

Doctrines That Divide

The Reality and Rejection of Hell

The traditional doctrine of hell, developed in the early centuries of Christianity, understood it to be a place of eternal torment as the just judgment of God on sinners without faith in Jesus Christ

“At some point in the nineteen-sixties, Hell disappeared. No one could say for certain when this happened. First it was there, then it wasn’t. Some realized that they had been living for years as though Hell did not exist...Others realized that had been behaving as though Hell were still there, though in fact they ceased to believe in its existence long ago....

On the whole, the disappearance of Hell was a great relief, though it brought new problems.”

David Lodge, 1980

“Today’s cultural pluralism fosters an under-emphasis on the ‘hard sell’ of Hell while contributing to an overemphasis on the ‘soft sell’ of personal satisfaction in Jesus Christ

Kimon Sargeant, *Seeker Churches*

The Disappearance of Hell

1. Reduction of personal responsibility
2. A restorative view of Justice
3. A growing humanitarian view of God
4. Changed view of soteriology

A Restorative View of Justice

- Justice as restoration vs. retribution
 - *Universalism* – No one is left unredeemed

A Changed View of God

- There are many Christians who cannot reconcile the image of a loving and just God with eternal punishment which is incommensurate with finite sin

“Unending torment speaks to me of sadism, not justice. It is a doctrine which I do not know how to preach without negating the loveliness and glory of God.”

John Wenham

“I consider the concept of hell as endless torment in and body and mind an outrageous doctrine...how can Christians possibly project a deity of such cruelty and vindictiveness whose ways include inflicting everlasting torture upon his creatures...surely a god who would do such a thing is more nearly like Satan than God.”

Clark Pinnock

Challenges

- ✓ Paints a humanitarian portrait of God
- ✓ Overemphasizes God's love to the neglect of other exceedingly important principles of Christianity and characteristics of God
- ✓ Based on unscriptural sentimentalism

A Changed View of Soteriology

Rudolph Bultmann argued that the Bible paints a mythological three-storied portrait of the world where earth is in the center, heaven is above, and hell is beneath. A portrait that is incompatible with modern science and requires that abandonment of any claim that hell is a real place

The *demythologization* of hell, along with the devastating wars of the 20thc gave rise to a this-worldly character of heaven and hell.

Heaven is liberation, hell is oppression, economic disparity, poverty, etc.

“Hell is not a punishment imposed externally by God but the condition resulting from the attitudes and actions which people adopt in this life.”

Pope John Paul II, 1999

“Those who...do not know the Gospel of Christ or his church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of conscience – those too may achieve eternal salvation.”

Vatican II, 1975

What's at stake?
What are the other problems that
come with the rejection of the
traditional doctrine of hell?

“The idea that hell means everlasting conscious punishment contributes much to the belief in universal salvation. If the choice is between hell as everlasting torment or universal salvation, who could resist the latter?...I cannot accept that God would subject anyone, even most corrupt sinners, to unending torture.”

Clark Pinnock

The challenge of *Universalism* and
the last state of the unbeliever

Evangelical responses to Universalism

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- *Postmortem Evangelism*

God would not condemn anyone to hell without first determining their response to His grace which happens when they come face to face with the Lord

- Little to no biblical support

Conservative responses to universalism

- ✓ Annihilationism
- ✓ Conditional Immortality

Annihilationism

The belief that those who reject God's gracious offer of salvation through their own free will experience total destruction at death

- Favors eternal death over eternal punishment
 - Central tenet of Seventh Day Adventist Church

Annihilationism demands
Conditional Immortality

Conditional Immortality

Rejects the Greek philosophical
inherent immortality of the soul

Rejects the reality of eternal
punishment

Believes the soul is not immortal until
it receives everlasting life in Jesus
Christ

How does annihilationism and conditional immortality address the challenge of universalism?

Conditional Immortality and Annihilationism

Ezekiel 18:4

Matt 10:28

I Thess 4:15

Next Week

Hell in:

Old Testament

Gospels

Revelation