

HELL

(Mt. 10:28)

By Paul T. Butler — OBC Chapel, September 1975

INTRODUCTION

MY NAME IS NOT HARRY TRUMAN AND I'M NOT RUNNING FOR PRESIDENT. But I propose to give you a sermon on Hell this morning.

I. HELL MAKES THE NEWS OCCASIONALLY.

- A. In May, 1967, *Time* magazine ran an article on it. Some theologians interviewed had doubts about whether there is an afterlife, and others absolutely disavowed the existence of an eternal hell.
- B. A 30 year old preacher in one of our western communities suddenly became a popular sensation and a national figure because he publicly and proudly denied the existence of hell—and was so quoted in *Time*—he said, “Hell is a damnable doctrine—responsible for a large measure of this world’s hatred. According to this doctrine, God, who commands us to love our enemies, plays the hypocrite by damning his enemies. This in turn stimulates the hatred of God by people who abhor hypocrisy—and it gives sanction to our hatred of certain selected enemies.”
- C. Of the doctrine of the Second Coming and all mankind, except a few, being extinguished or tormented for ever, Nels F. S. Ferre says (*Sun and the Umbrella*, pg. 33), “It seems doubtful that Jesus ever taught such a doctrine.”

II. BUT THERE IS A RETICENCE, EVEN OF BIBLE BELIEVING PREACHERS, TO PREACH ON HELL.

- A. Billy Graham says, in one of his tracts,
 - 1. Hell “. . . is the most unpopular subject a minister can choose. . .”
 - 2. “In glancing through the books in my library I found that there have been few sermons written on this subject in the past 50 years.”
 - 3. “I have had a number of ministers tell me that they have never preached a sermon on hell and yet, as I read the New Testament, I am amazed at the number of direct references to this subject, especially by Christ.”
- B. In a tract from the “Back To God Hour” the results of a survey taken and indicated that 99% of the people in this country believe in God, but only 58% believe in hell (Tract #112).

III. FEAR OF HELL IS A BIBLICAL MOTIVATION FOR REPENTANCE AND CONVERSION.

- A. Halley’s Handbook, pg. 459, Jesus “talked much about the future life. He appealed to the hope of heaven and the fear of hell. . . .

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It is a pity that the present day pulpit so generally deprecates the very motives that Jesus himself appealed to. Maybe that is one of the reasons the pulpit has lost so much of its power. One of the most powerful stimulants to good and deterrents from evil in this life is a profound conviction as to the reality of the future life, and that our estate there will depend on our behavior here. . . .”

C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcom*: “I have met no people who fully disbelieved in hell and also had a living and life-giving belief in heaven.”

- B. C. S. Lewis, in *The Problem of Pain*, pg. 118: “There is no doctrine which I would more willingly remove from Christianity than this, if it lay in my power. But it has the full support of Scripture and, specially, of Our Lord’s own words.”
- C. Dwight L. Moody once said, “The word of God teaches us plainly that there is future retribution; if it does not teach that it does not teach anything. . . . Now some people say, ‘Oh, you are just trying to scare us, you say such things just to alarm us.’ I would consider myself an unfaithful servant if I did not so warn you. The blood of your soul would be required at my hands if I did not so warn you. . . . No one spoke of the judgment as Christ did; none knew it as well as he.”
- D. Paul the apostle said, “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men . . .” (II Cor. 5:11).
Peter wrote, “. . . pass the time of your sojourning here in fear . . .” (I Pet. 1:17).
- E. Donald F. Tweedie, Jr., *Eternity*, April 1965, said: “. . . I personally am not negative about fear as an inducement to a crisis which will culminate in a Christian conversion. Probably at least some element of fear is a necessary part of such a crisis experience. Certainly, if the dangers of lostness and hell are real, fear is a most appropriate emotion.”

TO LET A LOST AND DOOMED WORLD OF MANKIND GO MERRILY, LAUGHING AND JOKING AND ENTERTAINING ITSELF WITH POSITIVE FEELINGS AND UNFOUNDED OPTIMISM TOWARD AN ETERNAL HELL IS LIKE LETTING A CHILD RUN MERRILY OUT INTO A BUSY STREET LAUGHING, THINKING HAPPY THOUGHTS ALL THE TIME AND NOT WARNING IT OF IMPENDING CATASTROPHE!

I am not contending that fear and hell and judgment is the most expedient way to motivate conversion. Trusting in the faithfulness, mercy, love and goodness of God is the most significant basis for a lasting and maturing conversion. But as easy as it is for any of us and all of us to fall into hypocrisy, presumptiveness upon the grace of God, or returning to a life

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of self-indulgence, WE NEED TO REMIND OURSELVES FREQUENTLY OF THE DANGER OF ETERNAL HELL!

IV. ILLUSTRATION:

A number of years ago four men were fishing from a boat in the Niagara River some distance above the world-renowned falls. As the fish were not very hungry the fishers got into a controversy regarding future punishment. Three of the number contended that there was no such place as hell, whilst the fourth accepted the testimony of Scripture on the subject. The discussion became so heated they failed to observe that their boat was getting perilously near the sweep of the current. Perceiving their danger, they seized the oars, and rowed with all their might to a safe spot on the river. "If there is no such place as hell," said the believer in God's Word, "why were you so afraid to go over the falls?" One of them replied, "The 'No Hell' doctrine is good enough to go fishing with, but it is very poor to go over the falls with."

DISCUSSION

I. HELL IS A REAL PLACE.

A. There are four words translated Hell in the KJV.

1. *Sheol*: The Hebrew word which represents the locality or condition of the dead (*keber* means tomb; *shahkath* means corruption). *Sheol* is not as precise about endless, retributive character of the life beyond as New Testament. Still, wherever used, it does usually represent the place of future retribution (Deut. 32:22; II Sam. 22:6; Job 17:15; 21:13; 26:6; Ps. 9:17; 18:5; 89:48; 116:3; 139:8; Prov. 23:14; 15:11; Isa. 14:15; Ezek. 31:16, 17; Amos 9:2; Jonah 2:2).
2. *Tartarus*: II Pet. 2:4 — the place where God cast the angels who sinned and who are delivered into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment.
3. *Hades*: Most frequently used as antithetical to heaven. Mt. 11:23; 16:18; Lk. 10:15; 16:23; Rev. 1:18; 6:8; 20:13. Sometimes simply the place of departed dead.
4. *Gehenna*: or Valley of Hinnom; Mt. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mk. 9:43, 45, 47; Lk. 12:5; Jas. 3:6. Most used word and most associated with judgment.

The words in themselves do not prove hell's existence. They merely describe in human language that which man has not yet fully experienced. The existence of hell is proven from three lines of evidence.

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B. Natural Revelation (we shall equate judgment with hell).

1. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them . . . clearly perceived in the things that have been made . . . receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error" (Rom. 1:18ff.).
2. The very fact that built into our universe and its moral structure there are penalties, judgments and executions of those judgments has indicated to the pagan world some place of future retribution.
3. Many would *like* to believe there is no such place and some even use the word hell to swear there is no such place, but God has not left Himself without witness to the whole world . . . so they shall be without excuse!
4. I've known some rounders in my day and every one of them except one believed there was a place of retribution—hell.

C. Man's Conscience

1. "When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them . . ." (Rom. 2:14ff.).
2. Alfred M. Rehwinkel has written a masterful book on *The Voice of Conscience*.

Conscience is absolute in its verdict. There is no bargaining or compromising. We may attempt to excuse ourselves, but conscience will prevail. The judgment of conscience is final. Conscience does not change its verdict unless the standard or law is changed or done away. This is the very essence of the Christian's "passing from death to life"—Jesus has taken away the law that stood against us. This is the only escape from conscience. Without the removal of the law, judgment and retribution are inevitable. Conscience is no respecter of persons. It pronounces its unimpeachable judgments regardless of the opposing authority by which it may be confronted.

3. Conscience is man himself speaking as a moral being to himself. God has placed this voice in man at his creation and man cannot rid himself of it, even if he would.

Men have cried out to die and have committed suicide attempting to escape from the horror of a tormenting conscience. In the torments of an aroused conscience, man experiences a foretaste of everlasting torture in hell.

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D. On the Authority of Jesus Christ

1. Never were there words as solemn and as searching as those in which Jesus warned of hell and the judgment to come. In 12 out of 35 of his parables he depicts men as judged, condemned, and punished for their sins. In one, (Lazarus and the rich man) he draws back the veil on the conditions men in the hereafter . . . a chasm that is forever unbridgeable (Lk. 16:19-31).
2. More than the love of God is revealed at the cross. There we see, unsheathed, the implacable hostility of God's wrath against sin—past, present and future. It is a precursor of the last judgment.
3. The documents that make up our New Testament have been submitted to nearly 2,000 years of intense, scientific, archaeological, textual, investigation. They have been verified, authenticated, accredited as historically trustworthy. They have never, by any authentic evidence, been contradicted. They are a record of one Jesus of Nazareth who walked on the sea, healed the sick, cast out demons, raised the dead and was himself raised from the dead.

HE SAID THERE WAS A PLACE OF FINAL AND ETERNAL RETRIBUTION IN THE LIFE BEYOND THIS ONE. . . . I BELIEVE HIM! UNTIL SOMEONE COMES ALONG WITH BETTER CREDENTIALS THAN HIS, I WILL CONTINUE TO BELIEVE HIM!

Madalyn Murray O'Hair, speaking on the campus of Drake University, said, "There is absolutely no conclusive evidence that Jesus ever really existed. . . . These stories about him must be considered nothing more than folk tales. . . . But there is never going to be any way of verifying them one way or another. . . . I reject the idea of a life hereafter on the same grounds. Do you know anybody who has come back with a first-hand report on heaven? If you do, let me know. Until then you'll pardon me if I don't buy it. I agree with Mark Twain, who wrote about the hereafter, that there is no sex in it; you can't eat anything in it; there is absolutely nothing physical in it. You wouldn't have your brain, you wouldn't have any sensation, you wouldn't be able to enjoy anything—unless you were queer for hymn singing and harp playing. So who needs it? SPEAKING FOR MYSELF, I'D RATHER GO TO HELL."

II. HELL IS THE ETERNAL HOME OF THE IMPENITENT

A. It is described as:

1. the outer darkness (Mt. 8:12)
2. weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mt. 8:12)
3. the pit of the abyss (Rev. 9:2, 11)
4. eternal punishment (Mt. 25:46)

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5. torment or anguish (Lk. 16:24; Rev. 14:10, 11)
 6. eternal sin (Mk. 3:29)
 7. second death (Rev. 21:8)
 8. eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might (II Thess. 1:9)
- B. Hell is the penitentiary of the moral universe in which all impenitent are sentenced for eternity to share with the devil and rebellious angels.
1. Obviously its essential characteristic is lostness, separation from God and the fellowship of the godlike.
 2. It is eternal remorse, despair, hopelessness and guilt.
 3. C. C. Crawford, *Survey Course in Christian Doctrine*, Vol. II, "Hell has been prepared for the devil and his angels. Wicked men will eventually go to hell, not because God will cast them into it, but because their own consciences will drive them, instinctively, to their proper place (as in the case of Judas, Acts 2:23). As water seeks its own level, they who in this present life fit themselves only for the society of the rebellious, wicked, unbelieving, will instinctively seek that type of society in the next world. For, without a doubt, the devil and all his kind would be miserable in heaven."
- C. A place where sin and wickedness is rampant
1. Judging from the manner in which God deals with unrepentant sinners (Rom. 1), that is, allowing their sin to go unrestrained, it follows that man's destiny is the free expression of pride, selfishness and greed, hate, hurtfulness.
 2. God says: "You have lived for yourself, now you may have just that. . . . Man who was created a social being, is in the end cut off completely from God and goodness."
 3. When you were born into this world, you came to a place that had been prepared for you. Generations of blood and breeding and tradition . . . and, of course, the particular preparation of parents, etc. You were expected; you were prepared for; and so you arrived, not at just a place, but a prepared place. IN OTHER WORDS, YOU ARRIVED AT HOME. HELL IS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO WANT IT!
- IT SHOULD NOT BE A STRANGE THOUGHT THAT, EVEN AS THERE WAS PREPARATION FOR MAN'S ARRIVAL INTO THIS WORLD, THERE IS ALSO PREPARATION FOR HIS ARRIVAL IN THE NEXT WORLD!
- D. A place of utter ruin and lostness and destruction of reality
1. C. S. Lewis in *The Problem of Pain* (p. 125-126), "To enter heaven is to become more human than you ever succeeded in

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being in earth; to enter hell, is to be banished from humanity. What is cast (or casts itself) into hell is not a man: it is "remains." To be a complete man means to have the passions obedient to the will and the will offered to God: to *have been* a man would presumably mean to consist of a will utterly centered in itself and passions utterly uncontrolled by the will."

2. "By virtue of God's moral law, the sinner reaps as he has sown, and sooner or later is repaid by contempt, selfishness, hate, hurtfulness. Then the selfishness of one sinner is punished by the selfishness of another, the ambition of one by the ambition of another, the cruelty of one by the cruelty of another. The misery of the wicked hereafter will doubtless be due in part to the spirit of their companions. They dislike the good, whose presence and example is a continual reproof and reminder the height from which they have fallen, and they shut themselves out of their company. The Judgment will bring about a complete cessation of intercourse between the good and the bad" (Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p. 1035).
3. Uncle Screwtape, writing to Wormwood says:
"To us a human is primarily food; our aim is the absorption of its will into ours, the increase of our own areas of selfhood at its expense. . . . We want cattle who can finally become food; He (God) wants servants who can finally become sons. We want to suck in, He wants to give out. We are empty and would be filled; He is full and flows over. Our war aim is a world in which Our Father Below has drawn all other beings into himself. . . ."

HELL IS A PLACE OF TOTAL SELFISHNESS . . . WHERE EVERYONE DEVOURS, EXPLOITS, ABUSES, PERVERTS, DESTROYS, REBELLS.

Prisoners of hell enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded and are therefore self-enslaved.

The blessed, forever submitting to obedience, become through all eternity more and more free.

What went on in Sodom and Gomorrah; what people did to people in the decadance of Rome; the hateful, hurtful tortures of the German Third Reich; the agonies and torments of the millions in Russian and Chinese concentration camps; the ruin, destruction, hopelessness, despair of thousands of American skid-rows, bars, brothels, and drug addicts. . . . MULTIPLY A MILLION TIMES A MILLION AND YOU STILL DO NOT KNOW THE HORROR OF HELL.

IT IS A PLACE WHERE ALL THE HORRIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF UNBELIEF AND REBELLION ARE ALLOWED TO RUN RAMPANT FOREVER AND EVER!

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III. HOW TO GO TO HELL

A. Just want to!

1. God created all of us with the power of will and choice. He will not revoke that power. He will give us what we choose.
2. C. S. Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, p. 127, "I willingly believe that the damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the inside. . . . they (occupants of hell) do not will even the first preliminary stages of that self-abandonment through which alone the soul can reach any good."
3. Just want this world—want what the devil wants—not the globe, but worldliness or mind-of-the-world (rebellion, license, greed, exploitation).
4. "To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:6).
5. ". . . friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4-5).
6. "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. . . . No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other. . . . You cannot serve God and mammon" (Mt. 6:21, 24).
7. DO NOT THINK YOU CAN PRETEND TO BE SOMETHING OR DESIRE SOMETHING OTHER THAN WHAT YOU REALLY WANT IN YOUR HEART AND MIND. JESUS' MOST SCATHING JUDGMENTS FELL UPON THE "GREAT PRETENDERS" THE PHARISEES, OF HIS DAY. WE MAY FOOL ONE ANOTHER, BUT WE CAN'T FOOL GOD ABOUT WHAT WE REALLY WANT.

It comes down to this: If you really *do not want to do the will of God*, God will grant you your choice and all eternity to make that choice and suffer the consequences.

B. Because, you become what you want

1. The Lord has the power to make us become what we want but He will not make us become something we do not want!
2. The people of the Old Testament wanted a king like the nations, worshiped gods like those of the nations, and became like the wicked people of the nations! (Hosea 9:10).
3. The Pharisees went over land and sea to make proselytes and by their hypocrisy *made* them two-fold more sons of hell than themselves (Mt. 23:15).

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4. Those who worship and serve the beast in the book of Revelation are stamped with the beast's image and character just as certainly as God's people are stamped with His Holy Spirit (sealed).
 5. What do those who do not want to do the will of God become? ". . . filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless . . ." (Rom. 1:29-31). **THEY NOT ONLY DO THEM BUT APPROVE THOSE WHO PRACTICE THEM.**
 6. ". . . immoral, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers will not inherit the kingdom of God" (I Cor. 6:9-10).
 7. ". . . immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing and the like . . ." (Gal. 5:19-20).
 8. ". . . reject authority, revile whatever they do not understand, grumblers, malcontents, following their own passions, loud-mouthed boasters, flattering people to gain advantage, act like instinctive, irrational animals" (Jude).
- C. One may actually do *nothing*, and go to hell.
1. "To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).
 2. The tree that produced nothing was hewn down and cast into the fire (Lk. 13:6-9).
 3. The parables of the talents (Mt. 25:14-30) and the pounds (Lk. 19:11-27) indicates those who did nothing incurred the wrath of the master.

ANXIETY, LETHARGY, SLOTHFULNESS ARE ALL SIGNALS OF UNBELIEF. WHAT YOU WANT, YOU BECOME; WHAT YOU BECOME YOU DO OR REFUSE TO DO!

The safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, with signposts (*Screw-tape Letters*, C. S. Lewis).

CONCLUSION

I. HELL OR HEAVEN?

- A. These are the alternatives in the Word of God for the whole human race.

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1. By its warnings, threats, invitations and commands, it urges men to recognize the decisiveness of this life.
 2. It permits no silly, superficial view of life or of death, or of destiny.
 3. Instead, it insists on the inevitable fact that a man shall have what he has chosen. . . . "Let the evil doer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy" (Rev. 22:11).
- B. It further declares that "now is the acceptable time" and "now is the day of salvation" (II Cor. 6:2).
1. It is unthinkable that a follower of Christ should take an indifferent attitude toward the issues of life.
 2. If the apostle Paul sought to persuade men, prompted by the terror of the Lord, it is difficult to see how we can become unconcerned for the salvation of the lost.
- C. Today's generation needs to be told what the New Testament teaches about hell and the awful reality of eternal retribution.
1. It is not a congenial task—not popular, but it is necessary.
 2. It must not be done sadistically, but seriously.
- II. THE PLAIN FACT IS THAT WE ARE ALL CLOSER TO ETERNITY THAN WE MAY REALIZE!
- A. The judgment day is nearer than any of us think. In a very real sense it is here right now.
- B. The night is far spent; the day is at hand, right here, right now.
- C. The Day is here, pressing upon us all with the immediacy of the *constant* call of Christ for our personal surrender to Him.
- D. The call is to engage now in a battle in Christ's Name in all the areas of the devil's usurpation of the throne of our hearts and lives.
- E. As C. S. Lewis says, "In all discussions of hell we should keep steadily before our eyes the possible damnation, not of our enemies nor our friends . . . but of ourselves. This sermon is not about your wife or son, nor about Nero, Hitler or Judas Iscariot; it is about you and me."
- III. GOD IN HIS UNSEARCHABLE GRACE HAS PUNISHED OUR SINS IN HIS SON ON THE CROSS AND OFFERED US THE CHOICE OF LIFE IN HIS NAME.
- A. The offer is to all men everywhere.
- B. Christ Himself is the source and the manifestation of that Life.
- C. The Scriptures are the invitation and the covenant terms of that Life.