

Scriptures and Doctrine :: HELL: The District of Damnation

HELL: The District of Damnation - posted by RobertW (), on: 2004/12/18 11:51

HELL: The District of Damnation
By Robert Wurtz II

Hell is the district of eternal damnation. It is a location that has been set apart to quarantine wickedness. Hell was created by God for the devil and his followers. Scripture uses many illustrations to describe Hell and none is more fearsome than that of Tophet/Gehenna. Tophet was a small valley southwest of Jerusalem which belonged to the sons of Hinnom. According to Jeremiah 7:31 the Children of Israel would come and sacrifice their children there to the false god Molech (I Kings 11:7,33; II Kings 16:3; Jeremiah 19:6, 11-14; etc.). Those Jews who had fallen into idolatry placed a large, bronze, hollowed out statue of Molech- shaped like a man and with its arms outstretched. A fire would be built within the statue that was fed by an air canal that made for a fierce heat. When the flames were intense and the arms red-hot the idolaters would place their babies onto the outstretched arms and hands. Some accounts say they would calculate the distance and throw the infant directly into the fire. The infants would die a horrific death; their skin would be burned off and their bodies burned alive. The screams and cries of the babies would be unbearable, even to these depraved people. Therefore, drums (tophim) were played to drown out the hideous screams of the infants to make the event tolerable for the parents who had all but quenched their familial love (storgos). Hence, Tophet, in the Hebrew, signifies the beating of drums.

Tophet Becomes Gehenna

Over the course of time Tophet became synonymous with judgment and slaughter in Jewish history. King Josiah stopped the Children of Israel from making their sons and daughters "pass through the fire" and is believed to have been the person who made the area a garbage dump. Later, when Babylon came to destroy Jerusalem dead bodies were piled there until there was no room (Jeremiah 7:32, 33).

By the time of Jesus, Gehenna was a trash dump that burned continually outside the city. The cities refuse, as well as the bodies of criminals, were thrown there. Gehenna was the 'visual' that Jesus used to illustrate what hell is like. Everything that we know of and think of concerning Tophet/Gehenna must come to bare. The fire, the screams, the burning of refuse; all of these are analogies as to what hell is. Hell is a place where the cosmic refuse of God's creation is burned. It is a place where those who desire to rebel against the love and peace of God are quarantined and burned.

Deep and Large

In Isaiah 30:33 we read "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. Hell was created for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). Had Satan opportunity, he would have turned Heaven into Hell. He is the enemy of ALL that Heaven is. He does not like the conditions of Heaven and brought war to it. We must understand that at satan was not at home in Heaven once sin was found in him. He obviously enjoys the pains of Hell because of his behavior after 1000 years in the bottomless pit. He comes out only to ADD to the punishments that he justly deserves.

God did not create hell for man; but man has chosen to follow Satan and Satan is headed for hell. I have personally known of demonized men to say, "why should I go to Heaven and worship God all the time," (and other unutterable things) It was then that I realized that this man by his own admission, would not be at home in Heaven. Therefore hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure; and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth, shall descend into it" (Isaiah 5:14). Hell has expanded to contain the multitudes that are walking the broad road following Satan who militate against all that is good.

Why Teaching on Hell is Often NOT Effective

If there is one thing that characterizes our culture and generation it is one of the "here and now" and of "instant gratification". People go into extreme amounts of debt because of the need for instant gratification. They are bolstered by the idea that the payments won't be coming for a month or a year or more. A "No payments until next year" is a sales and marketing strategy that seeks to allure people by making the payment for their excesses seem more distant and in the future. A sober minded person sees strait through such a tactic and refuses to buy anything on such terms. The Devil, in like fashion tells people to go ahead and sin; because there are no real payments "until eternity". Because the sentence is not carried out speedily; mans heart is fully set in them to do evil (Ecclesiastes 8:11).

People do not fear things that are distant because they are distant. They think they will "cross that bridge when they get to it." And cross over they will- over that great gulf affixed (Luke 16:26). I have heard it said that men spend their whole lives pressing the thought of death as far back into their minds as possible. How much more do they seek to bury the idea of unending flame?

Another Reason Why Teaching on Hell is Often NOT Effective

What are the tophim (drums) of our lives? What are we doing to drown out the sounds and horrors of hell? What are we doing to numb our minds to the reality of hell? What is the overarching distraction that is keeping us from focusing on hell? What do we do to put hell out of our minds? The horror of hell never changes; but there are things we do to put it out of our minds. Jesus said that if our hands or feet or eyes offend us we ought to do away with them rather than go to hell. (Matthew 5:29). Many, rather than doing away with them do away with the thought of hell. Jesus also said that we should not fear men who can merely kill the body; but we should fear the one who can perpetually destroy our soul in hell (Matthew 10:28). Where is that fear? Why has the doctrine of hell not been as effective as it should be? Why are people so careless with their soul in the face of such unimaginable consequences? Why do people keep telling themselves that there is time to repent? Why do we "beat the drums of procrastination" or self-deception? Why don't people want to hear it?

Many haply travel the downward broad road of destruction with the thought that they will someday change. They procrastinate as though they will feel the need to repent any greater than now. Their unconscious policy is procrastination and it is among the most dooming of mindsets. It's as though people think that right in front of the gates of hell there is going to be an "exit" for them to take; but by then it will be too late. After they had spent as many lifetimes gnawing their tongue for pain as there is sand on the sea shore there will be yet one word that will haunt them the most: ETERNITY. They have been there so long and yet they will be there forever and ever. Nothing is worth that. Nothing is worth even remotely risking that. The enemy is beating the drums of indifference and deceit- we must hearken to the cries of God's word as it defines hell.

If there is a sinner in this house, let me say to him, Abandon all your excuses. You have been told to-night that they are all vain. To-night it will be told in hell, and told in heaven, and echoed from the ends of the universe, what you decide to do. This very hour may seal your eternal destiny. Will you submit to God to-night--NOW? (C.G.F Lecture X)

Re: HELL: The District of Damnation - posted by Svineklev, on: 2004/12/24 22:33

The fact is that teaching on hell may sometimes not be effective for evangelism because it is only indirectly relevant. People must be convinced of the gravity of their sin and their responsibility to a righteous God, not scared into conformity. (Yes, the severity of the punishment may help them "get it," so to speak...on the other hand, they may be running more FROM the punishment than TOWARD God.)

Re: - posted by RobertW (), on: 2004/12/25 13:34

Quote:

-----The fact is that teaching on hell may sometimes not be effective for evangelism because it is only indirectly relevant.

Hi Svineklev,

Before Felix, Paul "reasoned concerning righteousness, temperance (self-control), and the judgment to come." Through John the Baptist, God said that Christ would come to burn the lost "with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:12). Eschatologically it is the judgment to come. It is greater than the Book of the Revelation's tribulation in which men and women hide in the mountains, dens, and caves of the earth desiring to be hid from the Face of God. It is greater than the time when men shall seek death and not find it or when they gnaw their tongues for pain. Indeed, it is the time when those who refused the absolute Lordship of Christ will be brought before Him and torn asunder in His presence. (Matthew 24:51; Luke 19:27).

The Surgeon General's warning on the bottom of a package of cigarettes is not there to scare people as much as it is to inform them of the finality of what they are doing. We have all watched this information go unheeded. So to, when teaching on the finality of Hell it is not a scare tactic so much as a glimpse of a final reality for the path of an unrepentant sinner. Predictive prophecy is better than an eyewitness account. It is a sure thing.

John MacArthur made some sobering comments about hell that I have never quite come to terms with. I will borrow a few quotes here:

If there were any doctrine in the Bible that could be wished away, it would be the doctrine of hell. But hell cannot be eliminated from the Bible. The wicked will be cast "into the furnace of fire"--those are terrifying words from our Lord. He spoke of hell more than anyone else in the Bible, and for a good reason. People probably wouldn't listen if anybody else tried to teach about hell. Christ had to be the one who taught about hell. We cannot conceive of eternal damnation. Christ emphasized hell in His preaching. If you don't think that is true, then you haven't paid attention to His ministry. (Hell, The Furnace of Fire)

Jesus is the one who tells us most about Hell. Some would call it "hell-fire" preaching, but the message of the burning of the chaff is an opening characteristic of the revelation of the purpose of Christ. His fan IS in His hand and He shall thoroughly purge His floor. The wheat shall be gathered to the barn and the chaff with unquenchable fire.

People often say to me, "Isn't it a terrible thing that people have to go to hell?" The fact of the matter is, if people don't want Jesus Christ, they choose to go to hell. There were angels in heaven, but they chose to leave and wound up in hell. That's essentially the same choice that a man makes. God isn't going to force a man to go to heaven who doesn't want to be there. He didn't force angels to stay when they didn't want to be there. They wanted more than they thought heaven could offer, so they joined in the prideful rebellion of Satan and were thrown out. (Destruction of Apostates)

Would a sinner be at home in Heaven? No wild parties, no booze, no drugs, no sin, etc. Would they suddenly want to 'be there' with God after seeing all the splendor. They have spent their whole lives running from Him, resisting Him, and hiding from Him; so now they will suddenly want to spend eternity with Him? Who knows?

Hell may awaken a sinner, but only Holy Ghost conviction will lead them to repentance and faith. It is the conviction we need.

God Bless,

-Robert

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/12/28 10:40

Quote:

-----The fact is that teaching on hell may sometimes not be effective for evangelism because it is only indirectly relevant.

Eric

I don't understand what 'effective evangelism' might mean to someone who holds to 'unconditional election' and 'irresistible grace'. Wouldn't 'effective' evangelism be contributing to grace in some sense?

Re: - posted by KeithLaMothe, on: 2004/12/28 17:25

I echo the question about the meaning of differences in the "effectiveness" of different kinds of evangelism in the context of the doctrines of Grace. "More effective" means "more likely to effect (cause) a certain result," with that result being the goal. What goal are you speaking of? The salvation of the lost? That is a goal of evangelism, but it is certainly not a goal which any given mode of "human" evangelism is more or less likely to fulfill, at least according to Reformed theology as I understand it. It is there that I perhaps most strongly agree: God may graciously deign to have us play parts in His orchestration of another individual's salvation, but none other than He Himself actually contributes in any decisive manner to the salvation of the lost. Have I misunderstood Reformed theology here?

I'm thinking you may have had another goal in mind that various modes of evangelism are more or less apt to accomplish. Communicating the main point(s) as clearly and quickly as possible? Correctly representing God and the Gospel? Provoking more honest thought among the audience about the topic? Being conducive to genuine dialogue with the audience? (the audience is not necessarily 100% unsaved, indeed some of the best fruits of evangelism I've experienced are the fellow Brothers and Sisters I meet and the conversations we have)