

Welcome

**An Examination into
the Doctrine of Hell**

4 Major Perspectives on the Doctrine of Hell:

1. Annihilation: the soul is extinguished.
2. Metaphorical: real but indefinable)
3. Purgatorial: process of purification)
4. Natural-Literal: both literal place and state

Annihilation View of Hell (conditionalism):

All people are created immortal, but those who reject salvation in Jesus Christ are completely annihilated, that is, reduced to nonexistence. Therefore, hell is literal. It simply means the extinction (nonexistence) of the soul; it is not eternal conscious suffering.

Metaphorical View of Hell:

The nature (not reality) of hell in Scripture is expressed in figurative language; though hell is real, the nature of hell is indefinable.

Purgatorial View of Hell:

It is a process of purification after death for those who need it. It is a process in which the concern of the living for the dead, expressed through prayers and charitable works, may have a beneficial effect on the healing of the dead.

Natural-Literal View of Hell:

Hell is a literal place (and a state) whereby punishment for the wicked is everlasting and is punitive, not redemptive; the nature of hell is literal as expressed in Scripture.

Support Offered for Annihilationism:

(1) Language. Scripture speaks of the soul & body being “destroyed” (Matt. 10:28) and “perishing” (John 3:16):

“If to kill is to deprive the body of life, hell would seem to be the deprivation of both the physical & spiritual life, that is, an extinction of being.”

~ Robert A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial*, pp.12-14.

Support Offered for Annihilationism:

- (2) Imagery of fire. Jesus spoke of the “fire of hell” (Matt. 5:22; 18:9) & of “eternal fire” (Matt. 18:8; 25:41)

“It would be very odd if what is thrown into it (the fire) proves indestructable. Our expectation would be the opposite: it would be consumed forever, not tormented forever.” Robertson, *Hell on Trial*, 11-14.

Support Offered for Annihilationism:

(3) Divine Justice.

“Would there not, then, be a serious disproportion between sins consciously committed in time & torment consciously experienced throughout eternity? ...I question whether ‘eternal conscious torment’ is compatible with the Biblical revelation of divine justice.” Robertson, *Hell on Trial*, 12-14.

Support Offered for Annihilationism:

(4) Universalistic Passages.

“These texts do not lead me to universalism, because of the many others which speak of the terrible and eternal reality of hell....It would be easy to hold together the awful reality of hell and the universal reign of God if hell means destruction and the impenitent are no more.” ~ Peterson, *Hell on Trial*, 12-14.

Arguments Against Annihilationism:

(1) Passages that speak of destruction & perishing are few in number & do not argue conclusively for nonexistence. On the other hand, there are many passages that speak clearly of eternal conscious existence for the wicked (Matt. 25:46; Mark 9:44, 48; 2 Thess. 1:9; Jude 7, 13; Rev. 14:10-12; 20:10, 14-15).

Conscious existence & eternal torment are clearly taught in Scripture.

“They will be tormented day and night forever & ever.” ~ Rev. 20:10.

Arguments Against Annihilationism:

(2) The parallelism between eternal life & eternal punishment argue against Annihilationism. It is exegetically weak to contend that heaven is real & conscious while at the same time reject hell as being the same. Heaven & hell appear together in the same passages & are described with the same words as to duration.

Matthew 13:30; 25:46; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-10; Jude 7, 21; Revelation 21:7-8, 25-27.

Metaphorical View of Hell

Advocates include D.A. Carson, Millard J. Erickson, Carl F.H. Henry, Roger Nicole, Ronald Youngblood, F.F. Bruce, Billy Graham, Donald Guthrie, Kenneth Kantzer, C.S. Lewis, Leon Morris, & J.I. Packer.

See William Crockett, *Four Views on Hell*, 44 for bibliographical support & quotations.

Following Quotations Are Representative of Metaphorical View of Hell:

“There seems no more reason for supposing that the fire spoken of in Scripture is to be a literal fire, than that the worm that never dies is literally a worm.”
~ Charles Hodge.

“The Bible makes it clear that hell is real and it’s bad. But when Jesus spoke of flames...these are most likely figurative warnings.”
~ Kenneth Kantzer.

“We must conclude that the biblical pictures of fire and burning signify the horrible suffering of the unrighteous in hell. Should we understand the fires of hell as literal flames? The answer is no....I stand with the majority of contemporary conservative scholars in understanding the biblical imagery of hell metaphorically rather than literally.”
~ Robert A. Peterson.

Metaphorical View of Hell:

“People in the first century often used hyperbole, or colorful language, to bring truth home. So also with the images used to describe heaven and hell: vivid, every day language of the first century is used to communicate the joys and sorrows of these ultimate destinations.

The images of heaven and hell are not to be taken literally, as if there were real gates of pearl and material smoke and flames. The writers used common, everyday images to impress on the readers the reality of the next age. Heaven and hell are real; one a place of immeasurable happiness, the other of profound misery.”

~ William V. Crockett, *Four Views on Hell*, 43-76.

Support for Metaphorical View of Hell:

1. The Bible uses symbolic language that is not intended to be interpreted literally.
2. The strongest reason for taking them as metaphors is the conflicting language used in the New Testament to describe hell. How could hell be literal fire when it is also described as darkness (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; 2 Peter 2:17; Jude 14).

“Rabbis in ancient times (and this includes Jesus) often used colorful speech to bring home forcefully their points. ...The words seem to say one thing, but from the context we readily perceive them to be rabbinic hyperbole or colorful speech.....Their purpose is not to give the reader a literal picture of torment, but a symbolic one. ...The writers do not intend their descriptions to be literal depictions of the damned, but rather warnings of coming judgment. ...people in the first century often used hyperbole, or colorful language to bring truth home (Crockett, 51-55).

Support for Metaphorical View of Hell:

3. “The strongest reason for taking them as metaphors is the conflicting language used in the New Testament to describe hell. How could hell be literal fire when it is also described as darkness?”

~ Crockett, *Four View on Hell*, 59.

Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; 2 Peter 2:17; Jude 14.

Support for Metaphorical View of Hell:

4. Three Reasons Against a Literal Hermeneutic regarding the nature of hell:

- a. High view of Scripture does not mean that every word is taken literally.
- b. A literal view results in either hell not being taught at all or offending the people whom you are trying to reach.
- c. Literal fire does not account for levels of hell taught in the Bible (Matt. 11:24; Luke 12:47-48).

Arguments against the Metaphorical View of Hell:

- (1) The metaphorical view raises questions about the accuracy and inerrancy of Scripture.

“If, as a matter of fact, hell is not described accurately in Scripture, does this not raise the question whether it is possible that the Holy Spirit was influenced in inspiring the Scriptures by the views of its human authors? In particular was Christ himself influenced by the culture of his day, so that he taught a doctrine of hell that emphasized more than any other writer both the element of hellfire and the element of eternity? If these concepts are granted credence, does it not question both the accuracy of Scriptures and the veracity and integrity of Christ?” ~ John F. Walvoord

Arguments against the Metaphorical View of Hell:

- (2) The metaphorical view requires a non-literal interpretation of prophecy.

“ The non-literal interpretation is largely motivated by the fact that people do not want to accept what the Bible teaches about the future, especially the doctrine of punishment—whether in this life or in the life to come. Yet the Bible records historically how God drastically punishes people because of sin, as illustrated in the history of Israel both in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 when hundreds of thousands perished and the city was destroyed. ...Is not God sovereign? Those who are disturbed by the doctrine of hell do not face the fact that God has demonstrated in history that he can drastically destroy wicked humans.”

~ John F. Walvoord

Arguments against the Metaphorical View of Hell:

- (3) The metaphorical view lacks proper exegesis that includes all pertinent facts relating to this doctrine.

“ I find it singular that this very carefully drawn up chapter does practically nothing with the doctrine of sin and its infinite character in relation to the infinite righteousness of God. It hardly mentions the righteousness of God and the necessity of punishment...the exegesis of Revelation 20:10...the subject of duration...punishments of hell are temporary or will be terminated.... The fallen angels are never offered grace, even though they sinned only once, and those in life who did not avail themselves of grace, for whatever reason, are revealed to be headed for eternal punishment.”

~ John F. Walvoord

Arguments against the Metaphorical View of Hell:

- (4) Jesus spoke often and graphically about the horrors of hell.

“As the Son of God did not shrink from declaring the truth even when it was unpopular to his generation. Christ is the leading voice on the nature and duration of hell. It is disturbing, to say the least, to think that Christ used ‘rabbinic hyperbole.’ It seems to call His integrity into question.”

~ Dr. Ken Hanna

Arguments against the Metaphorical View:

- (5) The metaphorical view is emphatic on what hell is not, but brief and vague on what hell actually is. It dismisses the literal view and yet does not put anything substantial or meaningful in its place.
...what about forever, torment, etc?

Crockett affirms, “the reality of heaven and hell, but a heaven and hell is best left unspecified (p. 45).”

“...precisely what it will be we do not know (p. 49).”....

“the truth is we do not know what kind of punishment will be meted out to the wicked” (p. 54).

Four Views on Hell.

Arguments against the Metaphorical View:

- (6) The metaphorical view makes too much of cultural accommodation. That is, the idea that first century writers (the Apostles) were limited to their experience and observation in conveying divine revelation.

“It is difficult to imagine that divine revelation on a matter of such eternal importance would be so culturally conditioned that it cannot be taken literally. It is striking that this approach is not used in other arenas of theology, but only in eschatology.” Dr. Ken Hanna.

The Purgatorial View of Hell:

“In summary, the notion of a purgatory is intimately related to the conviction that our eternal destiny is irrevocably decided at the moment of our death and that, ultimately, our eternal destiny can be only heaven or hell. But not everyone seems ‘bad enough’ to be consigned to an eternal hell. And most do not seem ‘good enough’ to be candidates for heaven. Therefore, something has to happen ‘in between’ but this cannot mean a coming back to this life and getting another chance since our destiny is decided at the moment of our death. Therefore, some sort of a cleansing process is postulated between death & the entrance into heaven.”

~ Zachary Hayes, *Four Views on Hell*, 99.

Support for Purgatorial View:

1. It is almost entirely extra-biblical;
2. Appeal is made to the allegorical method of interpretation of early church fathers (School of Alexandria);
3. Appeal to the development of the purgatorial tradition of the Roman Catholic Church;
4. Appeal to the interpretative & ecclesiastical authority of the Roman Catholic Church.

“But it has long been the conviction of the Roman Catholic church that Christians must reckon with the possibility that not everything was said in the Bible and that new and important insights-and therefore new formulas-may legitimately emerge later in Christian history....Just as the text of Scripture give witness to the divine revelation, so also does the reality of tradition give witness to the same revelation, but in circumstances unknown to the authors’ of Scripture.”

~ Zachary Hayes, *Four Views on Hell*, 103.

Arguments Against Purgatorial View of Hell:

1. Purgatory is based on the allegorical school of interpretation at Alexandria;
2. Purgatory depends upon apocryphal writings;
3. Purgatory depends upon “revelation” given to the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Age;
4. Biblical references do not teach doctrine of purgatory;
5. Purgatory requires an inaccurate definition of grace;
6. The doctrine of purgatory keeps changing in R.C. Church.

“The exposition and defense of the purgatorial view of hell are most revealing. Although delineating the Roman Catholic view of hell, and specifically purgatory, with skill, the treatment itself provides all the necessary ingredients for rejecting the doctrine of purgatory.” ~ Dr. John F. Walvoord, 119-121.

Support for Natural-Literal View of Hell:

1. **A place not just a state.**

“It is important to observe that the lake of fire is a place, not just a state, although a state is involved.”

*~ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 555.*

Jesus promised the disciples that he was going to prepare a place for them in His Father's house (John 14:2-4). He was equally clear in His promise that a place of eternal fire had been prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41).

Support for Natural-Literal View of Hell:

2. **Final not the intermediate state.**

Consignment to hell is always viewed as permanent in Scripture.

Consignment to hell is always viewed as permanent in Scripture (2 Thess. 1:9; Jude 7, 13; Rev. 14:10-11; 15:20; 10:14; 21:8).

Support for Natural-Literal View of Hell:

3. Conscious not unconscious suffering. We catch a glimpse about the rich man & Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). The rich man is described as being “*in torment*” and “*in agony in this fire.*” The rich man could not escape, but he wished desperately to prevent his brothers from following in his steps.

The sense of torment & conscious suffering is reinforced by the term “*weeping and gnashing of teeth*” (Matt. 8:12; 13:50; 22:13; 24:51). It is also described as ceaseless torment that will continue relentlessly, day and night (Rev. 14:10-11).

Support for Natural-Literal View of Hell:

4. **Eternal Fire.**

Hell is described as a ceaseless burning in which the objects of judgment are not consumed.

It is described as “lake of fire” (Rev. 19:20; 21:8), a “furnace of fire” (Matt. 13:50) and an “eternal fire” (Matt. 25:41). As such this fire is unquenchable” (Luke 3:17).

Support for Natural-Literal View of Hell:

5. **Darkness.**

Hell is marked by “*darkness*”:

Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Jude 13. As heaven is characterized by the light of God’s presence (Rev. 21:23) so hell is marked by total and permanent banishment from the presence of God.

“*Darkness*” [*skotos*] is defined as “the state of unbelievers & the godless (BGAD, 932).” “If light refers to God’s presence and his salvation (cf. Matt. 4:16), darkness describes the awful circumstances of those separated from God’s presence and his salvation. Instead of joyful fellowship with God and his people, those in the darkness experience the anguish of separation and banishment from God’s presence.” *The Bible Knowledge Key Word Study: The Gospels*, ed. Darrell Bock, 6.

Support for Natural-Literal View of Hell:

6. Second death. Hell is described as a second and hence final death. The first death involves (a) separation of the soul from the body, but the second death involves (b) separation of both the soul & body from God (Rev. 20:14; 21:8).

The context of these passages in the Book of Revelation aids in our understanding. The second death is experienced only by those whose “*name was not found written in the book of life.*” Believers have full & free access to the presence of God, but those experiencing the second death are totally excluded (Rev. 22:14-15).

Support for Natural-Literal View of Hell:

7. Degrees of punishment. Scripture indicates that some will suffer more than others. There are several passages that point to degrees of punishment in hell.

Matthew 11:21-24; Luke 12:42-48; Romans 2:5;
Mark 12:40.

Support for Natural-Literal View of Hell:

7. Jesus taught a literal hell. Jesus defined everlasting punishment more specifically and more times than any N.T. prophet:

- *All but one reference to Gehenna are from Christ Himself.*

- A. Jesus made many statements that it is better to loose an eye (Matt. 5:29) or a hand (Matt. 5:30) than to go to *gehenna*.
- B. He referred to fire (Matt. 5:22) and darkness (Matt. 25:14-30).
- C. He referred to punishment by degrees (Luke 12:47-48, Mark 12:40).
- D. If one accepts the authority of Scripture as being inerrant and accurate, it is clear that Christ taught the doctrine of everlasting punishment.

Support for Natural-Literal View of Hell:

8. Scripture never challenges the concept that eternal punishment is by literal fire, therefore arguments against it must be on philosophical or theological grounds.

The Duration of Hell:

The Duration of hell. Punishment of hell is always described as eternal. It is never regarded as being temporary or conditional. It is unrelenting, and, once entered, inescapable.

The Greek word for eternity is “*aionios*.” It is used 66 times in N.T. 51 times it refers to the “*happiness of the righteous*”; 7 times it refers to the punishment of the wicked; 2 times it refers to the eternal duration of God’s glory.

“In support of the idea that *aionios* means ‘endless’ it is consistent placement alongside the duration of the life of the godly in eternity. If the state of the blessed is eternal, as expressed by this word, there is no logical reason for giving limited duration to punishment.” ~ Dr. John F. Walvoord, *Four Views on Hell*, 24.

The Duration of Hell:

Unless Scripture specifically terminates a promise of “forever”, we can assume that “eternity” means “everlasting” as in the character of God and character of salvation in Christ.

- a. Revelation 2:10; 21:8: the devil, beast, and false prophet were cast into the lake of fire for eternal punishment and followed by the wicked. No mention of it ending...
- b. Jude 7 “Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.”
- c. Eternal punishment in the N.T. is never regarded as being terminated.

The Occupants of Hell:

- 1. The beast & false prophet who dominate events on earth during the future tribulation are consigned to the lake of fire along with the fallen angels. (Rev. 19:20).**
- 2. Satan and his fallen angels (Jude 6-7) will join the other members of the unholy trinity in the lake of fire after his last attempted and unsuccessful rebellion at the close of the earthly millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ (Rev. 20:10).**
- 3. Unregenerate humanity will be judged at the Great White Throne & thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11-15).**

Scripture often labels the unregenerate by the sins to which they were addicted (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Col. 3:5; Rev. 21:8; 22:15). This eternal judgment includes both the body & souls of the unregenerate (Matt. 5:30; 10:28; 18:9; Rev. 20:15). The basis is their “*works*,” but they also stand condemned because their names were not found in the Lamb’s book of life.

Other Considerations for the Doctrine of Hell:

1. God's justice demands hell.
2. God's love demands hell.
3. God's sovereignty demands hell.
4. Human depravity demands hell.
5. Human dignity demands a hell.
6. The Cross of Christ implies hell.
7. It is illusory to Deny Hell

Several attributes-some of God's and some of ours-call for the existence of hell. The characteristics of God that necessitate hell are His justice, His love, and His sovereignty. The characteristics of humanity that require the same are depravity and dignity

1. God's justice demands a hell: Since God is just (cf. Rom. 2), “pure and holy that He cannot even look upon sin (Hab. 1:13), and that “There is no partiality with God” (Rom. 2:11), “the Judge of all the earth [will] do [what] is right” (Gen. 18:25).

It is a simple fact that not all evil is punished in this life...the wicked may even prosper (cf. Ps. 73:3). Thus, the existence of an after-this-life place of punishment for the wicked is necessary to maintain God's justice.

Concluding Theological Observations:

1. Hell is a Total Absence of Divine Favor.
2. Complete Domination of Sin.
3. Conscious Suffering
4. Subjective punishment as pangs of conscious, anguish, despair, weeping, and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 8:12; 13:50; Mark 9:43, 44, 47, 48; Luke 16:23, 26; Rev. 14:10; 21:8);
5. Punishment may be commensurate with their sinning against the light which they had received.

How Should We Then Live?

How Should We Then Live:

1. We believers who understand the awful reality of hell cannot speak of it lightly or with delight. Rather, we should be overwhelmed with gratitude that God in His grace has delivered us from the wrath to come.
2. It should lead to deep appreciation and affection for our Lord Jesus who suffered and endured the full penalty of sin our behalf.
3. It should move us to passionate evangelism as we realize the awesome responsibility/privilege to warn the lost (Ezek. 3:16-20).
4. Knowing the awful reality of eternal judgment we as believers ought to be as earnest in warning the lost as the rich man was in trying to prevent his brothers from entering that awful torment (Luke 16:27-31).