

## THE FIRE OF HELL IS LITERAL FIRE

One of the most important miracles in the Old Testament was the miracle of Daniel and his friends being thrown into a burning furnace and not getting burned though the flames licked around them. The same book that speaks of this miracle says the wicked will rise in the resurrection to everlasting contempt. God raises the wicked and they will suffer bodily forever. God replenishes their bodies so that they can suffer indefinitely or he is able to preserve them from being destroyed by the suffering.

Exodus states that God came down on Mount Sinai as a threatening and dangerous fire. That may explain what the fire of hell is. It is God.

The message so far is that this everlasting contempt could involve burning people in a tormenting flame forever is an idea.

The idea is endorsed in the New Testament as a fact.

Belief in eternal punishment for those who die estranged from God is a core doctrine of the Christian and Islamic faiths. Moreover, for Christianity it is THE core doctrine for without it you cannot understand what Jesus was supposed to have saved you from and it is supposed to be why Jesus is so important and central. Lee Strobel tells us that Hell is both the natural result of a rejection of God and also a punishment from God for opposing goodness and real love.

Christian tradition from the earliest days took the torments of Hell literally. Clement 2 about 100 AD makes that clear. Early apocryphal texts such as the Apocalypse of Peter 200 AD support this tradition. The antiquity of the tradition is a stronger indication that this is correct Christian doctrine than any watered down Hell that modern theologians come up with. A very literal Hell of torment was universally accepted by the Church in all its forms until quite recently.

Catholic teaching says that there is a place, Hell, where mortal sinners go immediately after death though their bodies are laid in the grave. The spirits of the sinners go there and then at the resurrection they rise again. Body and soul they will never leave Hell. They will be in anguish for all eternity. The suffering must get worse when they get their bodies back. God raises them from the dead for a vindictive reason. It is not going to help so he would not bother unless it was going to hurt them far worse.

Even if God does all he can to keep us out of Hell there is a point according to Jesus where he stops doing so. Jesus said God's angels will torment the wicked by taking them and throwing them into Hell. God doing all he can to keep you out of Hell then according to him does not mean God will not throw you. God sending the angels to do it is the same as God doing it for God makes the angels. Let Jesus speak. The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. "Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked his disciples. "Yes," they replied. Like men of their time, they thought of Hell in literal terms.

Some say that Hell is not a torture chamber set up by God in which he gets his own back. God rules Hell if he made it to punish sinners. Otherwise Satan must run it. But as God is all-powerful and Satan is not he must be the real ruler even if Satan does rule there.

Many argue that Hell is not a punishing but a punishment. They seem to think that God banishes you because you ask for it and as a result of the banishment other bad things happen. So Hell could be a torture chamber without it being anything to do with God. If you go your own way you make yourself vulnerable.

Strobel points out that not all in Hell will cut off by God to the same degree. It depends on how great their sins are. This is an absurd doctrine. If it is true then a demon in Hell could have a sort of relationship with God. It would contradict the view that Hell is the rejection of God. It would imply the damned can do better but something is preventing them and that something must be God!

The believers insist that people are valuable as people and not just because of what they do or don't do which is why God cannot just simply put sinners out of existence so it is more dignified to send them to Hell. But is that true? The assumption is that going out of existence or going to sleep for all eternity is worse than having them suffer forever! This is a cruel insane idea. The believers are evidently trying to justify what they know is inexcusable and extremely inexcusable.

Jesus taught that Hell was a dump and that there was weeping there and gnashing of teeth and the victims of Hell suffered greatly in an unquenchable fire and endured everlasting darkness. The thought that Hell is a fiery torture chamber is so ridiculous that most theologians these days prefer to see such images as symbolic. But in Jesus' day, a Hell like that sounded possible. Just because we know that such a Hell would be ridiculous today, does not mean that we should see Jesus' utterances as symbolic. Jesus was speaking to simple people who took him literally. Therefore he meant it literally. Some theologians say that Hell is fire and darkness which indicates symbolism. Others say the darkness of Hell may refer to the damned being blind or God preventing them from seeing the light of the fire.

Jesus in the Gospel of John said he was the vine and his disciple was the branch and should the branch not bear fruit it will be hacked off and thrown away. It is clear that God will do the cutting off. It is not about God passively standing by while you cut yourself off. When you are thrown into Hell, that is torture. Even if Hell is loneliness and not hellfire it is still a torture chamber. The throwing in makes it God's torture chamber for sinners.

In Luke 16, the rich man is described by Jesus as going to suffer forever in torment and the poor man he ignored goes to Paradise after they die. Jesus says there is a barrier to prevent anybody crossing from Paradise - Heaven - to Hell or vice versa. If you really stay in Hell or Heaven of your own free will there would be no need for a barrier. The rich man was concerned for his brothers so he was not totally selfish. Also the rich man did not ask to be sent back to warn his brothers about "this place of torment." He asked that a saint be raised from the dead to do it. All these things indicate that he is forced to stay there. He is therefore in a divine torture chamber. Nothing in the story indicates that it was just a story. It was not like a parable.

Pope Francis in 2017 said that the natural disasters in Mexico were a punishment from Satan for its devotion to the Virgin Mary. The Church teaches then that Satan punishes people for doing the allegedly right thing. The Book of Job does the same thing. Nobody likes the thought that they are punished for fair or unfair it expresses judgement. And it would feel no different from the punishment really being from a just God. And if God punishes in Hell then maybe Satan does too! If God punishes in Hell with fairness it does not follow that he protects the people there from Satan's attacks. So Hell could be both fair punishment from God and also unfair punishment from Satan. It would be even worse than a lake of burning sulphur.

The Bible speaks of Hell as eternal fire. Nothing indicates that this fire is a symbol. The notion that it is a symbol is just us reading our modern ideas back into the Bible writings. Or more likely it is the Church trying to retain a good reputation by hiding one of its worst and most sanity-destroying doctrines for it knows it will not get away with it and shows that Christianity is evil even if Christians are good. The God of Jesus Christ is evil but we are not allowed to even think that. We are expected to see him as our loving Father. That is compounding the evil.