

# Hell and the Wrath of God

Thomas Robinson, *Living in Hope* 6, June 12, 2011

## Mark 9:42-48 (cf. Matt 5:29-30; 18:8-9)

<sup>42</sup> “Whoever **causes** one of these little ones who believe in me **to sin** (skandalizein), it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were **thrown into the sea**.

<sup>43</sup> And if your **hand causes you to sin** (skandalizein), cut it off. It is better for you **to enter life** crippled than with two hands **to go to hell (Gehenna)**, to the **unquenchable fire**.

<sup>45</sup> And if your **foot causes you to sin**, cut it off. It is better for you **to enter life** lame than with two feet to **be thrown into hell (Gehenna)**.

<sup>47</sup> And if your **eye causes you to sin**, tear it out. It is better for you to **enter the kingdom of God** with one eye than with two eyes to **be thrown into hell (Gehenna)**, <sup>48</sup> ‘where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’” [Isaiah 66:24]

## Matthew 10:28 (cf. Luke 12:4-5)

<sup>28</sup> And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can **destroy both soul and body in hell (Gehenna)**.

## Matthew 26:39, 42

<sup>39</sup> And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, **let this cup pass from me**; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” ... <sup>42</sup> Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, **your will be done**.”

## Romans 2:5-11

<sup>5</sup> Because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up **wrath** for yourself on the **day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed**. <sup>6</sup> He will render to each one according to his works: <sup>7</sup> to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, **he will give eternal life**; <sup>8</sup> but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be **wrath and fury**. <sup>9</sup> There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, <sup>10</sup> but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. <sup>11</sup> For God shows no partiality.

## Romans 8:9-11

<sup>9</sup> You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact **the Spirit of God dwells in you**. Anyone who does not **have the Spirit of Christ** does not belong to him. <sup>10</sup> But if **Christ is in you**, although the body is dead because of sin, **the Spirit is life** because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> **If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you**, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also **give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you**.

## Romans 12:19-21

<sup>19</sup> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance (meting out justice) is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” [Deut 32:35] <sup>20</sup> To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” [Prov 25:21-22] <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

## 1 Corinthians 15:22

<sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also **in Christ shall all be made alive**. <sup>23</sup> But each in his own order: **Christ the firstfruits**, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. <sup>24</sup> Then comes the end, when he **delivers**

**the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.** <sup>25</sup> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> **The last enemy to be destroyed is death.**

## **The Wrath of God! Isn't That Against Hope?**

Many people in our day are uncomfortable/offended by the idea of God's wrath. It is not an explosion of temper but is the reverse side of God's love. It is his determined opposition to all that corrupts and destroys God's creation, esp. human beings made in God's image. It is God's determination that justice/right will be vindicated, that "*the destroyers of the earth*" of all kinds will be destroyed (Rev 11:18). It makes possible living without violent revenge.

Many vivid images are used in scripture to depict God's judgment and wrath. One that is often used is the cup of wine: "*the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger*" (Rev 14:10, cf. Isa 51:17). It is that cup of wrath that Jesus accepted in the Gethsemane.

Jesus' cross is the great event of God's Love and Wrath united. The sin and brokenness of humanity is so great that the cup of God's wrath is filled to the brim against it. But in Jesus, God himself drinks the cup, takes into God's self all the horror of our corruption, rebellion, and sin in order to set us free from sin's guilt and enslaving power. But the struggle against evil and for salvation continues and will be consummated at God's judgment.

## **The Elaboration of the Story of Immortal Hell**

Hell as elaborate damnation, unending conscious torment, has become a staple of culture. But also a real problem of Biblical interpretation and theology. How does it fit in the Gospel?

"Hell" is a poor/distorting translation of "Gehenna" a word used 12 times in the NT. Jesus uses the image of the Valley of Hinnom (Ge-hinnom/a), the large garbage dump south of Jerusalem, impure because of child sacrifice there, with continual fires and destruction. Other images "outer darkness" (exclusion from God); Rev: lake of fire and sulfur (Sodom). The images are vivid warnings of perishing, destruction, complete loss (Jn 3:16).

In 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the non-biblical Greek idea of the innate indestructibility of the soul was added. A soul can't die. Thus "destruction/perishing" must mean "unending, conscious torment." Often combined with doctrine of predestination: God created most humans for torment.

It is important to realize that all language about Hell is metaphorical, even the word Gehenna. It is a creation of human free will, rejection of God's reality and love. God allows us to create hell on earth now and to reject him permanently. Forfeit everything that is God's.

## **Created to Share God's Life**

For many of us who want to grasp the Biblical understanding as best we can, it's hard to knock off all the theological and literary barnacles and get a coherent/limited image of afterlife.

We are created by God with a soul (*nephesh, psyche*), human life, our self. That life is strong, capable of great good and evil. It is more durable than the ordinary physical body and will survive it. But is not imperishable in itself. The most amazing aspect of human life is that God has made us able to receive the gift of God's immortal life, the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. Through Jesus this gift of the Spirit is the beginning of the power of resurrection life.

After physical death, the soul without the body is incomplete, "naked," and is in a period of waiting. It experiences good or bad (paradise or hades), but always with incompleteness.

At the end, the *parousia*, comes the resurrection to life and to judgment (Jn 5:29). Those "in Christ" are recreated in glorious, imperishable, physical bodies. These bodies are "spiritual" in that they are fully animated by the immortal power of God's Spirit rather than human soul. This is full eternal life. Those who reject God are raised but without any new life. They are judged, punished according to their deeds, and body and soul perish in the "second death."

We can receive the life of the resurrection here and now through Jesus' gift of God's Spirit.