

Monday Morning Rewind – February 8, 2010

Good morning! As you drive to and from work today, is there another world—thousands and thousands of feet beneath the streets you travel—where the souls of the damned are tormented in the unquenchable and unending fires of hell?

Many believe this to be true and supported in the scriptures. But is it? On Sabbath, we continued our Community Conversations series by asking the question, “Would a loving God burn sinners in hell for millions and millions of years?” Why ask the question? Because God’s character has been called into question, and multitudes have turned away from the Christian faith because of the doctrine of eternal torment.

One atheist wrote: “...any God who would send people to such a place can only be described as a mindless monster. Alternatively, if God unconditionally loves everyone and has the ability to pull them out of Hell, but does not, then he is still an insane tyrant.”

To possess a faith that matters, our opinions are irrelevant. We must go to the Word of God to answer the question and get to the truth. Rewind to 2 Peter 3:7, 10-12. Note that **the earth and the ungodly are destined to be destroyed by fire (WHEN?) on the Day of Judgment**. Hell? Yes! Hell *now*? No. It is being reserved for the “Day of Judgment”—the “Day of the Lord.”

There is no mistaking that a destruction by fire is a reality. The question now becomes, does the Bible support the popular belief that unrepentant sinners suffer the conscious punishment of hellfire in body and soul for all eternity? Or does the Bible teach that the wicked are annihilated by God at the second death? Does hellfire torment the lost eternally or consume them permanently?

Origins of hell. It’s important to remember that **the doctrine of an eternally burning hell is dependent upon the belief in the immortality of the soul**. This dualistic view of human nature sees man consisting of a mortal body and an immortal soul that survives the death of the body and goes either to hell or to paradise. This dualistic view, and the belief in an eternally burning hell, has its origins, not in Scripture, but in Ancient Egypt.

Scripture, however, teaches a holistic view of human nature, whereby man doesn’t *have* a soul, but is a living soul. Rewind to Genesis 2:7; Psalm 104:29; Genesis 3:19 to see that **dust is the destination for those who die (the first death) not Paradise or Hell**.

However, the Greeks and Romans borrowed the Egyptian view, and the Christian church gradually adopted it towards the end of the second century A.D. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (354-430 A.D.), became the most influential theologian and writer in defining the Catholic doctrine of hellfire. According to Augustine, Hell is real, severe, just, meted out in retribution, and endless. He said the lost are “not permitted to die.” For them, “death itself dies not.”

Here, then, are the facts we uncovered, concerning hell:

- **Hell was never intended for humans. It was meant for the devil and his angels. (See Matt. 25:41.)**
- **God takes no delight in the destruction of the wicked. (Ezek. 33:11)**
- **The “tares” (children of the wicked one/them which do iniquity) are burned at the “-harvest” which is “the end of the world.” (Matt. 13:38-42. See also 2 Peter 2:9 and Matt. 16:27.)**
- **Total destruction, *not* perpetual torment, is the purpose and effect of hell fire. (See Mal. 4:1,3.)**
- **It is the fire that is eternal, not what is put in it! (See Jude 7; 2 Peter 2:6.)**

For mortals “forever and ever” means for as long as mortal life lasts (see 1 Sam. 1:22, 28). For those who have immortality (the saved who have put on immortality in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye **at the last trumpet** – 1 Cor. 15:51, 52) it means without end. The wicked cannot burn forever because they did not experience the Resurrection of Life. They remain unchanged meaning they are still mortal at the Resurrection of damnation. They burn for as long as their mortal life lasts and then they perish. The smoke which Rev. 14:11 depicts as rising “forever and ever” is evidence that the fire has done its work of complete consumption. (Compare with Psalm 37:20 and Obadiah 16.)

The ultimate fate of the lost is destruction by eternal fire and not punishment by eternal torment. Romans 6:23 says that the wages of sin is “death” not eternal life in hellfire. John 3:16 says for God so loved the world that He gave His only son so that whosoever believes on him should not perish [*apollumi*] (To destroy fully). If hell burned sinners forever with no end then God would not be “destroying” anything. And in fact, they would possess eternal life just like the saved.

John calls the "Lake of Fire" the "second death" in Rev. 20:14. Are the wages of sin really death or not? If, according to Augustine, the lost are "not permitted to die" because for them, "death itself dies not," the Lake of fire cannot in any sense be called the "Second death." And thus, Augustine, and those who follow his teachings, align themselves with the serpent in saying, "You will not surely die" (Gen. 3:4).

Eternal torment serves Satan's purposes in making God to be a liar, and, as a bonus, making God to be a sadist of the worst kind. *God can take care of evil without becoming evil Himself to do it! And we can see His solution in the cross.*

By stripping away the pagan foundations of this doctrine, we exalt the cross of Christ and exonerate the character of God. The good news about hell this morning is that God's wrath against sin fell upon His Son on the cross so it needn't fall on sinners. Jesus paid the wages of sin for all. To reject His sacrifice on the cross is to agree to pay the wages of sin yourself, which is eternal death. This is not necessary, however. Eternal life is the free gift God has made available to all. Choose life. –Pastor Randy

p.s. We couldn't cover this vast subject in just one sermon, so come to part 2 Wednesday night, February 10 at 7:00 PM. The Rich Man and Lazarus will be among the issues discussed.

Randy Maxwell
Pastor, Kuna Seventh-day Adventist Church
www.kunasdachurch.org
2 Chron. 7:14

"The need is great. The key is prayer. The time is now."