

Series: God Is Near #1629

Title: Philippians 4.5

Hell Is Eternally in God's Presence

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. One of the challenges of only having these short amount of minutes together each weekday is that sometimes we are not able to finish a point of discussion in one day and need to carry it over into the next. And this can be particularly challenging when we are invested in a topic that is hard to talk about, maybe because it is complex or maybe because we find the subject matter painful. And anytime we talk about the reality of hell, we feel the pain. The biblical reality, the truth, that hell is real, that people are going to go there when they die, and be eternally (that is, forever and ever) in torment – as God's just punishment upon them for their unrepentant sin – this is sad, the epitome of tragic, and painful for us to think about and talk about.

And it should be. It is right that hell is a cause for such concern among us. I never want to talk about hell light-heartedly. Never. I never want to have a cavalier attitude about eternal torment. Never. In fact, what I find most disturbing about sharing the gospel with people and having them reject the Christ of the Good News is that I know what this means for that person or persons. Unless they yet repent, hell follows the judgment. Dear Christians, let us not talk about hell with anything other than a very sober attitude and mindset. And let us, with all our strength, diligently work to convince others that Jesus remains the only way of escape from God's wrath.

Well, why are we talking about hell? I remind you this is because we are answering a fourth question before us concerning the omnipresence, the all-presence, of God. Here is the question: is God present in hell? We have affirmed the orthodox teaching of the church through the ages that God is near. God is all-present everywhere. Well, does that include hell? Hell is a very real place. Is God there?

Let me remind us what has been said thus far, then we will finish our answer. We began by affirming what the Scripture teaches. First of all, God is eternal. God is omnipresent. And that means that God is omnipresent forever. His omnipresence does not end or go away when this world ends and eternity begins (for us). Second, hell is eternal. Hell is not a temporary place of punishment. Hell is an eternal place of punishment. People who die in their sins, without the forgiveness of Christ, are going to live in hell forever and ever. Listen to Jesus in Matthew chapter 25 and verse 46. The Lord says, **"These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."** (Matthew 25.46.)

"These" refers to the goats; the unbelievers, those who do not accept, love, and serve Jesus. And notice they will go away into *eternal* punishment. Highlight the word "eternal." The Greek word means unending, eternal, and age-long. This word contrasts with that which is brief and fleeting. Jesus says hell is an eternal punishment. And then there is Revelation chapter 20 and verse 10. Here the lake of fire and brimstone is the eternal hell. Listen to the Revelation 20, verse 10, **"And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."** You heard it. "They will be tormented day and night forever and ever. There is biblical proof that hell is eternal.

So, God is eternal. He is eternally omnipresent. Hell is eternal. Therefore, third, hell is eternally in God's presence. However, that does not mean that God is present to people suffering under eternal torment in hell in the same way God is present to people enjoying eternal blessing in heaven. Today I want to share these verses with you and say something about them, albeit it somewhat limited due to time. In Jesus' statement in Matthew 25 that we already heard, Jesus talks about the people "going away into eternal punishment..." That certainly indicates these people go away from Him, away from His presence.

And in 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 and verses 7-9 we read this, **"When the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, ⁸ dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power..."** That was 2 Thessalonians 1, verses 7-9 and this certainly speaks to the reality of eternal hell.

This text also highlights the epic and drastic danger in not obeying the gospel of our Lord Jesus. But I want to highlight this in verse 9: people in hell will be “away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power...” This again indicates that the presence of God is withdrawn from those in hell. So how can we say that hell and those suffering there will be eternally in God’s presence?

I interpret the Lord Jesus and the Apostle Paul to mean this. Being away from the presence of the Lord means being separated from Him in the sense of having no relationship with God. There is a severe severing of the fellowship between God and those people. In hell there is no communion with God. There is a total absence of the grace and favor of God. In that sense, those who pay the penalty of eternal destruction are away from the presence of the Lord and away from the glory of His power. But, still, they do not escape God’s omnipresence in the sense that hell is eternally in God’s presence. Because God is omnipresent, because God is near, God is *always and forever* omnipresent and near to each of us. In a sad irony, the reason people are in hell is because they never wanted to be in the presence of God, and yet they can never escape His presence. (As they will soon learn.)

Furthermore, to show you where I take my view, listen also to the words of Revelation chapter 14 and verse 10. You can find it if you have your Bible with you. The fourteenth chapter of the Book of the Revelation and verse 10. In this passage we have a description of those who worship the End Times beast and his image and receive the mark of the beast on their foreheads or on their hands. That is, they forsake the true Christ for the worship of the Anti-Christ. Listen to this, **“He also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.”**

The holy angels are the angels of God and the Lamb (capital L) is Jesus Christ. So, we must emphasize that these in hell, experiencing the wrath of God, drinking the full strength of God’s cup of anger, these being tormented with fire and brimstone are...*in the presence of* the angels and the Lamb, Jesus Christ. So as to say, God is present in hell and hell is eternally in God’s presence. Friends, there is nowhere – absolutely nowhere! – where anyone can go to escape the presence of the all-present God. Even death, even the grave, cannot separate us from *God*. Just the opposite: death puts us face-to-face with Jesus our Judge.

I trust this is helpful in answering this fourth question of ours. Is God present in hell? The answer is yes. We have biblical support and proof for our answer. And again, if you have a question or comment for me about this, do write to me today. My addresses are forthcoming.

Well, are there other questions we could ask and answer about the omnipresence of God? Yes. There most certainly are. In fact, I have a few more here in my notes. And maybe you have one I did not raise. If so, include that question when you write to me, because despite there being other questions, I want to move on. There are some concluding remarks and insights I want to make about the nearness of God in our lives. And I am eager to get to this, but I notice that tick tock goes the clock and so we’ll need at least one more day together reflecting on the truth that God is near.

As we soon need to end this broadcast and podcast, let me remind you of the importance of giving sincere thought to what is being said. These are messages that require wrestling with, thinking and praying about, and (I believe) doing something about. For example, because we do not want anyone to experience the cup of God’s anger and the fire and brimstone of His judgment, we must take action (based on the commandment of Christ) to speak about hell to others, and to urge them to embrace Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Let’s commit to this: tell someone today about Jesus!

Graciously and lovingly, yet boldly, share Christ. And be prayerful about this, asking God to please mercifully save this individual from their sin. Remember, God is near to this person and God is near to you as you witness. In fact, God is *in* you, dear Christian, by the presence of the Holy Spirit. So, do not be afraid or awkward or nervous or resistant. Carry out your responsibility to tell others about Jesus. And join us next time because God Is.

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