

Where Will The Faithful & The Sinner Go?

Introduction

1. This lesson forms part of the series of lessons on the fundamental teachings of the Christian faith in which the focus of the lesson is on the reward of the faithful and the punishment of the unrepentant sinner.
 - a. The fact that there is going to be a day when we all will be recompensed for the lives we have lived is an essential teaching of the gospel, as witnessed by Christ and His apostles.
 - 1) Our appearance before God's judgment throne is determined by divine decree (2 Corinthians 5:10 cf. Hebrews 9:27).
 - 2) It is referred to as the 'Day of Judgment' – total of 9 references
 - 3) Apostles Paul, Peter and John all make references to it (Acts 10:42; 1 John 4:17; Acts 24:25).
 - b. It is not only important that we recognise we are going to be recompensed but also the nature of that recompense in respect of our standing before God in this life.
 - 1) Christians can look forward to the Day of Judgment with confidence and hope (1 John 4:17; Romans 8:24-25).
 - 2) The unrepentant sinner and those that reject the gospel will perish (John 3:16 cf. Luke 13:3-5).
2. There are many today that dispute that the hope of heaven has been universally promised to all the faithful as well as denying the existence of hell as a place of eternal punishment. The following quotes are a sample of what they believe:
 - a. Jehovah Witnesses:
 - 1) "These 144,000 Christians, including Jesus' faithful apostles, are raised to life in heaven...so those remaining ones of the 144,000 who die in our day are instantly resurrected to life in heaven...The vast majority of mankind, however, have the prospect of being resurrected in the future to life in Paradise on earth (What The Bible Really Teaches, pg.74)".
 - 2) "What about all the people who did not serve Jehovah because they never knew about him? These billions of 'unrighteous' ones will not be forgotten. They too will be resurrected and given time to learn about the true God and to serve him...this period is what the Bible refers to as Judgement Day (ibid, pg.72-73)".
 - 3) "Hence the English word 'hell' to conform with the original expression of the condition for the dead and according to its original meaning, scripturally applied to gravedom, the common grave of all mankind, good and bad alike, in an unconscious state without suffering or pleasure (Make Sure Of All Things, pg.155)".
 - b. Universalists:
 - 1) "Christian universalism is the position that all mankind will ultimately be saved through Jesus whether or not faith is professed in Him in this life. It claims that God's qualities of love, sovereignty, justice, etc., require that all people be saved and that eternal punishment is a false doctrine (Matt Slick)".
3. The two main objections illustrated in these quotes are that: heaven is promised to all but a few Christians / faith is not a requirement, and that the notion of hell as a place of eternal torment is both unscriptural and repugnant to God.
4. Do the scriptures give justification to these views? What is the whole scriptural idea of the Day of Judgment? Will Hell be a state of non-existence or a place where sinners will spend eternity?

I. Alternate terms, One Idea

- A. Terms such as the 'final judgment' and 'last judgment' are not found in Scripture but they correspond to scriptural terms such as the 'Day of Judgment' and the 'Day of the Lord', described by Vine's as the 'day of His manifested judgment on the world'.
 1. This day will bring about a manifestation of God's last and final judgment in respect to man and his eternal destiny, described variously in the New Testament as:
 - a. The 'Day of Judgment' (Matthew 11:22; 12:36).
 - b. The 'Judgment' (Luke 10:14; 11:31-32).
 - c. The 'day of wrath and revelation of God' (Romans 2:5).

- d. The 'Judgement to come' (Acts 24:25).
- e. The 'Judgment of the great day' (Jude 6).
2. This judgment of eternal consequence upon mankind is to be executed by and at the Coming of Jesus in awesome display of divine majesty and power (Matthew 16:27; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).
 - a. It is through Jesus that God will judge all men for actions in this life (Acts 17:31 cf. Matthew 7:21-23; Romans 14:10).
 - b. Christ's resurrection is our assurance of the judgement to occur when Christ comes again (1 Corinthians 4:5; Acts 1:9-11 cp. Matthew 24:3, 34; Revelations 1:7).
 - c. The Lord's awesome demonstration of power in judgement will extend to the physical destruction of the universe (cf. 2 Peter 3:3-13 cp. Matthew 24:35; Hebrews 1:11-12; Revelations 20:11).

II. Where Will The Faithful and The Sinner Go?

- A. In terms of the different destinies of the Christian and the non-Christian there are a wide variety of beliefs held by different Christian groups. But what is not disputed is that the Bible teaches something about heaven and hell. The only question is what?
 1. Does heaven represent one hope for a chosen few and a restored earth another hope for the rest?
 2. Is the traditional notion of hell borrowed from paganism and imposed upon Christian teaching?
 3. From where does the idea of hell as representing eternal torment arise; from men or God?
- B. On the question of heaven as being the home and reward of all the faithful there is clear and overwhelming scriptural evidence, notwithstanding the fundamental error of premillennialism.
 1. There is for the Christian one hope – a single expectation described and presented in the gospel (Romans 8:24-25; Ephesians 1:18; 4:4; Colossians 1:23).
 - a. The one hope of the gospel marks it as a single thing and from any other thing, as in one God etc.
 - b. Apostolic insight tells us that all Christians share a single hope, not a multiplicity of hopes.
 - c. One is accursed that teaches another gospel – another hope (Galatians 1:6-9; 5:5).
 2. The New Testament reveals a number of things that are involved in the one hope of the gospel, but ultimately it is the hope of being eternally with God in heaven.
 - a. Christians are to look to the revelation of Jesus and the realization of the promise of hope they hold (Titus 2:11-13 cf. Colossians 3:4; Hebrews 9:28).
 - b. The goal of the Christian's hope is to be taken to heaven and to live eternally with God (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 cf. John 14:1-3; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelations 21:1-4).
 - c. It is those that faithfully obey God that are promised eternal life and immortality (Romans 2:5-7; 1 Corinthians 15:50-57; Philippians 3:20-21).
- C. The punishment of hell is clearly set against the reward of heaven, which in itself says much about it as a place and in regard to the duration of the experience of the punishment. Punishment is experienced or else it is not punishment. Can annihilation be explained as the punishment of hell?
 1. The word 'hell' is Anglo-Saxon used in place of the Greek word 'Gehenna' which in Old and New Testament times was the name of a site in Jerusalem for burning dead animals and refuse.
 - a. "This was originally the valley of Hinnom, south of Jerusalem, where the filth and dead animals of the city were cast out and burned (Thayer)." "Originally the Valley of Hinnom, near Jerusalem, Gehenna became among the Jews the synonym for the place of torment in the future life (ISBE)."
 - b. Previously the site of the vilest form of idol worship with Jews sacrificing their children in fire eliciting God's extreme anger and judgement – the place then became associated with judgment and burning (Jeremiah 7:31-34; 19:1-13; 2 Kings 23:10).
 - c. In Norse mythology, hell was the specific name for the underworld reserved for the damned in contrast to Valhalla, a place of slain heroes.
 2. A reliable translation of the English Bible will show the word 'hell' appearing 12 twelve times in the New Testament, all but once by Jesus Himself. The question is what was Jesus teaching by employing the notoriety of Gehenna?

- a. Firstly, He taught hell was a future judgment against unrepentant sin (Matthew 5:22, 29-30; 18:9).
 - b. Secondly, He taught that hell would be a place – ‘into’ preposition denoting interior or to the inside of (Mark 9:43-47; Luke 12:5 cp. Matthew 13:40-42, 49-50).
 - c. Thirdly, He taught hell was a place of eternal suffering and punishment for sin – worm dies not & unquenchable fire (Mark 9:44-49 cp. Isaiah 66:14-24).
 - d. Though hell certainly describes a literal place, images of darkness and fire are clearly being used symbolically to denote a place of ‘weeping and gnashing of teeth’ (cp. Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30).
3. Opponents of this traditional teaching on hell are for the most part materialists rejecting the idea of conscious existence beyond death (note Luke 23:43).
- a. Their response in addition to their aversion to the idea of eternal suffering is to contend that hell represents annihilation, pointing to the destructibility of fire and the use of the word destroy (cf. Matthew 10:28; 2 Thessalonians 1:9).
 - b. ***Apollumi***, means to destroy fully...literally or figuratively: destroy, die, lose, mar, perish (Strong: 622).
 - 1) “The idea is not extinction but ruin, loss, not of being, but of wellbeing... in the case of the unsaved hereafter” (Vines).
 - 2) While the word is used to refer to death of persons, it is never used to denote a cessation or extinction of existence (Matthew 8:25; 27:20; Mark 3:6 compare Matthew 9:17; Luke 15:4-10; John 6:27; 1 Corinthians 1:19; 1 Corinthians 8:11; 1 Peter 1:7).
 - 3) Finally, the concept of punishment entails a conscious experience of suffering; Jesus clearly means this in His parable on the separation of the sheep and goats (Matthew 25:41-46 cf. Romans 2:5-9; 1 John 4:8).

Conclusion

1. The doctrine of the final judgment is an essential part of the gospel message first spoken by Jesus and then by His apostles and prophets, and ought to be included in our communication of gospel to others, regardless of how they might feel towards it (note Acts 20:27; 24:25).
2. As a fundamental teaching of the gospel, it is important that we are clear and grounded in what that the scriptures actually teach on any subject, and not to be swayed by human reasoning or an appeal to the emotions. Our judgment on what the Bible teaches should not be based on personal taste, but on sound scriptural reasoning (note 2 Kings 5:10-14).
3. The overwhelming teaching of Scripture is that heaven is the home and reward promised to those in Christ when He returns to execute the final judgment. The same amount of evidence is true of hell as a place of eternal suffering for unrepentant sinner. Though we have not considered every argument or scripture used both in defense and against these two positions, the truth is quite clear.
4. Finally, what is often overlooked especially by those rejecting the traditional teaching on hell is the nature and consequence of sin. Despite its numerous descriptions in the Bible as well as recognising God’s horror of it, we will probably never come to truly grasp it fully with our limited minds. Suffice it to say that in the material and linguistic symbolisms used both to describe heaven and hell these only bring us to a sufficient appreciation of what is being promised: Heaven will be much greater than the symbols employed in its description; similarly, hell will be much worse!
5. Hopefully, this lesson will not only remind us that we truly have been promised an eternal home in heaven with our Lord and Saviour, but also that the future expectation of those outside of Christ when He returns is infinitely much worse than human mind can comprehend or language convey (Galatians 6:7-9).