

San Juan Church of Christ

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What Does God's Word Say About...

Eternal Separation From God

A question many people ask today is, "How can we believe in a loving, powerful God who would also cast people into an eternal destination of pain and torment?" Reconciling the horrible nature of hell with a God who desires all to be saved (2 Peter 3:9) can be a challenge for most to understand. However, hell is compatible with an all-loving and all-powerful God.

The issue of hell does not disprove the Bible or Christianity, even if people do not fully understand the nature of hell or why it must exist. Objections to hell's existence are based on emotional responses to the idea of its severity. People feel negatively about hell because they do not like the concept. If hell is real, then our emotions cannot change the reality of it and the fact that there are consequences for sin that separate us from a holy God (Isa. 59:2).

The denial of hell is based on redefining both who God is and what our concept of ultimate justice is in connection with God's character. Because we do not like the concept of hell, we then try to re-shape God into the mold we think He ought to fit. In the human mind, God, who is all about love, is not a God who could actually support a notion like hell, so God, justice, or both must be denied or re-made. The re-shaping of God into our image is then supported by our view of what ultimate justice should be.

Our mind would not conceive of such a terrible penalty so obviously God would not condemn us. This sounds familiar to what Satan told Eve in the garden, "You will not surely die," (Gen. 3:1-5). The essence of the devil's lie is that God does not mean what He says when it comes to punishment and we bite the forbidden fruit by planting the idea that God is really not going to be that strict for rebellion against His word. We feel that we know better than God, and if His will is not our will we just deny God.

What did Jesus say about hell? Jesus used the imagery of Topheth in the Valley of Ben-Hinnom from the Old Testament. This valley outside of Jerusalem was where idolatrous sacrifices took place by "passing their children through the fire" (2 Chron. 28:3; Jer. 7:31-32). This place was a fire pit which was an abomination and a place where there could be no fellowship with God. Gehenna is the New Testament term for this valley and is also a description of eternal separation from God. Jesus said that hell [Gehenna] is where the "worm does not die and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:47-48). He referenced hell as a "sentence" for wickedness (Matt. 23:33). It is where the soul and body meet destruction (Matt. 10:28). Hell is conceived as being "outer darkness" ... "in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth," (Matt. 25:30). It is the "eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels," (Matt. 25:41). Hell is "eternal punishment," (Matt. 25:46). If we accept Jesus as Lord of our life and do His will (Matt. 7:21), then we accept the reality of what He taught, and we will adjust our lives accordingly.

Please send any comments, questions, or requests for a Bible study to:
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