

Because most believe that hell burns forever, this presents a big challenge for Christians. How could a God so infinite in love torture people forever for simply not wanting to give their heart to Him? Think about it. While we are saved by accepting Jesus into our heart, there are many moral people who choose not to accept God. How should God punish these people? Well, according to most Christians, those who do not want to follow God will be tortured in fire forever and ever. That means, while believers are enjoying heaven, all their loved ones who did not accept Christ, including perhaps children, friends, parents, and so on will be burning in fire somewhere beneath them. Could anyone really enjoy heaven knowing their lost loved ones were being tortured at the same time they were enjoying the pleasures of heaven? Will we become so hardened that we won't even think of the billions of people suffering below us?

The tragedy is, the way we view hell has an affect on how we view God. Many wonder, could I really love a God who does this? How could a God who tortures people forever for the sins of one life be fair? Think about. Tortured forever and ever for the sins of one lifetime! Those who accept this theory cannot help but wonder, Am I "more righteous than God" (Job 4:17)? This idea that God tortures people in hell forever not only affects how we view God, but it has led many to turn away from God completely. This is the great tragedy of this teaching, yet the fact is, the teaching that hell burns forever has come more from Greek mythology than from the Bible. Certainly, the Bible has some verses which people have used to support the idea that hell burns forever. We cannot evade the fact that the book of Revelation speaks of hell burning forever in a few places, but even Christians recognize that the book of Revelation is highly symbolic. Could it be that forever simply means until death? Ironically, other places in the Bible use the word "forever" to simply mean until death (Ex. 21:6). The Bible at times refers to "forever" to mean "as long as he lives" (1 Sam. 1:22, 28). So could it be that these few verses that say the wicked will burn forever, actually mean they will be "destroyed forever," never to live again, as suggested in Psalm 92:7? If this is really true then we should be able to find other verses in the Bible that tell us the wicked will

be destroyed and never live again, right? Incidentally, that's exactly what we find.

The fact is, those who support the idea that hell burns forever focus their belief on a handful of verses while ignoring the mountain of Bible verses which clearly tell us the exact opposite. David says, "yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; indeed, you will look diligently for his place, but it shall be no more...Yet he passed away, and behold, he was no more; indeed I sought him, but he could not be found" (Ps. 37:10, 36). While these verses alone are enough to question the belief that hell keeps burning forever, there is more. Obadiah says the exact same thing David said. Speaking of the wicked he says, "they shall be as though they had never been" (Ob. 1:16). God even says the same thing of Satan, the instigator of all sin, telling us, "I brought fire from your midst; it devoured you, and I turned to you ashes upon the earth in the sight of all who saw you. All who knew you among the peoples are astonished at you; you have become a horror, and shall be no more forever" (Eze. 28:18, 19). According to the Bible, Satan will be burned up and will finally be gone. No more. Forever. All that will be left of the devil after the fire goes out will be his ashes, "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," says the Lord of hosts, "They will leave them neither root nor branch...You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this" (Mal. 4:1-3). After it is over, all that will be left of the wicked are ashes under the soles of our feet.

Notice also that the verse in Malachi says, "the day is coming," implying that this is a future event. While many think that hell is burning now, the Bible does not teach this. On the contrary. The Bible makes it very clear that hell is not burning right now. Job says that the wicked are in "the grave...reserved for the day of doom" (Job 21:13, 30). If they are reserved for the day of doom, they are not burning now but resting in their graves until they are raised for the judgment at "the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:29). Jude confirms this, saying that the wicked are "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day; as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having giving

themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" (Jude 1:6, 7). Here we see two things. First, the wicked are reserved for a future judgment, which means hell is not burning now. Second, Sodom and Gomorrah were an example of the "eternal fire" of hell. Those who are familiar with Sodom and Gomorrah realize that fire came down and destroyed the city. According to Jude, this event is an example of eternal hellfire and yet we know that Sodom and Gomorrah are not still burning today. They have burned "up." This is exactly what the Bible tells us hell will be like.

We find the actual picture of hell in the last book of the Bible and it occurs just as it occurred in Sodom and Gomorrah when fire rained down from heaven. As the wicked are raised up at the judgment, Satan tries to rally the wicked to make one final attack, trying to overthrow heavenly city and they "went up on the breadth of the city and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them" (Rev. 20:9). The actual description of hell says fire comes down and devours the wicked. Those who have been more wicked will burn longer, while those who have not been as bad will burn shorter, "each one according to his works" (Rev. 20:13). Now here's the cool part. Right after this we are told, "Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death" (Rev. 20:14). When it says death and hell are cast into the lake of fire, that means death and hell finally end. According to the Bible, there will be a time when there is no more hell and no more death. This is why the Bible describes hell as the second death. Think about that. Why would the Bible describe the "lake of fire," or hell, as "the second death"? Maybe because the wicked die once in this life, then they are raised at the final judgment, then they die a second time, thus the "second death." You see, if hell burned forever and the soul continued to live, hell could not be referred to as the second "death."

The fact is, the idea of an eternally burning hell actually derived from the belief that the soul is immortal, but the doctrine of the immortal soul is not in the Bible. The Bible refers to people as "mortal" and says that the "Lord of lords...alone has immortality" (Job 4:17; 1 Tim. 6:15, 16). In spite of what many claim, man was not created inherently

immortal. The Bible says that only God is immortal. Man is mortal and immortality is a gift only given to the righteous at the resurrection, when "this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:53). That's why the most famous verse in the Bible says that only those who believe "shall not perish but have everlasting life," or immortality (John 3:16). The gift of immortality is only given to the righteous, not the wicked. That means, the wicked do not live forever in hell. They burn up. God will "destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). Sinners "shall be consumed" (Isa. 1:28). The "wicked shall perish...into smoke they shall vanish away" (Ps. 37:20).

There is no question that there are some Bible verses on the topic which may lead to some confusion, but do not let the few verses that confuse you take away from all the other verses which give overwhelming evidence that the wicked "shall be as stubble, the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame; it shall not be a coal to be warmed by, nor a fire to sit before" (Isa. 47:14)! Hell is real. The wicked will burn up, but even this is consider an "unusual act" for God, who has "no pleasure in the death of one who dies" (Isa. 28:21; Eze. 18:32). If God even loves the wicked as dearly as Christians claim, then His great heart of love would be in constant agony if the wicked were being tortured beneath Him throughout eternity. No, the Bible teaches that there is coming a day when "there shall be no more pain" (Rev. 21:4). In order for this verse to be fulfilled, hell must have an end. Fortunately, the Bible tells us that the day is coming when hell itself will be cast into hell and end.

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