

Outline of Lecture #7 - Life after Death, Heaven  
Christian Apologetics 101  
Christian Assembly, Summer 2009

1. Introduction

2. **Chapter 11 - Heaven**

- a. The definition of heaven
  - i. We cannot *define* heaven as we can define earthly things - but we can say what it is *not*
  - ii. We can describe it using analogies (as in Scripture)
- b. 7 alternative theories of life after death (non-Christian notions, to recap from last lecture)
  - i. Atheistic materialism - since there is no God, there is no image of God or soul
  - ii. God but no life after death - unusual belief; but a sort of deistic God who does not save us from death
  - iii. Skepticism - no one can ever know what happens after death
  - iv. Ancient paganism - after death we become pale ghosts inhabiting the underworld
  - v. Platonism - immortality of the soul alone, without the body
  - vi. Pantheism - we are drops in the cosmic ocean; there is no real individuality, we simply return to the ocean
  - vii. Reincarnation - after our current body dies, we get another earthly, mortal body
- c. 10 refutations of reincarnation
  - i. It is contradicted by Scripture (Heb 9:27)
  - ii. It is contradicted by orthodox tradition in all churches
  - iii. It would reduce the Incarnation to a mere appearance and the crucifixion to a mere accident - confusing incarnation with reincarnation
  - iv. It implies that God made a mistake in designing our souls to live in bodies; we are really pure spirits in prison or angels in costume
  - v. It is contradicted by psychology and common sense, for its view of souls as imprisoned in alien bodies denies the natural psychosomatic unity
  - vi. It entails a very low view of the body, as a prison, a punishment
  - vii. It usually blames sin on the body and the body's power to confuse and darken the mind. This is passing the buck from soul to body, as well as from will to mind, and a confusion of sin with ignorance.
  - viii. The idea that we are reincarnated in order to learn lessons we failed to learn in a past earthly life is contrary to common sense and basic educational psychology - I cannot learn something if there is no continuity of memory and if I can't remember them. People do not usually remember these past 'reincarnations'.
  - ix. The supposed evidence for reincarnation, 'rememberings' from past lives that come out in hypnosis, can be explained by mental telepathy from souls of dead humans

- x. What is the root of the evil that percolates through each reincarnation? If we came from Paradise and are going back to Paradise, where did the evil come from?
  - 1. \*added – what evil is the first reincarnation paying for?
- d. Earthly analogies for heaven
  - i. To understand God
  - ii. To love God
  - iii. To understand others
  - iv. To love others
  - v. To understand yourself
  - vi. To love yourself
- e. Objections to heaven answered
  - i. **Heaven is merely pre-scientific superstition**
    - 1. What about ‘pre-scientific’ ideas of birth, death, good, evil, beauty, pain, etc?
  - ii. **No scientific evidence**
  - iii. **Wishful thinking** – humans have invented it as a ‘necessary dream’
    - 1. The heaven of the Bible does not correspond to something that humans would make up – it is selfless, self-forgetful love and holiness, not the gratification of selfish desires, the death of egotism, worship of God rather than man
    - 2. Even if there is a correspondence between our innate wishes and idea of heaven, that correspondence could equally well (and probably better!) be explained by God’s having designed us for heaven rather than by our having designed heaven for ourselves
    - 3. The reasoning is fallacious – the argument is that if there were no heaven, we would have to believe in one; and we do (have to) believe in one, therefore there is no heaven (fallacy of affirming the consequent)
    - 4. If an effect cannot exceed its cause, how can the idea of heaven come about from a sinful and depraved minds?
  - iv. **Mythic** – heaven is just another version of myths/legends
    - 1. This is not evidence against, but *for*, heaven – there is a common consent between humans that such a place exists
    - 2. Also, the biblical version of heaven differs from that of popular and pagan religions (Islam, etc.) – does not appeal to natural, worldly, selfish desires
  - v. **Escapist**
    - 1. The first question about any idea is not whether it is escapist, but whether it is true
  - vi. Diversion
  - vii. Irrelevant
  - viii. **Bribery** – heaven makes religion selfish, you love God for your heavenly reward
    - 1. Again, this claim says nothing of the truth of the matter

2. Heaven is not some reward externally added to love of God and neighbor, but that love itself perfected

- ix. Too dogmatic
- x. Too egotistical
- xi. Too selfish
- xii. Too unselfish
- xiii. Too earthly
- xiv. Too unearthly
- xv. Pantheism or imitation?

**xvi. Boring**

- 1. Boredom is a specifically earthly and fallen emotion
- 2. The picture of a heavenly church service is symbolic, not literal – Rev 21:22 says that there is no temple in heaven. Church can be boring, but God cannot.
- 3. Heaven will not be boring because it is not merely the satisfaction or lulling of a desire; it is joy, not merely contentment. Joy is as passionate as desire itself.
- 4. Heaven will be love and work; knowing and loving God, others and yourself. These are inexhaustible and non-boring.

**xvii. Not happy if loved ones are in hell**

- 1. What we do know – there will no sadness (Rev 21:4)
- 2. If in fact God has arranged the love and closeness between you and this other person, and you cannot imagine spending eternity without them – that love is just as much a reason to witness to them in this life

- xviii. No work
- xix. No future
- xx. Anthropomorphic

**xxi. No freedom to sin**

- 1. No one will sin because no one will want to – there is a lack of motive to sin, and all will freely choose never to sin
- 2. God cannot dwell with evil – necessitating a lack of evil in heaven
- 3. God will dispel our ignorance to the effects of sin – we will dwell eternally with the effects of beauty and holiness without any ignorance of how sin corrupts

- xxii. Too much individuality
- xxiii. No equality
- xxiv. No privacy
- xxv. No sex
- xxvi. Disloyal to earth
- xxvii. Earth is preferable
- xxviii. Alien

### **3. Chapter 12 - Hell**

- a. The difficult question of hell

- i. Survey last August by Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life
    - 1. 59% of 35,000 respondents said they believe in a hell "where people who have led bad lives, and die without being sorry, are eternally punished."
  - ii. Islam – Imam Sharif Sahibzada: "I don't know how I will end up...I have to show trust in God and his mercy all the time. Always Satan is circling and trying to misguide me."
  - iii. Judaism – Gehenna, often translated as hell in the Bible. It is derived from a burning valley south of Jerusalem where garbage was dumped and children sacrificed.
- b. 10 issues at stake in the doctrine of hell
  - i. Trustworthiness of Scripture and the church
  - ii. Trustworthiness of Jesus
  - iii. Existence of propositional data – we presuppose that doctrine is negotiable and that it is based on human ideology, not divine revelation
  - iv. Infinite importance of earthly choices – no consequence for evil and practice of such
  - v. Freedom of the will – does not exist if there is no hell (salvation is automatic for everyone; everyone goes to heaven)
  - vi. Objectivity of good and evil – (in some Eastern religions) no hell leads to no absolute morality – no definite sense of good and evil
  - vii. Reason for a savior
  - viii. Consequence of indifference – indifference to salvation
  - ix. Need for Christ's sacrifice – a great mistake and tragedy that wasn't required
  - x. Basis for believing in God's love
- c. Defining the doctrine of hell – 14 things hell is not
  - i. Unreal – teaching of universal salvation; contradicted by Jesus' teachings
  - ii. Earthly – hell exists only in this life (see Mk 9:44-48)
  - iii. Purgatory – clear difference between the nature of purgatory and hell
    - 1. Purgatory is good (it purges and purifies), hell is evil
    - 2. Christ speaks explicitly about hell, but not about purgatory
  - iv. Annihilationism – destruction of the soul; 3 problems
    - 1. Contrary to the words of Christ
    - 2. Would make hell to have an end (not eternal)
    - 3. Souls seem to be intrinsically immortal – unlikely to 'cease' to exist
  - v. Reincarnation
    - 1. Sort of a universal purgatory – unlike hell
    - 2. Denies free will and individuality
  - vi. Temporary
  - vii. Unpopulated – unlikely; Jesus refers to the saved as a few, and to the damned as many
    - 1. Parable of the 99 sheep
  - viii. Limbo – a sort of nursery for unbaptized infants (Catholicism)

- 1. Again (like purgatory) – does not match the nature of hell as Jesus portrayed it
  - ix. Divine hate – is God a god of vengeance and hate?
    - 1. ‘wrath of God’ – likely a Scriptural anthropomorphic metaphor, his wrath against sin, not sinners
  - x. Forced on the damned – people are thrown into hell against their will (implying loss of free will)
    - 1. They *have* willed it – self instead of God, sin instead of repentance
  - xi. A place for humans – hell is populated with the people we know now
  - xii. Necessary
  - xiii. Justice over love
  - xiv. A double predestination
- d. 3 things hell is
- i. Punishment – by natural law
  - ii. Pain
  - iii. Privation
- e. Demonstrating the doctrine of hell – 7 reasons for believing in hell
- i. The Bible
  - ii. Christ
  - iii. The church
  - iv. Justice
  - v. God’s exclusivity
  - vi. Free will
  - vii. Argument from fear
- f. Defending the doctrine of hell – 13 objections answered
- i. Contrary to God’s love – an eternal torture chamber is contrary to a loving, kind, merciful God
    - 1. Its existence does not refute God’s existence – it matches up with His nature of justice and the fact that love creates a freedom, which may choose hell
    - 2. True – God is about mercy and forgiveness. But forgiveness *appeals* to freedom – forgiveness is freely given and must be *accepted*- we hold ourselves back, not God
    - 3. God’s love is also truthful and *accurate* – it is not ‘blind’ or contradictory; God’s love *is* reality
  - ii. Contrary to justice – the punishment does not seem to fit the crime
    - 1. 3 possible charges
      - a. Temporal crimes do not merit eternal punishments
      - b. Finite crimes do not merit infinite punishments
      - c. Mild or petty crimes do not merit such intense punishments
    - 2. 3 points to note
      - a. Eternity is not quantitative – it is another dimension than time
        - i. The relation between earthly choices and eternal rewards/consequences is not akin to crimes and prison sentences, but like the relation between a foundation

and a building – eternity is a *internal* component of the world we live in, not an imposed external reward or punishment

- b. Hell's punishments are eternal, not infinite – only God is infinite; souls, sin and punishment are all finite
  - c. The 'intense' punishment, however interpreted, is meant to only *suggest* what it is like living without God
  3. Hell' punishment fits sin's crime because sin is *divorce* from God. The punishment IS the crime. Saying no to God means no God.
    - a. What is sin? – it is not merely 'behaving badly', it is choosing *against* God
- iii. Contrary to omnipotence – if God is omnipotent why not arrange for no one to go there?
1. Similar to the existence of evil and God dilemma
  2. Again, we need to define God's omnipotence – God's power does not extend to contradicting himself or his nature. God is consistent. Given that, His 3 options:
    - a. Destroy hell – but doing so eliminates free choice
    - b. Annihilate souls in hell – but doing so contradicts an eternity without Him, which is natural consequence of choosing against Him (Why is hell eternal? We sinned against an eternal God!)
    - c. Arrange for no hell-bound persons to be conceived – again, this eliminates free choice
  3. The objection claims that a world with no hell is possible and then asks why God did not create it
    - a. He did! – We messed it up. God did not create hell, or separation from Himself. He left it up to us whether this actual world – the one without hell – would *continue* to be, or whether another possible world – one with hell – would *begin* to be.
- iv. Contrary to human freedom – the threat of torture renders a forced confession unfree – belief in God and goodness is thus forced, not merely free choice
1. Does the fear of hell remove free choice? Does the fear of falling off a cliff remove the free choice to skate close to the edge or to avoid it?
- v. Contrary to human sanity – we do not punish criminals that are insane; it seems contrary and even insane that someone should choose hell over heaven
1. We *are* spiritually insane – in sinning, one chooses to go insane
- vi. Contrary to the morality of Jesus – a cosmic 'hypocrite', preaching forgiveness but practicing vengeance (Bertrand Russell)
1. To say that anyone who teaches/warns about hell is like saying that any mother who warns her children not to play with fire is immoral

- vii. Effects are fear, despair, and hatred
- viii. Prevents the joy of heaven
- ix. Vastly overpopulated
  - x. Makes evil eternal - if Heaven and Hell are eternal and exists forever, good and evil exist as equal and opposite warring ultimates (Manichaen dualism) - and God is not omnipotent
    - 1. Contradicts Scripture (God will be victorious over evil) - 1 Cor. 15:12-28, 54-57
- xi. Thwarts God's purpose - what purpose could God have for sustaining in existence the souls of those in an eternal hell from which there is no hope of escape?
  - 1. Hell does not serve a good purpose because by nature it is evil (chaotic to purpose)
  - 2. Hell is not in time - purposes are served in time, but hell is not in time, hell does not have a purpose, and hell was not made by God at all
  - 3. God does not *sustain* souls in hell - souls are themselves sustaining by their own nature
- xii. Unendurable by human nature
- xiii. Instinctively monstrous and intolerable - but denial is not disproof
- g. The proper use and misuse of the doctrine of hell
  - i. CS Lewis, Problem of Pain - "In all our discussions of hell we should keep steadily before our eyes the possible damnation, not of our enemies nor our friends...but of ourselves. This chapter is not about your wife or son, nor about Nero or Judas Iscariot; it is about you and me."
  - ii. Why believe and preach a hell?
    - 1. First, because it is true
    - 2. Second, out of compassion and love - when there is real way, the *least* loving thing we can do is to cry "peace, peace when there is no peace" (Jer 8:11)