

WHY DO PEOPLE GO TO HELL?

John 3:17-21

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The doctrine of hell is one the most hated doctrines in all the Bible.
 - i. Many Christian leaders cannot stomach it. They seem to believe the Bible on all other points but this one.
 1. Just a few years ago, Rob Bell, one of the most popular pastors in America, wrote a book called *Love Wins*, in which he denied the traditional doctrine of hell and affirmed a form of universalism – everyone goes to heaven as long as you are reasonably good.
 2. **John Stott**, an otherwise good example of an orthodox theologian wrote, “The concept of eternal conscious torment [is] intolerable. [I] do not understand how people can live with it without cauterizing their feelings or cracking under the strain.”
 3. FF Bruce, famous theologian, ““Any God who would do such a thing is not a God who is worthy of worship.”
 4. **Washington Gladden**, a 19th century theological liberal wrote, “To teach such a doctrine as this about God, is to inflict upon religion a terrible injury and to subvert the very foundations of morality.”
 5. **F. W. Farrar**, the chaplain to Queen Victoria, called the doctrine of hell “blasphemy against the merciful God.”
 6. In response, **Al Mohler**, president of Southern Baptist Theological seminary wrote, “Whereas preachers from earlier eras were concerned to save persons from punishment in hell, Farrar and his like-minded colleagues were determined to save their congregations from the fear of hell.”
 7. **Al Mohler** “Hell is theological odium, it is an odious doctrine in the minds of many moderns. It is absolutely unthinkable, morally and theologically unthinkable. It doesn't matter according to liberal theologians that the Bible is clear. There is virtually no doctrine in the New Testament so clear as the doctrine of hell. But what they want is a reformulation of a doctrine that is absolutely seen to be out of step with the modern age. The Briefing, 4/5/18
 - ii. Many Christians either haven't been taught about hell, or they have been taught and deny it anyway.
 1. A Barna Research survey found that 3 out of 5 people in America do not believe in hell. 38% of Christians believe that if a person is generally good, he can go to heaven.
2. The Bible crystal clear about hell.

- i. **Matthew 25:46** “And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”
 1. This verse addresses a number of misconceptions that people have about hell:
 - a. Universalism – the idea that everyone goes to heaven. Clearly not. Some go to eternal punishment.
 - b. Annihilationism -- the idea that when the wicked die they cease to exist (this is how Jehovah’s Witnesses define hell). But hell is both eternal, lasting forever, and punishment. If you ceased to exist it wouldn’t be eternal punishment because you wouldn’t be experiencing it.
 - c. Purgatory – a temporary place of punishment and purification to make one worthy of heaven. The Bible says nothing of purgatory. This verse makes it clear that there are only two possible destinations.
 - d. Hell exists but only in this life. This verse makes it clear that eternal punishment is a place you go away to, and it is eternal.
- ii. Jesus spoke more about hell than anyone else. He taught four things about hell:
 1. The pain of hell.
 - a. Hell is a place of weeping. Lk 13:28. Not just a watering of the eyes; but a continual sobbing. **Quote** "If you wake up after you die and find yourself in hell there will be endless sobbing on your part as you realize the mistake that you have made."
 - b. Hell is a place of wailing. Mt 13:42. “Weeping gone grotesque.” A crying out.
 - c. Hell is a place of gnashing of teeth. Lk 13:28. A grinding of teeth as you realize your situation is irreversible. Gritting your teeth in extreme pain.
 - d. Hell is a place of darkness. Mt 8:12. Not a place where you can hang out with your friends. Complete darkness.
 2. The finality of hell. Lk 16:26. There are no second chances. Once you get to hell, your station is fixed.
 3. The eternity of hell. It is called...
 - a. The fire that never goes out. Mt 3:12
 - b. The place of eternal fire. Mt 18:8
 - c. An unquenchable fire. Mk 9:43
 - d. Eternal punishment. Mt 25:46
 - e. The penalty of eternal destruction. 2 Thess 1:9
 - f. The place of eternal fire where there is the blackness of darkness forever. Jude 7, 17

- g. The smoke of their torment will go up forever and ever, and there will be no rest day or night. Rev 14:10-11
- 4. The justice of hell.
 - a. No one goes to hell who doesn't deserve it.
 - b. The penalty for rebelling against the infinite God is infinite punishment.
 - c. God doesn't want to send people to hell. He wants to save them. But people go to hell when they reject God's offer of salvation.
 - d. **C.S. Lewis** said, "There are two kinds of people: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, 'Alright, then, have it your way.'"
- 3. Hell is real. But the Bible says that God is love. So, how do these two Bible truths co-exist? Are they contradictory? In the text today we're going to learn exactly why people go to hell.

II. TEXT: John 3:17-21

- 1. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Anyone who believes in him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. 19 This is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone who does evil hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed. 21 But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be shown to be accomplished by God."
- 2. This passage contains five responses to the question, "Why do people go to hell?"

III. FIVE REALITIES ABOUT HELL

- 1. **God doesn't want anyone to go to hell.**
 - i. **John 3:17** "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."
 - ii. "Condemn" means to cast judgment and sentence people to hell.
 - iii. God does not want to condemn people.
 - 1. **1 Timothy 2:4** God "... wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."
 - 2. **2 Peter 3:9** "The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance."
 - iv. As a father of six, I do punish my children, but that doesn't mean that I want to. That doesn't mean that I enjoy it. I would prefer to never punish them; to never rebuke them; to never spank them. It's the same with God, only infinitely greater is His desire to save and not condemn.
 - v. "Lonesome Dove" is known as the best western film of all time. It's about a group of old Texas Rangers who are taking a herd of cattle from Texas to

Montana. One of their buddies, Jake Spoon, ends up leaving them and falling in with bad company, who went on to kill five men and steal their horses. So, when they are caught, the Texas Rangers decide to hang him. It's a sad moment, because Gus and Call go way back with Jake. They don't want to hang Jake. He is their close friend. They love him. Jake pleads his case, but Gus says, "You know how it works, Jake. You ride with the outlaw, you die with the outlaw. Sorry, you crossed, the line."

- vi. God doesn't want anyone to go to hell. No one. God sent his Son "to save the world." The "world" includes everyone who has ever lived – everyone! There is not one person who has ever lived that God wanted to condemn.
- vii. **Lamentations 3:33** "For he does not enjoy bringing affliction or suffering on mankind."
- viii. **Ezekiel 33:11** "Tell them, 'As I live—this is the declaration of the Lord God—I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked person should turn from his way and live. Repent, repent of your evil ways! Why will you die, house of Israel?'"

2. Avoiding hell couldn't be easier.

- i. **John 3:18** "Anyone who believes in him is not condemned"
- ii. How do you avoid hell? Believe in him. Who? Jesus Christ.
- iii. Verse 17 says that God sent His Son to save the world through Him. How? By sending Jesus to die in our place, for our sins, on the cross. Christ made salvation possible to everyone through His death on the cross. And God made salvation available to all through faith in Jesus Christ.
- iv. Think of all the things that God could do to make us earn salvation: Go to church every day. Give all your money away. Fast twice a week. Instead, the offer is to just believe. If you will simply believe in Jesus Christ, you will be forgiven.
- v. Imagine that you are drowning in the ocean, and I come along and throw you a life raft. All you have to do is grab it; receive it; accept it; trust in it. That's what God has done for us. We are drowning in our sins, and He has sent His Son to save us. All we have to do is cling to Him by faith. He will do all the rest!
- vi. At this point we must take a moment to define belief. A more accurate English word is trust. Notice that it says "believe in him." We are not simply believing Him, or believing things about Him; we are believing in Him. We are trusting in, relying on, depending on, leaning on Him. To believe in Christ means two things:
 - 1. You believe in Him as the Savior, and not yourself. You deny self-righteousness. You recognize that you are the worst of sinners, deserving hell, without any power to save yourself. You believe that

Jesus died in your place for your sins, and you rely upon Him alone for salvation.

2. You believe in Him as the King, and not yourself. You deny self-rule. You recognize that you belong to Jesus, and you exist for His glory. He is the master, you are His servant. You surrender full and total control of every arena of your life His authority. He leads, you follow.

3. Hell is for unbelievers, not sinners.

- i. **John 3:18** “but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God.”
- ii. Who is condemned? Not sinners, but unbelievers. Why? Because if sinners went to hell, then no one could be saved. We are all sinners.
- iii. All of us have sinned (Rm 3:23).
 1. Have you ever stolen anything? You are a thief.
 2. Have you ever told a lie, or cheated in any way? You are a liar.
 3. Have you ever lost your temper with someone? Jesus said that is just as bad as murder. You are a murderer.
 4. Have you ever lusted after someone in your mind, or looked at pornography? Jesus said that is just as bad as adultery. You are an adulterer.
 5. Have you ever taken God’s name in vain? You are a blasphemer.
 6. Have you ever dishonored or disobeyed your parents? That’s one of the Ten Commandments.
- iv. We have all sinned, and the wages of sin is death (Rm 6:23). “Death” in that context refers to spiritual death, or eternal separation from God. That’s what we deserve. If God sent all sinners to hell, then all would be condemned.
- v. God offers eternal life to all who believe in Jesus Christ, which means that the only people who go to hell are unbelievers. The only people who go to hell are those who reject God’s offer of eternal life through Christ.
- vi. That’s really good news for those of you who realize that you are a bad person; that you have committed terrible sins. Perfect people don’t go to heaven, forgiven people do. And to be forgiven we just need to believe.
- vii. Notice the term “anyone who does not believe is already condemned.” In other words, regardless of how good you think you are, if you reject Christ, you have already done enough to go to hell. You already deserve hell, so if you reject Christ, you have rejected your one and only hope for salvation.
- viii. Jesus spoke about the one unforgiveable sin – blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who reveals Christ to us; He helps us understand the gospel; He convicts us of sin and draws us to Christ. When we reject and resist His attempts to save us, we have committed the one and only unforgiveable sin – we have rejected Jesus Christ.

4. God has gone to great lengths to save us.

- i. **John 3:19** “This is the judgment: The light has come into the world”
- ii. People don’t go to hell because God has not tried to save them.
 1. God went to such great lengths to save us that He sent His one and only Son, who was God in the flesh, perfectly innocent, to be crucified for our sins.
 2. God sent His one and only Son into the world so that people could see Him face to face.
 3. God sent His only Son into the world to perform miracles to prove Himself.
 4. God sent His only into the world to teach us about God.
 5. God sent His only Son into the world to live a perfect life and to show us what God is like.
- iii. If people go to hell, it is not because God hasn’t done all He could do to save them.
- iv. Imagine that you invited your best friend to go on a cruise with you. You paid for the tickets – all expenses paid. You booked the dates. You called your friend’s job and made sure that he could take off for a paid-vacation. You bought your friend some new clothes for the cruise. You even offered to pick your friend up from his house and drive him to the dock. You have done everything necessary, everything within your power, to get your friend on that cruise boat. The only thing you haven’t done is to kidnap him and force him to go with you. All he has to do is say yes.
- v. God has done everything from start to finish for our salvation:
 1. He sent His Son to die for our sins. **Romans 5:8** “But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”
 2. He sent someone to preach the gospel to us. **Romans 10:15** “How, then, can they call on him they have not believed in? And how can they believe without hearing about him? And how can they hear without a preacher?”
 3. He sent His Holy Spirit to open our hearts, to convict us of sin, and enable us to understand and respond to the gospel. **John 12:32** “As for me, if I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all people to myself.”
 4. God has done everything to save us, even giving us the ability to believe. But He doesn’t force us, because that would be a violation of His love. He leaves us the freedom to resist.
- vi. All we have to do is say yes. All we have to do is believe.

5. People go to hell because they choose not to.

- i. Let’s walk through verses 19-21 together.

- ii. **John 3:19-21** “19 This is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone who does evil hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed. 21 But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be shown to be accomplished by God.”
1. “This is the judgment: The light has come into the world” – God sent Jesus to save the world.
 2. “And people loved darkness rather than the light” – People preferred life without Christ.
 3. “because their deeds were evil” – People rejected Christ because they didn’t want to repent of their sins. They loved darkness – life without Christ – because they could continue in their sins.
 4. “For everyone who does evil hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed.” -- People reject Christ because they don’t want to acknowledge and turn from their sin.
 5. “But anyone who lives by the truth” – Anyone who is truly seeking God and salvation; anyone who truly wants to please God.
 6. “comes to the light, so that his works may be shown to be accomplished by God.” -- True seekers accept Christ so that their actions can be affirmed as righteous, or exposed as unrighteous so they can repent.
- iii. In verse 18 we learned that it is not sinners who go to hell, but unbelievers – those who reject God’s offer of salvation through Jesus Christ. Why don’t people believe in Jesus? Why do they reject Christ? It is not for lack of evidence. It is not because the gospel is not believable. It is because they don’t want to repent of their sins. They literally choose sin over salvation; they choose evil over heaven. Very few unbelievers are honest enough with themselves and with others to admit this. Instead, they come up with all kinds of excuses and arguments for why they don’t accept Jesus – “the Bible is not trustworthy; miracles aren’t possible; there is no evidence for God; Christians are all hypocrites; the church just wants your money; there’s too much evil in the world for there to be a God, etc.” Those are just smokescreens. The real reason people reject Christ is because they don’t want to give up their sin.
- iv. You might respond, “Why would anyone do that? That’s insane.” You are right. Sin is insanity. It is the rejection of eternal love, and joy, and peace for temporary pleasure. People do insane things all the time. People know that smoking is lethal, yet they do it anyway. People know buy a brand new car is a rip-off, but they do it anyway. People know the high risk of catching an STD, but they still have pre-marital sex. People know that eating at Popeyes will only make you feel horrible, but they still do it. People go to hell because

they choose sin over salvation through Jesus Christ. They choose temporary pleasure over eternal peace.

- v. I once heard an evangelist say that there are two reasons people don't accept Christ. One, they don't believe. Two, they don't want to give up their sin. One time I asked a close friend of mine why he refused to follow Christ – unbelief, or love of sin. Surprisingly, he admitted to the latter. He didn't want to give up his sin. This passage is saying that in the end, that's the real reason people don't accept Christ, and the real reason people go to hell. If they were true seekers, the evidence for Christ is abundant. But they don't want to face up to the evidence because they don't want to give up their sin.

IV. CONCLUSION

1. Earlier I mentioned that close friend of mine who told me that he refused to follow Christ not because of unbelief, but because he loved his sin and didn't want to give it up. Well, that's not the end of the story. That was about twenty years ago, and that past twenty years have been a living hell for him. He has struggled with addiction, been in and out of prison, and lost everything several times over. I remember one time hearing that he was homeless, living in a friend's rented storage unit, in the winter. Lydia and I brought him a care package – some food and other items that would be useful to him. I remember the tears in his eyes when I told, "We want to help you, but we don't know how because you refuse to give up your sin." Well, eventually he went back to prison, and there he finally surrendered to Christ. He finally relinquished his sin. Now he is back on the outside, living with his family once again, and life is good – better than it's ever been. But best of all, he has eternal life. He doesn't have to fear hell.
2. Hell was not created for you. It was created for the devil and his demons. God doesn't want you to go to hell. He loves you and sent Jesus to save you. All you have to do is believe. All you have to do is receive Christ into your life. Trust Him as your Savior. Trust Him as your King.