

Eddie Hyatt: 3 Reasons I Still Believe There Is a Hell

I received an email from a person in another state asking my thoughts on hell. She went on to explain that many of her Christian friends have dispensed with the idea of hell and have chided her for being “stuck in religion” for believing in such “an old-fashioned doctrine.”

Indeed, many evangelicals are giving up the doctrine of hell as a place of eternal punishment, in spite of the fact that it is mentioned numerous times by Jesus and New Testament writers who urge their readers to avoid it at all costs. One of the starkest examples is in Matthew 18:8, where Jesus said, “If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life lame or maimed than having two hands or two feet to be thrown into eternal fire.”

The argument commonly presented against hell is that it is inconsistent with a God whose chief characteristic is love. This argument, however, reveals a serious misunderstanding of love and the place of God’s justice in the matter.

In the following essay, I present three reasons I still believe in hell: 1) God’s love made hell necessary; 2) Mankind’s freedom to choose made hell necessary; and 3) the Holy Spirit has confirmed the doctrine of hell throughout history.

No. 1: God’s love made hell necessary. Suppose a serial child molester is released from prison by a progressive, liberal judge. He immediately kidnaps an innocent child whom he abuses, rapes and murders. The murderer/rapist is arrested, tried before the same judge and is found guilty. The judge then sentences him to six months of community service, a \$1,

fine and lets him go free.

Would we say, "Oh, what a loving and kind man is that judge?" No! We would be rightfully outraged because justice, you see, is a necessary component of love. Love without justice is an empty, sugary-sweet niceness that refuses to protect the righteous and do what is right and just in every situation. Such "love" is worthless and dangerous.

A parent who does not protect his/her children does not love them. Most parents will fight tooth and nail to protect their children, and that is an expression of their love. In a similar way, God will not allow the evil intentions of men and devils to mar the eternal happiness of those who have put their trust in Him.

What we are talking about here is the biblical concept of love that is expressed by the New Testament Greek word *agape*. *Agape* is not flaky or shallow but is infinitely just and wise. *Agape* is not a fleeting feeling or emotion but is sensible and rational. It was this *agape* love that brought our Creator down from heaven to offer Himself as a sacrifice for our sins, and the very nature of this love made hell necessary for those who would reject such infinite love.

This is made clear in John 3:16, the love verse of the Bible. It reads, ""For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not *perish*, but have eternal life" (author's emphasis).

This verse says that those who reject this infinite love of our Creator, revealed in Jesus Christ, will "perish." The Greek word translated "perish" is *apolumi*. *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon* defines this word as meaning "to destroy," "to abolish" and "to devote or give over to eternal misery."

Those who reject God's infinite love justly deserve infinite punishment, for they have chosen their own selfish, temporal goals and rejected God's eternal, infinite plan for them and

all mankind.

This is the point Charles Finney made in his preaching on hell and eternal punishment. In his *Autobiography*, he tells of a great revival in Rochester, New York in which many lawyers and judges were coming to Christ. Finney, who was a converted lawyer, tells of a conversation he had with Judge Addison Gardiner, who was a Supreme Court Justice for the State of New York.

The judge told Finney he had answered his questions thus far and cleared the way for him to become a Christian. "But," he said, "When you come to the question of the endless punishment of the wicked you will slip up—you will fail to convince us on that question."

When the night came that Finney preached on the endless punishment of the wicked in hell, he was careful to thoroughly present the biblical and reasonable arguments. He showed how those who reject the infinite good of God and His salvation in Christ for their own selfish ends, justly deserve infinite, or endless, punishment.

As he neared the end of the sermon, Judge Gardiner could not wait for him to finish, but came to the front and with great emotion made known his desire to commit his life to Christ. This had a powerful impact on all present and many bowed their heads and wept. Finney said, "The lawyers arose almost *en masse*, and crowded into the aisles, and crowded around the open space in front, wherever they could get a place to kneel." Incredible revival swept over the city.

Finney told what happened when he met Judge Gardiner the next day. He said, "The next day I met him, and he volunteered the remark at once, 'Mr. Finney, I am convinced. Your dealing with that subject was a success; nothing can be said against it'" (Owen, *The Eternal Fires: Why I Believe in Hell*, 128).

Yes, infinite Divine love came down from heaven and provided

an infinite sacrifice for our sins. The just punishment for rejecting such infinite love is also infinite, or eternal, in nature.

Finney considered hell to be God's eternal prison house where incorrigible rebels against God and His kingdom will be confined and not allowed to spoil the eternal bliss and happiness of those who have accepted the free mercy and grace God has shown to us in Jesus Christ. This too is love!

Yes, hell is a necessary expression of God's amazing grace and love.

No. 2: Mankind's freedom to choose made hell necessary. I once read a romantic piece in a newspaper about an old bridge that had been torn down to make way for a new highway. The author ascribed personal virtues to this bridge, speaking of how faithful it had been for so many years, and how it had remained steadfast in the face of wind, rain, snow, cold and heat.

As I read this, I thought about how there really were no virtues in this bridge, for it was just a heap of metal and concrete. Virtue is found in personhood, and personhood is distinguished by the ability and freedom to think and choose.

Not only is virtue not to be found in inanimate materials such as wood, stone, concrete and steel, neither is it to be found in feeling. Virtue is ultimately tied not to our feelings but to our choices. We are responsible not for how we feel but for how we choose.

Love also is tied to the freedom to choose. Where there is no choice, there is no love. Can you imagine being married to a robot—even a very sophisticated one? Anytime you want to hear words of affirmation and love, all you have to do is load the right software and push the right buttons.

We know that would not be satisfying. Love is real because the

people involved have chosen to love.

When God created Adam and Eve, He did not create robots or creatures that were programmed to love and serve Him. Creating them in His own image and likeness meant they would have the ability and freedom to think, to choose and to decide if they were going to trust Him and love Him.

In this sense, it was a risky move on God's part to create such beings, for they might choose to rebel against Him. But if there was going to be real love in the relationship, there had to be real freedom to choose.

Yes, God knew beforehand that our first parents would turn from Him. He also knew that countless numbers of their offspring would reject His love and truth. Nonetheless, He considered that the benefits and blessings of creating them outweighed the pain and suffering that He knew would come.

Do you want to know why there is pain and suffering in the world? It cannot be blamed on God. It is because human beings have misused and abused their God-given freedom to choose. Instead of choosing God and His ways, they have chosen to rebel against God and do their own thing, create their own morals, and erect their own standards of truth and righteousness.

It is self-evident that creatures with such freedom to choose, must be held accountable for their choices, and the Bible is clear in this regard. Throughout Scripture there are warnings and exhortations concerning a Day of Judgment.

In Matthew 12:36, for example, Jesus said, "But I say to you that for every idle word that men speak, they will give an account on the Day of Judgment." And in 2 Corinthians 5:10-11 (NLT), Paul speaks of the judgment of the righteous at the judgment seat of Christ. This is not a judgment concerning our worthiness for heaven, but a judgment concerning our motives and how we have lived our lives. Paul says,

“For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body. Because we understand our fearful responsibility to the Lord, we work hard to persuade others.”

The great American statesman, Daniel Webster (1782 –1852), when asked what the most sobering thought was to ever enter his mind, replied, “My personal accountability to God.”

In Revelation 20:11-12 John describes his vision of the great and final judgment, saying, “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. From His face the earth and the heavens fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God. Books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. The dead were judged according to their works as recorded in the books” (Rev. 20:11-12, MEV).

Yes, mankind’s freedom to choose made hell necessary. That is why, in Deuteronomy 30:19, God through Moses, urged the people of Israel to make the right decisions and choose life: “I call heaven and earth to witnesses against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live.”

Have you chosen to make Jesus Christ your Lord and Savior?

No. 3: Hell is confirmed by Holy Spirit. There has never been any significant work of the Holy Spirit through the preaching of universalism. I do not know of any example, past or present, in which the preaching of universalism inspired men and women to a greater love for God and a new determination to walk in His truth. On the other hand, preaching on eternal punishment has been a part—even if a small part—of the great revivals of Christian history.

In the First Great Awakening, Jonathan Edwards’ sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” captivated the minds

and hearts of the masses. The Holy Spirit fell like rain when he read this message from the pulpit. In the Second Great Awakening, sermons on hell and divine retribution were preached along with messages on God's redeeming love and grace, and the masses were awakened. Finney's pointed preaching about the divine justice of eternal punishment turned the hearts and minds of many to Christ and lifted the church to a new level of commitment and effectiveness. Numerous such examples could be cited from the annals of Christian history and revivalism.

One of the most somber examples comes from the pen of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), pastor of the Congregational Church in Northampton, Massachusetts. He was one of the most prominent leaders in the First Great Awakening. He tells of a wicked and intemperate man coming to him one day in a very solemn state of mind. This man related to Edwards an alarming dream he had experienced the previous night. In this dream, he had descended into hell and observed the horrors of that place.

He was told, however, that he was being allowed to return to earth on a one-year probation, the condition being that he must change his manner of life during this time or he would have to return at the end of the year. Edwards was solemnly impressed with the man's dream and assured him that it was a warning from God. Before retiring for the night, Edwards opened his journal and recorded the details of the dream and the date.

Edwards said the man seemed to be serious in his new commitment, leaving off the bottle and faithfully attending church. However, before the year had ended the man returned to his former manner of life. One evening, in a drunken state, he turned to descend a set of stairs when he stumbled and pitched headlong down the stairs breaking his neck and dying instantly.

When Edwards was informed of the tragic news, he opened his

journal and somberly noted that that very evening was exactly one year from the time the man had experienced the dream of his one-year probation from hell.

Yes, the Holy Spirit has confirmed the doctrine of hell throughout the history of the church, especially in those Spiritual Awakenings that have revitalized Christendom again and again during times of spiritual malaise and indifference.

How to Avoid Hell

Jesus and the New Testament writers treated hell as a very serious matter, and so should we. You can avoid hell by praying this prayer with sincerity of heart. "Lord Jesus, I confess that I am a sinner in need of your mercy and grace. I turn to you now with all my heart. I believe that you died and rose again for my salvation and from this day forth I confess you to be my Lord and Savior."

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). {eo}

*This article by **Dr. Eddie Hyatt** was adapted from Chapter 10 of the book, The Eternal Fires: Why I Believe in Hell by Valarie Owen and is available from Amazon. Dr. Hyatt contributed Chapter 10 to the book. His books are available from Amazon and his website at .*