

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

Fourth Quarter 2022: *Life Everlasting: On Death, Dying, and the Future Hope* Lesson 10 “The Fires of Hell”

Read for this week’s study

Mark 9:42–48; Malachi 4:1; Jude 7; 1 Timothy 2:5; Acts 2:29, 34, 35; 1 John 5:3–12.

Memory Text

“Test all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21. NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. Immortal Worms?
- III. The Fires of Hell
- IV. The Saints in Purgatory
- V. A Paradise With Disembodied Souls
- VI. The Biblical View
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. “If the human soul never dies, then it has to go somewhere after the body dies. In short, a false understanding of human nature has led to terrible theological errors. This week we will deal with some of these unbiblical theories, as well as with the biblical view of what happens after death.” (Sabbath afternoon)
2. A belief in hell presupposes a conscious existence after death. However, the Bible presents humanity that was created as a unity of body, mind and spirit, which expresses itself as a “living soul”. The Fall affected all aspects of humanity as a unit (there is no “good” part unaffected by sin). We die as a unit (no part survives the death) and we will be resurrected as a unit (all parts reunited). If one separates this unity, there are far reaching consequences. Some people use certain biblical texts to defend the idea of (everlastingly burning) hell, others use philosophical arguments. This lesson examines these biblical texts.
3. How does Isaiah 66:24 help us to understand and illuminate the troublesome expression “their worm does not die” from Mark 9:42–48? (Sunday’s lesson) What is Isaiah 65 & 66 addressing? It is a reference to the return to Edenic conditions – all creation was with God, and now all creation worships before His face as was intended at the beginning in Genesis 2-3.

4. The Bible does allow for the possibility of a very differentiated punishment (cf. Luke 12:47). However, what do the notions of “everlasting fire” (Matt. 18:8) or a “fire that shall never be quenched” (Mark 9:43, NKJV) mean in light of Malachi 4:1 and Jude 7? (Monday’s lesson) How can these passages help us better understand the concept behind it (cf. Hebrews 6:2)?
5. What arguments would you present to refute the idea that some people are in purgatory? (Matthew 5:26; Luke 12:59 cf. Ecclesiastes 9:10; Ezekiel 18:20–22; Hebrews 9:27) (Tuesday’s lesson)
6. How do verses like Acts 2:29, 34, 35 shed light on the state of the dead and suggest that those who have died are awaiting resurrection rather than being in paradise with disembodied souls (cf. Colossians 3:3? (Wednesday’s lesson)
7. Why is it significant that John limits the “eternal life” only to those who are in Christ (1 John 5:3–12)? (Thursday’s lesson)
8. Some years ago, the Gallup Poll reported that 86% of Americans believe in God, and that 69% believe in hell. Wes Morriston argues that if you believe in God, you probably should not believe in hell—at least not if you think that God is very good, and hell is a very bad place to be. If the occupants of hell are stuck there forever, this casts shadows over the goodness of God who confined them there.
9. Jewish radio host Dennis Prager said: “I pray with all my heart that the people who deliberately hurt people get punished. I would sit in depression, if I truly believed that the torturers and their victims have the same fate... ”
10. “The sufferings of the damned in hell, since they are interminable, can never lead to any constructive end beyond themselves and are thus the very type of ultimately wasted and pointless anguish. Indeed, misery which is eternal and therefore infinite would constitute the largest part of the problem of evil.” (John Hick)
11. In our interactions with others, how can we make certain that what people are left with is the triumph of God’s love, rather than the triumph of our beliefs? And how do you see God’s promise at work, to ultimately resolve the issues of sin, evil, and evildoers for all eternity?

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

Well, the good news seems to be evaporating rapidly here at the end of Isaiah. What do you do with those verses that I’ve just read? Does your version have various, apparently interpretive, renderings of 65:20 about the child dying a hundred years old? There are some very bold renderings here that seem to clear up the problem, but it doesn’t help with the Hebrew. When the Isaiah scroll, the Dead Sea scroll, was discovered more than thirty years ago, I wondered if maybe the Hebrew was not as difficult as this, so I sent for a photographic copy. And when the Hebrew arrived, it’s exactly the same. So the solution is not in the Hebrew. And that’s a

thousand years older copy of Isaiah than had been known before. So what do you do with these verses? Hardly the ones to go home with tonight! Do you like the thought that in the hereafter we can go and look into hell after all? And you'll see those worms working; you'll see that fire burning. And you can say to your son, "Look, that's what happens when you're bad. Next Sabbath will you behave?" That would produce the obedience that springs from fear, wouldn't it? And God's trying to eliminate fear from His universe. What to do with that? Maybe we should have gotten to this a little sooner tonight. Anybody have a remedy you've been very satisfied with? Can I make a suggestion, since time is so late? One thing is always to read around this. Read more of it. Look back to Isaiah 65:17. This is one of the several places where God describes how wonderful it's going to be. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in All 66 – Isaiah, recorded January 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

*Audio links to the West Covina series recorded in 1984:

<http://pkp.cc/33MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/34MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

All we're left with is that dreadful passage at the end. Is that talking about hell? I've heard it explained that the worm is the worm of life which will live forever. No, I read, what condition are their bodies in? Are they living to suffer? They're dead, aren't they? The dead bodies will be there. And what are the worms doing? Well, to a Jew, this was just as vivid as the picture of vines and fig trees and lions, and so forth. As you approached Jerusalem, or looked out over the walls in the right direction, you saw the city garbage dump known as Gehenna. And they all knew what was going on out there. The refuse, that which was discarded, was either consumed by the worms, which were not eternal, they kept reproducing themselves until the job was done, or they were consumed by the fire. And so long as there was anything to consume, the worms had something to eat and the fire had something to consume. What would cause the worms to cease their labor and the fire to go out? When there's nothing more to be destroyed. I think this is just God ending on a serious note, as He began the book. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in All 66 – Isaiah, recorded January 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

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Lou: Graham, you alluded to this matter of hell, and someone has raised this question: “Since most Christian believers have some idea of a form of hell, some kind or other, where did that idea of hell come from? It seems to be so prevalent throughout Christianity.”

Graham: One of the first Christian documents that describes hell is the Revelation of St. Peter which is in the *New Christian Apocrypha*. And I don’t think there’s a single copy of that in the room tonight. That’s a very detailed description. It antedates Dante’s *Inferno* by many centuries. And in there it tells you exactly what will happen to you. For example, if your prevailing sin was lying, you might be hung by your tongue over a hot flame. If perchance some other organ of the body was your instrument in sin, you might be similarly tortured. I mean, it’s very detailed.

But I think the real origin of this is the belief in Satan’s lie in the Garden of Eden that we’re immortal. Because if we are immortal and we’re not all going to be saved, then some are going to be immortally lost, which means that some have to go somewhere else. We either go to heaven to enjoy the bliss of the hereafter, or we go to some other deprived place, which to some is a place of sulfurous flames. God has no choice, since the soul is immortal anyway. I believe that a combination of the immortality of the soul, which the devil taught in the Garden of Eden, combined with his caricature of God as a destroying God, has produced the doctrine of hell. And I don’t think anything has turned more people against God than the doctrine of eternal torment in hell.

Lou: So it’s another example of Satan’s success in giving us a false picture of God and creating fear.

Graham: Yes. Going back to, “The day you eat thereof, you will die.” He twisted that. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Conversations About God*, #9 with Lou Venden, “There Is No Need to Be Afraid of God” recorded March 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/9MMCAG>*

But doesn’t the Bible warn also that the sinner will experience God’s wrath and be burned forever? How about Revelation 14:10? “Yes, he also shall drink of the wine of God’s wrath . . . and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone . . . for ever and ever.” (RSV) We are back to Nebuchadnezzar, it would seem. No, the preceding sixty-five books of Scripture have prepared us to understand these awesome terms. God’s wrath, remember in Romans and Hosea last time, God’s wrath is simply His turning away in loving disappointment from those who do not want Him anyway; thus leaving them to the inevitable and awful consequence of their own rebellious choice. And as He lets them go, He cries, “How can I give you up? How can I let you go?”

And then the words “for ever”—how long is forever? You notice in Jude 7: “Sodom and Gomorrah . . . serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of for ever fire or eternal fire.” (RSV) That fire went out millennia ago. We understand that term. Also in Exodus 21:6. In

reference to the servant who would serve his master forever, that might mean only a very brief period, until the next jubilee. Until, at most, as long as life shall last. So we understand the meaning of that term. No support for the eternally burning fires of hell. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #9, "There Is No Need to Be Afraid of God" recorded March 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/9MMCAG>*

Luther objected to the Apocrypha on the ground that it taught ideas contrary to the books of the Hebrew canon. Among these were the doctrine of purgatory and the efficacy of prayers for the dead (2 Maccabees 12:43-45). He also observed the considerable emphasis upon the earning of merit by good works (Tobit 12:9; Ecclesiasticus 3:33; 2 Esdras 8:33; et cetera). {Maxwell, A. Graham. *You Can Trust the Bible; why, after many translations, it is still the word of God*, 25. Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1967}

Further Study with Ellen White

This is not an act of arbitrary power on the part of God. The rejecters of His mercy reap that which they have sown. God is the fountain of life; and when one chooses the service of sin, he separates from God, and thus cuts himself off from life. He is "alienated from the life of God." Christ says, "All they that hate Me love death." Ephesians 4:18; Proverbs 8:36. God gives them existence for a time that they may develop their character and reveal their principles. This accomplished, they receive the results of their own choice. By a life of rebellion, Satan and all who unite with him place themselves so out of harmony with God that His very presence is to them a consuming fire. The glory of Him who is love will destroy them. {DA 764.1}

I saw that the angels of God are never to control the will. God sets before man life and death. He can have his choice. {EW 221.1}

It is beyond the power of the human mind to estimate the evil which has been wrought by the heresy of eternal torment. The religion of the Bible, full of love and goodness, and abounding in compassion, is darkened by superstition and clothed with terror. When we consider in what false colors Satan has painted the character of God, can we wonder that our merciful Creator is feared, dreaded, and even hated? The appalling views of God which have spread over the world from the teachings of the pulpit have made thousands, yes, millions, of skeptics and infidels. {GC 536.2}

After the fall, Satan bade his angels make special effort to foster the belief in man's natural immortality; and when they had induced the people to receive this error, they led them to conclude that the sinner would live in eternal misery.—4SP 354. {TA 62.5}

Men have the power to quench the Spirit of God; the power of choosing is left with them. They are allowed freedom of action. They may be obedient through the name and grace of our Redeemer, or they may be disobedient, and realize the consequences. {FLB 58.3}

God destroys no man. Everyone who is destroyed will have destroyed himself. Everyone who stifles the admonitions of conscience is sowing the seeds of unbelief, and these will produce a sure harvest. By rejecting the first warning from God, Pharaoh of old sowed the seeds of obstinacy, and he reaped obstinacy. God did not compel him to disbelieve. {COL 84.4}

God destroys no one. The sinner destroys himself by his own impenitence. When a person once neglects to heed the invitations, reproofs, and warnings of the Spirit of God, his conscience becomes seared, and the next time he is admonished, it will be more difficult to yield obedience than before. And thus with every repetition. Conscience is the voice of God, heard amid the conflict of human passions; when it is resisted, the Spirit of God is grieved. {5T 120.1}

No soul is ever finally deserted of God, given up to his own ways, so long as there is any hope of his salvation. "Man turns from God, not God from him." Our heavenly Father follows us with appeals and warnings and assurances of compassion, until further opportunities and privileges would be wholly in vain. The responsibility rests with the sinner. By resisting the Spirit of God today, he prepares the way for a second resistance of light when it comes with mightier power. Thus he passes on from one stage of resistance to another, until at last the light will fail to impress, and he will cease to respond in any measure to the Spirit of God. Then even "the light that is in thee" has become darkness. The very truth we do know has become so perverted as to increase the blindness of the soul. {MB 93.1}

The destiny of the wicked is fixed by their own choice. Their exclusion from heaven is voluntary with themselves, and just and merciful on the part of God. . . . {GC 542.2}

We are not to think of God only as a judge, and to forget him as our loving Father. Nothing can do our souls greater harm than this; for our whole spiritual life will be molded by our conceptions of God's character. {RH, April 5, 1887 par. 10}

Men put God out of their knowledge and worshiped the creatures of their own imagination; and as the result, they became more and more debased. The psalmist describes the effect produced upon the worshiper by the adoration of idols. He says, "They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them." Psalm 115:8. It is a law of the human mind that by beholding we become changed. Man will rise no higher than his conceptions of truth, purity, and holiness. If the mind is never exalted above the level of humanity, if it is not uplifted by faith to contemplate infinite wisdom and love, the man will be constantly sinking lower and lower. The worshipers of false gods clothed their deities with human attributes and passions, and thus their standard of character was degraded to the likeness of sinful humanity. They were defiled in consequence. {PP 91.2}

God bids us fill the mind with great thoughts, pure thoughts. He desires us to meditate upon His love and mercy, to study His wonderful work in the great plan of redemption. Then clearer and still clearer will be our perception of truth, higher, holier, our desire for purity of heart and clearness of thought. The soul dwelling in the pure atmosphere of holy thought will be transformed by communion with God through the study of Scriptures. {COL 60.1}

Christ represents death as a sleep to His believing children. Their life is hid with Christ in God, and until the last trump shall sound those who die will sleep in Him. {FLB 175.5}

When Christ comes to gather to Himself those who have been faithful, the last trump will sound, and the whole earth, from the summits of the loftiest mountains to the lowest recesses of the deepest mines, will hear. The righteous dead will hear the sound of the last trump, and will come forth from their graves, to be clothed with immortality, and to meet their Lord (SpT Series B, No. 2, p. 24). {7BC 909.2}

The living righteous are changed “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.” At the voice of God they were glorified; now they are made immortal and with the risen saints are caught up to meet their Lord in the air. Angels “gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” Little children are borne by holy angels to their mothers’ arms. Friends long separated by death are united, nevermore to part, and with songs of gladness ascend together to the City of God. {GC 645.1}