

Hell

by Francis Turretin

The sermon emphasizes the reality and severity of hell, including its punishments, and argues that they will be eternal and uninterrupted.

Scripture: Matthew 3:7, Matthew 5:22, Matthew 25:41, Matthew 26:24, Mark 9:44, Luke 16:23, Hebrews 6:2, Revelation 14:11, Revelation 19:20

Topics: "Eternal Judgment", "Hell And Punishment"

Description

Francis Turretin delves into the topic of Hell and Eternal Death, affirming the existence of hell and its punishments, which include eternal torment with the devils for the wicked and the joys of eternal life in heaven for the pious. The descriptions of hell in the Bible include terms like Gehenna, the lake of fire and brimstone, and eternal judgment, portraying a place of unquenchable fire and torment. The intensity and eternity of these punishments are emphasized, with various symbols used to depict the direful torments awaiting the wicked in both body and soul.

Transcript

Seventh question: Hell and Eternal Death

Is there a hell? And what are its punishments--whether only of loss or also of sense. We affirm the latter.

I. The execution of the sentence of the Judge will follow its promulgation. This will be carried out with respect to the wicked by casting them down into hell, where they must be tormented for ever with the devils; but with respect to the pious, by their introduction into heaven, to the joys of eternal life. Concerning this twofold end of men, of eternal life as well as of eternal death, something must also be said. And in the first place of hell or eternal death:

II. Hell is called in Hebrew sh'vl, in Greek Hades, of the multiple signification of which word we have spoken in Volume II, Topic XIII, Question XVI, Section 3. Here we take it for the place of the damned, as it is taken in Lk. 16:23. Various synonyms of it occur in the Scriptures: 'bhdhvn (Prov. 15:11) or perdition (cf. also Prov. 27:20); Gehenna (Mt. 5:22, 29), a word derived from the valley of the children of Hinnom, in which the wicked Israelites were accustomed to practice horrible idolatries to Moloch, the idol of the Ammonites, from a false zeal (kakozelia) (as is believed) of the sacrifice of Abraham, or in imitation of the cruel superstition of the Phoenicians. They either drew miserable infants through the fire or burnt them resting upon the glowing arms of the statue of Moloch, in the midst of the sounds of flutes and drums that

the cries extorted by pain might not be heard. Hence the name typhth given to it from typh, "a drum." Hence King Josiah in detestation of that dreadful idol-mania began to pollute the place with carcasses and human offal, to burn which a continual fire was kept up (2 K. 23:10), Hence it is not surprising that such a foul place employed both for the torment of fire and infamous on account of its various abominations was used to designate the torments of hell. "The gnawing worm" and "unquenchable [asbestos] fire" (Mk. 9:44). "Outer darkness, where is weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt. 22:13). "Everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Mt. 25:41). "The lake of fire and brimstone" (Rev. 19:20). "Eternal judgment" (Heb. 6:2). "The lake and winepress of wrath" (Rev. 14:19). "The wrath to come" (Mt. 3:7). "The second and eternal death" and other appellations.

III. We think it superfluous to inquire whether there is a hell, whatever Epicureans and atheists (who consider it as a mere figment and empty scarecrow of the simple)

may say. For it is asserted in so many passages of the Scriptures, and is confirmed by so many arguments (whether from the justice of God, or from the curse of the law, or from the heinousness and demerit of sin, or from the tenors and torments of conscience) that it is a proof not only of the highest impiety, but also madness to question or deny it. Those deriders will too well feel its truth and terribleness to their own great hurt.

IV. But what it is or in what infernal punishments consist, it is not easy to define. It ought to be certain and constant that it is not a mere annihilation (as the Socinians wish) or the punishment of loss, as if it consisted in a simple privation of good without any sense of evil. For undoubtedly both concur here to increase the torments of the wicked. Hence the Scriptures describe these punishments now privatively and negatively (steretikos) by the removal of all good, then positively and affirmatively (thetikos). The negative (steretika) evils are separation from God and Christ and privation of the divine vision: in which is placed the happiness of the saints; separation from the angels and saints (between whom and the damned a great gulf [mega chasma] is said to intervene); a privation of light, joy, glory, felicity and life, and of all good things of whatsoever kind they may be. On the other hand, the positive evils are manifold. These are adumbrated by pains and tortures, by torments, by groans and grief, by cries and wailings, by weeping and gnashing of teeth, by the gnawing worm, by the unquenchable fire and other things of like nature, which are accustomed to imply evils of all kinds in the soul as well as in the body.

V. Whether the fire in which the wicked are to be tormented in soul as well as in body will be material and corporeal is controverted. The Romanists, to prop up their fictitious purgatorial fire (which they hold to be the same with the infernal as to species, but differing only in degree and duration), do not hesitate to assert this and think the soul will be tortured by it. But others far more truly deny it and wish it to be explained metaphorically or allegorically of the most severe tortures of conscience and desperation. (1) Because it is treated of the fire prepared for the Devil and his angels. And yet body cannot act upon a spirit, since it cannot act without contact either mediate or immediate, which does not fall upon a spirit. Nor is it to be said, if the soul cannot by itself and in its own nature be affected by fire, still it can by consent and sympathy with the body. For the soul, as the principal cause of wickedness, ought to be punished immediately and by itself, not sympathetically only. Nor if a corporeal object acts upon the soul objectively and virtually, does it follow that it can do so physically and formally.

VI. (2) The various other phrases by which infernal punishments are described are to be understood not so much properly as allegorically, when they are expressed by "outer darkness," "the worm," "gnashing of teeth," "chains of darkness," "lake of brimstone," "prison" and "gulf" and by other things of the same kind.

Future punishments are represented by these which in other respects agree neither with the condition of our souls, nor with each other; but all of them set forth the most sad and painful condition of the wicked. For the same reason a metaphorical, not a proper fire is to be understood.

VII. (3) If heavenly goods are depicted under symbols of the most delightful things (which are to be understood not properly, but mystically and figuratively;

as when mention is made of Abraham's bosom, lying down in the kingdom of heaven with the patriarchs, of paradise, the tree of life, treasures, crowns and the like), why should we not think that the Holy Spirit employed equally figurative terms in the description of the opposite evils, so that the most direful torments are adumbrated by fire, which is wont to create the most intense pain?

VIII. Now although we do not think the souls of the damned will be tortured by any material fire; still we are unwilling to say that their bodies will not be cast into some physical fire and be scorched and tormented for ever (the Scriptures asserting it so often, although we do not know what kind of fire it will be, or what its nature and condition will be). "Of what kind that infernal fire is," says Augustine, "I think no man knows" (CG 20.16 [FC 24:291; PL 41.682]). Therefore, we should strive with all care, with the desire of real conversion for this-- that we may escape that fire, nor ever experience to our most bitter pain what it is; rather than that by idly disputing concerning its nature, we may with the Scholastics stir up this fire by the sword of contention beyond what is right.

IX. Various adjuncts of those infernal punishments can be noticed. In the first place, inequality according to the various relations of the sins, which is supported by various passages of Scripture. "I say unto you, It shall be more (1) tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you" (Mt. 11:22). "That servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes" (Lk. 12:47, 48). "On account of this ye shall receive a greater condemnation" (krima perissoteron, Mt. 23:14). Reason also persuades us of this because a punishment ought to answer to the guilt, according to the order of distributive justice. Now the guilt is unequal, for some sins are more heinous than others. Therefore the punishments also ought to be unequal, that God may render to each one his due and according to his works. However, the inequality is not to be examined with regard to extension or duration, because to both will be assigned an eternity of punishments (as we will presently show); not with regard to species, but with regard to degrees.

X. (2) The magnitude and intensity of the punishments are so great as can be neither conceived by the mind, nor expressed in words; as to both multitude and universality (inasmuch as they will be tortured not only in the body, but in the soul), nor in one part alone of the former or faculty of the latter, but in all (as they have sinned in all). Nor with only one species of pain and torment, but with all that can be imagined. And indeed with the greatest intensity and degree that the state of the damned will admit. On this account, they are wont to be set forth by the most sad and bitter things, the "gnawing worm," "fire" perpetually "burning," "weeping" and "gnashing of teeth," the "pangs" and "pains of childbirth"; by "disgrace," confusion and ignominy; by perplexity and the most dreadful torment; and by other similar expressions which exhibit some idea (but altogether imperfect) of the unspeakable tortures they will suffer in the soul as well as in the body. All these sufficiently and more than sufficiently evince the falsity of the figment of those who make the punishments of the wicked to consist in annihilation and nonexistence (anyparxia). For to what end would they be described by the most dreadful pains and torments if it is to be a mere punishment of loss or annihilation? Why should Christ say of a man doomed to the punishment of hell, "It

had been good for that man if he had not been bom" (Mt. 26:24)? Nor can it be said that it is called everlasting death and fire not with regard to itself, but with regard to its effects because it reduces him to that state whence they say no one can return. For thus eternal death would overhang and ought to be denounced not only against men, but also against brutes.

2. The greatness and intensity of punishments.

XI. (3) Duration and extension belong to the punishments, not only in their uninterrupted continuity (in as much as the damned will have no interval of rest and

relaxation from these most direful torments, but will be tortured day and night, Rev. 14:11; 20:10), but also in their perpetuity and eternity, which will be an immortality as it were of death itself. Hence it is said to be "everlasting shame," "eternal and inextinguishable fire," "never ending death." Thus the infinite demerit of sin is visited as it were with a punishment infinite in duration. And on this account the more justly, that as he will never cease to sin against God, so neither to be punished by him. The guilt of fault will always remain and not be extinguished by any expiation because no place will be given for repentance, but sinners will always be inflamed with madness and hatred against the Judge and will curse him in the midst of the flames. Thus the wrath of God, the most just avenger of crimes, will rest upon them for ever. Hence will arise despair and raging as the inevitable consequence because no way of escape will be found out of that most horrible prison.

XII. Hence is evident the worthlessness of the comment of Origen and his followers, who, being preposterously merciful, maintain a certain end of the punishments of the Devil and the wicked; and when they have fulfilled it, they will at length be delivered from them. For since the Scriptures so often assert the eternity of those punishments and compare it with the absolute eternity of the joys of the blessed, who can dream of a limited eternity here? Nor are the greatness and infinity of mercy to be opposed here. For this belongs to the vessels of mercy, not of wrath; to the blessed, not to the damned; for judgment without mercy will belong to them who did not exercise mercy. Nor will the future age be a time of mercy, but only the present because then the gate will be shut, nor will there be any place for pardon.

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