are still unforgiven at the Judgment.
 - 2. The counterfeit trinity: Dragon, Beast, and False Prophet.
 - 3. Demons, Death, and Hades.
- c. Hell is Empty
 - 1. Both Heaven and Hell are presently uninhabited by dead humans.
 - 2. Heaven is not the future abode of those whose sins are forgiven – rather, that will be the new earth and the eternal city of New Jerusalem (Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you..." John 14:3). "Paradise" was available at the cross.
 - 3. Hell is not the present abode of those whose sins will never be forgiven – their loci are separated into three divisions:
 - a. Abraham's Bosom – Old Testament/Pre-Cross Saints (Abraham, Lazarus, John the Baptist, etc.).
 - b. Paradise (possibly Eden) – Post-Cross Christians (Thief on the cross, Paul and the Apostles, my grandparents, and all born-again Christians).
 - c. The Grave (Sheol/Hades) – All nonbelievers through the ages (Judas, the rich man, presumably Adolph Hitler, and my father).

C. **Location of Hell:** Hell exists in the non-physical realm. It has no spatial locus (does not occupy physical space). It is "away from the presence of the Lord". C.S. Lewis called it the "*Great Divorce*" (i.e. – the separation of God from man).

- 1. **2Th 1:7-9** "*...the Lord Jesus will be revealed from Heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God, and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These people will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power*"
- 2. **Matt 25:41** "*Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, you accursed people, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;*"

3. **Rev 22:14-15** *“Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life, and may enter the city by the gates. Outside [of the city New Jerusalem] are the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral persons, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.”*

SESSION 3.2 – WHY DOES HELL EXIST?

Introduction: Millions of Americans reject the reality of Hell. The biblical concept of Hell is hard to swallow for many Christians, let alone non-Christians. Atheists have the worst time with Hell. It just seems unreasonable to so many people. A Pew Research poll in 2014 found that 72% of U.S. adults believe in Heaven, but, oddly, only 58% believe in Hell. In 21st century America, everyone likes rewards – every kid gets a trophy on the losing team, but no one likes consequences – we’ve removed corporal punishment from schools, we don’t punish criminals, we call good evil, and evil good.

- A. **Hell is a choice.** Far from being foisted upon the unsuspecting, Hell is chosen by those who enter therein. Hell is self-inflicted, unless God’s grace intervenes.
1. French philosopher, and father of existentialism, Jean-Paul Sartre, suggested that Hell is a place whose door is locked from the inside. Hell necessarily involves the volition of the sentenced, whose participation in their sentence turns the blame back upon the sinner.
 2. God doesn’t want us to sin, or choose Hell over Him. Nevertheless, He gives us the free will to choose, and we all choose separation/Hell (Rom 3 :10-12).
- B. **God is Holy.** God is separate and distinct from His creation, wholly other, and thus, untainted by sin. He must be separated from unrepentant sinners.
- C. **God is Just.** If there is no Hell, then God is not just. He cannot tolerate, ignore, or allow sin to go unpunished (Ro 2:5-16). He is slow to anger and gives time for repentance (Ps 145:8). But sooner or later, justice must come.
1. God knows where every body is buried. What justice would there be if the wicked went unpunished?
 2. God would be a worthless judge if everyone, wicked and righteous alike, received eternal life.
 3. Where would be the justice for the victims of pedophiles and serial killers, or the millions murdered in the name of communism, or slaughtered in The Holocaust, and so on, if there is no Hell?

- D. **God's sovereignty demands a Hell.** If there is no Hell, then God is not in ultimate control of the universe (sovereign). God must have victory over sin. It can't be allowed to continue for all eternity, without judgment or punishment. For good to triumph over evil, there must be a Hell.
- E. **Man's dignity demands a Hell.** Man is made in God's image with sovereign freedom to make his own moral choices, which is the basis of our dignity. If there is no Hell, man's freedom is denied, and he has no dignity. In *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis wrote "*There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God 'Thy will be done' and those to whom God says, 'Thy will be done.'*"
- F. **God's love demands a Hell.** God's ontological being (nature of His existence) is love. Love is not simply something God does, but it is what He is (1 Jn 4:16).
1. If there is no Hell, then God is not loving. True love does not coerce, but persuades. C. S. Lewis noted that God does not force us to love Him. He woos us. God does not override human will; He draws us to Himself.
 2. Hell allows separation from God. Norman Geisler argued that, because God's nature is love, He allows the freedom to choose to not love Him, and those who reject Him must be allowed to separate from Him.
- G. **The Crucifixion.** As humans, we are condemned to Hell for our corrupt nature and our sin. The Crucifixion of Christ implies a Hell. If there is no Hell (no penalty for sin), Jesus' crucifixion was meaningless. If people are not being saved from something (God's wrath in Hell), there is no need for a crucifixion.

SESSION 3.3 – APPLIED THEODICY: TWO DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

- A. **What about those who have never heard the gospel?**
1. **No one is undeserving of Hell simply because he has not heard the gospel.** Man has been given the necessary natural revelation sufficient to escape Hell, but man rejects it. Consider Ro 1:20-21, 25, 28, 32.
 2. **All people are entitled to eternal punishment in Hell for 3 reasons:**
 - a. We descended from Adam and received his evil nature through Seminal Generation. We cannot enter God's holy presence in eternity because we are evil, even if we never committed a sin.
 - b. We sinned by Seminal Headship since we were in Adam's loins when he sinned. Thus, we are guilty before God, even if we ourselves never committed a sin.
 - c. We have committed sins of our own, and someone must be punished.

3. **God is the Righteous Judge:** All who go to Hell gets what he deserves, that's *just*. We're all born standing in line for Hell. If by grace God elects to pluck some people out of the line and give them eternal life, it is no injustice for rest to get what they deserve by going to Hell. (**Mt 20:1-16**).
4. **Man's guilt is on his own head.** There are many who hear the preaching of the gospel and still do not repent. The question assumes that hearing the Gospel automatically results in repentance and faith. Preaching the Gospel is the means, but it is not the cause. Salvation is a result of God's unmerited election of a person for salvation. The reasons why God chooses one for salvation and not another reside solely within Him.

B. How is eternal punishment fair?

1. **Fairness is not an attribute of God.** God is not fair, or else all would be given the same parents, intellect, opportunities, etc. Variety in humanity necessitates *unfairness*. If God were fair, and all humans were identical, only one human would be necessary to satisfy God's desire for fellowship, and there would be billions of useless, redundant ones.
2. **God is *just* rather than *fair*.** The question is not of fairness, but of justice. It is quite just for the punishment of sinners to last throughout all eternity. There are at least four reasons why it only seems reasonable to question God on the eternal nature of Hell. The question assumes:
 - a. Too low a view of God's holiness;
 - b. Too low a view of sin and its offense to God;
 - c. Too high a view of human nature; and
 - d. Too high a view of man's sense of justice.
3. **The offense of sin.** Sin is so offensive to holy God that it must receive the maximum punishment of eternal separation from Him in Hell. Anything less than eternal Hell would be an inadequate response to the enormity and depravity of our sin.
4. **God's punishment of the damned is proportionate to their sin.** Consider Lk 12:47-48 or Mt 11:22-24 *"Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will be brought down to Hades! For if the [t]miracles that occurred in you had occurred in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment, than for you."*

5. **Human justice is inadequate.** When humans question God's sense of justice, they are elevating their sense of justice above His. Fallen humans are corrupt in their thinking, and can never attain to a perfect ethic. Only God is ethically perfect and just in all things.
6. **The damned do not repent.**
 - a. No punishment in Hell will bring about repentance or faith in Christ, because they are gifts from God (**2Tm 2:25-26, Eph 2 :8-9**).
 - b. The damned will regret their circumstances, sin, and rejection of Christ, but they will not repent and turn to God (**2 Co 7:9-10**).
 - c. The rich man does not repent (**Luke 16:22-31**), even though he is in extreme agony – he only despises his circumstances.
7. **God is eternal.** God's wrath does not diminish over time under entropy. His separation from eternally unrepentant sinners must be eternal to satisfy His eternal wrath. Neither is His knowledge of sin erased nor is His holy wrath appeased by the passage of time. Sin must be punished eternally.
8. **Just as punishments are eternal, so are rewards eternal.**
 - a. If one argues that, since a man only sinned during a short, finite life, he should not be punished eternally in Hell, then one must also agree that since a righteous man lived a short, finite life, that his reward in eternity should be cut short. If that were the case, then one would wonder, "Why any creation at all?"
 - b. God created man for eternal fellowship with Him. If He so arranged things that eventually He would be left alone again, His initial act of creation seems incomprehensible. On the contrary, man was created to exist eternally, whether in or out of fellowship with God, and ultimately, man chooses his own way.

C. **Annihilationism and Cruelty:**

1. Some hold a non-biblical view of Hell known as Annihilationism, which suggests people only suffer in Hell for a period of time, then cease to exist. But annihilation isn't punishment, it's relief from punishment.
2. Many hold to Annihilationism because they believe eternal punishment is cruel, and cannot reconcile God's supposed good nature with cruelty.

Conclusion: There is significant justification for Hell, which is the ultimate destination of the wicked. It is a place where terrible torment will be experienced forever by the enemies of God. Hell's inhabitants choose it by their rejection of God, who will not force anyone to serve Him. His love requires that He provide an eternal abode for those who reject His presence. God cannot allow sin to go unpunished, thus He provides an eternal abode for the unforgiven. God rules and reigns over the whole creation, and His triumph over evil is represented in Hell. God provided salvation through the sacrifice of His own Son. Those who are saved through faith in Christ are saved from God's wrath which is expressed in Hell. Without Hell, there would have been no need for Christ's death. Even those who have never heard the gospel still suppress the knowledge of what is revealed to them about God in the creation. Hell makes God neither unjust nor cruel, which are sins, God is pure and holy, and cannot sin. He is righteous and cannot be righteous without a Hell. Hell is both necessary and justified.
