

Who Will Be In Hell?

Jim O'Connor

Jim is a graduate of the Northside School of Preaching in Harrison, Arkansas. He began preaching in 1969. In 2003 he made his 14th journey to Europe and his 30th trip to India. His overseas work is under the oversight of the elders at 39th Street. His labors take him regularly to India, Estonia, Latvia, Philippines, Singapore and Costa Rica. His wife Judy is his co-laborer on many of the evangelistic journeys. They are also strongly involved in correspondence course work throughout the world. Jim has authored many tracts in the International Bible Studies series and also many of the lessons in the IBS Correspondence Course series. He is one of the writers for the International Bible Studies publication. While in the United States he is a frequent speaker on lectureships and gospel meetings.

“Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?” These very serious words of Jesus from Matthew 23:33, connecting the words “damnation” and “hell”, remind us that we do not want to go, nor intend to go, to that awful place called “hell”.

Our discussion of who will be in hell does not require me to name names. I am thankful for that. I have neither the ability nor the inclination to do so. I have met some whom I felt would be happy to function as “prosecuting attorney” on judgement day. I have no such aspiration. I am happy that a just and merciful Lord will handle all of the duties on that day with no human involvement. For this study we will simply look at the characteristics of those who will inhabit that terrible place, hoping that some will decide to alter their character to avoid that place. *“I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies”* (Psalm 119:59) seems like sound advice.

The Bible says the devil and his angels will be in hell. Our Lord said; *“Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels”* (Matthew 25:41). This is a very good reason for not wanting to go to that awful place. The devil is giving us enough trouble here in this life, we certainly don't want to be with that devious critter for eternity. One preacher is reported to have telephoned the “Church of Satan” and asked them; “Are you that little bunch that think you're the only ones going to hell?” Is it any wonder that *“the devils.....tremble”* (James 2:19)?

The disobedient will be there. Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; *“And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power”*. What a sobering and frightening situation! The writer of the book of Hebrews commented; *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”* (Hebrews 10:31). This scenario is not true for those who “Trust and Obey”, but it is certainly the future that the rebellious and disobedient have to look forward to. The writer of Hebrews also reminded us that, *“though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him”* (Hebrews 5:8-9). Matthew 8:27

poses the question: *“What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?”* The answer is: He is the Son of God, the Creator (John 1:3) who came to save us from a future in hell (John 3:17). We certainly recommend Mary’s advice in John 2:5: *“Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it”*.

The selfish and uncaring will be there. In making a point on this truth, Jesus said; *“There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom”* (Luke 16:19-23). This is obviously before judgement day, and is, therefore, not the eternal hell that the Bible speaks of; however, it seems to me that the only difference is the time element. Like the priest and the Levite that passed by on the other side (Luke 10:30-32) (maybe because the victim had already been robbed) this man showed no compassion whatsoever toward Lazarus. *“Depart from me, ye cursed into everlasting fire”* (Matthew 25:41) are words motivated by this very uncaring and selfish attitude.

We are admonished by Paul in Galatians 6:10 to be caring people. He put it this way; *“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith”*. This passage was intended to motivate more than a collective benevolence program in the church. It must also find it’s application in the life of every Christian in his or her daily life. John wrote: *“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue: but in deed and in truth”* (I John 3:16-18). James used the caring, benevolent attitude as an example of a working faith (James 2:14-17). Caring and sharing is not an option if we hope to be saved!

Those who fall away from the faith will be there. In Hebrews 6:4-8, the writer penned these sobering words; *“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned”*. The “impossible” portion of this passage is due to the rejection of the word of God, which is God’s power to save (Romans 1:16; James 1:21). God does not have a “Plan B”. One who rejects the word of God rejects God (2 John 9), putting an omnipotent God in a position of being powerless to save. *Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel* (Psalm 78:41).

Perhaps it would be good to point out just here that the doctrine of “once saved, always saved” is not true (Hebrews 3:14), but “once a member of the church always a member of the church” is true. There is no such thing as one who “once was a member of the church of Christ”. The ‘use to be’ doctrine is false. One who falls away from the faith will be judged as an unfaithful member of the church, and it is not a pretty picture. Hear Peter on this subject: *“For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire”* (2 Peter 2:20-22).

What a shame for a person to be faithful for a while (any length of time short of death) and then forfeit their hope by forfeiting their faith. This was the point the writer of Hebrews was making to seek to persuade his readers not to give up. He wrote: *“But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion on me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise”* (Hebrews 10:32-36). Remember that Jesus warned: *“No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God”* (Luke 9:62).

The immoral will be in hell. God warns us; *“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate (the passive one in a homosexual relationship), nor abusers of themselves with mankind (the aggressor in a homosexual relationship), nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God?”* (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). The Gnostic doctrine (that a Christian can live a sinful life, if they please to do so, and God will overlook it due to the imputed righteousness of Christ) was false in the first century, and it is still false in the twenty-first century. God is not going to overlook sinful practices either in the world, or in the church. Paul informs us that *“...the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world”* (Titus 2:11-12). This passage clearly involves a change of lifestyle for the one who wishes to be a recipient of the “grace of God that bringeth salvation”. There are numerous passages we could cite which demonstrate this same truth. In fact, in a large measure, this truth is the very reason for the writing of the epistles. Toward the close of new testament revelation, John wrote: *“He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death”* (Revelation 21:7-8).

It is interesting to me that, when the apostles wanted to remind Christians of who they were, and, therefore, of their responsibility to live godly lives, they reminded them of their baptism (Romans 6:1-4, Galatians 3:26-27, Colossians 2:12, I Peter 3:21). The reason? That's the point in a person's life when their sins are washed away (Acts 22:16), and they arise to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). It is obvious that God expects godly living, and he will deal harshly with all who do not seek to comply with that.. However, being yet in the flesh, all of us are prone to sin. John addressed that in his first epistle. He wrote: *"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world"* (I John 2:1-2). Bear in mind that this is addressed to Christians, and that sin is forgivable only on the grounds of repentance of that sin (I John 5:16, 2 Corinthians 7:10).

Those practicing religious error will be in hell. In Matthew 7:21-23, our Lord said the following: *"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me ye that work iniquity"*. For some unknown reason many hold the view that anything we view as religious is automatically acceptable to God. This has never been the case! God has never allowed man to make the rules by which he was going to practice an acceptable religion. The Bible is filled with warnings against such, and of examples of punishment of those who did not heed the warnings. Jesus regarded religious practices (Matthew 7:22) that were not the will of the Father (Matthew 7:21) as iniquity (Matthew 7:23). He warned in Matthew 15:9; *"But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men"*. I realize that some of the religious practices taught today are taught by men who are regarded as great men. However, remember that Job said, *"Great men are not always wise"* (Job 32:9). It is certainly not wise to practice that for which one has no Biblical authority.

We can add to the above characters who will be in hell the unprofitable (Matthew 25:30), the unforgiving (Matthew 6:15), the hypocrite (Luke 20:46-47), and the "such like" (Galatians 5:21). When you do so you will have a pretty good idea of the type of people who will be in hell. It is important to each of us that we not be identified with that class of folks who will hear *"Depart from me"*.