

Annihilationism – a Spiritually Fatal Innovation

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Introduction

Hell has fallen on hard times. The most frequent reference to it nowadays is as a term of cursing, swearing, or intensification of expression. Others use it in a weak attempt at levity: “I want to go to Hell; after all, that’s where all my friends will be.” Many moderns have tried to take the murky-gray road of claiming – at the same time – to believe in the existence of Hell, but professing to know of no one who does anything sufficiently evil to go there. It is historically demonstrable that outright denial of Hell to any great degree, or its companion, loss of belief in Hell, are phenomena of relatively recent times. How has this come about?¹

A Brief History of the Deconstruction of Hell

For sixteen centuries the doctrine of eternal punishment of the wicked at the hands of a just God was a matter of certain conviction almost universally throughout Christendom. In fact, this was the prevailing view even in the intertestamental period that preceded Christ and His doctrine: “Everlasting punishment of the wicked was and always will be the orthodox theory. It was held by the Jews at the time of Christ, with the exception of the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection” (Schaff, 2:606-07). The only significant voice among the ancients who dissented from the orthodox view of Hell was Origen (A.D. third century), later condemned (rightly, in this case) by two ecumenical councils for his heresy. However, with the approach of the Renaissance, man’s emphasis shifted from theo-centricism to anthropo-centricism. Humanism, with man at its center as the be-all, do-all, and end-all, began to displace God. The further man moved himself up, the farther he pushed God down. Man was so valuable and so precious, even to the “theistic” humanist, that he could not abide the thought of eternal punishment or retribution, or of a sin serious enough to warrant it. One writer summed it up thus:

From the sixteenth century on, God’s judgment was a constant target for attack by humanists both within and outside the church. Hell and humanism didn’t mix; they can’t mix and never will mix. It just won’t do to have highly exalted man experiencing the torments of hell eternally. First, it is presumed that the precious creature couldn’t possibly do anything bad enough to warrant such punishment. And even more significantly, the humanists are convinced that God could not bear the eternal loss of even one of these marvelous man-creatures (Braun, 35–36).

Certain radical liberal theologians have become outspoken deniers of Hell and have influenced other clerics. A good example of such blasphemy is from the pen of the late John A.T. Robinson, Bishop of the Church of England. As long ago as 1949 he wrote:

Christ, in Origen's old words, remains on the Cross as long as one sinner remains in hell. That is not speculation; it is a statement grounded in the very necessity of God's nature. In a universe of love, there can be no heaven which 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 the final mockery of His nature—and He will not ("Universalism...", 155).

Only eighteen years later he wrote as though the destruction of Hell had already been fully accomplished: "There are still a few who would like to bring back hell, as some want to bring back birching and hanging. They are usually the same types who wish to purge Britain of horror comics, sex, and violence" (*But That...*, p. 69).

Another of Robinson's ilk was Emil Brunner, a Swiss theologian:

That is the revealed will of God and the plan for the world which He discloses, a plan of universal salvation, of gathering all things into Christ. We hear not one word in the Bible of a dual plan, a plan of salvation and its polar opposite. The will of God has but one point, it is unambiguous and positive. It has one aim, not two (182).

Obviously, Brunner read the Sacred Text through tinted or dirty glasses. Aside from the insistent Biblical theme of judgment against and eternal punishment for impenitent transgressors of God's will, the very existence of a **plan of salvation** necessarily implies "its polar opposite"—damnation. The will of God is "unambiguous and positive" all right, but about the **existence** (rather than non-existence) of a final Judgment and of eternal retribution for sin in a place called "Hell."

As is often the case, those who were once considered radicals have gradually become almost mainstream, and the abnormal has increasingly become "normal." The seminaries have for a century or more been filled with professors who are theological liberals and modernists of the rankest sort, most of whom have no stomach for (among other things) anything unpleasant, "negative," or foreboding connected with their brand of religion, their treatment of the Bible, and their concept of God. This posture, as a primary assumption, all but categorically ignores Divine Justice and its necessary implication—Divinely administered eternal punishment for unforgiven sin.

These schools have turned out tens of thousands of infidel ecclesiastics who have spewed out their message of unbelief week after week in denominational pulpits across the

land. At the heart of their theology is an over- (and pseudo-) emphasis on the love, grace, mercy, kindness, and longsuffering of God. They have accompanied this lopsided and perverted message with a drastic **de-emphasis** (if not total avoidance and denial) of the balancing traits of God's justice, law, wrath against sin, and the corollary implication of these verities – Hell as retribution for impenitent sinners. Seminaries – and the pulpits they have filled – have so watered down the Biblical “orthodoxy” of centuries that even so-called “evangelical” churches nowadays are freely accepting such things as divorce and remarriage for any cause, recreational sex, social drinking, and in some cases tolerance of homosexual behavior as compatible with a “Christian lifestyle” and the hope of Heaven.

This Modernism was bad enough, but it inevitably led to the deadlier philosophy of Postmodernism, which eschews facts and evidence, allowing each person's feelings/opinions to determine “truth” (at least for him or her). In turn, even more recently, Postmodernism has spawned the “Emerging Church” ideology, which, while still claiming to be a “Christian” movement, is hardly more than a new version of Universalism. (Informed readers understand that, by definition, Universalism demands the denial of eternal punishment for sinful men in its advocacy of their universal-salvation dictum.) While the Emerging Church approach is all the rage in current theology, few schemes could be more anti-Biblical or anti-Christian.

The Humanism produced by the Renaissance has spawned at least five distinct schools of Hell-denial:

1. **Universalism** – Hell could not exist as an eternal state because God is too loving and benevolent to allow anyone to suffer forever in such a place. Therefore, all will be saved regardless of belief or behavior.
2. **Annihilationism/Extinctionism** – The wicked cease to exist at death (or soon following the Judgment, after a brief period of torment).
3. **Atheistic Humanism** – Mankind is the ultimate form of life. Since God does not exist, moral absolutes, accountability, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell do not exist.
4. **Liberalism/Modernism** – While Hell may exist, no sin is bad enough nor sinner wicked enough to deserve it (“Universalism-Lite”).
5. **New Ageism** – Lack of or low self-esteem is the root of all human problems. The Biblical world view is responsible for this failure. To the New Ager, “acknowledging oneself as a sinner destroys a human being. His solution to this is simply to define sin out of existence and declare man sinless” (Michaelsen, 289). This tactic, of course, also defines Hell out of existence. One can see some common threads between Postmodernism, Emerging Churchism, and New Ageism.

No-Hell Innovators “Among Us”

Among those still claiming membership in the church of Christ, I am aware of only one who has gone on record in modern times as a full-fledged Universalist: Richard Beck, Professor and Psychology Department Chairman at Abilene Christian University, blatantly lays out his convictions on his blog (*Experimental Theology*). (Are any still in denial about the utter apostasy of those in charge of this institution?)

However, a few (but apparently growing number) have imbibed its first cousin – the annihilation/extinction dogma – in recent years. The “pioneer” in this respect is Edward Fudge, an elder in the historically apostate Bering Drive Church of Christ in Houston, Texas. In a 1982 “ten-pound” tome, *The Fire that Consumes*, he argues that the wicked will only be punished temporarily following the Judgment, after which they will be subject to “total, everlasting extinction” (425, 435–36). John Clayton, who has circulated widely among the Lord’s people, lecturing on apologetics for more than three decades (in spite of his being repeatedly exposed as a “theistic evolutionist”), has excitedly endorsed Fudge’s book (20). Al Pickering, who gained moderate notoriety among brethren with his “Sharpening the Sword” Seminars, is an ardent advocate of the Fudge contention (Jackson, “Changing Attitudes,” 66). He has since made total shipwreck of the faith and works among various denominations, but principally Independent Christian Churches, in the Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas, area.

F. LaGard Smith (at one time a “Scholar in Residence” at Lipscomb University, but currently a “Visiting Professor” at Faulkner University’s Jones School of Law) first voiced his denial of eternal punishment at the 1988 Pepperdine University Lectures (Jackson, “Eternal Punishment”). In 2003, he (as did Fudge) devoted a book to the subject (*After Life*). The late Homer Hailey, longtime teacher at Abilene Christian University and Florida College, advocated his extinction views in a booklet published in 2003 after his death in 2000 (*God’s Judgements...[sic]*). Other “lesser lights” (e.g., Stephen Clark Goad) have also joined the *no-Hell* chorus.

Moreover, the number of brethren is already many and is ever increasing, who, in their loose and latitudinarian approach to grace, baptism, the identity of the church, fellowship, worship, the nature of God, and Biblical authority in general are *de facto* – if not *de jure* – universalists and annihilationists. By this I mean that these brethren will hardly identify any doctrine as heresy or any practice as sinful (e.g., allowing that God will make “exceptions” to

His plan of salvation to save unbaptized “believers”). These will not oppose or expose any teacher or preacher as false or his/her doctrine as damnable, regardless of how foreign or contrary to Gospel Truth it may be. Furthermore, they do not want anyone else to expose them. They wittingly embrace in their fellowship those who are not in fellowship with God and shun those of us who expose their errors. They have found ways of contorting the Scriptures and redefining ordinary words so as to grant approval to adulterers and drunkards and to heretics of every stripe and hue.

Shall we surrender the existence of Hell to the infidels, the skeptics, and the liberals? Without question, the denial or at least the mitigation of Hell is very appealing. If one is guided by fleshly lust and selfish indulgence alone, why would they not be attracted to the doctrine that there is no such thing as consequential sin, no ultimate accountability for behavior, no code of conduct imposed by a Supreme Being/Creator, and no final, inescapable, horrible retribution for rebellion against His law? Undeniably, multiplied millions, in one way or another, have dismissed the reality of Hell.

What Did Jesus Say About Hell?

I will come back to this later, but I will introduce another proposition just here: One cannot deny the existence of eternal, punitive Hell without denying Christ Himself. Thus, the crucial issue concerning belief in Hell is the even larger issue — **belief in the Christ Himself!**

In the face of all of the denials of Hell, there still remains the stubborn, nagging, undeniable fact that Jesus had much to say about Hell and eternal punishment. In fact, He said much more about Hell than he did about Heaven. When correctly perceived, every warning about the Judgment, every prohibition of evil, every encouragement to righteousness, and every declaration about sin has the concept of eternal damnation behind it and embedded in it. Otherwise, they are meaningless, empty words. In fact, the necessity of Jesus’ earthly sojourn and the purpose of His coming are rendered vain and unnecessary apart from the reality of the eternal damnation of the souls of men because of their sins. Indeed, setting aside the plain teaching of Jesus about Hell for the moment, the coming of the Christ from Heaven to earth and the sacrifice of Himself upon the cross for the sins of mankind are the ultimate arguments for the reality of eternal damnation — Hell itself! Now, let us survey the teaching of Jesus about Hell.

Man Has an Ever-Living Soul

For there to be a Hell for man he must survive death; in other words, he must have/be a soul that does not perish when his body dies. Jesus taught unequivocally that man is more than flesh and blood: “And be not afraid of them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mat. 10:28; cf. 16:26).²

There Is a Realm in the World of Spirits Called “Hell”

Jesus clearly referred to Hell in Matthew 10:28, quoted above, in such a way as to indicate its unquestionable reality. He threatened “the hell of fire” for those who pronounce, *thou fool*, upon their fellows (Mat. 5:22). He referred to Hell as a real entity and place into which the body would be “cast down” as retribution for sin (vv. 29–30). One who causes another to sin will be cast into “the hell of fire” (18:9). The Lord referred to Hell as the final abode of the wicked no less than eleven times.

What is Hell, as referred to by Jesus? What did He mean by the term? Although space forbids a thorough word study, a brief definition is appropriate here. Note first that the King James Version often uses *Hell* when, in fact, *Hades* is the correct term (from the Grk., *hades*, meaning “unseen,” referring to the unseen realm of the dead, i.e., departed spirits; e.g., Mat. 16:18; Acts 2:27). Our English word, *Hell*, correctly translates *gehenna*, which appears twelve times in the Greek New Testament (eleven of which the Lord employed, James using the remaining one).

Gehenna derived from the Valley of Hinnom (also, “the valley of the Sons of Hinnom”), a valley Jerusalem overlooks to its south, first mentioned in Nehemiah 11:30. Historically speaking, it was the site where idolatrous Jews burned their children in homage to the pagan god Molech (2 Chr. 28:3; 33:6). Josiah, the righteous restorer king of Judah, caused this practice to cease, and the valley thenceforth became a place of abomination and abhorrence – the dump ground for the city. As early as the second century B.C., uninspired Jewish literature used *gehenna* as a figure to refer to final, eternal punishment of sinners. The Son of God applied this word in the very same way, using the name of the literal valley to refer to the place of ultimate abomination and abhorrence beyond the Judgment.

Hell Is Awful and Dreadful Beyond Imagination

1. Jesus attached the original imagery of the fires of Molech worship in Gehenna to eternal Hell as a place of fire. He twice called it “the hell of fire” (Mat. 5:22; 18:9). He twice referred to it as “the furnace of fire” into which the evil will be cast after the Judgment (13:42, 50). He twice called it a place of “unquenchable fire” (Mark 9:43, 47–48). We correctly identify the Hell the

Lord thus describes with “the lake of fire and brimstone” and “the lake of fire” into which the devil, the beast, the false prophet, and all those not found written in the book of life were cast for eternal torment (Rev. 20:10, 15; 21:8). John appropriately called it a “baptism” (dipping, plunging, overwhelming) in unquenchable fire (Mat. 3:11–12).

2. Additionally, the Lord intensified His description by labeling it as a place “where their worm dieth not” (Mark. 9:47–48). The depiction is one of maggots eating living flesh. Though obviously figurative language (there is no flesh in the realm of spirits), the figure portrays terrible agony and pain.
3. Jesus described Hell as a place where those cast would be “destroyed” (Mat. 10:28). The annihilationists/extinctionists argue that this passage supports their contention that *destroyed* equals *annihilated*. However, even the simplest Greek word study proves otherwise. *Destroyed* in this passage translates *apollumi*, found in numerous passages in which *annihilation* cannot possibly be its meaning. For example, it is rendered “burst” (Mat. 9:17), “lost” (Luke 15:4–9), and “perish” (v. 17). Neither these nor numerous other such passages can bear the idea of annihilation or rendered non-existent as the meaning of *apollumi*. Joseph Henry Thayer, the renowned Greek authority, was a Unitarian who did not believe in eternal punishment, yet his knowledge of the meaning of *apollumi* (and honesty) forced him to define this word as “to be delivered up to eternal misery” (36). Robert Morey concluded:

In every instance where the word *apollumi* is found in the New Testament, something other than annihilation is being described. Indeed, there isn’t a single instance in the New Testament where *apollumi* means annihilation in the strict meaning of the word (90).

The idea of being “destroyed” in Hell is that one will suffer utter, irreclaimable loss, and he will do so forever. Jesus also used the noun form of this word in reference to Hell (Mat. 7:13).

4. Jesus referred to Hell as a place of “eternal punishment” (Mat. 25:46). The word rendered “punishment” (*kolasis*) means torment, torture, suffering, chastisement (cf. Luke 16:23, 28; Rev. 14:10–11).
5. The Hell which Jesus believed in and described is a place of separation from God, Christ, and the redeemed – banishment from Heaven. The lost are “cast into hell” (Mat. 5:29). Jesus will say, “Depart from me” to the lost at the Judgment (7:23). He taught that Hell is a place of “outer darkness” (8:12, et al.). At the Judgment He will say to impenitent sinners, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire . . .” (25:41). He said that the wicked would see themselves “cast forth without” the eternal kingdom of God (i.e., Heaven) (Luke 13:28). Similarly, Paul wrote that the lost would be banished eternally “from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might” (2 The. 1:9). Just as evil men are those now “having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12), if they do not repent they will find themselves hopeless and without God in the eternal realm (Rev. 22:15).
6. The Lord teaches that Hell is a place where one will be inescapably confined with Satan and all of the evil men and women of all time. While the fire of Hell was “prepared for the devil and his angels,” at the Judgment, the lost will be consigned to the same place (Mat. 25:41). John echoed this same doctrine (Rev. 20:10, 15; 21:8). Imagine being imprisoned forever with the most evil men and women of all time with no relief or hope of escape!

Hell Is Everlasting, Eternal, Forever

Jesus not only teaches the **reality** of Hell, but the **eternality** of it. However long Heaven lasts, so long lasts Hell. To conclude His description of the Final Judgment, He said, “and these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life” (Mat. 25:46).

The *no-Hell* heresy made a much earlier appearance among the Lord’s people than in the twentieth century, as recorded above. In 1846, Jesse B. Ferguson, a brilliant, eloquent, and influential young preacher, moved to Nashville, Tennessee. Some six years thereafter, he began teaching various errors that led to his complete abandonment of the faith. Among these errors was his denial that the wicked will be punished after death and the Judgment (West, 264). Various godly men withstood this grievous error and reclaimed as many as possible who fell prey to it. Ben Franklin was one of the most widely known and respected preachers of that era, and the following statement from him exemplifies the vigor with which faithful men withstood Ferguson’s error and its influence. Note his comments on the Lord’s words in Matthew 25:46, directly addressing Ferguson’s heresy:

*Everlasting and eternal [KJV] are from the same [word] in the original. “Everlasting punishment,” and not everlasting annihilation, nor everlasting extinction of being, nor everlasting non-existence, is what the Lord threatens.... At the same time the righteous enter into “life eternal,” the wicked “go away into everlasting punishment.” ...The same word used by the Lord, in the same sentence to express the duration of the life of the saints is used to express the duration of the punishment of the wicked. It is as likely that the life of the saints shall terminate, as that the punishment of the wicked shall cease. There is no word in any language that more certainly expresses unlimited duration than this word, *aionion*. It is used to express the duration of the life of the saints, the praises of God, and even the existence of God...(279).*

As Franklin did in the nineteenth century, so must we forcefully expose, oppose, and refute this damnable doctrine in this century.

The fire of Hell is “unquenchable” fire (Mat. 3:12; Mark 9:43, 48). The “eternal fire” Jesus mentioned in Matthew 18:8, he identifies as the “hell of fire” in verse 9. Paul continued this thought by describing the damnation of those who “know not God, and...obey not the gospel” as “eternal destruction” (2 The. 1:8–9). John wrote that the lake of fire and brimstone is characterized by torment “day and night for ever and ever” (Rev. 20:10). No one can believe the words of Jesus and believe in the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory or any other concept of **temporary**, much less of non-existent punishment in the realm of spirits!

Jesus Tells Us the Populace of Hell

1. Self-righteous, pride-filled, egotistic persons who deprecate others as lower and less worthy than themselves:

But I say unto you, that every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of the hell of fire" (Mat. 5:22).

2. Those who are unwilling to sacrifice whatever causes them to sin or keeps them from serving God (vv. 27-30).

3. Those who confess Christ, but will not obey God, even though they perform what they believe to be good works and claim to work by the authority of Christ:

Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (7:21-23).

4. Those who reject the messengers, and the message, of Christ (10:14-15).

And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, as ye go forth out of that house or that city, shake off the dust of your feet.

Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city.

5. Those who persist in unbelief in the face of overwhelming evidence of the authenticity of the Christ (11:20-24).

Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, shalt thou be exalted unto heaven? thou shalt go down unto Hades: for if the mighty works had been done in Sodom which were done in thee, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

6. False teachers and their followers (15:13-14).

But he answered and said, Every plant which my heavenly Father planted not, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they are blind guides. And if the blind guide the blind, both shall fall into a pit.

7. Those who are hypocrites, who profess one thing and practice another (23:13-36).

But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye shut the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye enter not in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering in to enter. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, even while for a pretence ye make long prayers: therefore ye shall receive greater condemnation. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is become so, ye make him twofold more a son of hell than yourselves.

Woe unto you, ye blind guides, that say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor. Ye fools and blind: for which is greater, the gold, or the temple that hath sanctified the gold? Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gift that is upon it, he is a debtor. Ye blind: for which is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? He therefore that sweareth by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon. And he that sweareth by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. And he that sweareth by the heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye tithe mint and anise and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, justice, and mercy, and faith: but these ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone. Ye blind guides, that strain out the gnat, and swallow the camel! Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye cleanse the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full from extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first the inside of the cup and of the platter, that the outside thereof may become clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but inwardly ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and garnish the tombs of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we should not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye witness to yourselves, that ye are sons of them that slew the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of hell? Therefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: some of them shall ye kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city: that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of Abel the righteous unto the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah, whom ye slew between the sanctuary and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

8. The wicked, careless, neglectful, wasteful, murmuring, blaspheming, lazy persons, as depicted in various parables (Mat. 24:45-25:30; Luke 19:12-27).

He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called ten servants of his, and gave them ten pounds, and said unto them, Trade ye *herewith* till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent an ambassage after him, saying, We will not that this man reign over us. And it came to pass, when he was come back again, having received the kingdom, that he commanded these servants, unto whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by trading. And the first came before him, saying, Lord, thy pound hath made ten pounds more. And he said unto him, Well done, thou good servant: because thou wast found faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Thy pound, Lord, hath made five pounds. And he said unto him also, Be thou also over five cities. And another came, saying, Lord, behold, *here is* thy pound, which I kept laid up in a napkin: for I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that which thou layedst not down, and reapest that which thou didst not sow. He saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I am an austere man, taking up that which I laid not down, and reaping that which I did not sow; then wherefore gavest thou not my money into the bank, and I at my coming should have required it with interest? And he said unto them that stood by, Take away from him the pound, and give it unto him that hath the ten pounds. And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds. I say unto you, that unto every one that hath shall be given; but from him that hath not, even that which he

hath shall be taken away from him. But these mine enemies, that would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me(Luke 19:12-27).

9. Those who are selfish, stingy, cold, unkind, uncompassionate, and unsympathetic (Mat. 25:41-46).

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry, and ye did not give me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these least, ye did it not unto me. And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life.

Other inspired writers also define the populace of Hell: Paul listed the full gamut of wickedness, evil, immorality, worldliness, and unrighteousness, which constitute the gratifications of the “lusts of the flesh,” and said that those who behave in such ways (whether Christians or alien sinners) are Hell-bound (Rom 1:18-32; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:19-21). He also mentioned as future residents of Hell the “lawless one,” those who receive not the love of the Truth, those who make “shipwreck concerning the faith,” those who succumb to the deceitfulness of riches, and those who are heretics or factious (2 The. 2:4-12; 1 Tim. 1:19-20; 6:9-10; Tit. 3:10-11).

Peter identified **brethren** who are false teachers, who themselves are overtaken by evil and who entice others to follow their wicked doctrines and practices, as those who will be lost in Hell (2 Pet. 2:1-22).

John consigned not only Satan, the beast, and the false prophet to Hell, but also all men who had followed them in wickedness, evil, and immorality of all sorts and whose names are therefore not written in the book of life (Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 15; 21:8; 22:15).

Surely, he who says his pleasure in fleshly lusts in this earthly life is worth being confined to eternal Hell knows not what he says!

Conclusion

There you have it, straight from the mouth of the Only Begotten of the Father, Jesus the Christ, and His inspired apostles. After quoting several passages in which the Lord set forth the doctrine of Hell as a place of eternal punishment for the ungodly, Braun queried and observed:

Does any question remain as to whether or not Jesus declared the eternal punishment of the wicked? All the authority of the almighty God is present in the Words He spoke about hell.

Jesus had more to say about hell than any other speaker or writer in the Bible. If He was mistaken in what He said, then the almighty, eternal, and everlasting God was mistaken. And that is not the case. Indeed, if it comes to a disagreement: "Let God be true and every man a liar." ...What more could Jesus have said? There is absolutely no way the clear impact of His words can be brushed aside, and the assertion made that there is no eternal doom for the ungodly, unless of course, we join the critics who arbitrarily determine that Jesus didn't really say these things at all.... Those who maintain Jesus did not utter these severe sayings about hell are like gamblers playing a game they will surely lose.... Jesus, the One who is coming again to judge the living and the dead, expressed Himself clearly and without room for doubt about it. The rest of the New Testament writers followed His lead to the letter. Retribution for the ungodly is eternal, without end (146, 163).

Men must make their choice between the annihilationists, the liberal theologians, the Humanists, the Universalists, the New Agers, the Emergers, and all other "no-Hell" advocates on the one hand and the Son of God on the other. **None can be taken seriously, therefore, who question and/or deny that He taught the reality of Hell as a place of eternal punishment for the wicked.** Those who reject this teaching of His also thereby reject Him as the Son of God and the Savior of mankind (John 12:48).

Michaelsen, after quoting from various New Agers and their totally subjective denials of the existence of the devil, sin, and Hell, drew the following incisive conclusion:

If hell is **not** a literal reality then Jesus was indeed a fool for going to the cross: The whole reason He did so was in order to save us from that place of eternal torment and separation from God. "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (John 5:24). "I said therefore to you, that you shall die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins" (John 8:24) (299).

Heaven and Hell stand or fall together—in reality and in duration. If Heaven is real and eternal, so is Hell. If Hell is denied, so must Heaven be. They are both as real as the God Who made us and Who gave us the inspired revelation concerning Himself, His Son, and their marvelous plan of salvation. In His great mercy this same God has warned us of Satan, sin, the Judgment, and Hell. God sent His Son into our world in the flesh that we might have a road through otherwise impassable space to Heaven and to God (John 1:1–2, 14; 3:16; Phi. 2:5–8).

Jesus, the Christ of God, is Himself that road and the only road that leads to God and Heaven (John 14:6). If we walk on that narrow, admittedly difficult way, it leads to life (Mat. 7:14). If we reject the Christ and His way, we have chosen the road (which actually includes countless other roads of human invention) that leads ultimately to Hell (v. 13). Jesus' own simple summary of entering that road to Heaven is as follows: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16).

The picture of Hell in the words of Jesus is so frighteningly, horribly, terribly unimaginable that He boldly challenges all men to make whatever sacrifice is necessary to escape its horrors (Mat. 5:29–30; 6:19–25, 33; 8:18–22; 10:28, 37–38; 13:44–45; 16:24–26; 19:21–22; et al). Surely, this is the course of wisdom!

God's faithful people must be ever vigilant against those who seek to fasten the *no-Hell* doctrinal innovation upon the church.

Endnotes

1. For this chapter I borrowed heavily from a MS I wrote in 1992, "What Jesus Says About Hell." Said MS appeared as a chapter in *Whatever Happened to Heaven and Hell?* ed. Terry M. Hightower (San Antonio, TX: Shenandoah Church of Christ, 1993). This book is no longer in print.
2. All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

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- [**Note:** I wrote this MS for and presented a digest of it orally at the Bellview Lectures, hosted by the Bellview Church of Christ, Pensacola, FL, June 7–11, 2013. It was published in the book of the lectures, *Innovations*, ed. Michael Hatcher (Pensacola, FL: Bellview Church of Christ).]
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