

The Judgment of God And A Place Called HELL

The Bible declares, “I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.” (Jeremiah 17:10).

The subject of Hell can be very contentious. I recall an evangelist telling a group of us back in the 1970s that when he addressed a crowd of unbelievers, he could speak on nearly any subject without much trouble, but when he spoke about Hell, it often evoked an emotional negative response from one or two of the listeners. These days, evangelists rarely engage people in open-air campaigns, but the subject can still stir up much debate, even amongst Christians. Therefore, it is best to be well-armed with the correct answers.

This paper will briefly look at the following:

- Hell defined
- Past beliefs and attitudes
- The intermediate state
- Is Hell everlasting and is it just?
- The trial
- The effect of Hell on its occupants
- Summary
- A practical application of the doctrine

Hell defined

One authority makes the point that the English word ‘Hell’ “... is from a Teutonic root meaning ‘to hide’ or ‘to cover’”¹

The King James Version of the Bible uses the word ‘Hell’ quite broadly. In the Old Testament, it uses the word ‘Hell’ for ‘Sheol’ which is simply the place of the dead - the godly and the ungodly. For instance, “For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [*Sheol*]” (Psalm 16:10, KJV). It is in this sense that the ‘Apostles Creed’ uses the word when it declares that Jesus descended into Hell, and on the third day, rose again.

The New Testament often uses the word ‘Gehenna’ when referring to the ultimate place of the ungodly. In this paper, it is primarily the Greek word ‘Gehenna’ that I am referring to when I use the English word, ‘Hell’ as in, “... be in danger of the fire of Hell [*Gehenna*]” (Matt. 5:22).

The origin of the word ‘Gehenna’ is the valley of Hinnon located SW of Jerusalem. It is the place where people sacrificed children to the god Molech. King Josiah desecrated the site of sacrifice so that people could not continue in the abominable practice (2 Kings 23:10). This site became “a common refuse dump, a place of perpetual fire and loathsomeness”² A place that is a picture of the Hell to come for many people.

Past beliefs and attitudes

I rarely hear a sermon on Hell these days, perhaps that is why I can still vividly remember a sermon on the subject by Billy Graham back in the 1970s. He made the point that many people spend a lot of money to cure pain in their body, but those same people will live a Christ-denying life which will bring them to judgment before God and a place of pain called Hell. He then placed some emphasis on the pain that people

will suffer when they go to Hell. This type of preaching is typical of a group of preachers from an earlier period called the “Hellfire and brimstone preachers”.

They wanted their audience to firstly fear Hell, then take remedial action through seeking salvation in Christ. It is good that the Godless fear Hell, but some of the preaching/teaching was not balanced. A picture of Hell developed in the minds of many that was so terrible it became hard to reconcile the picture with a just God. One example of this comes from a gospel tract titled, *Time Stops for no one* which makes the false claim, “The Bible tells us that Hell will be a terrible place. It will be filled with anguish and pain beyond any human’s comprehension.”³

A motivation for the Jehovah’s Witness sect to deny the existence of an eternal Hell is the misunderstanding that an eternal Hell means eternal torture - unjust punishment. The *Watchtower* magazine (a Jehovah’s Witness periodical) states, “Jesus did not teach that God would maliciously torture the wicked forever.” On the same page, it further states, “No, God does not torture people eternally in hell.”⁴ In the *Watchtower* article, several passages of scripture are ignored and other passages taken out of context to deny an eternal Hell.

To protect the name of God from the terrible picture of Hell that has developed in the minds of many, some Bible teachers have resorted to ingenious interpretations of the text to argue that there is no Hell at all, or that it is a place of brief pain where the person is annihilated. The United Church of God for instance says on its website, “What happens to physical human beings who are thrown alive into a massive cauldron of fire? They burn up and are completely consumed.” Another view is that, souls are purified in Hell and transported to Heaven. Perhaps the top of the list of false ideas goes to the urban myth that the devil is in charge of Hell and he takes an active part in making others suffer.

Before continuing further, two points must be stated:

- Because God is perfect in His moral character, the Hell he has designed must be just, and seen to be just.
- The doctrine of Hell, when all of the scriptures are fully understood, will be in agreement with the above point.

In order to thoroughly deal with this subject, something needs to be said about the intermediate state.

The intermediate state

When a person dies, it is sometimes stated that the person has gone to Heaven, or, if the person was a non-Christian and was particularly wicked, it might be stated that he has gone to Hell. While those statements will ultimately be true, they are a simplification of what takes place. When a person dies, there is an intermediated phase which he or she passes through. The exception to this rule is when Christ returns. Those who are dead in Christ will be raised first, then those who are alive will be changed and taken up to be with Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:15-18). So those who are alive at his coming will not go through the intermediate state.

In the intermediate state, people are without a body. Our old body will remain on earth when we die, and it will decay (Acts 13:36). Only the soul and spirit of a person departs this earth at the moment of death. The apostle Paul speaks of being absent from the body from the moment of death, "Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord." (2 Corinthians 5:6-8).

In another passage we read, "If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body." (Philippians 1:22-24).

All who have died wait for the resurrection of a new body. For those who go to be with the Lord, it will add to the joy which they already have, and for those who are ultimately cast into Hell, it will add to the misery they endure.

The resurrection body will not suffer decay. It will be imperishable. The apostle tells us, "So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body." (1 Corinthians 15:42-44, see also v. 50).

The Bible speaks of only two bodies. The body we have now and the body we receive when we are raised from the dead. So quite clearly, in the intermediate state, people do not have a body. When the apostle John saw those who had died, he did not see their bodies, but only their souls. "... When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained." (Revelation 6:9).

The Westminster Confession sums up the situation well when it says, "The souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies."

The apostle Paul spoke of consciously being with Christ in the intermediate state, "... We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord." (2 Corinthians 5:8). The fact that we will behold Christ immediately after we die is clearly stated by Christ himself. He told the penitent sinner on the cross beside him, "... 'I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise'" (Luke 23:43).

I have spent some time on the situation for the Christian in the intermediate state for good reason. The Bible says little on the intermediate state for the non-Christian. Knowing what happens to the Christian is helpful because several passages of Scripture indicate that the non-Christian takes a somewhat parallel course. The non-Christian upon death is also without a body. He too awaits the resurrection of his body. The apostle Paul said, "and I have the same hope in God as these

men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked." (Acts 24:15). The book of Daniel also speaks of the resurrection of all of mankind. "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt." (Daniel 12:2).

We learn from the parable of the wheat and the tares (or weeds) that the godly and ungodly will be on the earth together until harvest/judgment time (Matt. 13:24-30). "Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn." (Matt. 13:24-30).

After the resurrection, Christians will be judged before gaining the reward they deserve. Paul told the Christians at Corinth, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." (2 Cor. 5:10). He also told the Church in Rome, "... For we will all stand before God's judgment seat." (Rom. 14:10).

From this we can see that the Christian is not able to receive his full reward until after he has stood before God's judgment seat.

One other thing must be considered, and that is the final destiny for the believer. Christians will dwell with God forever upon a renewed earth. The Bible says, "'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" (Rev. 21:1-4). Because it is a common misconception that Heaven will be a place out in the far reaches of the universe, I will quote further passages of Scripture.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." (Matt. 5:5). From the book of Romans we learn, "It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith." (Rom. 4:13). So here we have it clearly stated that Abraham and his offspring - meaning all believers (Rom. 2:28-29) will inherit the earth. For more on Abraham, see '*God's Covenant With Abraham*' on the web site.

Just as the Christian must face the judgment seat of Christ before his final reward, so too, the wicked must face the judgment of God before entering his ultimate place of punishment.

The Bible says regarding the great judgment and the final place for the wicked. "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death

and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." (Rev. 20:12-15). From the above, we can see that a clear sequence is set out. The wicked wait for the resurrection of a supernatural body. They then face judgment, after which they are thrown into the lake of fire.

The wicked angels (demons or evil spirits) who rebelled against God must also follow a sequence toward their final destiny. "And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home - these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day." (Jude 1:6). See also 2 Peter 2:4.

Not all evil spirits are kept in this place of darkness - the Abyss. Those who are free are fearful of going there. That is clear from a request to Jesus of demons in a possessed man. "And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss. A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into them, and he gave them permission." (Luke 8:31-32).

Many demons are held in the Abyss until the day of judgment. Regarding Godless humans, the Bible gives no detail, but it seems logical that the human wicked upon death go to the same place - the Abyss. There is no necessity on theological grounds that they must go to a different place.

So far, we can see that the Christian and the non-Christian follow a parallel sequence of events.

1. The righteous in Christ and the wicked will remain together on the earth until harvest/judgment time.
2. Both are without a body upon death.
3. Both receive a taste of what is to come in the intermediate location.
4. Both are raised with a supernatural body.
5. Both face judgment.
6. Both enter their final everlasting destiny.

At this point, I must introduce a passage of Scripture which appears to overthrow some of the above neat sequence of events. The passage tells a story of a rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). A contentious point regarding this story is over the question of its nature. Is it a story relating a real event, or is it a parable? If the story is a real event, then every part of the story must be true. If it is a parable, then it is a story made up to convey certain truths.

In favour of the claim that it was a real event is the plain matter of fact way in which it begins. "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day." (16:19). A rich man in great luxury and a poor man at his gate in great poverty was a distinct possibility in the time of Jesus.

There are parts to this story which indicate that it is a parable. Angels carry Lazarus to Abraham's side, literally 'bosom' (16:22). Do angels carry the righteous to Abraham's

side, or is this part of the story used to emphasise the special welcoming treatment given to Lazarus in contrast to what happens to the rich man? The rich man sees Abraham in Paradise (literally 'sees Abraham from afar') and calls out to him (16:23-24). Is it a fact that the wicked in Hell can call out to people in heaven, and then strike up a conversation with them? The rich man asks that water be placed on his tongue (16:24). Where did he get his tongue from if his body is not yet resurrected? What did the angels carry and what did the rich man see if the righteous do not yet have a body? If the story relates a real event, then it means the rich man will at some point in the future be taken out of Hell, brought before the great judgment, have his sentence pronounced, and be cast back to where he came from. That sequence of events obviously devalues the importance of having the great judgment. As can be seen from the above, treating the story as a real past event creates many problems. Treating it as a parable tends to focus the attention of the reader on the lessons to be drawn from the story.

Is Hell everlasting?

Some, for instance the Jehovah's Witness sect, believe the wicked are quickly consumed in the flames of Hell, which means that it is not everlasting. A simplistic reading of John 3:16 seems to support that view. This well-known verse says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16). The use of the word 'perish' in this verse seems to support the idea that the ungodly will be completely destroyed - annihilated. The Greek is literally 'not may perish' (Gk. *me apoletai*). That 'perish' may not necessarily mean complete destruction, but rather, destruction of well-being, can be seen from how it is used in other passages of Scripture. For instance, "the wineskins will perish", "be ruined" (NIV, Luke 5:37). "... food that spoils ..." or literally "food which is perishing" (John 6:27). The same Greek word is used of lost sheep. That is, lost to the shepherd and his care, metaphorically, spiritual destitution. See Luke 15:4, 6. In John 3:16, the word 'perish' is used in the sense of loss of well-being. Of being left spiritually destitute and ruined.

The fire of Hell is eternal (Greek *Aionios*) "... it is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire." (Matt. 18:8).

It can not be argued that the Greek word means temporary because the same word is used to describe God "... the eternal God, ..." (Rom. 16:26). It is used to describe our redemption "... an eternal redemption." (Heb. 9:12).

The same Greek word is used to state the duration of the final state of both the righteous in Christ, and the wicked. "Then they will go away to eternal [*Aionion*] punishment, but the righteous to eternal [*Aionion*] life." (Matt. 25:46). Clearly, the duration of the final state for everyone is the same.

Some fear those who can kill the body, but Jesus informs people that the first priority is to fear the one who has power over Hell. He said, "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of

those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.” (Luke 12:4-5). See also Matt. 10:28. Quite clearly, Jesus is not telling people that the suffering of Hell is very brief, and therefore of no real concern. He tells us, “... the fire never goes out” (Mark 9:44).

What is Hell like?

At this point we come to the heart of the study. Firstly I will deal with the Bible’s description of Hell before looking at its effect upon its victims.

In Revelation chapter twenty, it is called “the lake of burning sulphur” (v. 10) and “the lake of fire” (20:14-15). A place of fire is a typical description of Hell. For instance:

Matt. 3:12 “... burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”
 Matt. 5:22 “... anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell”
 Matt. 13:42 “They will throw them into the fiery furnace...”
 Matt. 25:41 “... the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”
 Mark 9:44 “... the fire never goes out”
 Other references include Luke 3:9, 17, 16:24, Heb. 10:27, James 3:6.

Hell is just

Now I must introduce one more parallel situation between the righteous and the wicked. All of the righteous in Christ go to Heaven and are rewarded for their good deeds. The Lord tells us, “Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.” (Rev. 22:12). See also Eph. 6:8, Col. 3:24, Heb. 11:26. Not everyone has the same reward.

A parallel situation happens in Hell. All of the wicked go to Hell, but they do not suffer the same amount of punishment. They suffer according to what their deeds deserve. The Bible depicts Hell as a place of just punishment. Jesus told a story which tells of a situation between a master and a servant to show that some will be punished more in Hell than others.

“That servant who knows his master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.” (Luke 12:47-48).

In another passage, after describing the bad behaviour of some of the religious authorities, Jesus says, “... Such men will be punished most severely.” (Luke 20:47). The above passage makes no sense if everyone is given the same level of punishment.

A further indication that much of the suffering in Hell is personal comes from the use of the word ‘worm’. The Bible says regarding the worm, “where ‘their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched’” (Mark 9:48). The Bible says little about the worm. Perhaps the ‘worm’ is an awakened

conscience which gives the person no rest. If that is the case, it would certainly be personal and just, because the greater the sin, the greater the torment for the person concerned. The primary things which can be definitely stated about the worm is that it is ‘their worm’, and that it will not die, it will remain forever.

The Bible is clear on the point that people get what they deserve, it declares, “I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.” (Jeremiah 17:10). The punishment that God gives will be just and will be seen to be just. “... he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth.” (Psalm 96:13).

The trial

A popular view of the trial of mankind is one where God sits on his throne and simply pronounces judgment. It is God versus mankind. God certainly has the right and the ability to judge, and then execute the verdict. God took swift action after the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. He slew them after they had acted deceitfully toward the Church (Acts 5:1-11).

God can give a perfect judgment because he knows everything, “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” (Heb. 4:13).

Although ultimately it is against God that mankind sins, and ultimately, it is to Him that we must give an account of ourselves, “For God will bring every deed into judgment. ...” (Ecclesiastes 12:14), nevertheless, He will involve mankind in the judgment process.

The apostle Paul rebukes the poor behaviour of the Corinthians with, “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? ...” (1 Cor. 6:2-3).

The saints will not only judge angels, but also fellow human beings. Jesus revealed to his listeners some of the enthusiasm with which at least some of mankind will be involved in the judgment, he said, “The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here.” (Matt. 12:41-42).

God does not need the testimony of the accusers to arrive at a verdict. He knows the correct judgment before the above process begins. God is allowing mankind to take part in the process to satisfy the needs of man. The action of the accusers - ‘will stand up’ - conveys a sense of indignation at the wickedness of the guilty party. Their actions also reveal their thoughts on the justice of Hell. Quite clearly, they do not think Hell is unjust, otherwise they would not be so eager to condemn the failings of some of fellow mankind.

The punishment

Some years back, I heard a preacher on the radio give his

view on Hell. He asked his audience to imagine holding their hand over a lit candle and to think of the pain they would receive. To understand Hell, they had to imagine their whole body being in flames. There are several problems with this widely accepted view.

- (a) The body which is resurrected is not the same as the flesh and blood body, therefore, sensations will be different.
- (b) The pain level in the Bible's version of Hell does not match that of the imaginary and sensational version. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, we should note that the rich man does not scream endlessly from the pain. He is able to have a conversation and describe his experience. He requests that some water be brought and placed on his tongue to relieve his suffering. This indicates a measured amount of suffering to fit his crime.

We should be mindful of the fact that the sin of the rich man was great. He had the means to help the poor man through his wealth, and he also had the power because of his rank, indicated by his purple robe. He chose to be self-indulgent toward himself, and quite heartless toward the poor man. He thought he could treat the poor man with contempt and get away with it; he was wrong. Because the sin of the rich man is great, his suffering is great in comparison to many others who will suffer in Hell. The suffering of the rich man does not go beyond what he deserves.

As stated earlier, the story is a parable, however, the degree of suffering part of the parable needs to be close to the truth. It does not make sense that Jesus would under or overstate what the ungodly can expect.

Jesus spoke of the jealousy the wicked will experience. "There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out." (Luke 13:28).

We can see from this passage that some of the suffering that the wicked will receive will come from their sense of loss when they see many in the Kingdom of God, but themselves shut out. I think it can be argued that it would be rather pointless to mention the jealousy element of suffering if the overwhelming suffering of Hell was like that of holding a flesh and blood person over the flames of a fire.

- (c) Shame and everlasting contempt will be the lot of the wicked (Daniel 12:2). This indicates mental suffering as well as physical suffering. Here again, it would be pointless mentioning shame and contempt if the experience of Hell is one of extreme torture.
- (d) The Bible says of those who reject the worship of God and worship the beast, "And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name." (Rev. 14:11).

In summary:

- The punishment is personal, *their* worm will never die.
- The punishment of the wicked is in accordance with what their deeds deserve.
- They suffer jealousy.
- They suffer thirst.
- They suffer shame and everlasting contempt.
- The smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever.

In this age, there is much unjust suffering. Jesus suffered unjustly. In fact, he was familiar with suffering (Isaiah 53:3). In the age to come, there will be no unjust suffering. Any suffering the wicked receive must be within God's strict rules of justice which are naturally much higher than that of any human standard.

The no suffering for the wicked after death view (annihilation) is supported by Atheists, and a very brief suffering followed by annihilation (consumed in flames) is supported by the Jehovah's Witness sect, the Seventh Day Adventists and a few others. That idea is justice denied for those who have been terribly wronged by the ungodly. It also denies God's vengeance upon sin. The Bible tells Christians, "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord." (Rom. 12:19). See also Deut. 32:35, Heb. 10:30-31, Rev. 6:10.

From the above passage, there are several points which are relevant to our discussion. Note the carefully measured amount of suffering for the wicked which come out of the words, "leave room for God's wrath". The warning here is against anger and revenge, because punishment, particularly excessive punishment, will result in no room for the exercise of God's punishment for that particular sin in the age to come.

This passage is also a warning to the criminal who escapes punishment on this earth. He is only storing up punishment for himself on that great day when God calls all mankind to account for the deeds they have committed on this earth. Further to the point that the actions of Christians on earth can influence the outcome of those who turn against God, the passage goes on to say, "... On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.'" (Rom. 12:19-20). This shows that acts of love given out in the face of hatred, will make matters worse for the unrepentant sinner.

It is well-known that some societies in the past were excessively harsh in dealing with criminals. God forbids his people from being excessive with their punishment. They must not beat a man more than forty times. "When men have a dispute, they are to take it to court and the judges will decide the case, acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty. If the guilty man deserves to be beaten, the judge shall make him lie down and have him flogged in his presence with the number of lashes his crime deserves, but he must not give him more than forty lashes. If he is flogged more than that, your brother will be degraded in your eyes." (Deuteronomy 25:1-3).

If God expects judges to examine a man thoroughly and then give a just judgment, then it can hardly be argued that he will act differently himself on Judgment Day. Jesus informs us that the judgment to come will be very thorough. “But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.” (Matt. 12:36).

While planning to write this paper, two Christians from quite different theological backgrounds gave their view on Hell. One was of the view that the wicked will be annihilated. The other had recently finished reading a book on Hitler’s Nazi regime. He said, “After reading that book, it makes you glad there is a Hell”. So which of the two is right? Actually their views don’t count. It is what the Bible tells us that matters. The main various views can be summed up as follows:

- Hell is a place of extreme never-ending suffering.
- Hell is a place of brief extreme suffering where the person is consumed (annihilated) in the flames.
- Hell is simply the grave.
- Hell is a place of eternal moderate pain. The suffering is in accordance with the level of evil in the person’s life.

Of all the above views, the last is the only one which fits comfortably with the whole of Scripture. It is the only view which meets God’s demands for the punishment of evil and at the same time, meet his standard of justice. For those who think God can let sin go unpunished, I must ask the question, If that is the case, then why did God punish his own Son on behalf of the redeemed in Christ?

A correct view of Hell affects my understanding of my salvation. If Hell is a place of unjust suffering, then God had to save me to rescue me from a suffering I don’t deserve. But if Hell is a place of just suffering, then God could have let me go to the suffering I deserve, and that would have been just. The wonder of my salvation is that God sent his Son to the cross to save me from a punishment I rightly deserve. It is a case of mercy and love shown to one who does not deserve mercy and love. My own life merits me Hell. It is only the life of Christ in my place, the ‘substitutionary atonement’, which merits me Heaven.

The Bible describes the salvation of sinners as being based on the grace and mercy of God. It is never described as being based on moral necessity, that is, based on Hell being so extreme (unjust) in its punishment that God is morally obliged to save sinners.

God Never Fails

We will take the above important point a little further. Lets imagine one person in Hell receives punishment just one inch beyond what he deserves - figuratively speaking. In that situation we have the unthinkable false view:

- God is morally corrupt because he has punished someone beyond what they deserve. Or:
- God is morally just, but lacks the power to exercise correct justice with all individuals.

- Or worse still. He is a God who fails on both accounts.

God can not fail on any account. That is the teaching of the Bible and the Reformers. The God who cannot fail stands at the heart of ‘Reformed Theology’. The starting point of Reformed Theology is God himself. Now lets look at our subject from the perspective of Reformed Theology - the attributes of God. God is all powerful (omnipotent), all knowledgeable and wise (omniscient), and present everywhere (omnipresent). He is also holy - he can not tolerate sin.

When we start with God and ask ourselves what sort of Hell will the above God create, the only sensible conclusion is that it will be a just Hell. “... God is light; in him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). Righteousness is not simply a right frame of mind or attitude. It also involves right actions. God declares to us in Scripture, “He who does what is right is righteous ...” (1 John 3:7). This command to us comes from one who is perfect in thought and actions.

This now brings us to an important point regarding the subject of theology. Theology should agree in both directions, that is, if a student of the Bible looks at the attributes of God and comes to one conclusion, then looks at another subject and comes to a conflicting conclusion, then he needs to study one or both subjects in further depth because, when fully understood, there is agreement between both.

Not surprisingly, most of the great Bible teachers have been ‘reformed’ in their approach. This group includes such men as Charles Spurgeon - the prince of preachers, George Whitefield - the most prominent evangelist of the 18th century awakening, Matthew Henry - the highly acclaimed Bible commentator, Martin Luther and John Calvin - both great leaders in the reformation.

A somewhat opposite approach to studying Scripture is Arminianism. The less rigorous approach of the Arminian can leave him with the unspoken idea that God is to a minor degree at least, a failed God. God fails to create a Hell that is just with the consequence that the great reformation doctrine that we are saved by the **grace** of God is watered down. An underlying thought is that we are saved out of moral necessity, or, God must be failing if he is not saving most of the people on the earth.

The doctrine of Hell in evangelism

A prominent idea in the thinking of many Atheists is the view that Christianity is a spent force. It has little influence in society, therefore, it is not something which should be seriously considered. Some time back, I was engaged in a conversation with a chap who possessed a good intellect and was proud of his achievements in life. He was also proud of the theory of evolution which he felt very secure in; problems with the theory are revealed on my web site.

Our conversation moved to the subject of origins. He enthusiastically aired his ideas that there is no need for God. It was clear that he was not going to let me fully explain the problems with his ideas, he kept cutting me short. I decided to change tact and go straight to the subject of the judgment to come.

He was not prepared for the sudden change of direction in the conversation. He stopped talking and listened with a

concerned look on his face as I described to him the conditions of Hell. My description of Hell was troubling to him because it made a lot of sense. He found it hard to dismiss what I was saying, no matter how much he would have loved to have done so.

It has been my experience with many, that underneath all of the bravado and loud proclamations that there is no God, there is the lurking feeling that one day they will need to give an account of themselves before the Almighty. As the Bible declares, "... man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." (Hebrews 9:27).

Today we live in a society which has an emphasis on feeling good. Manufacturing and advertising is geared to making people content and comfortable. This emphasis on feeling good has found its way into the Church to such an extent, that there is little said in some quarters on the uncomfortable subject of Hell. Prior to the nineteenth century, preachers considered it their duty to warn people of the judgment to come.

The apostle Paul spoke on the judgment to come. The Bible declares, "As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, 'That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.'" (Acts 24:25).

Even though Paul was under trial before Felix, he still did not go soft on the gospel message, he was prepared to tell Felix what he needed to hear. Two thousand years later, the message Paul declared is still relevant.

I will close with a passage of scripture mentioned earlier.

"...he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth." (Psalm 96:13).

End Notes

1. Hell, "*The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*", Ed. Merrill C. Tenney, Vol. 3, p. 114.
2. Hell, "*Baker's Dictionary of Theology*", p. 267.
3. "*Time stops for no one*", Author unknown, Little Red Book, 2004. Printed with permission by Southland Baptist Press, Qld, Australia, p. 4.
4. *The Watchtower*, 01 November 2008, p. 8.

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