

Reconciling the Love of God and Hell

John 3:16; Matthew 10:28; Ezekiel 18:23-32

I've enjoyed preaching on the subject of the love of God all this year. As I bring this series of sermons on the love of God to a close, I admit this is one message I have no enjoyment in preaching. But I must preach it if I am to be true to my calling to preach the whole counsel of God.

Most of you have probably seen the famous sculpture called "The Thinker" by Auguste Rodin. It depicts a man sitting in serious thought. The statue was originally created in 1880 as part of a larger work called "The Gates of Hell." What is "The Thinker" thinking about? According to the artist, "The Thinker" is sitting in amazement as he contemplates lost people in hell.

If there were ever a subject that deserves our serious thought, it would be hell. However, most of us don't like thinking about hell.

The question we face is: "**How can a loving God allow people to go to hell and burn forever?**" Most of the time, people use this question as an excuse to justify their rejection of God and the Bible.

I will admit the subject of hell is a chilling and unsavory subject. But, the issue is not whether it is unpleasant—The question we must face is—Is it true? This much is certain—This is one subject we cannot be indifferent or neutral about. Too much is at stake.

I recently read about a woman who refused to talk about life after death. She did not want her children to be disappointed if it turned out there was no life after death. Hey! If there is no life after death, there will be no consciousness to feel disappointment! But, if there is life after death, as the Bible says, and someone dies unsaved, there will be something far worse than disappointment!

I. **The REALITY of Hell.**

According to a recent Harris Poll 89% of Americans believe there is a heaven, but only 31% believe there is a literal place called hell.

A. Misconceptions about hell:

1. Hell is an eternal party.
2. Annihilation—non-existence after death
3. Universalism—eventually everyone will be saved
4. Purgatory—people will get a second chance
5. Worst misconception of all—hell simply doesn't exist.

When England closed it's Libyan Embassy, Muammar Qaddafi became so angry that he ordered England to be removed from all maps in Libya. Simply removing England from a map does not mean it doesn't exist. Just because people don't believe in hell doesn't mean it doesn't exist. Hell is very real.

B. Bible statements about hell.

- There are over 50 references to hell in the N.T. To not believe in a literal hell is to not believe the Bible, or reinterpret the Bible to suit your liking.

➡ WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT HELL:

1. **Unquenchable fire** (Mk. 9:43-48). "...*a furnace of fire...*" (Mt. 13:42, 50).
 - Jesus used Greek word "gehenna" to describe hell. "Gehenna" was a valley southwest of Jerusalem. During the reign of some of Israel's most wicked kings, an altar to the Canaanite god, Molech, was built in the valley. The people would bring their sons and burn them as a horrible sacrifice to Molech.
 - Later, during the reign of the good king Josiah, the altars to Molech were destroyed, and the valley filled in with garbage and refuse and the corpses of the wicked. It became a vast burning garbage dump—Smoldering embers burned continually there. A foul place of stench and rot. Jesus was saying hell is like "gehenna."
2. **Eternal dying** ("...*their worm dieth not..*"). Called "*the second death*" (Rev. 20:14-15).

3. **Unending torment** (Luke 16:23-28; Rev. 14:10-11). “...*there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth...*” (Mt. 13:42, 50).
 4. **Everlasting punishment** (Mt. 25:41, 46—“...*everlasting fire... everlasting punishment...*”).
- If there is no Hell, Jesus Christ was the greatest false prophet who ever lived!

II. The REASONABLENESS of Hell.

- **Why hell?** Hell was created because of sin—For Satan and fallen angels (Mt. 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.*”)
- A. **God’s PERSON** makes hell reasonable.
- Someone asks, “How could a loving God allow anyone to go to hell?” My response: “**How do you know God is a loving God?** What are you basing that on? Do you have good, sound reasons for believing God is a loving God?”
1. The only way anyone can speak with any assurance about a loving God, is if they are willing to begin with what the Bible says. If we use the Bible as our starting point we must accept ALL it says about God attributes. We cannot pick and choose which attributes we accept.
 2. The same Bible that says “*God is love,*” also says God is **holy, just, and a consuming fire**. God is **perfectly balanced** in His attributes. Some people tend to care only for God’s “softer” attributes—love and mercy—while avoiding God’s harder attributes of holiness and justice. They want “a kinder and gentler theology.” But, as Paul wrote in Romans 11:22, we need to “*Behold therefore the **goodness and severity of God...***”
 - Most unbelievers would agree that if God is so “loving” that He never punishes evil, He is not a just God. Justice requires evil be punished. To remove hell would discredit God’s character of justice.

➤ How can a God, who is love, create a place like hell and allow people to go there and burn forever? The question is, **how can He not and remain just?**

B. **God's PURITY** makes hell reasonable.

1. God is HOLY and of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. He cannot co-exist with sin.
2. **Heaven is perfect**, but if sin should enter heaven, heaven would be contaminated.
 - Sin must be dealt with. God judged sin at Calvary while Jesus bore the sin of the world and God poured out His wrath upon Christ (1 Pet. 3:18—*“Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God...”*).
3. Anyone who rejects Christ's payment for sin, must therefore bear the penalty himself in hell, because God will not allow sin into heaven.

C. **God's POSITION** makes hell reasonable.

- Some ARGUE—Everlasting punishment in hell is out of proportion to the sins people have committed. They've done nothing to warrant suffering forever.
1. WHO IS THE SIN AGAINST? The sin itself is not the only factor to consider in determining the severity of punishment. **The status of the one** against whom the crime is committed is also taken into consideration. In most states there are tougher penalties for killing a policeman than any other murder. Why? Because killing a policeman is an attack upon the authority of the state.
 2. Sins against God are attacks against the highest level of authority in the universe. Because God is so great, any sin against Him deserves a punishment equal to His greatness.
 - Sins against an eternal and infinite God have eternal and infinite consequence. Therefore, the punishment of them

must be eternal and infinite. It takes eternity for suffer eternal consequences for sin.

III. The REDEMPTION from Hell.

➔ The greatest truth about hell is no one has to go there.

One day, when Vice-President Calvin Coolidge was presiding over the Senate, one senator angrily told another to go “straight to hell.” The offended Senator complained to Coolidge as the presiding officer. Coolidge looked up and wittily replied. “I’ve looked through the rule book. You don’t have to go.”

- A. Christ is the way to avoid hell, if you receive His gift of eternal life (Rom. 6:23).
- B. HELL IS A CHOICE: All that are in Hell choose it.
 1. *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights...”* (James 1:17). God is the Author all that is good. By rejecting Him, a person has chosen to separate themselves from the Provider of all that is good. Then what is left if goodness is rejected?
 2. Two options: *“I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life...”* (Dt. 30:19). If you want blessing, receive Christ. If you reject God’s provision for blessing, you are left with a curse.
- C. God doesn’t want you to go to hell (2 Pet. 3:9— *“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”*)
 1. Look at Ezekiel 18:25-32. Is God saying He wants souls to go to hell?
 2. The truth is, God doesn’t SEND people to hell. God has done everything He could possibly do to keep people from going there (John 3:16-18).

SUMMATION: Essentially, a person puts himself in hell by rejecting God’s provision of salvation.

Did Jesus say, when the Holy Spirit would come, “he will convict the world of sin, because they murder... commit adultery... lie?” NO! Jesus said when the Holy Spirit came, He would “*reprove the world of sin... BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE NOT ON ME*” (John 16:8-9). You have a choice, and if you go to hell, it will *not* be because you lied... committed adultery... got drunk. It will be because you did not receive Jesus as your Savior!

The love of God does not *negate* the existence of hell, but rather *necessitates* the reality of hell—Hell is a direct consequence of God’s love. It would be UNLOVING of God to force someone to live in His presence forever if they didn’t want Him in this life. It would be UNLOVING for God to force someone who loved sin, to live in an environment of holiness for eternity.

God loves us so much that when this life is over, **we will get what we want, even if it doesn’t include Him.**

C.S. Lewis put it this way: “Sin is man saying to God, ‘Go away and leave me alone.’ Hell is simply God saying to man, “You may have your wish...”

C.S. Lewis: “There are only two kinds of people in the end: Those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God will say in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’”

➡ Is it unfair for people to go to hell? No, what is unfair is for people to go to heaven, because none of us deserve heaven, but hell.

➡ No person who ever gets to heaven will be able to point his finger at himself and say, “Look what I have done to get me into heaven.” Likewise, no person who goes to hell will be able to point his finger at God and say, “You sent me to hell.”

Frank Sinatra’s theme song was “*(I Did It) MY WAY.*” This is also the theme song of every soul in hell!