

IS HELL EVERLASTING FIRE?

Message 2

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INTRO: Our subject is, "Is Hell Everlasting Fire? My wife came across this quote by Spurgeon the other day. He said: *We rob the Gospel of its power if we leave out its threatenings*. Could that be one of the reasons why the Church is so powerless today?

Well, in our first message we looked at Raegan's first point that hell is not hades. Here is what he said: **Hell is not Hades. A careful study of the Scriptures will reveal that Hades in the New Testament is the same place as Sheol in the Old Testament (Psalm 49:15).** He teaches that hades refers to a place that had two compartments, paradise and torments. The two compartment view is a theory. It has some Scriptures that might be used to point that way, but it is not clearly taught in the Bible.

I view hades as a state, not a place. It is the bodiless state. When the lost enter the bodiless state they go to hell. When the saved enter the bodiless state they go to heaven. Raegan's argument was that since the sins of the OT saints were not actually paid for until Christ died so the saved were in a kind of intermediary place called paradise. Paradise was one part of hades. After Christ died he went to hades, preached to the lost there and then took paradise up to heaven. The place he calls torments was another compartment in hades and it remained where it was.

It is true that the sins were not really paid for until Christ died. But all the blood sacrifices of the OT pointed to what would one day happen. As I view it it was somewhat like when we buy a car or a house and we make a down payment. The car or house is not paid for but we come into possession of it because there is evidence that we will pay for it. That evidence is in the down payment. In like manner, the OT saints evidenced their faith by following the requirements God set out for them. So when they died they came into possession of eternal life based on their faith in what would yet happen.

We then began to consider his second point called "The Duration Of Hell." Raegan said there are two views. The first was the traditionalist viewpoint which says that hell is everlasting fire. The second was the conditionalist viewpoint, the view that

Raegan subscribes to. This view says each lost person suffers hell fire for the length of time their sins deserve and then they are annihilated. They cease to exist forever after that. That is our subject this morning.

III. THE TWO VIEWPOINTS

A. The Traditionalist Viewpoint

We begin then with what Raegan called the traditionalist view point. This is the camp in which we find ourselves. He writes:

Few traditionalists are happy about the doctrine of the eternal torment of the wicked, but they accept it anyway because they believe it to be biblical. In this they are to be commended.

I would say that is a rather crude way of putting it. What difference does it make to facts when people are not happy about something the Bible teaches? The point is not what are we happy with. The point is, what is the truth? And do we drop a teaching in the Bible because we are not happy about it? I am not happy with the doctrine of repentance, but I know it is required and it works and it is right. Then he writes:

Most point to scriptures such as [Matthew 25:46](#) for support: *"Then these [the wicked] will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."* Since the word "eternal" is used of both the wicked and the righteous, they conclude that the punishment must be eternal in the same way that the life is.

Many traditionalists also cite [Revelation 20:10](#) — a verse specifically about the Devil, the Antichrist and the False Prophet — to prove that a God of love can indeed sentence at least some of His creatures to eternal torment: *"And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."* If it is possible for God to treat one set of His creatures in this way, they reason, why should it be impossible for Him to do the same thing with another set?

Still another Revelation passage also figures in the traditionalist argument. [Revelation 14:9-11](#) reads:

9 And another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or upon his hand,

10 he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.

11 And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name."

Traditionalists notice that not only are these unbelievers tossed into the lake of fire where *"the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever,"* but they have no rest *"day or night."* This is in stark contrast to the saved, who will enjoy rest eternally ([Revelation 14: 13](#)). To traditionalists, both the "rest" of believers and the "unrest" of unbelievers seem to imply a conscious state.

We would of course agree with all Raegan has said here about the traditionalist view because it describes our position. He then adds some other traditionalists arguments. He writes:

In other parts of the Bible, several passages which talk about Hell use the word "destroy" or "destruction" to describe what happens to the unrighteous. Traditionalists claim that the picture in these passages is not of obliteration but of a ruin of human life out of God's presence forever. In this way they are able to conceive of a "destruction" which lasts forever.

It is rather subtle for him to say, "In this way they are able to conceive of a 'destruction' which lasts forever." I do not think that to hold to an everlasting hell fire is something one has to try to bend the Scriptures so as to conceive of a destruction that lasts forever. We will deal later with the matter of destruction. I go on in his article:

A more philosophical traditionalist argument concerns Mankind's creation in the image of God. Some traditionalists believe that the torments of Hell must be eternal, since humankind was made in the image of God and that image cannot be "uncreated." Thus they believe that immortality was bestowed on Mankind when God created male and female in His image.

I had not given this much thought to this before I read this argument. It seems a legitimate argument for the traditionalist view to me. I believe the image of God in man is personhood. It is this that all other animated beings on earth do not have. In my

understanding all other animated beings cease to exist when they die. But I do not find anywhere in Scripture where beings with personhood can ever cease to exist. Destruction and ceasing to exist are two different things in man's being. We know from Scripture that God will never cease to exist. I do not find that angels can cease to exist. They either dwell with God or they dwell with Satan and those that dwell with Satan will be cast into hell. God created hell for them (Matt. 25:41). Nor do I find anywhere that a human being can cease to exist. So this seems a legitimate argument to me and we will see more of this in later messages.

Raegan then goes on like this:

Last, many traditionalists believe that Hell must be eternal because of the nature of sin itself. All sin is an offense against God, goes this argument, and since God is infinite, all sin is infinitely odious. Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), the great Puritan theologian, took this line of argument in his famous sermon, "The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners."

This again is a reasonable argument. I think how bad sin is does not seem to be clear to most Christians. And again we will see more of this later. Raegan then says:

As you can see, these arguments seem both biblical and substantial. And yet they are not without significant problems. Allow me to explain why I believe the conditionalist approach is a better solution to the difficulty.

This then is Raegan's explanation of the traditionalist position on hell. Since we hold to this position, we move on to a view called the conditionalist viewpoint.

B. The Conditionalist Viewpoint

Raegan will now introduce the various problems that the traditional viewpoint raises and then he will give the conditionalist position which he believes is the right view. To begin with a list of problems with the traditionalist view he then writes:

The doctrine of the duration of Hell has been so strongly held throughout the history of Christianity that few have dared to challenge it. Adding to the

reluctance has been the fact that most modern challenges have come from the cults. Thus, a person who dares to question the traditional viewpoint runs the risk of being labeled a cultist.

A classic characteristic of modern-day "Christian" cults is their denial of the reality of Hell. Some argue that everyone will be saved. Most take the position that the unrighteous are annihilated at physical death.

The views of the cults regarding Hell have always been repulsive to me because they deny the clear teaching of Scripture that the unrighteous will be sent to a place of suffering called Hell. Yet, I have never been able to fully embrace the traditional viewpoint of conscious, eternal punishment.

Here Raegan recognizes that what he believes will cause some to think his view is like that of the cults and he tries to take care of that before he moves on. He will now list the problems that the traditionalist view presents. That brings us to his third point which he calls traditionalist difficulties.

Let me just note here that Raegan says he has never been able to fully embrace the traditional viewpoint of hell. It seems he undertook this study with the view that the traditional view was not correct. The question is, could he then study objectively?

IV. TRADITIONALIST DIFFICULTIES

A. The Character Of God

Here is what he writes regarding his first difficulty of the traditionalist view:

My first difficulty with the traditional view is that it seems to impugn the character of God. I kept asking myself, "How could a God of grace, mercy and love torment the vast majority of humanity eternally?" It did not seem to me to be either loving or just. I realize He is a God of righteousness, holiness and justice, but is eternal suffering justice? The concept of eternal torment seems to convert the true God of justice into a cosmic sadist.

Let me just note for you what the Jehovah's Witnesses say on their site jw.org. Here is their fifth of five objections against the Christian view of hell. They write: **God does not even contemplate eternal torment.** The idea that he would punish people in

hellfire is contrary to the Bible's teaching that "God is love."—1 John 4:8; Jeremiah 7:31.

I understand this reasoning, and it is reasoning that is involved here. I am not opposed to reasoning. God is most reasonable. He says, "Come, let us reason together" (Is. 1:18). For example, Calvinism's five points need to be reasoned. But they need to be reasoned from the Scriptures. And when one does that objectively, I believe they will find it is not reasonable and not Scriptural. By the way I wrote that a few years before Calvinism ever became an issue here.

But what happened to Raegan is a common thing. Take for instance divorce and remarriage. If you start with the rationalization that it does not seem right that a person, whose husband or wife is unfaithful, that the marriage partner should remain single for the rest of their lives. If you begin with that as a base thought, then you will find that, sure enough, the Bible teaches that divorce and remarriage is OK for the innocent party. This thinking does not think through the damage remarriage does to children and the long range problems that will be created.

Christians today bemoan where America is going. But I think to a large part the Church is responsible. Probably two key reasons why we are where we are is that the Church gave in on divorce and remarriage, and second, our country's acceptance of abortion.

If one begins one's study on hell with the base thought that it does not seem that a gracious, merciful, and loving God could send anyone to an everlasting hell, then sure enough one will find that the Bible does not teach an everlasting hell. So in Raegan's very first point, I would detect this weakness of a predetermined answer.

Further, I would say that hell is not related to grace, mercy and love. It is related such matters as truth, justice, holiness and righteousness. If one begins with all the moral attributes, not just such as grace, mercy and love, the picture takes on a changes

But I think what is most crucial here is to understand the magnitude of the evil of sin. I don't mean to bore you but I will use an illustration I have used in the past to give us some understanding of how bad sin is. Some sin is worse than others, there can be no question about that, but all sin is horrendously evil.

I use this illustration because I can't find a better one. Let us say you come home from church and your neighbor's boy has burned your house down. You would be upset and rightly so. That is very bad. And now, let us say, this boy has no dad and he is a bad boy. But he has a rich uncle who hears about this. And he comes to you and says, "I am very sorry my nephew has done this. I am here to offer you \$100,000.00 to tide you over until your house is finished and I will build you a house to any blueprint you wish as long as it stays within the size of the house you had. I will rebuild it within 4 months and will replace all the possessions you had in the house. All you need do is make a list. And I will see to it that the boy is dealt with. Do you accept my offer?"

And you say, "I accept your offer and I feel fully vindicated and I am very content with that." You see, such a wrong can be paid for and the one who has been wronged can be satisfied if the price is right.

But now let us say you are gone from home. Your family is at home and they are asleep. The neighbor's boy comes and burns your house down and your family is burned with the house. Now I ask you, what price could rich uncle offer to satisfy you? And if you are normal you will say, "There is no price." That is the best I can do to show you how horrible sin is to God. There is now only one price that satisfies Him, and that is death.

But God loved man and found a way to deliver him from the penalty, power and presence of sin. His own Son would die in the place of the sinner. However, the sinner in turn must repent of his sins and trust in Christ for salvation. This price is so horrible that neither you nor I would pay it, but God did.

And why is sin forever? Once a person comes into being, that person can never cease to exist. And if that person commits sin, unless that person accepts God's offer that person must suffer forever because the sin can never be fully paid for.

B. Problem Of Biblical Examples

Raegan gives the following as his second point:

Second, the concept of eternal torment seems to run contrary to biblical examples. God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire — suddenly and quickly. He destroyed Noah's evil world with water — suddenly and quickly. He ordered the Canaanites to be killed swiftly. In the Law of Moses there was no provision for incarceration or torture. Punishments for violation of the Law consisted either of restitution or death. Even sacrificial animals were spared suffering through precise prescriptions for their killing that guaranteed a death that would be as quick and painless as possible.

Well, let us consider that for a moment. The people of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed quickly. But we have to now consider where they are. Raegan agrees the unrighteous are not annihilated, so where are they? Further he has said that they suffer according to their sinfulness. If that is so, how long do they suffer? If they were annihilated almost immediately, now his position is much like that of the cults. If they suffer for a year or two, once again we have the problem of prolonged suffering. The same holds true at the flood.

When God destroyed the first world He did not annihilate the people. When He destroyed the Canaanites He did not annihilate the people. We will look at what it means to destroy something later, but it does not mean annihilation.

Raegan says in the Law of Moses there was no provision for incarceration or torture. Incarceration and torture are two different things. God did not instruct Israel on such a thing as incarceration, that is there were no jails. When sin of any magnitude was committed, it was death, not rehabilitation. Torture is never right for man, while discipline is.

However, when it comes to vengeance God says vengeance belongs to Him and He says He will do it. So though it is out of keeping for the Christian to carry out vengeance, it is fully within God's jurisdiction. Vengeance, in the NT is *ekdikēsis*. It means 'out of justice.' When sin is not dealt with by the repentance of the wrongdoer, God will take vengeance. He will inflict pain to the degree of the sinfulness of the sin. This is a clearly biblical teaching (Rom. 12:19 and more).

And true, animals were not to be mistreated. This is perfectly understandable and reasonable. Abusing animals is cruelty.

What is Raegan trying to say in this point? God may inflict death but not torment. But hell, if it is short as Raegan insists is still torment. One day Jesus went across the sea of Galilee to Gadara and there two demonized men met him. One of them was exceedingly fierce and we find out later why he could break chains. When Jesus asked the demon what his name was he said it was legion. The reason he had that name is because he said they were many. So I expect this demon was the demon over all the demons in that man.

Now I have read of numbers between 5 and 6000 soldiers made up a legion. Imagine a demon over this many in one person. And when Jesus addressed them they were filled with fear. They know who Jesus was. Listen to what they said in Matthew 8:29:

8:29 And suddenly they cried out, saying, "What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?"

They realized what lay before them. Torment. The rich man who went to hell as recorded in Luke 16:27-28 said this to Abraham:

27 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house,

28 *'for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.'*

Revelation 14:11, speaking of those who take the number 666 says this:

14:11 "And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name."

Now let me mention that when it says it ascends forever and ever, the original gives the strongest wording possible for that which has no end. This smoke ascends into the ages of the ages. That is time without end. There is no use for the smoke to ascend that long if the torment is long over. The idea of torment in hell is not foreign to Scripture, nor is the idea of torment lasting forever.

C. Problem Regarding The Second Death

I don't think the biblical examples Raegan used change anything. So we go to his third problem with the traditional view. It is the problem regarding the second death.

He says:

As a student of God's Prophetic Word, I found a third problem with the traditional view. It seems to contradict a descriptive phrase that is used in prophecy to describe Hell. That term is "the second death." It is a term peculiar to the book of Revelation ([Revelation 2:11](#); [20:6](#), [14](#); [21:8](#)). How can Hell be a "second death" if it consists of eternal, conscious torment?

We have now come to what I view as a most important objection to the traditional view of hell. What we must come to a conclusion on is the term 'dead' or 'death'. The one major problem of many regarding the subject of hell and heaven is the term 'death'. When one thinks of death as an end of existence, it immediately causes problems. So we will take some time to explain life, and then look at the meaning of death.

If we can define life, it will help us to define death. Our usual understanding of what death means is the snag that Raegan has run into here. Some time ago at prayer meeting we came across a matter and I spent quite a lot of time explaining the nature of man. I want to take some extra time here to do that as it affects one's view of hell as well.

1. Life

a. Definition of Life

So, we begin with the subject of life. Now I have stressed over and over in my years of ministry that definition of words is most important. When one talks to a Mormon, and he tells you that he believes one must be born again, you must have him define what he means by being born again, because he does not mean what you mean. And if one doesn't make him define, one may be on the road to deception.

So, we begin with the word *life*. What is life? We must define what life is before we go on to look at what death is. In general, in my studies I have concluded that life is a state of being or the existence of an entity which is continuous or successive, active, useful and productive. Now what is most important to understand, at least in my view, is that this state of being called life is maintained by the interactive union of two or more substances which creates a useful and productive state of existence.

Maybe this example will help. If you light one log on fire, the fire will die before the log is burned up. But if you place two or more logs close together and light them on fire, as long as they are close together the fire will be alive until they are gone. If you add more logs, it will keep going until they are all gone.

If you have two logs burning and you take one away, the fire will die. Life requires two or more entities

working together to keep it going. As long as the fire is alive it may provide a continuous or successive, active, useful and productive existence.

With regard to life, Acts 17:25 says:

25 *"Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.*

Turn to Genesis 2:7. It is God that gives life to everything that has what we call life. Without God, we cannot live. Jesus said, "Without Me, you can do nothing." Genesis 2:7 says:

7 *And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, (there we have the first part. Then it says) and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; (there we have the second) and man became a living being.* The KJV says man became a living soul and that is more accurate. So we have the body and the spirit together and as long as they remain together man is in a living state.

But there are various kinds of life, just as there are various kinds of death. So, we will look at these. They are carnal or biological life; what I call soulical life, and spiritual or everlasting life.

b. Kinds of Life

1) Carnal life

The first kind of life we want to look at is what I call carnal life. It could be called physical or biological life. The word carnal has to do with the body, the physical or the flesh. If you went to school longer than I did, you will be familiar with the subject of biology. I never learned any of that. Can anyone tell me what biology has to do with? The Wikipedia says, "Biology is

a natural science concerned with the study of life and living organisms..."

All entities that we call 'living' things, have *bios* life in common with one another. This includes unanimated, or bloodless things like grass and trees and so on; or animated creatures with blood like creeping, walking, flying or swimming things.

The word 'biology' comes from the Greek word 'bios'. This kind of life is maintained in animated beings by providing the body with food and water and the right air mixture.

Turn to 1 Timothy. We find the word for this kind of life in the NT. Let me show you this word used in the Scripture as related to mankind. 1 Timothy 2:1-2 says:

1 *Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men,*

2 *for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life (bios life) in all godliness and reverence.*

So when it says that we should pray that we might lead a quiet and peaceable life the *life* referred to is *bios* life. It is our physical life. Now go to chapter 4. Verse 8 says:

8 *For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.*

In this verse, when he speaks of the life that now is, it is *bios* life, physical life. This *bios* kind of life is the kind of life that all living entities have, whether animated human or beast or flying or creeping

things, and also unanimated living things such as grass and trees.

Let me now define what bios life is. I said earlier that life in general, "...is a state of being or the existence of an entity which is continuous, successive, active useful and productive." Now, to maintain this life, two or more substances must remain in union with whatever entity has this life, or death will take place. As long as these substances remain together life goes on.

2) Soulical life

The second kind of life we will look at that is mentioned in the Bible is what I will call *soulical* life. Turn to Genesis 2. We don't have an adjective for the word soul, so I have produced one and call it soulical life. This has to do with soul life. So look at 2:7:

2:7 And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being (the KJV is more accurate and says man became a living soul).

When the Jews translated the Hebrew OT into Greek, 132 years before Christ, the word for life they used in Genesis 2:7 is *zoe* life. This word is used of all kinds of animal life. We find it in 1:21 where it speaks of every 'living' thing. Verse 24 speaks of 'living' creatures. But look at 1:26 which says:

26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the

earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

So all living, animated beings have zoeë life. When we come to Genesis 2:7 we find that this is the kind of life man has as well. It says man became a living soul.

Our word zoo and zoology come from this word for life. It is the life that all animated beings have. Animated beings are not rooted into the ground or water. We will see later how this life is maintained.

3) Spiritual life

There is a third kind of life and we will call it spiritual life. You see, man is made up of body, soul and spirit. And these three parts have life related to each part. Let me add here that this is how I see it. So what is spiritual life? Well, we find it in a sense in Genesis 2 as well, though it is pictured from a negative standpoint.

Genesis 2:15-17 says:

15 *Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.*

16 *And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat;*

17 *"but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*

Now we know that Adam and Eve did not die physically the day they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So, just what did God mean when He said they would die the day they ate of that tree? Well, He meant what He said. He said they would die the day they ate from that tree and they did die that day. They died, what we call spiritual

death. And what is spiritual death? Well, we will consider that under the subject of death. But let me here tell you what spiritual life is. It is when God and man are united together in a spiritual relationship. We'll see more of this later

2. Death

a. Definition of death

So, having briefly studied life, we are ready to look at what death is. In general, I have said that in my studies I have concluded that life is the continuous, successive, active, useful and productive existence of anything, and this is caused by the interactive union of two or more substances or entities.

All who have studied carefully know that death is very hard to define. If life is the state caused by the interactive union of two or more substances or entities, it would then only stand to reason that death is the state entered when a separation of that union occurs. And I think you could find a consensus among scholars that death is basically separation. And so, as I see it, death is the state one enters in which that which causes the union of two or more things is separated. And the terrible thing about death for lost mankind is that it does not end a person's existence.

So, just as there were three kinds of life, so there are three kinds of death. We will just begin to look at those now.

b. Kinds of death

1) Physical death - The first death

We come now then to that which we might call 'the first death'.

It was not the first death experienced but it is the first death as compared to the second death. The Bible does not use the

phrase 'the first death'. But there is a death the Bible speaks of as the second death and we will look at it later. It is this second death that threw David Raegan off course.

So what is the first death? It is physical death. It is that which is referred to in the book of Hebrews when it says it is appointed to man once to die but after this the judgement. In the next message we want to look at what this death is not, and then at what it is.

CONCL: So to conclude, we have looked at the two viewpoints of hell. One is the traditionalist viewpoint which says hell is forever. The conditionalist viewpoint says hell is only as long as it is deserved, then the person ceases to exist.

We then began to look at Raegan's difficulties with the traditionalist viewpoint.

First, "How could a God of grace, mercy and love torment the vast majority of humanity eternally?" Second, he felt and I quote: "the concept of eternal torment seems to run contrary to biblical examples. God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire – suddenly and quickly. He destroyed Noah's evil world with water – suddenly and quickly. He ordered the Canaanites to be killed swiftly. In the Law of Moses there was no provision for incarceration or torture. Punishments for violation of the Law consisted either of restitution or death. Even sacrificial animals were spared suffering through precise prescriptions for their killing that guaranteed a death that would be as quick and painless as possible.

His third problem was the matter of the second death and it is this we are working on. I sought to define the three kinds of life I find in Scripture and began to deal with death. We began with the first kind of death which is physical death and Lord willing next time, from this I will seek to answer the problem of the second death.