

Luke 16:26

....between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.

The wicked, who persecuted the Christians in this world, will never be able to reach them in the next. Believers will be eternally blissful in heaven:

Revelation 21:27

And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Revelation 21:4

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

Yet still some people think this too harsh. They think there will be a “second chance” to hear the gospel in hell, especially for those who didn’t have the “chance” to hear it here. And they use verses like these:

1 Peter 3:18-20

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.

1 Peter 4:6

For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

If this was teaching a “second chance” in hell, it undermines all missionary work. If Christ Himself will be preaching the gospel in hell, I’m not going to preach to anybody here. He’ll do a far better job than I ever could. I’ll just leave it to Him. No. This teaches that when Noah, and others in history, preached – to those who are now long since dead – it was Christ they were preaching. The call, then, was to put their trust in a Saviour that was to come. Now, the call is to put our trust in a Saviour that has been, the Lord Jesus Christ:

Hebrews 4:2

For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

So there is only one “chance” to respond to the gospel, and that is while we are in this world:

Hebrews 9:27

it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment

With regards those to whom the gospel never comes, God knows they would never believe anyway. God makes the best use of His resources when He sends His missionaries:

Acts 16:6,7

Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.

Those in hell are there because they chose the lifestyle they chose while they were in this world. It’s their own fault. But we who get to heaven, will only be there by the sheer grace of God. Because, we have to admit, if left to ourselves, we’d also have chosen the lifestyle of the wicked.

But when God comes into our lives, He changes our hearts so we no longer desire the evil way we were born with. We are given a new heart and a new spirit, so instead of loving sin and hating God, we now hate sin and love God. A complete change. And that will save us from the judgment to come, and make us ready to face the next world.

That does mean we’ll now have trials and tribulations in this world, because we’ll realise how full of sin it really is. But it’s only for a short time, and it will be all worthwhile in the end:

John 12:25

He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:17,18

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

It is vital we have our hearts changed, here. To do that, we need to be finished with living for self, and call upon God to change us. If we are absolutely genuine, He will.

Jeremiah 29:13

And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.

Everlasting Burnings

Many people cannot understand how a God of love can send anyone to eternal conscious torment in body and soul in hell fire for ever and ever. The two don’t seem to be compatible.

We can explain that not only is God a God of love, but He is also a God of justice, and He hates sin with a perfect hatred:

Psalms 11:5

....the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth.

In fact, sometimes it’s God’s mercy we have a problem with:

Habakkuk 1:13

Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?

So, how can we bring these two aspects of God’s character together? Only in Jesus Christ:

Romans 3:26

To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Christians in particular have experienced at first hand the love of God. He has revealed Himself to them personally in their hearts as the Saviour who has saved them from what their sins deserve. So, the concept of God being anything other than loving can seem at first glance to be a problem.

Some have invented a place called purgatory. Like hell, it’s a place of torment as punishment for sin, but it doesn’t last for ever, and we’ll all get out eventually. But we have to face the fact that the Bible describes hell-fire as eternal:

2 Thessalonians 1:9

*Who shall be punished with **everlasting** destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power....*

Matthew 18:8

*Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into **everlasting** fire.*

Matthew 25:41

*Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into **everlasting** fire, prepared for the devil and his angels....*

Many try to argue that this idea of everlasting torment was never in the Old Testament. But it is:

Isaiah 33:14
*The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with **everlasting burnings**?*

Isaiah 66:24
*And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm **shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched**; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.*

Daniel 12:2
*And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and **everlasting contempt**.*

Another way of trying to deal with this problem is to say that those who don't embrace Jesus Christ as their Saviour are simply annihilated, snuffed out. They quote verses, such as:

John 3:16
*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not **perish**, but have everlasting life.*

There you are, they say. They "perish," in other words, they just cease to exist. But for this to be true, they have to explain away all the other references to eternal fire that Christ clearly taught. They argue He was referring to the valley of Hinnom, which was the rubbish tip outside Jerusalem that continually burns. But His references have nothing to do with Jerusalem:

Luke 16:23,24
And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.

In any case, the Bible tells us that we all have eternal souls that will continue on after death, whether we're Christians or not. There will be a resurrection of the just and the unjust:

John 5:28,29
....the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

Acts 24:15
....there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.

Sinners would be quite happy with nothing after death. It means they can do what they like, carrying on in their sin:

1 Corinthians 15:32
....what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die.

But the solemn fact remains that after death there will be a righteous judgment before God, with a just punishment:

Genesis 18:25
....Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

The main problem we have here is the idea of a God of love tormenting people **for ever**. We can't fathom that. So we need to ascertain where this torment actually originates.

Is it from the devil? No. The medieval church has given us a very distorted caricature of hell-fire. They depicted it as a place of flames with the devil in charge, demons running riot and sinners being poked back into the fire with pitchforks if they ever try to escape. The devil isn't in charge of hell, God is. The devil and his minions are it's most notorious inmates:

Matthew 25:41
Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels....

So, is it God that deliberately stokes the fire and fans the flames? No. I don't think hell-fire is an external flame at all.

Many think they'd quite like to go to hell, because they'll see all their mates again and be able to carry on sinning with them for ever. But God has not created a place in eternity where people can sin forever. In this world, sin is allowed for a short time. And it is very limited, because God only brings to pass what He intends to turn to His own glory in the end. In eternity, it's nothing like this. Eternity is clean and holy:

Isaiah 57:15
Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

This might sound odd, but I suggest that hell is actually quite a nice environment. It's a place where nobody will be able to sin, and everybody will be bowing the knee to Jesus Christ:

Philippians 2:10,11
*....at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and **things under the earth**;*

And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The only thing that will ruin hell are the people that God populates it with.

Christians will be going to an identical place after death. We too won't be able to sin any more and will also be bowing the knee to Christ. But Christians are going to love it there, whereas those in hell will be hating every minute of it.

So, where does the torment come from? Within themselves. After death, God merely puts them in the same kind of environment as the Christian. So He does nothing wrong. He's not stoking any fire. But they'll hate it and we'll love it. And those in hell will know it's their own fault that they're in that predicament. They won't be shaking their fist in God's face saying, "It's your fault I'm here." No. They'll know whose fault it is. They'll only have themselves to blame.

Other passages in Scripture, which have nothing to do with hell-fire, describe a burning as coming from within:

The Word of God in a believer's heart is likened to a burning:

Luke 24:32
And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?

Jeremiah 20:9
Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.

Unfulfilled desires before marriage are likened to a burning:

1 Corinthians 7:9
But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.

So, burning is a familiar term to describe something within ourselves. It doesn't necessarily depict anything external, like a flame or a punishment inflicted from the outside. The burning, fire-like quality, in hell doesn't come from God lighting a fire to deliberately torment anybody. It originates entirely from within those who go there.

Although the environments of heaven and hell are identical, they are also very separate. A great gulf has been fixed between the two: