

Is Our Understanding of Hell a Human Tradition?

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Introduction: We should not be afraid to have our beliefs challenged.

- A. There are an increasing number of men who claim that the doctrine of a conscious, eternal punishment in hell is a doctrine of men.
 - 1. There are publications by Edward Fudge, LaGard Smith, Homer Hailey, Stephen Clark Goad and others that are gaining popularity.
 - 2. I am amazed and puzzled that LaGard Smith has the following he does among non-institutional churches here in Birmingham.
 - 3. If the issue is decided upon scripture and not upon personality and “originality” then we can know clearly what God wants us to know.
- B. The only things we can know of the unseen which includes the hereafter can only be revealed by God!
 - 1. Jesus made this point in His ministry. (**John 3:11-13, 8:38, 42**)
 - 2. Because of the evidence of God's word I can know things beyond my personal experience. (**Heb 11:1**)
 - 3. Moses knew there was a God who will reward His people. (**Heb 11:27**)
 - 4. God gives everyone the opportunity to see Him. (**Rom 1:20**)
- C. As Christians we need to keep a clear view of the unseen realm.
 - 1. By having this strong confidence we will treat this world as temporary. (**Rom 8:24-25**)
 - 2. We are showing true faith when we rely on what God's word plainly teaches in spite of what our “background” may say. (**1 Peter 1:17-19**)

“John Clayton, a popular speaker among churches, gave Fudge's book an enthusiastic recommendation, while himself confessing: “I have never been able to be comfortable with the position that a person who rejected God should suffer forever and ever and ever”

I. The use of “hell” in the New Testament

- A. In the King James translation there are three Greek words translated "hell."
 - 1. **Hades** - (**Acts 2:27**) - *Hades* (lit. *an unseen place*); (1) the place of the dead *underworld* (**Acts 2.27**); (2) usually in the NT as the temporary underworld prison where the souls of the ungodly await the judgment (**Lk 16.23**)
 - 2. **Gehenna**; lit. *the Valley of the Sons of Hinnom*, ...figuratively in the Gospels for *hell*, a fiery place of eternal punishment for the ungodly dead (**Mt 5.22**).
 - 3. **Tartarus** – (**2 Pt 2:4**) - the name of a subterranean region, doleful and dark, regarded by the ancient Greeks as the abode of the wicked dead, where they suffer punishment for their evil deeds; it answers to the Gehenna of the Jews.
- B. In the OT there is the word “**Sheol**” - (**Psa 16:10**) - 1) Sheol, underworld, grave, hell, pit 1a) the underworld 1b) Sheol - the OT designation for the abode of the dead.
- C. The bible words "Sheol" and "Hades" describe the place where all the dead go.
 - 1. Jesus after His death went to "Hades." (**Acts 2:27, 31**)
 - 2. This is the same "hell" that will not prevail against the church. How? (**Mt 16:18**)
 - 3. This abode of the dead is temporary and will yield all of its occupants at the judgment day. (**Rev 20:13-14**)
- D. The Bible word "gehenna" describes the final abode of the wicked and of Satan himself. (**Mt 25:41; Mk 9:43-47**)

II. There is a conscious existence after death.

- A. Some have failed to see the context of some verses. (**Ecc 9:10,11**)

1. From the viewpoint of things "under the sun" this is true.
 2. Does our view of this verse harmonize with others?
- B. Do we go out of existence at death or in the final judgment when we are cast into hell?
1. How could this verse be true? **(Mt 18:6)**
 2. Notice that there is something else besides our bodies. **(Mt 10:28)**
 3. What does "destroy" mean in this verse?

a. W.E. Vine comments: "The idea is not extinction but ruin, loss, not of being, but of well-being"

b. J.H. Thayer defined *apollumi*, with reference to Matthew 10:28, in the following fashion: "metaphorically, to devote or give over to eternal misery"

The Greek word for "destroy" is *apolesai*, which derives from the verb form *apollumi*. The verb occurs about 90 times, and a noun form is found some 18 times. I do not know of a single reputable English translation that renders the term in any instance, "to go out of existence." It is translated by such common English words as "perish," "destroy," "lose," or "lost."

"The term is employed of physical items that lose their usefulness. A wine-skin that cracks open, and is no longer usable, is said to "perish" (Lk. 5:37). A sheep that wanders away from the safety of the fold is described as "lost" (Lk. 15:4,6), i.e., separated from the shepherd. The wayward prodigal son was "lost" to his father (Lk. 15:24), though certainly not annihilated. Food that spoils is said to have "perished" (Jn. 6:27)." - **Will Wicked People Be Annihilated in Hell?** - Wayne Jackson

c. During the April, 1988 Pepperdine University Lectureship, F. LaGard Smith argued that God "will destroy [the soul]. Not punish it. Not dangle it. Not torture it. Destroy it."

- C. The argument Jesus made on the resurrection demands that there is presently a continued existence of dead men. **(Mk 12:24-27)**
1. This was later proven to the three apostles on the mount of transfiguration. **(Mt 17:3-5)**
 2. Peter has no doubt about these truths. **(2 Pet 1:17-18)**
- D. Consider the case of the rich man and Lazarus. **(Lk 16:19-31)**
1. Both died and went to a conscious place of existence. Depending on their spiritual preparation they either were tormented or comforted.
 2. There was an ability to think and communicate.
 3. How do these men handle this verse?

"The case of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-30), which demonstrates the contrary, is dismissed as a "parable" due to certain figures of speech employed in the narrative, e.g., Lazarus' "finger," and the rich man's "tongue" (that are *necessary* symbols in conveying ideas related to the spirit realm)."

"However, this narrative does not bear the characteristic marks of a parable. Note that the persons are identified by name; that format never occurs in a parable elsewhere in the Bible." - **LaGard Smith's New Book: 'After Life'** - Wayne Jackson

III. What is hell like?

- A. It is torment. **(Luke 16:28; Rev 14:11)**
1. What will it be like to taste the full wrath of God?
 2. We know that weeping and wailing will be within the souls of those in hell. **(Matt 13:40-42, 49-50)**
- B. It involves an eternal fire. **(Matt 5:22, 18:8-9, Mark 9:43, 45, 47)**

1. While hell is a place for a spiritual body, this is the closest description the Lord could give of this place.
2. Even in the place before hell there is a “flame”. **(Luke 16:24)**
3. Have you ever been burned? (Ex. Truck driver trapped in wreck)
- C. It involves an eternal darkness. **(2 Pet 2:4, 17; Mt 8:11-12; 22:13-14; 25:30)**
 1. How dark is hell? Peter says it is “blackness of darkness”.
 2. Ex. An account of one man who visited a cave in the state of Kentucky.
- D. There will be no escape from hell.
 1. No one could escape the torment before hell. **(Luke 16:26)**
 2. One is described as being in “chains”. **(2 Peter 2:4)**
- E. It is a place of regret.
 1. The rich man was grieved because he did not help his brothers! **(Luke 16:27-28)**
 2. Are there degrees of punishment? **(Luke 12:47-48)**
- F. It is a place of unspeakable wickedness. **(Matt 25:41)**

IV. Some things in Hell the church needs

- A. There are fervent prayers in hell.
 1. Prayer is of great value to those who see the unseen. **(Lk 18:1, 6-8)**
 2. Why does this man pray now? **(Lk 16:24, 27-28)**
- B. Mercy is has an infinite value in hell.
 1. Who do you consider to be your enemy? Do you give him any mercy?
 2. The mercy we show in this life will have an impact on God's mercy to us in the next life! **(Jas 2:13)**
- C. There is deep concern for the lost.
 1. This man pleads for teachers for the lost but had no time in his life for the lost. **(Lk 16:27-28)**
 2. In hell everyone will be a teacher wanting to save his family!
- D. There is a clear realization that a life in sin brings death.
 1. This man now hates sin but he lived a life of indifference to it.
 2. Satan tries to accept sin as nothing to worry about.
 3. There was another rich man who had this attitude. **(Lk 12:16-18)**

Conclusion: Will you believe in Hell now or later?

- A. Remember Robert Ingersoll?
 1. His dying words: “O God, if there be a God! Save my soul, if I have a soul!”
 2. How many people today laugh at hell?

“Satan is the consummate “deceiver” (Rev. 12:9; 20:10). There is nothing that pleases him more than to see deluded men repudiating the idea of eternal punishment - which the Lord explicitly affirmed (Mt. 25:46). How tragic that some, who profess a relationship with the Son of God, would join with the enemy in this compromising denial of truth.”

- B. What will judgment day be like for you? **(Mark 8:38)**

LaGard Smith's New Book: 'After Life' - Wayne Jackson

LaGard Smith believes there must be a “radical” correction in the teaching of most Christians today (see **Radical Restoration**, Cotswold, 2001). His ongoing quest to achieve that goal is pursued in his latest book, **After Life**. Therein he challenges what he calls the “orthodox understandings” pertaining to death and eternity.

While this book does address certain sectarian views, e.g., Watchtowerism, Mormonism, Millennialism (rapture theory), and Catholicism (purgatory/limbo), these topics appear to be merely the “salad” that

accompanies the “main course,” namely, an assault upon some of the most universally-held, end-time views of Christian history. Consider the following brief points.

1. The author argues that “human mortality is *not* the result of sin”; rather, death is but a natural consequence of having been made “of dust.” This suggests that death is an extension of divine benevolence, and that God intended this experience from the beginning. Supposedly, passages that relate death to sin refer only to *spiritual* death.

The problem with this theory, which the author admits bucks “centuries of theological consensus,” is that the “dust-to-dust” destiny of man clearly results from the “curse” placed upon humanity for its rebellion. That is the explicit testimony of Moses (see Gen. 3:19; cf. Rom. 5:12). One can only marvel at the arrogance of one who believes that he has an almost unique understanding of a biblical theme that has eluded the greatest minds of Christian history.

2. Also advanced is the notion that all the dead are *unconscious* between the time of one’s demise and that of the Judgment Day. The case of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-30), which demonstrates the contrary, is dismissed as a “parable” due to certain figures of speech employed in the narrative, e.g., Lazarus’ “finger,” and the rich man’s “tongue” (that are *necessary* symbols in conveying ideas related to the spirit realm).

However, this narrative does not bear the characteristic marks of a parable. Note that the persons are identified by name; that format never occurs in a parable elsewhere in the Bible. See: "Are the Dead Conscious?" and "Are the Dead “Asleep”?"

Passages that refer to death as “sleep” are applied to the “soul,” rather than the body - as is the actual case. Daniel was very clear that the part of man that “sleeps” is that which is deposited in the “dust of the earth” (cf. 12:2).

Smith affirms that the condition of the lost and the saved in Hades is *identical*. Or, as he illustrated it - Hitler and “Mother Theresa” presently are experiencing the same status! Is it not obvious that the illustrious “scholar in residence” at Lipscomb University believes that “Mother Theresa” was redeemed by her “good works,” irrespective of her obedience to Christ?

3. The author contends that Christ will banish the wicked to hell, but “not with on-going torment.” Rather, “sooner or later,” those cast into hell will cease to exist. Logically, this theory is flawed; it suggests that the “punishment” actually is *non-punishment*. If hell’s “destruction” is “annihilation,” and if one enters “destruction” at death, then one is “annihilated” at death, and there is no actual punishment. A *non-entity* cannot be punished. See: "The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment".

It is alleged that the adjective “eternal” speaks of the *nature* of the punishment, rather than its *duration*. But the expression “eternal God” (Rom. 16:26), affirms the Lord’s unending existence, and “eternal life” is everlasting in duration (Mt. 25:46). In terms of afterlife reality, “eternal” is not “temporal” (2 Cor. 4:17-18).

This volume is a serious disappointment from a talented man who produced some helpful books in days gone by, but who, in recent years, has revealed a rebellious and radical disposition that is tragic indeed.