

Tough Questions of Faith

Volume 1, Hell

What is Hell Like?

Hell has been portrayed and described in so many different genres of art, literature, humor, film and music that we are left with an immense assortment of thoughts about what hell is like. That's if we ever think about it at all, which most people don't.

However, hell is described vividly and frequently by God in the Bible. Despite a growing avoidance of many pastors and churches to mention it these days, it still stands as an important facet of the Christian faith. The crux of Christianity is that God became man in Jesus to die on the cross and pay the penalty of our sins and disobedience, and that as we accept his sacrificial gift of forgiveness then we are saved from the punishment our sins deserved, which is hell.

Without the existence of hell there would have been no need for Jesus to die for our sins, and hence no Christianity. Without hell, God would be unjust and uncaring to not mete out punishment for all the evil that people perform in our world. Just as a loving parent or caring lawmaker sets up rules for healthy behavior along with consequences as a deterrent for breaking them, so has God set forth rules for life and consequences for breaking these. The Bible tells us that the punishment for our sin is spiritual death in hell. Author Max Lucado explains hell this way, "Hell is the chosen place of the person who loves self more than God and who loves sin more than his Savior, who loves the world more than God's world. Judgment is that moment when God looks at the rebellious and says, 'Your choice is honored.' While man does not always receive justice in this life, our holy God answers justice in eternity."

Hell is a horrible but necessary reality. Jesus described hell as the place of eternal punishment for sin where, "Their worm does not die, and fire is not quenched," Mark 9:48. There is "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:50). In Mathew 25:41, Jesus pictures judgment day with God saying to those who did not accept his forgiveness through Christ, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." The Apostle Paul's teaching on hell in II Thesselonians 1:8-9 instructs, "He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of His power." There appears to be degrees of punishment in hell as is described in Luke 12:41-48 as "beaten with many blows" vs. "few blows". Hell is a permanent state, showing that how we respond to Jesus in this life matters eternally. Know that the heart of God is for everyone to know and follow Him and spend eternity in Heaven. "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance," II Peter 3:9.

A question for reflection: If there were no hell, where would ultimate justice be served for people like Hitler, Stalin and Osama Bid Laden?