

A Tour of Hell

by

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Changes made to this edition do not affect the overall language of the document, nor do they change the writer's intention. Spelling, grammar and formatting changes have been made, and modernized wording is used in specific cases to help today's reader more fully grasp the intention of the author.

Unregenerate men often hate to think about hell as much as they hate to think about God, the Cosmic Warden of hell. For those who are unregenerate, or not born from above by the blood of Jesus Christ, it is a ghastly topic to think through, and terribly horrifying since it describes impending judgment and everlasting torment for God-haters. Even the Christian has a disdain for the doctrine of hell, and rightly so. He is certainly glad he is not going to hell. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross has delivered him from that awful fate, and he is outwardly joyful for that deliverance. Hell is not a common theme in which Christians choose for their local Bible study. When is the last time you thought deeply about hell? When is the last time the pastor of your church preached a series, or even one sermon, on the doctrine of hell? Certainly, it is not a popular topic. Who enjoys thinking about the tortured existence of the damned?

Hell is an important doctrine. It is not only important because of what it constitutes as a doctrine contained in the Bible, but also in terms of the other biblical doctrines which surround it. Hell has direct connections to the Fall, the holiness of God, the justice of God, judgment, punishment, angels, demons, and the like. With so many connections through the Bible, Christians should have a clear understanding of what hell is all about. This doctrine should be known for three reasons, 1) to glorify God's wisdom in the creation of such a place, 2) in a desire not to go there when they die, and 3) to save others from that fate by sharing the Gospel with the lost.

Some people have a twisted fascination with hell. Many movies (and fiction books as well) attempt to capture hell on film, but come away with some sort of materialistic view of the place, even though in some pictures they are closer to the mark than they may think. People often flock to these movies in order to be scared for a time because they like the "feeling" of being scared. One person said, "It demonstrates my mortality." If this person really understood the reality behind what Hollywood sometimes catches in miniscule form, he would see the foolishness of his heart in that statement. People who think through the biblical doctrine of hell should come away with nightmares when they really begin to understand what is going on in that real, literal place. We should have a fascination about it as biblical doctrine, and as part of the Gospel message, but not in the same manner as the world. They find it strangely funny, but in a warped kind of way. They are willing to be scared by a book or movie about the topic of hell for a short time if they are able to deny its truthfulness. Sometimes people come away from a movie or book and do have nightmares about hell. That is why parents often do not allow their impressionable children to watch such films. But the nightmares they have are not the same as the Christian's who has studied the biblical doctrine. The doctrine of hell in the bible is far worse and far more graphic than anything anyone would find in a movie. The reason being, the quickened and regenerate heart for the Christian not only enables them to understand the doctrine, but they are also able to understand the truthfulness of the propositions. Hell is not like any two-hour movie. Its not a place where you spend two-hours, are scared for a time, and then leave. It is real place where people spend all eternity in the worst torment imaginable, and even our imaginations fall far short of contemplating the truth of it.

Though many people deny the doctrine of hell who call themselves Christians, the Bible is filled with texts on the subject. We will look at many of them in this brief study. The base text to begin with will be Luke 12:1-5. The text states the following, "In the meantime, when an innumerable multitude of people had gathered together, so that they

trampled one another, He began to say to His disciples first *of all*, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. "For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. "Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops." And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. "But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!"

In the text at hand, we find the Lord Jesus exhorting his hearers to obtain a fear of God. He is very specific in directing men to have a fear of God over and against the common fear of man. The reason for this fear is that God, and God alone, has the power to cast men into hell; both in body and soul. Most men fear other men who can do them bodily harm (such as a murderer, or an enemy at war) and are not at all concerned with the reality that God holds the power to cast men into a *real place of eternal punishment* called "hell." People seem to be caught up on what they think is a tangible reality. Men who stab others with a knife, or who shoot at people with guns, are more tangible than thinking abstractly about the invisible God whom they cannot physically see. Hell, then becomes something as intangible to them as God has become. That is why when the movies do attempt their interpretation of hell, it is usually based on some kind of heightening of a physical reality. Being changed in a dank, dark prison is horrible. So hell, for them, is a *very* dank, dark prison. But Jesus corrects this thinking by introducing the intensity of the spiritual reality of God's judgment; and it is actually more real than what men derive from mere sense experience.

The word Christ uses for this "power" is translated in the Bible as "the power to cast," but may be literally rendered the "power of choice." God has the power of choice to cast men into hell. This God, who is the Supreme Master over the body and souls of men, is to be feared because of the power He has over their being. God has the right, as Creator to make some men vessels of wrath for His own purposes (Romans 9:22). He has the power of choice to dispose of men in the manner in which he sees fit. God is not a God to everyone in the same way. Though Jesus says God is our Father, He is only Father to some. To others He is a God to be feared, a just Judge who will punish even the slightest sin with a just sentence. Jesus says, "fear him," which means to have a terrifying fear of such an awesome Being who holds such terrible power.

Jesus taught that there was a real place called hell. He taught the reality of a literal holding place of the wicked. This doctrine surmised over 13% (or 1/6th) of his overall teaching in general. It would be fair and accurate to say that if Jesus were to pick six topics to preach upon in the entire course of his ministry while walking the earth, one of those six topics is the topic of a literal and real hell. Jesus was no stranger to the doctrine of eternal punishment and the terrors of the damned. It was something he pressed upon the mind of men at almost every venture of his preaching. It was a vital and important aspect of His *Doctrine of God*. Jesus came to "declare" the truth concerning the Father (John 1:18). Although there are many pastors, theologians and Christians who dislike the doctrine of hell and many who actually deny it, Jesus upheld that doctrine because it directly related to the realities surrounding the nature of the Father – the One who He came to declare, or "exegete" for us.

In Luke 12:5 Jesus uses the actual word “hell”. There is an awful history behind the use of the term. Jesus knows his audience would be well acquainted with the term and would, no doubt, understand his meaning and use of it. The history of Jesus’ designation is not simply the “garbage dump” idea that surrounds much of the common teaching about hell. Outside of Jerusalem there was a garbage dump where the waste of Jerusalem was thrown. As with any garbage dump, the fire there was always active, and it was a horribly disgusting place to visit due to the stench and vermin in that place. However, though many usually resort to this analogy, this is not the *only* idea Christ has in mind in this passage. Jesus has a worse concept in store; something the Jews would have cringed to be reminded about.

The New Testament word in this passage for the term “hell” is *Gehenna* (gheh'-en-nah) in Greek. This Greek word derives its meaning from the Hebrew word, “Gehinam” which is a reference to the Valley belonging to Hinnom in the Old Testament. To understand this name “Hinnom” we turn to the help of a Welsh puritan preacher named Christopher Love. In his series of sermons on hell (of which Jonathan Edwards gave high praise), he describes the fuller context of Christ’s meaning. In both Joshua 15:8 and Nehemiah 11:30 this valley is referenced and is the historical background to which Jesus points. In this valley owned by Hinnom, the idolatrous Jews setup a statue of Molech. Molech was a foreign god of the neighboring peoples. This large statue was in the form of a man with his hands stretched out before him, his palms being turned up – as if he was going to receive something. This statue, made of brass, and hollowed out, was stoked with wood and a fire was kindled in it. The fire was kindled continually so that sacrifices could be offered in the hands of this statue. You can imagine that a brass statue would become exceedingly hot, even to the point of glowing red as brass would with such a fire stoked continually inside it. The Jews would place one of their youngest children in the burning hands of this statue and sacrifice their children alive to the god Molech. Their children would be set in the fiery hot hands of this heated furnace and burned until dead, as if to cook them alive. In some twisted and warped fashion, the fathers of these children thought that such a sacrifice to this god would bless the *other* children and their home. There was a continual fire in the idol and thus, a continual shrieking and crying could be heard from the sacrifices of passing their children through this fire. It is even recorded that the Jews continued to play music and ring bells to drown out the sounds of the shrieking and crying of their children. Such a thing is unimaginable but recorded in such passages as 2 Chr. 33:6; 2 Ks 16:3, Jer. 7:31; 32:35; and Lev. 18:21. It was not until righteous king Josiah came along that this place was destroyed as recorded in 2 Kings 23:10. This is a grotesque and sick picture of the depravity of men. However, it is this picture that Jesus uses to remind the Jews about the place of eternal torment. In conjunction with the garbage dump of Jerusalem, this is the further illustration of hell as Christ thought of it. Hell is the place of continual fire and burning; a place of unending torture. Its analogical history is one of warped and twisted sin, but its reality is a cause to which the God of the universe should be feared, for He has the power to cast men into a *real* and *literal* hell.

When we speak of a real and literal hell, there are some ideas which must be corrected. There are certain thoughts that we should not be thinking about when speaking of that place. When the term hell is used it does not refer to the place where all wicked men hang out together to have “a good time.” Wicked men and their friends are

not having a good time in hell. They are not at the eternal barbeque living it up because heaven rejected them, or was too full, as the popular bumper sticker says. They are not glad to be in hell, and wish they were not there. Nor do they have any friends in that place. It is not a party, it is the eternal torture chamber of God's wrath on sin.

Hell is also not the place where the devil lives. The devil has not made his home in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. Hollywood has made hell a place where the devil's throne resides. In their mind this is where demons come to visit the prince of darkness and give reports on the manner of their work in the world. Oftentimes it is portrayed as set in a fiery cave, where we see columns of gaseous fire spurting out from the ground. There the devil contemplates his next strategy on the forces of "good" in the world, as he sits on the meticulously carved black throne of the underworld in this foreboding, dismal place. That is not the hell of the Bible. This, like the previous paragraph is a man-made, imaginary and unbiblical notion about hell. When the Bible speaks of hell, this is not its intention at all.

It would be most beneficial to have a working definition of the doctrine of hell. In searching through the history of the church one may find many definitions of hell, but all of them, in one respect or another added in something unnecessary, and left out other things needful. For instance, like Hollywood's conceptions of hell, some medieval writers believed hell to be the "ultimate torture chamber" where demons would whip people mercilessly as they dangled from metal chains. This was their defining idea of hell. Others have tried to compare hell with the idea of baking someone alive in a large oven. Others said that hell was being pierced with needles all over the body and in the tongue, eyes, and other tender spots. Various attempts at defining this place often fail. What is needful is the compilation of all the relevant biblical material into a sentence or two so that the reality of hell is explained without becoming fanciful in our conception of it. As a result, the following definition is a cut and paste compilation of Scriptural passages and theological ideas taken from throughout church history (as from various systematic theologians, and preachers like Jonathan Edwards who taught persistently on hell). In constructing this definition, in mixing together a variety of biblical ideas, the following result should help refine the concept of hell, or give us a helpful definition on hell that we can ponder with some clarity. To answer the question "What is hell?" the answer is this: Hell is "the spiritual and material furnace of fire where its damned victims, in their minds, bodies, and souls, are eternally tormented to the full degree and capacity of their beings by God, by the devil and his demons, by damned human beings, and by themselves through their memories and consciences, without any possibility of relief by mercy nor pity from God." Although this is a long, cumbersome definition of hell, it is very clear and helpful to the point at hand. It embodies all the major facets of the doctrine of eternal punishment that Jesus Christ taught, and of the reality of a literal hell. It is a workable and important definition.

In teaching on the doctrine of hell, one of the first questions that arise is "Where is hell?" To oversimplify this, in contrast to heaven which is "up," hell is "down." Psalm 55:15 says, "Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick into hell." Isaiah 14:15 states, "Yet you shall be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit." Even the Lord Jesus says in Matthew 11:23, "And you, Capernaum, which are exalted to heaven, shall be brought down to hell." Hell is down. Men ought to desire to go *up* to heaven, not *down* into the pit of hell, down into abysmal punishment. But, although hell is down,

it is also unique and special in its place. In the account of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16, Jesus makes it clear that hell is also visible *from heaven*. Luke 16:26 asserts this as Abraham says, “And beside all this, 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.” If you took a shovel and began digging, could you dig deep enough to find this place? No, you could not. In contrast to heaven it is said that hell is down, but, since it is also a *spiritual* place, it is unique in its location, even being visible to those who are in heaven. There is nothing in Jesus’ teaching in the passage of the Rich Man and Lazarus that assumes the story is not true, or that it is a parable. In other places the Gospel authors make it a point to remind the reader, “Hear another parable...” (Matthew 21:33), or “Another parable he put forth to them saying...” (Matthew 13:23), or “But without a parable He did not speak to them...” (Mark 4:34), or “He spoke a parable to them...” (Luke 6:39). Yet, in Luke 16:16, set after a series of parables explained as parables, Jesus says, “There *was* a certain rich man...” (Luke 16:19) Jesus explains this historical narrative as fact, not as a parable. The Gospel writers make no mention at all that this is a parable. Jesus believes this to be true. So we find that hell is located in a spiritual place, where even those who are in heaven can view the damned tortured in the fire as Abraham and Lazarus did.

The Bible uses a variety of names and designations for hell. They may be categorized in three main sections. First, hell is designated as a dwelling of fire. In this way it is described in a number of different ways in relation to fire. Imagine a place that no matter where you went you could not escape being burned by the fire. With a burning building, you can escape the flames if you were to run out of the firetrap onto the street. But in hell, there is no escape from the fire. Wherever you turn, wherever you run to, wherever you look, there is unquenchable fire. It is called “everlasting burnings” in Isaiah 33:14, “Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” It is deemed “fire unquenchable” in Luke 3:17, “Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.” It is a “lake of fire” as stated in Revelation 19:20, “These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.” And its most graphic picture is as a “furnace of fire” as Jesus describes it in Matthew 13:42, “And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” It is a real, literal fire. It is a fire that is kept burning forever. It never goes out, and there is no relief from it. Imagine the pain associated with a 3rd degree burn from, say, a chemical burn on someone’s arm. With such a burn there is medical treatment although, having your arm chemically cooked in that manner is more painful than most will experience in this life, and most would opt out of ever experiencing it voluntarily. In hell the pain is equally present on every part of the body, and the degree of pain is far worse than a 3rd degree burn. It is a torment that cannot be placed into words and cannot be imagined.

Though the Scriptures describe hell as a place of fire, this concept is not completely definable by us. We cannot fully comprehend this kind of fire. Why is this so? Is fire something too difficult to understand? Though hell is a place of fire, it is also a place of darkness. If it is a place of darkness, it must be a special kind of fire indeed that gives way to an eternal darkness. In Matthew 22:13 Jesus describes hell as “outer darkness,” “Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him

away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” It is called “blackest darkness” in Jude 13, “...to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.” And it referred to as “chains of darkness” in 2 Pet. 2:4, “...God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment.” Darkness is not something people enjoy except when they are sleeping. In hell people will never sleep, but they will experience the horror of darkness. Little children often keep their closet doors closed tight and desire a night-light because out of the darkness come the “bumps in the night.” When someone visits an amusement park attraction like a “haunted house” the main element that makes the journey frightening is that there is no light. It is pitch black. Out of the blackness come the frightening aspects and jolts of the performers, or mechanical devices, whose job it is to scare you while you wonder what will emerge from the darkness next? They jump out of the darkness with just the right sampling of light to fully scare you. (And people enjoy this?) Even in horror movies darkness often sets the tone for the monster or killer who is stalking the victim. Darkness plays a huge role in causing people to be frightened. The infinite God of the universe decided to make hell dark, with a special kind of fire that caters to that darkness. Maybe there are some flickers of light, but this may be speculation based on Lazarus and Abraham being able to see the rich man in hell. In any case, we know from Scripture that there is a heavy darkness suited to that place. Such a setting of fire and darkness make hell all the more intolerable.

Though hell is a place of fire, and of darkness, it is also categorized in Scripture as a place of the worst unimaginable torment. Literally, Jesus refers to it as a “place of torment.” From the lips of the rich man in hell, in Luke 16:28, the man says, “For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.” Over every area of the rich mans soul he was being tortured, but not tortured to death. There is no end to the pain. It is constant and never weakening. This torment is so horrible that it is referred to as a “second death” as in Revelation 2:11, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.” Death is frightening for the world; even for some Christians. The thought of dying in a difficult manner is frightening. A slow death is regarded as the worst kind of death. God has so ordered hell that those there would describe it as a living death. When people are cast into the blackest of darkness and the fiery rage of hell, they enter the second death by which they can never escape. It is a living hell. They are alive, but experiencing the pains of the eternal “death” of God’s wrath. In this death it is described as a dreadful description of “destruction,” Matthew 7:13, “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat.” It is described as “everlasting punishment,” Matthew 25:46, “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.” And the worst title of all in the New Testament is “the wrath” as in 1 Thessalonians 1:10, “And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.” The wrath of God poured out upon the wicked in hell heightens the torment to inexpressible degrees. They live out more than their worst possible nightmares under the wrath of God’s judgment - the living death they are consigned to for eternity.

John Bunyan, in his work *Pilgrim's Progress*, which talk incessantly of hell and judgment, describes a door on a hillside that when opened revealed a gate to hell. What if there was a door somewhere on earth in which men could peer through the keyhole to glimpse at hell and the victims of hell? What would we see if God allowed us to glimpse into this dark, fiery, place of torment? Most people, if not all people, would pass on the opportunity for good reason. Some deranged people may find it fascinating, but would no doubt be sorry for taking that look a second after they began viewing the place. What if we were forced to look? No doubt, we would find the most horrible, unimaginable conditions that we could ever conceive, multiplied more times than we could count. Language is inadequate to describe such things. Some, like *Dante's Inferno*, attempt to describe what hell may be like. The Bible though, forces us to look at hell. If we affix our "eyes" to the Biblical record we will glean a fuller understanding of the horror of that place.

When peering through the keyhole into hell, we would find that hell has occupants. Who are they who spend forever in hell? At the consummation of all things, we will find two classes of beings in hell: human beings and fallen angels. These two classes will comprise all of the damned of hell. Right now, there are those human beings, as spiritual men, who are confined to the flames; such is the case with the rich man in Luke 16 as we have previously seen. But in the end, two classes of beings shall reside there. The first class is the fallen angels: the devil and his demons. The devil does not dwell in hell now. The devil, nor his demons have any desire to go to hell now, much less make it their home base. They do not wish to reside in hell at all. They certainly do not desire to be tormented forever, which is the purpose of the place. However, the promise of the Lord in Revelation 20:10 says, "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever." In Jude 6 the Apostle says, "And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." The devil is not the little red devil on the side of the ham can or on the vacuum cleaner. He is a powerful angelic being, as are the demons, who will not take kindly to being forever in that place of torment. Those who reside in hell will also have the unpleasurable company of this powerful fallen angel and his minions at their side.

The devil and his fallen angels will go to hell and will spend eternity in hell because of their sin. Their rebellion against God and his holiness, and their plots and schemes against His people, deserves a just judgment that they will receive in torments forever. Isaiah 14:12 seems to portray a more full meaning surrounding the fall of the king of Tyre, and it may refer to Satan in some respects, "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.' Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit." Satan rebelled against God in heaven, and when he did, he deceived other angels to follow. They too fell. But they are not unwise to hell. The demons are afraid to go to hell. They know what is coming due. The demons said to Christ, "And suddenly they cried out, saying, 'What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have you

come here to torment us before the time?" (Matthew 8:29) The demons pleaded with Christ that He would not torture them before the appointment they have with God at the end of the world.

Not only will we find the devil and his angels in hell, but we will also see men, women and children both designed and self-willed for the place they occupy. There is a mystery that surrounds the age of men in the life hereafter, whether heaven or hell. We do not need to hypothesize on the ages of spiritual beings when they are in hell. There purpose here is to show that hell is not discriminatory with one's age. A fifteen-year-old girl can be sent to hell as quickly as her 39-year-old mother or 43-year-old father. Age in this respect is irrelevant.

People who die at various ages are in hell for two reasons. First, they are fashioned by the Potter who made them for that place. Romans 9:21 states, "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonour?" These people are dishonorable vessels damned by the Potter to glorify His justice and holiness through the medium of His wrath. God fashions people for hell. Does that shock you? Does God create beings he knows he will send to hell based on His eternal decree? The answer to this is a saddening, but justified, "yes." Like Pharaoh, he raises up people all over the earth that will one day glorify Him in hell by being set under His righteous judgment (Romans 9:13ff). They do not go to hell for no reason. They go to hell because they are fallen in Adam and are wicked as a result of the fall. Nor does God, when He creates them for this purpose, create evil and infuse it into their hearts. No, not at all. Though God is active in hardening them, He does this only in manipulating purposes, circumstances, and events so that they freely choose evil. They make a choice to sin, but it is the only choice they could have chosen. Their hearts, being wicked, love sin, and will always choose sin no matter what choice is set before them (Genesis 6:5). When they do this, they harden their own hearts while piling up wrath and condemnation for judgment day. They choose to follow the way of the serpent; they choose to follow the path leading to hell. They are vessels of wrath prepared for destruction. As Proverbs 16:4 says, "The LORD has made all for Himself, yes, even the wicked for the day of doom."

Though vessels of wrath are fashioned by the Potter, they are also those, secondly, who are fashioned by their own sinfulness for the place, and justly deserve to go there. In Revelation 21:8 we find a short list of the sins of men who shall ultimately reside in that place, "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." They are self-willed in that they continue in unbelief, though God has furnished them with general and special revelation. Romans 2:5-9 bears this out well, "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile." Their impenitent hearts justly deserve the hell-fire of that place. They have sinned against an infinite God and must pay an infinite price for their wickedness.

In peering through the door's keyhole into hell, we would see the state of men in hell. We know hell is filled with men and demons, but what will their state be like? We know that it is a place of fire, darkness and torment. The body of these concepts may be summarized as the "Torture of the Damned of Hell." That is their constant, never ending state – again, it is the most extreme torture imaginable multiplied infinitely. In hell there is real torment. Jesus tells us through the account of the rich man in Luke 16:25, "But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." Sin is punished in hell. Hell is the eternal prison where the punishment of men's sins takes place; the place where their punishment is executed by the Executioner. Men's sins are like gasoline where the fire is like the wrath or anger of God.

If the state of men is an eternity of torture, this pushes one to ask the question, "What is *torment* actually like? What makes hell *hell*?" The fire? The darkness? The demons? The answer may surprise some of you. The reason hell is hell is because *God is there*. God is a present curse to those people and His presence in hell is forever a cursed vision to them. There is a common misconception that people believe concerning God's presence in hell. They think that hell is horrible because God is not there. They believe that when Jesus says, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels," that he means "depart from the presence of God." But this would do injustice to the doctrine of God's being, as well as the meaning of Jesus' words there in context. First, God is everywhere present. There is no place that He is not. Psalm 139:8 says, "If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there." In Isaiah 30:32 the prophet says, "For Tophet is ordained of old; yea, for the king it is prepared; he hath made it deep and large: the pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of the LORD, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it." (*Tophet* literally means "hell-fire.") The anger of God in hell is akin to the stirring of the cup of His indignation. He is present stirring up the cup of His wrath and pouring it out on the wicked. Revelation 14:10 says, "The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb." God's presence in hell for the damned cannot be anything but anguish. God's anger is let loose in hell to the perfect degree of just indignation against sin. Second, Jesus says that the saints "enter in joy" and the wicked "Depart from Me," or they depart from the joy of heaven and the blessing of God. It is not that they depart from God Himself, but they depart from any grace, mercy, pity or favor. We conclude this point based on the texts at hand that God's presence is what makes hell *hell*. As those in heaven gaze upon the beauty of Christ and of God. In hell, the vision of God is all a curse to them. Those in hell would give one moments rest from the presence of God there.

The torment that God imposes on the men and fallen angels justly for their sins is torment which lasts forever; it is eternal torment. Jesus explains this graphically in Mark 9:44 which says, "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." How long is forever? Jonathan Edwards described forever as "Forever only beginning." Can you imagine a forever that is only beginning? Jesus again emphasizes this eternal duration in Matthew 25:46 when he says, "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." The contrast to eternal happiness is eternal condemnation.

This eternal torment is compounded in degrees for those in hell. It is a biblical principle to assert that what a person does here on earth determines how angry God will be with him in hell, at least the starting point for the pouring out of His wrath on the wicked. There are degrees of torture based on God's justice. Hell will be hell for everyone there, but in different degrees. Deuteronomy 32:22 says, "For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell." The Psalmist says in Psalm 86:13, "For great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell." Degrees of torment are assumed here. But this is much more explicit in Jesus' own words in Matthew 23:14, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation." There is damnation, and then there is greater damnation. Hell is where we will find the exact punishment due to the nature of the sins executed. Men will receive exactly what they deserve at the hands of Christ's wrath. Yes, Jesus is the executioner of this wrath. He will fit the due wage to the crime committed. Those burning under the wrath of God for the little white lies they have told will receive their recompense as much as Hitler will receive his recompense, and the devil his. Paul tells us in 2 Thessalonians 1:6, "Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." And it is not simply that one degree given to them is enough. Rather, it must be remembered that God does not cease to be righteous or just in hell when men continue to sin against Him. God continues to be more just as hell goes on for He must always punish sin. Hell is also a continual downward spiral into anguish. Every time a sin is committed by the wicked in hell, God becomes all the angrier with that person. If wicked men gnash their teeth at God in hell for His wrath on them, something Jesus says they will do in Mark 9, will God pardon that wickedness? Will God's holiness allow the rebellious creature to be more rebellious than he was on earth? No, He will not. His rage and anger is loosed on the damned, and they suffer under the eternal torment of this cursed vision for all time, and it worsens. It may be likened to a man under house arrest that becomes problematic. The man is then moved to the detention center. Here he still causes trouble so he is transported to the county prison. In prison he becomes even more of a problem so they put him in solitary confinement, and so on. The fallen angels and the men in hell are forever building up their own misery. They are forever procuring more of their own misery. The spiritual and material *Furnace of Fire* is heated by degrees. It is not as though there is one thermostat that controls the pain and torment of all men and fallen angels, as popular newspaper comics would have people believe. Each one has a thermostat of their own which God turns up as needed. An illustration may be of help. Imagine standing on the dock of a boat in the middle of the ocean. The ocean is hell. Imagine that you throw into the ocean a drinking glass, a bucket and an empty 55-gallon drum. Each one of them is in the ocean. But each one is filled to their capacity. Each one is in hell, but each one is filled up with the exacting justice of God to the proper measure. Hell will be hell for the glass, the bucket and the 55-gallon drum. It will be hell for all of them. But the degree of hell for each of them will be different. Each one is filled to a different level.

The torment in hell is forever, is by degrees, and affects the body, the mind (or conscience), and the soul. The pain and sorrow of that place is utterly complete in all the faculties and areas of the human psyche as well as the human anatomy. Acts 24:15 says, “that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.” Men will have real, literal bodies in hell, and their torment will adjust accordingly. Right now, those spirits in hell are dreading the day they will receive their bodies because they know their torment will raise that much more. And if it is not enough that their spirits and bodies are tormented, their minds, or consciences, are tormented as well. James 5:3 says, “Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire.” The damned of hell loath their past lives and all the sins they committed. They are eternally reminded of their rejection of the Gospel and everyone and everything which aided them in that rejection. They will be continually reminded of the lust for sex, power, money, and the like. They will be continually reminded that material goods gave aid to their hellish nightmare. These things will act as a worm boring through their minds for eternity. There is no consolation, no pity, no help, no aid, no grace, nothing to help them. They continually receive the due wages for their sinful lives and wicked hearts. It is a place of weeping where the howling of brokenness is never quenched. What a world of sorrow they will forever live in.

In hell there is no relief. There is only God’s continual anger poured out on the wicked. There is only sorrow mixed with pain. Their bodies are forever burned but never consumed in the unique fire of the place, and their souls continually reflect on past memories that forever condemn them. Their torment is compounded by the reality of heaven not so far off but totally out of reach, where they will see their loved ones enjoying God. That will compound their misery with a bitter hatred to them and to Christ. And in all of this, there shall never be any diminution of their torture.

The lives men live determine the amount of torment they shall receive. Men are now heaping up torment for that day. Sins heat hell hotter. Romans 2:5 describes those who are “storing up wrath” for the Day of Judgment. They are collectors of God’s wrath which will one day be poured forth from the cup of His indignation upon them for all eternity. And 1 Thessalonians 2:16 describes those who “always live to fill up the measure of their sins until wrath comes upon them to the uttermost.” Every day men fill up their sins. For each human life there is given “one lifetime.” A human life has been given a specific divine appointment that dictates the date and time on which God will require their life for judgment. Each day they sin so as to compound their guilt against an infinitely holy God who becomes more and more infinitely angry with them with every passing moment.

Those in hell are also active in their residence in hell. Jesus says in Matthew 13:42, “And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” These beings hate God so much that they gnash their teeth at Him. They act like a junkyard dog drooling at the mouth and shaking their fists as they growl at His presence. They are pro-active in this. In the midst of their gnashing, it often turns again and again to uncontrollable weeping, not just crying. This is the eternal sorrow of the damned. It is an eternal, continual grief that the imagination cannot fathom. What would the infinite wrath of God feel like to the soul and to the body in this way?

In the midst of their own personal anguish, fallen men and fallen angels will also despise and hate one another, and will torment one another in that place. Matthew 18:34-

35 describes this when Christ says, "And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." The Father, like the lord, will give men over to "tormentors." The Greek word refers to one who exacts truth by use of the torture device known as the "rack." It is a fearful and horrible term. Men are not only persecuted by God's wrath, but also their own anguish and hatred of one another. Their hatred turns to action, and they torment one another in speech as well as violence. This would cause hell to be all the more maddening. Others will persecute them there. They will be handed over to each other in torment. What would it be like for Satan, the demons, wicked men and women to torment one another? What could possibly compare to this by analogy? How awful is such a place to imagine!

Peering through the keyhole into hell maybe we would see Pontius Pilate trying to wash the blood from his hands in the river of sulfur flowing nearby. Or maybe we would see Ananias and Sapphira and Demas surrounded by images of wealth just out of reach witnessing against them. We would see Satan's rage against men and men's rage against his. We would see demons tormenting men, and one another. We would see men's rage against one another in a chaotic madness that is without boundaries. Why would anyone want to go there? Who would lust, fornicate, commit adultery, lie, steal, or commit any temporary sin against an infinite God to spend eternity in hell? These must be madmen who desire torment! It is insane to continue in sin. It is insanity to commit sin before a righteous Judge who knows your every thought and every action. It is insanity not to flee from the wrath to come.

After surveying some of these basic biblical truths about the doctrine of hell, it may then be appropriate to ask the question, "Who goes to hell?" The answer to this is "most people." Most people go to hell and that is a tragedy. 1 John 5:19 says, "And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness." The whole world lies in the hands of wickedness. Men are born evil. They are born locked in a spiritual cage. They have no key to escape. They need someone to come with a key to let them out of the spiritual cage they are in. All men are born in this wicked and sinful cage of bondage to self. Unless men are released from this bondage, they will suffer for the deeds done for all eternity. Someone may ask though, "What constitutes wickedness?" Is wickedness limited only to the heinous acts of Hitler, Stalin, and Genghis Khan? No, not at all. Wickedness may be simply defined as that which is not perfect. Hell was created for imperfect beings. God requires perfection from all men just as the Father is perfect. Men are to be holy as God is holy. Who can attain this? That is why Christ states that most people go to hell. Luke 13:23-24 says, "Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." Jesus makes things quite clear in Matthew 22:14, "For many are called, but few are chosen." And in Matthew 7:13-14 he says, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

How do people end up in hell? Do they jump into the flames themselves? This is the wrong question to ask. You are already on your way to hell when you are born. Rather, the question should be as Christ asked it in Matthew 23:33, "Ye serpents, ye

generation of vipers, *how can ye escape the damnation of hell?*” How can people escape? The elevator is already going down, and men must be rescued before they reach the tormentors of the pit. Generally speaking, men are ripening for hell, as Jonathan Edwards said. God does not cast men into hell until they are ripe for the picking. It is like the green tomato plucked from the garden. It sits on the windowsill until it is ready to be puréed into sauce. A few days will pass and it will become ripe for its destruction and retransformation. Men are seen in this light. God waits for the perfect time, the day of their appointment, and then calls them to judgment when they are ripe for the picking.

What have *you* done to flee from the wrath to come? There is a man in the Bible named Esau. And the Scriptures say in Hebrews 12:17 concerning Esau, “For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.” The words “sought it carefully” means “investigate.” Esau cried with many tears, and investigated the way of salvation, but was still ultimately lost because he was not truly repentant. What have you done? How well have you “sought”? Some people have never cried once over their sin. It is not true that 40 buckets of tears will get a person into heaven, but the diligence to enter in by the narrow gate is not very evident in many who profess to be Christians. If you do not believe you will be damned, what excludes you from the number of the damned? How do you know that you will not go to hell?

The only means of escape from hell is Jesus Christ. 1 Thess 1:10 says, “And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.” The verb here is a participle in the present-middle voice. It means Jesus not only has the ability to save men from hell, but He is still doing this even now. Jesus Christ suffered in the garden and on the cross for the sins of His people. He drank the cup of God’s indignation for those He died for, and suffered the pains of hell torment on the cross. He alone, in his work, is able to save men from hell. No one else can save men. He alone holds the way of salvation. He alone takes away sin and wraps men in the robe of His righteousness. He alone covers men with His blood and in His work men are accepted before God. There is great safety in standing in the righteousness of Christ on the Day of judgment. There is no other way to be saved.

In this matter of “going to hell, age makes no difference.” Little children are not too little to go to hell. Isaiah 5:14 asserts, “Therefore hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure.” Hell is like a mouth that is always hungry and always desires to be fed. It is after everyone, metaphorically. We know God is the one who damns men, but God is also the One to whom men must turn to be saved. Children must be saved, and should be told so. Why is this a pressing issue? Young children ought to grasp onto Christ now before further sins pile up. A human life is like a spiritual piggy bank. Piggy banks hold money and collect money over time. And every child has a spiritual piggy bank, and are all storing up wrath in that spiritual piggy bank. One day God will call the piggy bank of their lives into account and He will pour out the wrath due to them for their fallen condition and their sin. And the scariest thing is this: children have their whole lives ahead of them to store up this wrath if they are not repentant to turn and live! They must turn to Christ immediately and waste no more time, as young as they may be, that their sins may not pile up and condemn them later!

Some parents may be thinking that this kind of exhortation to children gives little ones horrible nightmares. Yet, nightmares about hell are not bad if they press them to

seek the truth of the Savior. It would be better for them to have nightmares now while you teach them about the realities of hell, that prompts them to consider the state of their never-dying souls, than wind up in the nightmare that hell is all about in reality. I plead with you as parents to talk with your children, pray with your children, teach your children about hell, and the power of God's wrath. Teach them that Christ is their only hope and He alone holds the power to save. Teach them that they are locked in a spiritual cage and that it dangles over the fires of hell. Jesus Christ alone has the power to free them from their spiritual cage. He alone is the One with the key.

One final word should be given to those who are really Christians. As a result of this horrible doctrine of hell, it should excite Christians to alarm. They should be more concerned about people going to hell. They should have a prayerful concern for the lost, and ought to desire to witness for Christ. Christians know what hell's terror holds because they hold the regenerate capability to apprehend the Bible and its truths about hell. 2 Corinthians 5:11 exhorts them to this, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." And Jude 22-23 says Christians ought to be "pulling men from the fire" to save them. Is this admonished before Christians enough? Time is ticking away. Every moment is ticking to the final end of someone. Every second someone dies somewhere. We find it tragic when 349 airplane passengers die in a plane crash. We talk about it for weeks. Over 11,000 people die every day. Do we talk about the tragedy of that? Jesus says that most of those people go to hell.

Though this paper has directed itself to the doctrine of hell, a moment must be taken to talk about the rejection of hell in 21st century Christendom. There is a current trend that is growing in Evangelical circles attempting to throw away the doctrine of hell. These "Christians" believe that God is too loving to torture men in hell for eternity. Their logic works in this way: men only sin for 80 years. God would not be just if he tortured men for eternity for sins committed in the body for only 80 years or so.

Even though the Bible speaks about hell in the manner given thus far, as a place of horror, the doctrine is still immediately useful for the elect Christian. How? Christians should be exuberantly thankful and joyful that they are not given up to hell's gaping mouth. If it were not for the grace of Jesus Christ, the true and abiding grace applied by the Holy Spirit, everyone would burn in hell forever. Christians, though, are not scared of hell. They may be saddened by it now, and weep for those who are going there, but they are safe from its clutches. They will not even "Taste" death though they die. If it was not for that real grace in Jesus Christ every Christian would also be among the damned. But now, Christians may rejoice in the Lord, always.

Also, by a reverent fear of God, that which Jesus was teaching us in Luke 12:1-5, Christians are spurred onto the service and duty as a child of God. Such a reverence for the known power of God settles the heart of every Christian to humble and contrite obedience. Isaiah 66:2 says, "Upon this one I will look; he who is poor, of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My Word." Hell causes Christians to humbly tremble in awe, adoration and praise for the sheer power and authority of the Creator who has redeemed them from His own anger.

In conclusion, the reiteration of the foregoing definition may be of help. We have seen that *hell* is "the spiritual and material furnace of fire where its damned victims, in their minds, bodies, and souls, are eternally tormented to the full degree and capacity of their beings by God, by the devil and his demons, by damned human beings, and by

themselves through their memories and consciences, without any possibility of relief by mercy nor pity from God.” Amen.