

## What Should I Believe About Hell?

On Sunday, we explored three different perspectives on hell. Now let's talk!

1. Warm up question. If an enemy were to custom design a hell for you, what would your personal hell look like? (You can give a serious or lighthearted answer.)
2. **The Traditional View – Justice.** As a child, ballerina Michaela DePrince had a horrific experience. Two rebels attacked her beloved teacher who was pregnant. The rebels made a bet whether the child she was carrying was male or female, then ripped her open with their bayonets. When Michaela tried to stop them, they stabbed her. She was spared only because the night watchman pleaded for her.
  - a. If you were God and those two rebels stood before you after death in an unrepentant state, with the same condition of heart as when they ripped open Michaela's teacher, what would you do? Would you let them into heaven? If not, what would you do with them – and why?
  - b. The Traditional View of hell is grounded in the belief that, with the gift of life comes responsibility. Those who use the gift to kill and steal and destroy should not receive the same reward as those who use it to love and share and bring people together. Does this seem like a good anchor principle for determining where people go in the afterlife? Does it seem fair?
  - c. For a succinct statement of the Traditional View, read Revelation 20:11-15.

Verse 11. Why does everyone want to get away?

Verses 12-13. What do these books represent? And how are people judged?

Verse 14. For those who embrace the Traditional View, do you picture hell as a literal "lake of fire"?
  - d. Can you imagine a loving God actively inflicting torment on people?
  - e. How do you feel about the notion that, once in hell, you can never get out?
3. **The Universalist View – Grace.** In this view, everyone gets into heaven. Those who die in an unrepentant state will, when they stand in the presence of God, be overwhelmed and transformed by the presence of God's irresistible grace.
  - a. What language in the following verses tends to reinforce the Universalist View – Philippians 2:6-11; Psalm 22:27-28; Romans 6:18-21.
  - b. Jeff told about a time when he saw his father express such amazing grace toward a stranger who was blind, it had a huge positive impact on Jeff. When have you experienced (or witnessed) an act of grace that felt transformational?

- c. How do you feel about the idea of irresistible grace? Can it be reconciled with free will, i.e., the idea that God gives us the right to choose how we want to live?
  - d. How do you feel about the idea that the rebels who ripped open Michaela's beloved teacher can live like hell, die, get zapped with the grace of God, and then share the same eternal reward as Michaela and her teacher?
  - e. If you had to make a choice between the Traditional View and the Universalist View, which would you lean toward – and why?
4. **The Hybrid View – An Attempt to Reconcile Grace and Justice.** Jeff offered a third theory that might be able to reconcile aspects of the Traditional and Universalist Views. This Hybrid View is derived from two key points – first, the history of the New Testament word for *hell*, which in Greek is *gehenna*, derived from the Hebrew *gehinnom*, which refers to the Valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem, a gorgous valley that we humans trashed.
- a. Read Jeremiah 7:30-33. Imagine walking through the Valley of Hinnom in the times described here. Describe what you might have seen.
  - b. By the time of Jesus, the Valley of Hinnom had become a dump where worm-infested garbage was constantly burning. Why do you think *gehinnom* became the Hebrew word for hell? Why did they pick that word?
  - c. Based on the foregoing, Jeff proposed that *gehenna* was originally a beautiful alternative destination for people who, in the exercise of free will, choose not to live with God. Because those people reject God's values, Jeff suggested their own behavior there makes it an awful place, so that the torments of *gehenna* are self-inflicted. Critique this theory. What do you like or dislike about it?
5. The other key factor in the Hybrid View is the notion that, after his death, Jesus descended into *gehenna*, preached the Gospel, and led those who were ready to repent out of *gehenna*. Read I Peter 3:18-22 and I Peter 4:6.
- a. If Jesus already descended into *gehenna* once to offer a second chance to those there, do you think it's possible he might do it again and again? Why or why not?
  - b. Read Matthew 5:21-26. To what extent are Jesus' words here consistent or inconsistent with the Hybrid View of hell?
  - c. To what extent is the Parable of the Prodigal Son consistent or inconsistent with the Hybrid View of hell?
  - d. As you reach the end of this discussion, what is your personal view about hell? Does it exist? If so, what's it like, who goes there, and do they ever get out?