

Sunday, August 16, 2015

“Until I went into the sanctuary of God; *then* understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they *brought* into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when *one* awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.”
(Psalm 73:17-20)

Psalm 73 is a Psalm of Asaph, written upon the occasion of him being envious of the foolish and the wicked, to the point that he had nearly fallen:

“But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.” (Psalm 73:2)

Gill says: “the psalmist under temptation concluded that all his religion and devotion were in vain, all his hearing, and reading, and attending on ordinances, all his concern for purity of heart and life; since those who showed no regard to these things prospered in the world, and increased in riches, abounded in ease and plenty, and seemed to be rather the favourites of heaven than religious men.”

He continued under these delusions until he went into the sanctuary of God, at which time he understood the end of the wicked, acknowledged his own foolishness, ignorance and brutishness, and drew near to God.

Spurgeon: “My brethren, if our eyes are dim, and our hearts forgetful as to eternal things, we shall be much vexed and tormented in mind, as [the psalmist] was when he understood not the sinner’s end; for indeed it is a great mystery to ordinary reason to see the ungodly prospering and pampered while the righteous are chastened and afflicted.”

Any person who is envious of the wicked is a person who lacks understanding, and who has lost sight of reality. The remedy here is to go into the sanctuary of God. There, and only there, will you understand their end. And what is the sanctuary of God? In Asaph’s day, it was “the tabernacle or house of God, where the Word of God was read and explained, prayer was made, and sacrifices offered up, and where fellowship was had with the saints, and communion with God himself; which for one hour or moment is preferable to all the prosperity of the wicked, during their whole life.” (Gill). And now in the church age, “where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:20). Some take the sanctuary of God to be the Scriptures themselves, by which we know the mind of God, and which are “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” (2 Timothy 3:16). And here, today, in the sanctuary of God, I pray that we can understand the end of the wicked.

The beginning of their end is in this world, with their death. “Surely thou didst set them in slippery places.” (Psalm 73:18). If they are in slippery places, they are on precarious ground, and could fall at any moment. It is dangerous, unstable, unsafe, and they are set to lose everything they love in a single instant. And they are too dirt dumb to see it and believe it! Some are so stupid and arrogant to their last breath that they die in peace and at ease, not understanding what’s about to happen to their eternal souls.

“For there are no bands in their death.” (Psalm 73:4)

Many others have the awful realization in their last moments. Think Noah’s Flood, when the raindrops began to fall, and the fountains of the deep began to spring. Imagine the horror of the wicked! Or Korah, Dathan and Abiram when the earth began to quake and cleave asunder.

If all I was talking about was their temporal death on earth, this would be a short sermon. But we’re here to understand their full end. Upon death, they are immediately cast down to destruction and desolation. They are utterly consumed with terrors. Sometimes they get a foretaste of this while they are alive, but at death, it’s final and irreversible. It will be as if they have awakened from a dream. Their lives of prosperity were all an illusion, and now reality has set in. God has awakened in judgment, and despises their very image. In fact, He’s always hated them. We can learn a lot about what happens to a wicked man when he dies from the story of the rich man and Lazarus:

“The rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And 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. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that *would come* from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” (Luke 16:22-31).

What do we see here? We see a man who was spiritually blind for his entire life who now sees. “In hell he lift up his eyes.” Now he understands. We see unimaginable suffering, both of body and mind. We’ve all experienced a hot day where we are thirsty, and our tongues are

cleaving to the top of our mouth, and we can imagine how wonderful a cool drink of water will feel against the back of our parched throats. And how hopeless would that be if we know we are never going to get a drink, nor so much as a single drop of water! And seeing the righteous in paradise will compound the suffering, knowing that you will never pass over to where they are:

**“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* thrust out.”
(Luke 13:28)**

Weeping as they look at their hopeless estate, and considering that they were warned to repent and believe in Jesus Christ as the only way to be saved, and they mocked and rejected Him. They have lost heaven! And gnashing (that is, grinding) their teeth because of the awful pain. And do you think that this wicked rich man has suddenly had a change of heart and wants to warn his five brethren out of love for their eternal souls? No, no. He doesn't want them anywhere near hell, because it would aggravate his own suffering. Imagine your contemporaries in hell with you, as you curse each for all of your mutual lies to one another while you were alive.

This is all before the final judgment at the great white throne. Let us continue to consider their end. After Christ has ruled for 1000 years, He will command the graves to bring forth their wicked dead (Revelation 20:5) and they will be judged.

“And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame *and* everlasting contempt.” (Daniel 12:2)

“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.” (John 5:28-29)

“And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.” (Revelation 20:11-15)

And so shall the wicked dwell for eternity.

Let me pause here to say that I feel completely unequipped to express how dreadful this is to you all; I don't believe that words can adequately describe the terrors and torments of hell, and it is far worse than we could ever begin to imagine. People in our society throw the word "hell" around to the point that it has become trite. They don't consider the horror of it. And I hope and pray that the people in this body will deal with it with the gravity that should attend it when we are warning our fellow men. I say words can't adequately describe the reality, and that the reality is far worse for those wicked men who are cast therein. Just like heaven will be far better than what we could ever imagine:

"But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." (1 Corinthians 2:9)

But words are what we have. We see descriptions in the Scripture like "everlasting fire" (Matthew 25:41), "unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:12), "shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2), "their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:44), "torments" (Luke 16:23), "everlasting destruction" (2 Thessalonians 1:9), "outer darkness" (Matthew 8:12), "the blackness of darkness forever" (Jude 1:13), "tormented with fire and brimstone" (Revelation 14:10), "the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever" (Revelation 14:11), "they have no rest day or night" (Revelation 14:11), "lake of fire and brimstone" (Revelation 20:10), "tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Revelation 20:10).

Now let us consider a few more attributes of the end of the wicked. The damnation of the wicked is absolutely certain:

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark 16:16)

Those of you who are living in your sins, and who refuse to believe, will just as surely go to hell as the elect of God will go to heaven.

There is no chance for repentance in hell. No hope. No mercy. No sacrifice. No blood of sprinkling. You will continue to be unjust and filthy, forever.

**"He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still."
(Revelation 22:11)**

There will be no mercy or pity from anyone. Not from God, not from the Redeemer, not from angels, not from the glorified saints. In fact, your everlasting destruction will be a source of great rejoicing and comfort to the saints of God in heaven:

“Rejoice over her, *thou* heaven, and *ye* holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.” (Revelation 18:20)

You will see the saints in heaven, which will increase your torments. And they will see you in hell, which will increase their joy. They will consider the perfect judgment and hatred of God toward you, which will intensify their understanding and love of the perfect mercy and eternal love of God towards them.

“I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? *Was* not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob, And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness.” (Malachi 1:2-3)

Everyone deserves to go to hell, and most people, in fact, do go to hell. Please don't be under some delusion that this doesn't apply to you specifically.

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23)

“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)

And most terrible of all, your judgment will be eternal! The human mind is not able to grasp how awful this is. Jonathan Edwards: “First, be entreated to consider attentively how great and awful a thing eternity is. Although you cannot comprehend it the more by considering, yet you may be made more sensible that it is not a thing to be disregarded. - Do but consider what it is to suffer extreme torment forever and ever: to suffer it day and night from one year to another, from one age to another, and from one thousand ages to another (and so adding age to age, and thousands to thousands), in pain, in wailing and lamenting, groaning and shrieking, and gnashing your teeth - with your souls full of dreadful grief and amazement, [and] with your bodies and every member full of racking torture; without any possibility of getting ease; without any possibility of moving God to pity by your cries; without any possibility of hiding yourselves from him; without any possibility of diverting your thoughts from your pain; without any possibility of obtaining any manner of mitigation, or help, or change for the better.

Second, do but consider how dreadful despair will be in such torment. How dismal will it be, when you are under these racking torments, to know assuredly that you never, never shall be delivered from them. To have no hope: when you shall wish that you might be turned into nothing, but shall have no hope of it; when you shall wish that you might be turned into a toad or a serpent, but shall have no hope of it; when you would rejoice if you might but have any relief; after you shall have endured these torments millions of ages, but shall have no hope of it. After you shall have worn out the age of the sun, moon, and stars, in your dolorous groans and lamentations, without rest day and night, or one minute's ease, yet you shall have no hope of ever being delivered. After you shall have worn a thousand more such ages, you shall have no hope, but shall know that you are not one whit nearer to the end of your torments. But that still there are the same groans, the same shrieks, the same doleful cries, incessantly to be made by you, and that the smoke of your torment shall still ascend up forever and ever. Your souls, which shall have been agitated with the wrath of God all this while, will still exist to bear more wrath. Your bodies, which shall have been burning all this while in these glowing flames, shall not have been consumed, but will remain to roast through eternity, which will not have been at all shortened by what shall have been past.

You may by considering make yourselves more sensible than you ordinarily are. But it is a little you can conceive of what it is to have no hope in such torments. How sinking would it be to you, to endure such pain as you have felt in this world, without any hopes, and to know that you never should be delivered from it, nor have one minute's rest! You can now scarcely conceive how doleful that would be. How much more to endure the vast weight of the wrath of God without hope! The more the damned in hell think of the eternity of their torments, the more amazing will it appear to them. And alas, they will not be able to keep it out of their minds! Their tortures will not divert them from it, but will fix their attention to it. O how dreadful will eternity appear to them after they shall have been thinking on it for ages together, and shall have so long an experience of their torments! The damned in hell will have two infinites perpetually to amaze them, and swallow them up: one is an infinite God, whose wrath they will bear, and in whom they will behold their perfect and irreconcilable enemy. The other is the infinite duration of their torment.

If it were possible for the damned in hell to have a comprehensive knowledge of eternity, their sorrow and grief would be infinite in degree. The comprehensive view of so much sorrow, which they must endure, would cause infinite grief for the present. Though they will not have a comprehensive knowledge of it, yet they will doubtless have a vastly more lively and strong apprehension of it than we can have in this world. Their torments will give them an impression of it. - A man in his present state, without any enlargement of his capacity, would have a vastly more lively impression of eternity than he has, if he were only under some pretty sharp pain in some member of his body, and were at the same time assured that he must endure that pain

forever. His pain would give him a greater sense of eternity than other men have. How much more will those excruciating torments, which the damned will suffer, have this effect!

Besides, their capacity will probably be enlarged, their understandings will be quicker and stronger in a future state, and God can give them as great a sense and as strong an impression of eternity, as he pleases, to increase their grief and torment.”

Now, there are many heretics when it comes to the doctrine of hell. On the one end of the spectrum, you have people who say that it doesn't really exist. On the other end, you have people who say that hell is there and it's almost as bad as everyone says it is, but it does not last forever...it just lasts a really long time, and the sinner is eventually annihilated. The arguments for this are varied, and I'd like to go over some of them, along with answers.

Argument 1 - An eternal hell would be inconsistent with the love and mercy of God.

Answer – This argument is the logical end of the “God loves everyone” lie. A quick read through Romans 9 should answer it. God does not love everyone, and God does not have mercy on everyone. He created some people as “vessels of wrath” (Romans 9:22) and others as “vessels of mercy” (Romans 9:23). The only inconsistency would be if God eternally loved someone, created them as a “vessel of mercy”, and then sent them to hell anyway (which is what the “God loves everyone” camp believes).

Argument 2 - If hell was eternal, that would upset people and turn them away from Jesus.

Answer – This is almost so ridiculous that it doesn't require an answer, but it's a common argument. They will say “no doctrine is more responsible for creating atheists than the doctrine of an eternal hell.” These are the people who think that they can save people, and don't have an understanding that it's the Holy Ghost who quickens hearts. It's the same argument that we've heard for years about preaching reprobation, and the hatred of God. If we change the message and lie about the nature of God and hell, and tell people what they want to hear, then we haven't brought anyone to God in the first place...we've brought them to a lie.

Argument 3 - The Greek word at the root of what is translated as “eternity”, “everlasting” and “for ever and ever” doesn't necessarily mean “eternity.” Sometimes it just means a long period.

Answer - The same Greek words are used to describe eternal life and the eternity of God, so if hell isn't eternal, then heaven isn't eternal, and God isn't eternal:

**“And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.”
(Matthew 25:46)**

“And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever.” (Revelation 15:7)

Argument 4 - There are verses that talk about the wicked being “destroyed” in hell. If something is destroyed, then it can’t be said to be eternal.

Answer – Those who espouse this argument ignore the fact that the punishment of hell is called “**everlasting** destruction.” Whatever this destruction is, it is most certainly not annihilation, and it will most certainly last for all eternity:

“Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.” (2 Thessalonians 1:9)

Argument 5 - It is unjust to punish someone for an eternity when their sins were confined to one lifetime.

Answer – This is a very common argument, and those who use it have neither an understanding of the nature of God, nor an understanding of just how bad sin is. For those people in hell, you have sinned directly against an eternal, immortal God, your sins are set before him, unpardoned, for eternity, and your just punishment therefore is an eternal, immortal sentence.

“Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight.” (Psalm 51:4)

**“Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret *sins* in the light of thy countenance.”
(Psalm 90:8)**

Furthermore, you will continue to sin in hell, for eternity. God did not give you repentance on earth (2 Timothy 2:25), and you will certainly not get it in hell. As mentioned before, “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still.” (Revelation 22:11). Just like during the plagues of Revelation, the sinners in hell will continue sinning:

**“And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory... And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.”
(Revelation 16:9,11)**

What is the usefulness of this doctrine of the end of the wicked? In the immediate context of Psalm 73, it should certainly teach you to not envy the prosperity of the wicked. A few years of prosperity, followed by an eternity of damnation, is no enviable position to hold. Beyond that, this doctrine should teach you to fear God:

“And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matthew 10:28)

It should teach you how awful sin is. If the punishment for sin is eternal, it is serious business. This is not a light thing. You should have a firm understanding of just how depraved and evil you are.

“What then? are we better *than they*? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” (Romans 3:9-12)

It should renew the elect’s love of God and gratefulness that He has had mercy on you and forgiven your sins. And I’m talking a heartfelt, sincere, deep down, joyful love and gratefulness towards God. When you see the juxtaposition of eternal life and eternal destruction, your heart should be inflamed with love toward your Savior.

Finally, with an understanding of the end of the wicked, we each have a non-delegable duty to love our wicked neighbors and warn them to repent. And it can’t just be a sound bite – love for your neighbor has to actually be the reason you’re doing it, and you better examine yourself and make sure that it is.

“Son of man, speak to the children of thy people, and say unto them, When I bring the sword upon a land, if the people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman: If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people; Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning; his blood shall be upon him. But he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul. But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take *any* person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand.” (Ezekiel 33:1-6)

I fear that we have people sitting here today, and certainly people listening to this on the Internet, who are in slippery places, on their way to hell, who have absolutely no interest in Christ. I can't make you have an interest. But I can remind you that there's only one way to heaven:

“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” (John 14:6)

There is no mercy and there is no salvation any other way.

Spurgeon: “The way of salvation is not hard to comprehend; it is no great mystery, it is simply ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.’ I know you will not do this unless the Holy Spirit constrains you, but this does not remove your responsibility. If you reject this great salvation you deserve to perish. When it is laid so clearly before you, if you refuse it, no eye can pity you.”

I know that Jesus said “no man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (John 6:44), but I also know that God uses the means of preaching to call sinners:

**“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God... For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”
(1 Corinthians 1:18,21)**

“At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and *he* to whomsoever the Son will reveal *him*. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:25-30)

I love you. Amen.