

What If This Book Is Wrong?

The message of this book is that the Bible does not teach that hell is eternal. It offers no opinion on what any individual's punishment or final destination may be. It attempts to show that the teaching of hell as never-ending torment is a human tradition added to the inspired God-given Scriptures. While most English translations do clearly teach hell is never-ending torment, this book shows that the idea is not in the original inspired Hebrew and Greek Scriptures.

But what if this book is wrong?

Do you think it will seriously harm people to tell them punishment may not last for eternity? Do you think the multitudes would serve God if hell is eternal, but if it only lasts for some shorter period of time they would refuse to serve God?

Personally, I would want to avoid hell just as much whether it lasted for one month or for eternity. I cannot see how insisting that God will allow people to spend eternity in torment does anything to draw people to love Him and serve Him.

Therefore, if the message of this book is wrong, it seems unlikely to do great harm. On the other hand, if this book is right, a good case can be made that the traditional teaching of eternal torment in hell has been very harmful to the spread of Christianity. Untold numbers of people have turned their backs on God because of this false understanding of hell which the Bible does not teach. Our message of Good News has not rung true to many. We preach that God is love, but people know eternal torment is not an act of a loving being. Therefore many have rejected our message as not believable. Many others have decided they want nothing to do with a God who would torment people eternally.

This subject is important because our view of God affects everything. If we picture God as someone who will torture people for eternity, there is no way we can really trust Him completely. Nor can we truly love God, if we think He is like that.

How can anyone truly believe God loves them, if they think He will torture them, or their friends and family, in never-ending fire if they fall short of God's requirements?

Is it really necessary for us to convince people they will otherwise be tormented eternally to get them to turn to Jesus Christ? Do you think Jesus is that unattractive? And do you think Jesus is thrilled about someone "loving" Him only as a way to escape eternal torment in hell?

So let's guard against thinking we need to add to what God said in the Bible, in order to be effective in reaching the world with the Gospel.

At its heart, the teaching of eternal torment in hell is an attack on the character and nature of God -- on His justice and love. The Bible teaches, and everyone intuitively understands, that all punishment should fit the crime. Some theologians have attempted to tell us why someone not accepting Christ (even if they never heard of Him) should deserve a penalty of eternal, never-

ending, conscious torture in burning fire. But every human being knows that is not fair or just. Yet, because of the tradition that has crept in to our English Bible translations, we who believe the Bible have had no better answer we could offer.

But if you spend the time necessary to dig beyond the English translations of the Bible to see what God actually said, you will find nothing in the Bible that teaches hell is eternal. The Bible clearly teaches punishment for wrongdoing, but it never says any punishment will last for eternity.

I expect there will be those who condemn a book like this without ever reading it for themselves. Some may even accuse me of misleading people. I fervently desire not to mislead anyone. So I previously thought it seemed safer just to keep quiet about the subject of hell. But God gave us the Bible to reveal truth to us, and protect us from error. We are to study the Bible, and teach it. When we find we have departed from what the Bible actually teaches, we need to change. And we need to tell others.

Finding out what the Bible actually says may be dangerous to human tradition and human institutions. But the truth of the Bible poses no danger for the cause of Christ and the spread of His Gospel.

All this book attempts to do is get people to examine the Bible. I tried to avoid human opinion as much as possible and focus on what the Bible says. This book is an honest and sincere attempt to follow the Bible. It was produced out of love and honor for God's Word, not because of ignoring or disbelieving the Bible.

So, you may ask, "Is there a hell where people are tormented after they leave this life?"

Since I am not the Judge, and since I have never been past this life, my answer has to be, "I don't know."

"Well, if there is a hell, will people who go there stay for all eternity?"

Again my answer has to be that I don't know because I am not the Judge. But I can say that I see nowhere in the Bible, correctly translated, that says hell, or any punishment, will be eternal. I believe the Bible, and encourage you to do the same.

If this book is wrong, then I sincerely desire to be shown from Scripture. Please show me where I am wrong. My desire is simply to know the truth, and follow Jesus my wonderful Lord.