

Breaking Bad

Slide -

One minute it's there the next minute it is gone.

So is the thought of some people and even religious people.

It just disappeared.

With this terse observation American church historian Martin Marty summarized the attitude toward a vanishing doctrine that received very careful attention in previous generations.

He continues to say, "if you are a church goer, ask yourself when the last time you heard an entire sermon or Bible study on the topic."

A Newsweek article says, "Today, hell is theology's H-word, a subject too trite for serious scholarship"

Gordon Kaufman of Harvard Divinity School believes we have gone through a transformation of ideas, and he says "I don't think there can be any future for heaven and hell."

Admittedly, hell is an unpleasant topic.

Unbelievers disbelieve in it, even most Christians ignore it.

Even the staunchly biblical diehards are often silent out of embarrassment.

Hell, more than any doctrine of the Bible, seems to be out of step with our times.

And yet we read that in the final judgement the unbelieving dead of all ages stand before God to be judged.

Slide - Revelation 20:14-15 "Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."

This is but one of many descriptions of hell in the Bible, what shall we do with this teaching?

This doctrine is often neglected because it is difficult to reconcile hell with the love of God.

That a great multitude of people will be in conscious torment forever is beyond the grasp of the human mind.

One of the liberal points of view are described by a noted Bishop John Robinson says, and I quote,

Slide - "Christ remains on the cross as long as one sinner remains in hell. In a universe of love there can be no heaven that tolerates a chamber of horrors; no hell for any which does not at the same time make it hell for God. He cannot endure that, for that would be a final mockery of His nature"

Another outspoken liberal of this viewpoint, James Mill says, "the doctrine of hell has driven many people away from Christianity."

Slide - He goes on to say, "I will call no being good, who is not what I mean by good when I use the word of any fellow creatures; And if there is a Being who can send me to hell for not so calling him, to hell I will go"

One man said he would not what to be in heaven with a God who sends people to hell.

Sounds like his preference was to be in hell so that he could live in defiance of such a God.

To put it simply, to us the punishment of hell does not fit the crime.

Yes, all mankind does some evil and a few do great evils, but nothing that anyone has ever done can justify eternal torment.

And think of all the millions of good people will be in hell simply because they have not heard of Christ.

It's like capital punishment for a traffic violation.

Thus, millions of westerners believe in some kind of afterlife, but it is one of bliss, not misery.

The genuine fear of suffering in hell has vanished from the mainstream of western thought.

Few, if any, give prolonged thought to the prospect that some people will be in hell.

Fewer yet believe they themselves will be among that unfortunate number.

There are a couple of alternative teachings and theories.

One takes the hell out of forever and the other takes the forever out of hell.

Slide -Universalism is the name given to the belief that eventually all mankind will arrive safely to heaven.

Since Christ dies for all people without exception, it follows, they say, that all will be eventually saved.

God will overcome any remnant of evil, and all rational creatures will eventually be redeemed.

There are a couple of verse they like to use to sustain their teachings.

Slide -Ephesians 1:10 "that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him."

Slide -And it is God's intention to Colossians 1:20, "and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross."

The implication we are told is that everyone will eventually be brought into the family of God.

Unfortunately, this attractive interpretation has a serious weakness.

If their interpretation were correct, then Satan would also have to be redeemed, that is, reconciled to God.

Yet Christ did not die for the angels

Slide -Hebrews 2:16 "For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham."

Therefore, God would have no just grounds to pardon him, even if he repented.

What is more, the Scriptures explicitly teach the he along with the beast and the false prophet shall be;

Slide -Revelation 20:10 "cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

Yes, everything will be summed up in Christ.

That means that all things will be brought under Christ's direct authority.

Christ has completed everything necessary to fulfill God's plan of salvation.

Slide -The final death blow to universalism is in Matthew 12:32 "Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come."

Christ is speaking of the unpardonable sin.

Slide -In Mark 3:29 “but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation”

This indicates it begins in this age and is carried on for all eternity without hope of reversal.

How could those who have committed this sin be reconciled to God when the Scripture clearly says they shall never be forgiven?

Universalism has never been widely accepted by those who take the Scriptures seriously.

Obviously if Universalism teaching is true, there would be no pressing reason to fulfill the great commission.

There would be no reason to urge unbelievers to accept Christ in this life.

And now we come to the belief or theory that attempts to take the hell out of forever.

Slide -**Conditional immortality, contents that not all will be saved, but neither will there be any conscious torment forever.**

God resurrects the wicked to judge them, then they are thrown into the fire and consumed.

The righteous are granted eternal life and the unbelievers are granted eternal death, hell is annihilation.

One of their out spoken, Roger Pinnock of McMaster University ask;

Slide - “How can one imagine for a moment that God who gave His Son to die on the cross, would install a torture chamber somewhere in His creation in order to subject those who reject Him in everlasting pain?”

He believes the fire of God consumes the lost.

Thus, God does not raise the wicked to torture them but rather to declare judgement on them and condemn them to extinction.

Slide -His reasoning comes from Matthew 10:28 “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

He and they assume hell is the annihilation.

Unfortunately, the Greek word for destroy does not mean to annihilate but to be delivered to eternal misery.

Slide -Jesus spells this out in Matthew 25:46 “And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Since the same word eternal describes both the destiny of the righteous and the wicked,

It seems clear that Christ taught that both groups will exist forever, just in different places.

The same eternal fire that Satan and his hosts experience **will be the lot of unbelievers.**

Daniel 12:2 supports the eternal **conscious** existence of unbelievers and believers;

Slide - “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

The wicked will **experience** shame and contempt for as long as the righteous experience bliss.

Finally, the occupants of hell are clearly said to **experience** eternal misery.

Slide -Revelation 14:9-11 “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.

Slide -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.”

Notice that the fire does not annihilate the wicked but torments them.

There will be no periods of rest during which the wicked are **unconscious** of torment.

They will never slip into peaceful **nonexistence**.

In Revelation 20 we have a similar scene which I already read to you.

Slide -Revelation 20:10 “The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

Hence the teachings of universalism and annihilationism come to their deceptive end.

Eternal conscious torment is clearly taught.

Let bring to light what Jesus taught in the Rich Man and Lazarus, where He pulls back the curtain to show us a glimpse of the afterlife.

Slide -Luke 16:23-26 “And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.²⁴ “Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’

Slide -25 But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented.

Slide -26 And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.’

Slide -**First note the man in hades was fully conscious immediately after death.**

Memory, speaking, pain, all of these were a part of his **experience**.

So, while his family is gathered around in some sort of memorial service for the rich man,

The one whose memory was respectfully honored was in pain, he had smoldering needs that were unmet.

He had inflamed desires that were neither satisfied nor quenched.

Slide -**Second, the eternal destiny of this man was irrevocably fixed.**

Whereas the relatives on earth can leave the memorial ceremony and go out to dinner or go home,

In hades he is confined, without the possibility of escape.

Slide -There is a quote that goes like this “**Once we have passed through the door of death, we can’t pick up our suitcase and move out because we don’t like the accommodations**”

He had an **overwhelming realization** that his destiny was irrevocably fixed.

And as we shall see, in the future his predicament will yet become worse, **never better**.

Slide -**Third, this man knew himself well enough to know that what he was experiencing was fair and just.**

In hades his entire life was present to him, his transfer into the nether world did not diminish, but only heightened, his self-awareness.

Slide -In verse 27 we read, “Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’”

We have reason to think that this man believed that what was happening to him was just for two reasons;

Slide -**First, he says nothing about how unfair it is to him to be there.**

He complains about the pain, but he does not complain about injustice.

Slide -**Second, he knew exactly what his brothers would have to do if they were to avoid his own fate.**

If they would repent, they would be kept from joining him in misery.

Slide -Hence verses Luke 16:29-31 “Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ 30 And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ 31 But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’ ”

How true! When Christ told this story, He had not yet been put to death and resurrected.

Yet He taught that His resurrection was the only sign that he would give to the world.

But today, even though the evidence for His resurrection is overwhelming, many men and women still do not believe.

Unforgiven sin, the rich man knew, led quite logically to a place of agony.

Slide -**With heightened perception and a better understanding, he could see that his relationship with God should have been his highest priority.**

Slide -**Fourth, let us not forget that the rich man was not yet in hell, but in hades.**

Slide -2 Peter 2:9 “then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment”

The tense of the verb attests that the punishment is ongoing, though the final judgement is yet future.

There is no other honest interpretation of these passages.

For humans the root of the debate is the question whether hell is fair and just.

Some say it is difficult enough to explain evil to the unbelieving world without having to explain hell too.

Some believe that sensitive Christians, cannot believe in eternal conscious punishment.

To us humans, everlasting punishment is disproportionate to the offense committed.

Slide -**First off, is the problem with the word everlasting. As I stated before is beyond the grasp of the human mind.**

Slide -**Secondly, to us the purpose of punishment, we are told, is always redemptive.**

Rehabilitation is the goal of all prison sentences.

The concept of a place where there will be endless punishment without any possibility of parole or reform is foreign to us and therefore unjust.

To some God appears cruel, unjust, sadistic and vindictive.

Slide -**Thirdly, and most notably, we are sinners living in a sinful world.**

Sin is all around us, we are swimming in it. People are just going along with the stream of sin.

Humans are creatures of habit and some of those habits are sinful.

Some of these habits bring us joy and pleasure and some just bring us comfort. That's why they are a habit.

So why rock the boat?

But we must confess that we do not know exactly how bad we are?

Slide -Isaiah 64:6 "But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away."

Then on top of that we do not know exactly how much punishment is enough for those who have sinned against God.

I say those, but is there anyone here who has not sinned against God? I know I have.

We may think we know what God is like, but we see through a glass darkly.

Slide -A quote from Jonathan Edwards, "the reason we find hell so offensive is because of our insensitivity to sin"

What if, from God's viewpoint, the greatness of sin is determined by the greatness of the One against whom it is committed?

Then the guilt of the sin is infinite because it is a violation of the character of an infinite Being.

What if, in the nature of God, it is deemed that such infinite sins deserve infinite penalty?

A penalty which no one can repay.

We must realize that God does not choose the attributes He possesses.

Because He has existed from all eternity, His attributes were already determined from eternity past.

If God had not possessed love and mercy throughout all eternity,

We might have been created by a malicious and cruel being who delighted in watching His creatures suffer perpetual torment.

Fortunately, that is not the case.

The Scriptures tell of the love and mercy of God; He does not delight in the death of the wicked.

But it also has much to say about His justice and the fact that even the wicked in hell will glorify Him.

To put it clearly, we must accept God as He is revealed in the Bible, whether He suits our preferences or not.

It sounds absurd to me to be extreme and say "I don't want to be in heaven with a God who sends people to hell I would rather go to hell and defy Him."

I can't exaggerate the foolishness of those who think they can oppose God to their own satisfaction or to His detriment.

In Psalm 2 we read that God sits in the heavens and laughs at those who think they can defy Him.

Even as we look at the world today, we should not be surprised that God allows multitudes to live in eternal misery.

Think of the vast amount of suffering (preventable suffering if you please) that God has allowed on this earth.

An earthquake in Mexico kills 20,000, a tidal wave in Japan kills 50,000, and famines world wide cause 20,000 deaths every single day.

Who can begin to calculate the amount of emotional pain experienced by babies, children and adults?

Yet we know that strengthening the earth's crust, sending rain and withholding floods could all be accomplished by just a word from the Almighty.

If God has allowed people to live in untold misery for thousands of years, why would it be inconsistent for Him to allow misery to continue forever?

If our concept of justice differs from God's, we can be quite sure that He will be unimpressed by our attempts to get Him to see things from our point of view.

No one is God's counselor,

No one instructs or corrects Him.

He does not look to us for input on how to run His universe.

Slide -Fourthly, we can keep ourselves busy so we don't have to think about it.

Slide -Fifthly, unless you are a murderer or have committed some other serious crime, we think we are good.

But I ask you how good do you have to be?

We remember Jesus' counsel to the rich young ruler

Slide -Mark 10:17-18 "Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God."

Then Jesus repeats the commandments

Slide -Mark 10:20 "And he answered and said to Him, "Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth."

He thinks he is good but who describes good?

Slide -Mark 10:21 "Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me."

People as well as you and I think we are good but what if Jesus comes to you and says "One thing you lack?"

What will you do?

I know there are some of you sitting here today thinking yes, I am good but Jesus says you still lack one thing.

Slide - You cannot love without truth, because love is the source of truth.

With love to everyone here today and not wanting anyone to perish into eternal torment in such a place as hell

Slide -So, with truth I repeat what the Lord said in Luke 13:3 "but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

Slide -Acts 22:16 "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."