

Will Sinners Burn in Hell for Eternity?

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" Dear Larry Wilson:

I came across your website a few weeks ago and I have enjoyed many of your Bible studies. You have cleared up some questions that I have had for a long time, but some of your teachings frustrate me because they are in obvious error. I don't understand how a Bible teacher like you can know so much about the Bible and overlook the plain truth.

For example, the Bible clearly teaches that sinners will burn in Hell for eternity. This issue is so simple that it can be summed up in one sentence: Everybody has an eternal destiny eternal life in Heaven with Jesus or burning in eternal Hell with the devil. Haven't you read Mark 9:43 and other verses that say the fires of Hell will never quit burning? If you are going to teach the Bible, why don't you teach what it says?

- Alicia"

Dear Alicia:

Thank you for your e-mail. Yes, the Bible teaches that everyone has an eternal reward coming, but what are the rewards? The Bible informs us that the saints will be rewarded with eternal life (John 3:16; John 6:40), and the Bible also states that the penalty for sin is death. (Rom 6:23, Rev 20:14) I know why millions of Christians believe in an eternally burning Hell because many Bible texts *seem* to indicate that Hell will burn forever. However, I would like an opportunity to show you another point of view.

When you investigate all the Bible teaches about God's justice, the Second Death, and Hell, eternal death is not the same thing as living for eternity in Hell! Please consider this: The Bible indicates that God has three purposes for Hell. In a nutshell, the first purpose is justice, the second purpose is to execute the wicked, and the third purpose is to purify the Earth. Since my view on Hell is quite different than yours, I hope you will consider my response and be sure to look up each verse as we go along.

Since I do not know anything about your background, and because I want to be as clear as possible in this response, I would like to say two things about Bible study that are important to me before I present my conclusions on Hell:

1. First, I believe the Bible is the Word of God. Therefore, each verse in the Bible has to have the same authority. The "same authority" rule creates a big problem for every Bible student. We are not honest in our search for "The Truth" if we "cherry pick" those verses that suit our personal bias and ignore those verses that we do not like or do not understand. Serious Bible students are forced by the rule of "same authority" to gather up every statement said in the Bible about a particular topic so that they can harmoniously align all that has been written.

To my knowledge, this is the only way the Bible can reveal issues to us that we would rather not believe. During the past 37 years, I have experienced many occasions when one verse unraveled my entire conceptual framework about a particular topic! I have found that God is neither simple nor simplistic. Therefore, I try to remain cautious about my conclusions. Many topics are presented in the Bible, so my first concern is to be sure that I have not left something out that should be put "on the table." When I study God's Word, my prayer is "Lord, I don't care what The Truth is, or where it leads I just want to know everything about You that I can possibly know!"

I am discussing the rule of "same authority" because there is a phenomenon in God's Word that some people believe is called "apparent conflict." In short, one verse will *appear* to contradict another verse. These collisions interest me because (a) both verses have the same authority, and (b) I believe that God's Word is in perfect harmony with itself; otherwise, the truth about any topic could not be determined.

I have dealt with "apparent conflicts" long enough to know that they can be resolved with the help of the Holy Spirit and plenty of mental "elbow grease." God is infinite, deliberate and thoughtful, and I believe that God has allowed "apparent conflicts" in Scripture to energize our search for truth. Nothing churns the human mind like a worthwhile mystery.

I have highlighted the phenomenon of "apparent conflicts" because many of them are embedded in the topic of Hell. The truth about Hell is only attained when everything written about the topic is resolved into perfect harmony. A person cannot do a simple word search through the Bible by looking up the word "Hell" and expect to resolve the topic. This is because other Bible topics – like justice, restitution and death are directly involved with the topic of Hell! So, digging "The Truth" out of the Bible is not as easy or as simple as some people would have you believe.

2. The Bible declares that God is love. (1 John 4:16) Love is the perfect balance of mercy and justice. This means that God loves mercy, as well as justice. (Ps 89:14; Mat 23:23) The Bible states that God's eyes constantly sweep over the Earth. (1 Chron 16:9; Ps 139:8) God sees every act of kindness done in secret and He rewards accordingly. (Mat 6:4-6) God also sees every act of violence, watches every theft, observes every adultery, and hears every lie. (2 Chron 16:9; Ps 139:8)

The reason that God's omniscient oversight is important in this study on Hell is **restitution**. Contrary to what many people think, God requires that every sin be made right before He will forgive us of that sin.* (Ex 21; Mat 5:23,24, 1 John 1:9) For example, God will not forgive a thief until the thief has provided restitution to his victim!

Think about this. Can a man steal his neighbor's hubcaps and expect God to forgive him while the hubcaps remain in his possession? Of course, not. God will not forgive our sins unless we truly repent, and the evidence of true repentance is restitution. (Mat 5:23,24) We can carry God's justice one step further. If the victim who lost his hubcaps refuses to forgive the thief when he attempts to make restitution, God will not forgive the victim of his sins, either! (Mat 6:15) I hope you can see that in God's economy, atonement for sin requires restitution and

forgiveness.

* Note: Sometimes, the issue of restitution is not simple to resolve. Restitution in kind is not always possible. For example, stolen hubcaps can be replaced, but how does one make restitution for adultery or abuse? I have found three guiding principles when it comes to the subject of restitution.

First, when there is heartfelt sorrow for a sin, there is a compelling desire and effort to change behavior. This is the fruit of repentance. Second, a determined effort to restore the victim through some form of compensation is appropriate. In those cases where tangible restitution is not possible, the debt owed to the victim can be discussed and redirected toward others in the form of service or assistance.

Last, because sin often harms innocent people (like children) who may or may not know about the event, discretion is important. The essential point is that the victim knows about the heartfelt sorrow and the endeavor to make restitution. I hope the reader can see that God's demand for restitution and forgiveness are important building blocks in character development. (Luke 3:10-14)

Yes, it takes a lot of courage and humility to confess our sins and make restitution to those we have done wrong, but it has to be done. (Luke 19:8,9) On the other hand, a wicked heart will not make restitution because there is no genuine sorrow or deep regret for doing wrong.

Courage and humility are displaced with rebellion and pseudo-justification in the carnal heart. But, like it or not, believe it or not, God will be sure that every wrong will be made right – we can either do so voluntarily or God will extract restitution from us involuntarily.

This explains, in part, why God resurrects the wicked dead at the end of the 1,000 years. He resurrects the wicked to extract the restitution they refused to pay. After justice has been served, they will be executed eternal death there will be no resurrection from this death. As I wrote earlier, justice is the first purpose for the fires of Hell. Remember, the second purpose is to execute the wicked and the final purpose is to purify of Earth.

Big Picture of Hell for Eternity

Now that these two issues have been considered, let us see how God's justice and restitution fit into the big picture of apocalyptic prophecy:

Prior to the Second Coming, Jesus judges mankind. (Dan 7:10, John 5:22, Acts 17:31) Jesus Himself decides who will receive eternal life and who will not. (2 Cor 5:10) When He completes His judgment process, Jesus will return to Earth. (Rev 22:12) Notice how He administers His judgment: At the Second Coming, dead people previously judged to be saints will be awakened from their sleep to meet the Lord in the air. Also, those who are alive at the Second Coming and are judged as saints during the Great Tribulation will also be caught up in the air to meet Jesus because Jesus will not touch Earth at the Second Coming. (1 Thess. 4:15-18, Luke 14:13,14)

After the saints from all ages have been gathered up to Jesus, He will proceed to kill all of the wicked, who are alive at the Second Coming, with the sword (a verbal command) that comes out of His mouth. (Rev 19:20,21; Rev 6:15-17) Then, Jesus and the saints will return to His Father's house in Heaven, the place where Jesus has prepared for them. (John 14:1-3)

During the ensuing 1,000 years, there will be no life on Earth except for the devil and his angels. They cannot leave Earth in its desolate condition because they will be bound in the abyss (the spirit realm). (Rev 20:1-3) During the 1,000 years, the saints will reign with Jesus in Heaven during the sentencing phase of judgment.

This means the saints will review the case of each wicked person and the saints, along with Jesus, will determine the amount of restitution that will be extracted from the wicked at the end of the 1,000 years. Restitution will be extracted through suffering in Hell. (Exo. 21, Rev 18:6, 2 Tim 4:14, Heb 10:30,31; Rev 20:15)

Reigning with Christ

Remember, the saints will reign with Jesus for 1,000 years. Jesus will give the saints authority to determine the amount of punishment wicked people and wicked angels must suffer. (Rev 3:21; 20:6; 1 Cor 6:2,3) The saints will not determine who is righteous or who is wicked because Jesus determined the eternal destiny of each person before the Second Coming.

Those people who injured and harmed others will be tortured in Hell according to the amount of suffering they caused. (Rom 12:19, Mat 10:28) Here is the interesting part: Many of the saints will have been victims of the people they judge! Who would be better judges to determine the amount of suffering that must be extracted from a wicked assailant than those who were their victims? God's system of justice is perfect!

The Golden Rule demands a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a bruise for a bruise and a burn for a burn. (Exodus 21, Luke 12:58,59; Mat 18:23-35) Some wicked people will perish quickly. These will be "salted with fire," while others, who caused great suffering, will suffer for a long time. (Mark 9:47-49, Mat 13:41,42)

The fires of Hell will extract restitution and will not burn out until justice has been served and restitution has been "paid in full." (Mark 9:43) The fires of Hell will not burn eternally. After the wicked people's torture is over, the wicked will perish. **" Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire, says the Lord Almighty. Not a root or a branch will be left to them. . . Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things, says the Lord Almighty."** (Malachi 4:1,2)

God has promised that at the end of the world, every wrong will be atoned for and He will even resurrect dead people to achieve justice. (Heb 10:30, 31; Mat 25:46) Since the fires of Hell will also extract restitution from the devil and his angels, I suppose Hell could last for several days perhaps 40 days and 40 nights? Regardless of how long it takes, everyone in Hell will

eventually die and when the wicked no longer exist, Jesus will create a new Heaven and a new Earth. John wrote, **"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea [of fire]."** (Revelation 21:1, insertion mine)

I hope you can see from this sequence of apocalyptic events how God uses Hell to accomplish justice, death and the purification of Earth. Now, I would like to address the question of an eternally burning Hell from several different perspectives altogether. Please consider the following eight points:

1. - **Eternal Life:** The reward that will be bestowed upon the saints at the last day is eternal life. **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."** (John 3:16) **"For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day [and give him eternal life]."** (John 6:40, insertion mine)

Here is the problem: A person cannot writhe in Hell throughout eternity without first receiving eternal life. In other words, a wicked person has to receive eternal life so that he can be tortured for eternity. The Bible teaches the wicked will not receive eternal life. In fact, the Bible teaches that the wicked will perish cease to exist. (See John 3:16 above.)

2. - **The Penalty for Sin:** Most Christians believe that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. (2 Cor 5:21) This problem is a simple one: If the penalty for sin is burning in Hell throughout eternity, then Jesus did not pay the price for sin. Period. Even if you say that Jesus was tortured in Hell for three days and three nights, three days in Hell is not the penalty for sin! Even after billions and billions of years, eternity has just begun!

To pay for our sins, the penalty for sin had to be imposed upon Jesus and it was. **The penalty for sin is "death by execution without hope of resurrection."** Consider the first recorded command given to Adam: **"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day [whether it be a Tuesday or a Friday] that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die [be executed]."** (KJV, Gen 2:16,17, insertions mine) Adam and Eve were to be put to death on the very day they sinned, but Jesus, seeing that they did not sin defiantly, chose to become man's intercessor instead of man's executioner.

3. Two Resurrections:

Let us assume for a moment that a wicked person does go to Hell at the time of death. Then, try to explain why the wicked are then resurrected at the end of the 1,000 years? What is the point of resurrecting Cain (the first murderer) if he has been burning in Hell for the past 6,000 years?

Even more, what would be the point of resurrecting Abel if he has been sitting at Jesus' side for the past 6,000 years? **The doctrine of two resurrections is in direct conflict with the doctrine of an eternally burning hell. - The Bible teaches the first resurrection occurs at**

the Second Coming for the righteous dead (1 Thess 4:15-18, Rev 20:6) and the second resurrection occurs at the end of the 1,000 years. (Rev 20:5) The second resurrection is for the wicked of all ages.

"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." (KJV, John 5:28,29)

4. - Immediate Judgment at Death: The Bible states that everyone will stand before **"the Judgment Bar of Christ."** (2 Cor 5:10) If a person goes to Heaven or Hell at the time of death, this presumes that "the Judgment Bar of Christ" has been in session ever since Abel was killed. The problem is that "the Judgment Bar of Christ" has a beginning point in time and an ending point in time. The apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation tell us the Judgment Bar of Christ began in 1844 and closes during the Great Tribulation, at the end of the 1,260 days allotted to the Two Witnesses, just before the seventh trumpet sounds.

No one can be judged by Christ until His Judgment Bar is "set up." For reasons beyond the scope of this response, Jesus was found worthy to ascend Heaven's throne in 1798 and Jesus began reviewing the books of record in 1844. (Ecc 12:13,14, Dan 7:10) So, Bible prophecy indicates that immediate judgment at death is not possible. **(Note:** God the Father has made a few "executive" exceptions to the Judgment Bar of Christ. Enoch, Elijah and the 24 elders were taken to Heaven prior to 1844. These exceptions are justified on the basis that the Father foreknew this was the best way of resolving issues that are not part of this discussion.)

5. - First Heaven and Earth Passed Away: The Bible teaches that God will create a New Heaven and New Earth after the old Heaven and Earth are destroyed. **"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. . . ."** (Rev 21:1) This verse means that Hell itself has to pass away. Hell is the means through which Earth will be purified of sin! Sin and sinners will have no place on Earth, in Earth or under the Earth when everything is made new. God's universe will be clean of sin and sinners.

6. Reigning with Christ:

If there is an eternally burning Hell, what judgment is left for the saints to conduct during the 1,000 years? **"Do you not know that the saints will judge the world . . .? Do you not know that we will judge angels . . .?"** (1 Cor 6:2,3) Think about this: If all of the wicked receive the same sentence burning in Hell for eternity, then there is nothing left for the saints to judge during the 1,000 years!

7. Walking on the Ashes of the Wicked:

The Bible declares the wicked will be devoured - destroyed - annihilated - turned into ashes. **"Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things, says the Lord Almighty."** (Mal 4:3)

Christians mess the doctrine of Hell up today largely because people do not understand the doctrines of restitution, God's vengeance, soul sleep, the Second Death or the Judgment Bar of Christ. I understand how people conclude that the wicked will burn in Hell forever. Language in the Bible seems to support the idea of eternal suffering in Hell until you put everything the Bible has to say about Hell on the table. Then, and only then, can we understand the truth on this topic. The Bible is like a giant crossword puzzle. When all of its doctrines are properly defined and understood, all of the pieces will harmoniously form one beautiful mosaic.

8. - **Golden Rule:** The final reason why Hell cannot burn for eternity is that God's own law, the Golden Rule, does not permit God to punish wicked people beyond the point of achieving restitution. Period. God abides by His own laws. He has proven His submission to His own laws by the death of Jesus!

The Father would not have allowed Jesus to die if there had been any other way to redeem man. No sinner, not even the devil, merits endless torture in Hell throughout eternity! Restitution is a finite matter and once justice is served, the wicked will die a death from which there is no resurrection.

If God tortured demons and "slightly wicked" people throughout the endless ages of eternity with the same punishment, He would be a tyrant. Justice demands that punishment be commensurate with the crime. Tyrants do not punish fairly. With tyrants, justice is arbitrary and self-serving.

They abuse their victims to suit their selfish or mean-spirited objectives. The Golden Rule can be stated: "As you do unto others, the same will be done unto you." This is perfect justice. According to this rule, there are limits to torture in Hell.

Summary

1. After considering the "same authority" rule. . .
2. After considering God's demand for restitution. . .
3. After considering the apocalyptic sequence that includes the Judgment Bar of Christ, the two resurrections and the purpose of the saints reigning with Christ during the 1,000 years. . .
4. After considering the eight theological points listed above. . .

I conclude that Hell will burn for a period of time. I conclude that wicked people will be tormented with fire according to the injury and harm they inflicted on others. I conclude that Lucifer and his demons will burn the longest because they have caused the greatest injuries.

I also conclude that after restitution has been extracted and justice has been served, the wicked will be put to death. They will never exist again. At that time, God will purify this orb with fire so that the foundations of a New Heaven and a New Earth will be free of the blight caused by sin.

Because the topic of Hell is so important, it seems to me that God has deliberately made the matter of an eternally burning Hell a topic of controversy to keep the subject alive! By keeping this subject in a state of controversy, it forces those who seek the whole truth to resolve this highly important and complex topic. For me, the conclusions stated above align with everything else that I have learned about the marvelous ways of God. There is no doubt about it. God is righteous, fair and just.

He is truly a God of love. There is no selfishness, meanness nor arrogance in God. If you have lost a loved one through a violent crime or if you been hurt in a grievous way by a thug, I hope you can appreciate the idea that God will fully repay. Millions of soldiers who raped and killed innocent people will pay for their deeds, too. You can be sure that justice will be served before death eliminates the devil and every wicked person. **"It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."** (Heb 10:31)

I hope this helps!

Larry Wilson

[Watch this video and see what the Bible says about burning in hell for eternity](#)