

10 Things the Huffington Post Doesn't Understand About Hell

It's easy to mudsling on the Internet. It's even easier when the topic is something as controversial as Hell.

So as I pen this article, my hope is that my words would not seem frivolous. I have no desire to attract attention. Rather, I believe that when mistruths are promoted publicly, they must be dealt with publicly—with tact proportionate to the immense weight of the topic.

On June 13, author Jon M. Sweeney, penned an article for the Huffington Post called “What About Hell? Fiction and Fact.” Sweeney, whose bio describes him as an evangelical-turned-Episcopalian-turned-Catholic who practices Judaism (I'm not sure how exactly that works, but I digress), lists five myths about Hell and five little-known facts.

While I disagree with most of what Mr. Sweeney wrote, he's got a good point; a lot of the PR on Hell has been man-made, and few of us have directly studied Scripture on this crucial topic.

The problem is that Sweeney indirectly condemns Christians for letting tradition and culture warp their view of the Bible, but himself does not trust what the Bible says plainly and injects his own opinions. You must use an evenhanded standard; if you are going to separate cultural myth from biblical fact, then allow the biblical texts to stand alone. If you are going to base your opinion off of your own intuitions about God's nature, then it shouldn't matter whether or not Christians have betrayed Scripture on the topic.

Like Sweeney, I too believe that a lot of what both Christians and non-Christians assume about Hell comes from the world and not from the Bible. Thus, I challenge all my readers to both

tear down the straw-man Hells *and* see the truth of Scripture that lies uncorrupted beneath it all.

By my count, Sweeney got 3½ of his points right. Clearly that's not a precise figure. But all 10 need to be addressed. Let's go through his piece and see how it lines up with what God has long ago revealed about himself.

Claim #1: The Bible is Unclear on Hell

The Bible is crystal clear on the subject of Hell. (It isn't. The Bible is vague at best.)

This is a little broad of a statement, so it's hard to give any kind of blanket response. But notice that Sweeney doesn't specify *how* the Bible is vague on the topic; he simply claims that it's vague in general.

Certainly there are things we don't know about Hell—precisely how hot the fire is, whether it's pitch black or not, so forth—but those are secondary at best. Sweeney is burying the lead: the Bible is *explicit* about who goes to Hell, how long it lasts, and that it's a terrible place.

If you had no prior exposure to the Bible, and you read these verses in context, would you be uncertain of what is being communicated?

- “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2, ESV).
- “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).
- “But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire” (Matthew

5:22).

- “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:12-15).
- “And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:13).
- “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).
- “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it” (James 2:10-11).
- “But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:28).
- “Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1 John 3:15).
- “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

- “Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town” (Matthew 10:15).

I do not know how Sweeney defines “clarity,” but even a brief survey of Scripture reveals that all sinners are going to stand before God, and that he is going to punish the guilty. And that’s a sobering thought for anyone.

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