

“Consider Hell”

By Pastor Stephen Finley

We live in an age in which the very idea of a burning hell is scornfully mocked. Those who, out of love, attempt to warn others that there is a real place called hell are increasingly thought of as fanatics. On the other hand, untold millions of people breathe out the word “hell” as part of their daily speech — either as an idle joke, or as a curse word directed toward people they hate: and very few people think anything of it.

Many who consider themselves Christians believe in heaven, yet choose not to believe in hell. Many others believe there is a hell, but believe that few people — only the *really* bad — end up there. (As for themselves, *they* certainly won’t go there.) However, regardless of what one chooses to believe or not to believe concerning hell, the testimony of God’s Word stands just as firm today as it did in millennia past. God’s warnings about this place are unequivocal.

Perhaps you need to consider hell.

The fashion today is to “allegorise” things in Scripture that one doesn’t want to believe (as though one’s choice to interpret a writer’s words as “allegory” makes it so). Words, however, have definite, intended meanings. God, the Creator of all human language and the divine Author of Scripture that moved the pens of the human writers, used unmistakable language to describe hell.

Consider the Bible’s description of hell. The prophet Isaiah said that it is a place for those who “*have transgressed against me*” (the LORD) — where “*their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched*” (Isaiah 66:24). John the Baptist, the herald of Jesus Christ, called it a place of “*wrath,*” “*fire,*” and “*unquenchable fire*” (Matthew 3:7-12). The Lord Jesus Christ constantly warned of this place. He called it a “*furnace of fire*” — a place of “*outer darkness,*” “*weeping,*” “*wailing,*” and “*gnashing of teeth*” (Matthew 13:49, 50; 22:13). In Mark 9:42-48, Jesus warns us five times in a row that it is a place of “*fire that shall never be quenched,*” and reminds us three times that it is a place where “*the worm dieth not.*” In Luke 16:19-31, Jesus tells the story of a man who died and went to hell. Using language that absolutely cannot be interpreted as “allegory,” Christ described it four times as a place of “*torment,*” where the man was able to see with his eyes, feel pain, and experience torment so awful that he begged for merely a drop of water to be placed on his tongue. John describes it as a “*lake of fire*” — a place where one’s existence of torment and separation from God can only be called “*the second death*” (Revelation 20:14, 15).

Furthermore, this place is eternal. There is no escape from it — ever. After describing it as a place where the inhabitants will be “*tormented with fire and brimstone,*” the Apostle John adds that “*the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day nor night*” (Revelation 14:10, 11). Friend, if you have not been taking hell seriously, you had better start to consider hell.

Consider also what the Bible says about *who* is going to hell. Here are just two Scriptural lists to consider:

“*But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.*” (Revelation 21:8)

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10)

Perhaps many of you just now read over these verses rather smugly, taking particular notice of the “big sins” of which you do not consider yourselves to be guilty. Since most of you probably took special note of the fact that you do not fit into the “*murderers*” category, let us consider that sin. How many times does one have to commit murder to be a “murderer”? Only once. Even if one truly feels sorrow for having committed the crime of murder, and never commits it again, he nevertheless remains, to the end of his life, a murderer. No one would debate this.

How about “*adulterers*,” then? Undoubtedly, many hearts are skipping a beat at this word. By the same standard of how many murders it takes to be a “murderer,” one must conclude that one who has ever committed this crime (it is not a “little affair”) remains, to the end of his life, an adulterer. How about fornication? Many of you who thought you were just “in love” or “sowing your wild oats” in your younger years, or who, even now, are living together outside of matrimony, are, according to the Bible, “*fornicators*.” Perhaps a few of you thought you’d “just try” that increasingly popular lifestyle of “homosexuality.” (The Bible calls it “sodomy,” and an unnatural abomination. Leviticus 18:22, Deuteronomy 23:17, Romans 1:24-27) Even those who have experimented with and left this perverse lifestyle remain guilty of having been “*abusers of themselves with mankind*.” How about “*drunkards*”? Have you ever been guilty of this sin — even once? “Having one too many” is not amusing: it’s damnable.

If you are starting to feel uncomfortable with this close examination of these verses, this test is not done. How about “*idolaters*”? Even if you have never worshipped or venerated a graven image, “idolatry” is more than venerating a piece of marble, wood, or metal: it is adoring and living for *anything* or *anyone* other than God. (Have you ever put anything ahead of God in your life?) It is for this reason that God says that “*idolatry*” is the same thing as “*covetousness*” — a sin that is also in one of the above lists (Colossians 3:5). Have you *ever* lusted for or coveted something? How about “*extortioners*”? Have you *ever* taken from or cheated someone? The question is not “for how big an amount?” The question is, “Have you *ever* unfairly taken from or taken advantage of someone?” How about “*fearful, and unbelieving*”? Have you *ever* doubted God’s Word, or flatly chosen *not* to believe even part of it? Are you, even at this very moment, looking God’s Word straight in the face and saying, “I don’t believe that”? God calls unbelief a sin for which people will go to hell.

Let’s get even closer to home. How about “*all liars*”?

“Now, wait a minute!” most of you are probably thinking. “Everyone has told a lie at some point. You mean to tell me that if I’ve told even one lie in my life, it makes me a ‘liar’?”

As always, one must judge by the standard of Scripture. What does it say? Jesus warned, “*But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned*” (Matthew 12:36, 37). James said, “*For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all*” (James 2:10).

The fact that God considers the committing of even *one* of these sins to be the breaking of His Law, and thus worthy of damnation, should be frightening. But it gets worse. So far, we’ve looked at only two lists. Other lists of sins for which the imminent wrath of God hovers over people include: “*envy*,”

“debate (quarrelling, arguing),” “deceit,” “whisperers (gossips, slanderers),” “backbiters,” “despiteful” (haughty), “proud,” “boasters,” “disobedient to parents,” “covenantbreakers” (not keeping one’s word), “unmerciful,” “anger,” “wrath,” “malice,” “blasphemy” (either using God’s name in vain, or speaking untrue or accusatory things about God), “filthy communication out of your mouth,” and many more (Romans 1:28-32, Colossians 3:5-8). Have you ever been guilty of any of these — even once?

There are, of course, also the inward thoughts, intents, and attitudes of the heart, which God takes just as seriously as outward sins. God views lustful thoughts in the same light as the act of adultery (Matthew 5:28). He views hatred, and unkind and hurtful words, in the same light as murder, and worthy of *“hellfire”* (Matthew 5:22, James 3:6, 4:1, 2).

If should be apparent by now that these lists encompass every last person on earth (including this author). That is, in fact, exactly what the Bible says. According to the Word of God, the whole world stands guilty before God’s Law, and worthy of hellfire (Romans 3:19, 20). That is why the Bible also includes another very large group of people in the list of those who are going to hell: the very religious! In Luke 13:24-28, Jesus said that many religious people in the last day will cry to Him, *“Lord, Lord, open unto us.”* He will say, *“I know you not whence ye are.”* They will protest, *“We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets.”* But He will say, *“I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.”* Then, Christ said, *“There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves cast out.”*

Lest one try to protest that this warning applies to religious people who are only outwardly religious, and not *“sincere,”* Jesus also had much to say about the *“sincere.”* He warned that many people who, in this life, called Him *“Lord, Lord”* — who sincerely, genuinely believe that they have served God with *“many wonderful works”* — who, in fact, actually believe that they possess divine gifts of prophecy and casting out devils — these people will hear Christ declare to them, *“I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity”* (Matthew 7:21-23).

Your condition would be absolutely hopeless — were it not for the fact that God has made a provision of escape from the *“wrath to come.”* There is an enormous, multiple-lane superhighway filled with people from every religion, level of morality, and walk of life. It is crowded with countless throngs who are heading straight for the precipice that drops into hell. The vast, overwhelming portion of humanity is on this road. However, there is a small, narrow path that leads to everlasting life, which God, in His love and mercy, has provided. Jesus said, *“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it”* (Matthew 7:13,14).

What is that way? Is it a church or denomination? No, it is not. Is it a code of morality? No, it is not. It is a Person: and that Person is Jesus Christ. Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”* To turn from trusting in your own righteousness, and instead put your faith in Jesus Christ alone, is to receive the gift of everlasting life, and a relationship with Jesus Christ. The Bible likens salvation to a *“garment”* or *“robe of righteousness”* that one puts on by faith (Isaiah 61:10, Matthew 22:1-14, 1 Corinthians 1:30, Revelation 19:7-8). When one puts his trust in Christ alone, he is covered with Christ’s own righteousness, as though it were his own. It is in this way that a righteous God is able to look at you, as a sinner, and declare you perfectly *“righteous”* — even though your life is, in fact, stained with sin (Romans 4:1-8). It is thereby that He is able to receive you into His kingdom.

If you are not certain that you have had this perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ applied to you, so that you may miss the coming wrath of God, it is the heartfelt desire of this “sinner saved by grace” that you should have it. Please do not hesitate to contact us for more information. In the mean time, we are praying for you!