

Hell and the Bible - The Short Version

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“Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels’ ... And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Mt 25:41, 46).

This is a subject that causes me no pleasure. But, neglecting it would be an act of hatred. When Paul met with the elders of Ephesus for the last time, this was one of his comments. *“For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God” (Acts 20:27)*. While I would never compare myself to Paul, either in knowledge or faithfulness, my personal failings in living up to a higher Christian level do not give me license to withhold this material from you.

And before proceeding further, do not fall for the gloss often pasted upon the opening passage above. While it is indeed true this *“eternal fire”* has been prepared for Satan and his angels, it does not follow that it has not been prepared also for those *“on His left.”* This *“lake of fire”* (Rev 20:13-15) has always been the destination for unredeemed man. It has never been an afterthought by God as some sad, unintended consequence. Many Bible proclaimers want to *“defend God”* and soften the reality of this place for man – and soothe one's conscience from sharing this material with others. Ultimately, it is an attempt to make God look more compassionate and *“a Victim”* in this matter. He's been forced into sending people there against His will. *“What if God, willing to demonstrate His wrath and make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction ...”* (Read Romans 9:19-23). I understand why people want to soften this. I would like to soften it, too.

1+1= 2

My opinion about this fact, one way or the other, has absolutely no bearing upon it. One plus one does equal two. So also, if heaven and hell are indeed the coming, eternal states, my opinion about this, one way the other, will have absolutely no impact on the reality. Of course, the same is true ... of your opinion. This reminds me of a discussion I had with my dad a couple years before he died. He had begun serious Bible study after he retired, so he spent a good part of his last 20 years wrestling through the varied subject matter. One thing that was a recurring stumbling block for him was the issue of, *“the born again Christian.”* To hear that the only people who are Christians are those who have been *“born again”* was very difficult for him. The primary reason was because his mother had been a faithful Catholic and died as such. She had raised seven sons in a very poor mining area in Oklahoma. Because of their poverty and rural existence, no priest had ever visited her even though she was faithful to the Catholic Church to the end. For my dad to think his mother may not be a *“born-again Christian”* caused recoil. She had probably never even heard of such a thing. Finally, one day, this all came to a head. He said to me, in an uncharacteristically sarcastic manner, *“I guess you're one of those who believe the only Christian is one who has been 'born-again.' Right? Is that your opinion?”* My response was immediate. *“My opinion?! Who cares about 'Robin's opinion'? I'm not the one who brought it up!”* (Jn 3:1-15). After a moment, we both started laughing. He never discussed this again - and I hope he was able to entrust his mother's fate to God and concentrate more fully on his own relationship with the Maker of heaven and earth.

The Bottom Line

Hell is a physical place void of any of the goodness of God. Nothing that brings joy, pleasure or satisfaction - will ever be there. The only thing present will be torment. There is ample Biblical

material attesting to the validity of these last three statements (See Mt 5: 29, 30 and 8: 12, Lk 12:5, Rev 20:12 and 21:8). But, in keeping with the title of this article, I have zeroed in ... on the bottom line. This reality is terrifying to me and causes unspeakable alarm in a variety of ways. I cannot bear to think of this fate for anyone whom I have come to know, respect, and/or care.

Hell is a place created by God which He Himself will eternally oversee. *“The Lord sat as King at the flood; Yes, the Lord sits as King forever”* (Ps 29:10). God is Hell’s King - not Satan. Indeed, this place is designed for *his* punishment - and all the angels who joined his rebellion. And the *“goats on the left”* - people - finally outside of Christ will also take their place in this place.

Personally

One reason I have had a great urgency in becoming educated on this matter is because each Christian has a great responsibility coming on Judgment Day. Paul, when discussing the Corinthian lawsuits, was appalled these lawsuits were being brought before non-Christians for a decision. *“Do you not know that the saints will judge the world and if the world is to be judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more matters of this life?”* (1Cor 6: 2-4). *“The world”* is a reference to unsaved people. So here is the question *to myself*. *“How can I operate in this role of meting out eternal destinies if I am not in total agreement with God?”* This is an exceedingly sober inquiry. This moment of reckoning is coming - and is going to be more real than the reality I am presently experiencing - even as I pen these words. I must be ready to stand shoulder to shoulder with the God of heaven and earth - with absolutely no hesitation or doubt. Accurate moral convictions on all matters must be as deep as they are real. I will not be able to fool myself, much less God, when that moment comes. And come it will.

The primary reason my personal readiness is a concern is because - if anyone deserves Hell, I do. To be spared that fate will not be based upon personal merit. I am wholly dependent upon the mercy of God being extended toward me. Such an act is not, and will never be, deserved. Additionally, my personal behavior continues to fall woefully short of His standards. Therefore, to stand as an eternal judge over others - when I currently commit some of the same offenses - does cause me pause. To finally arrive in full-throated agreement with all of God’s convictions will be an act of God on, and in, me. He alone can grant that I see as He sees, feel as He feels, and think as He thinks - and act as He acts. I am not there yet. And lastly, I am trusting that God Himself will impart the necessary conviction that any other fate for unredeemed angels, or people, would be an eternal act *of injustice*. Hell is necessary - and right. I am continuing to seek Him on all these matters - as neglect would be presumption. But this is not your problem. Your concern must be focused on your current standing with God and then your journey to this same role at the Judgment.

When I was on staff at a Christian drug rehabilitation program, a client, named Lewis, was asking a lot of questions about the Bible. One afternoon, he was quizzing the director and I as we were standing in the parking lot. After several inquiries, I drew back and asked, *“Lewis, why are you so interested in all this?”* Without hesitation, he replied, *“I want to be saved from God.”* The director and I looked at each other ... and laughed. I responded, *“Lewis, that’s a very good answer.”* After all, it was Jesus, the Good Teacher, who said, *“My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that there is no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who after He has killed has authority to cast into Hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!”* (Lk 12:4, 5). So, concerning this subject of Hell ... well, let me just say ... I’m not the one who brought it up.

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