



Hell is a Temporary Punishment and a Tool of Transformation: Everyone Will Ultimately Reach Heaven

Johniello Ataha
CEO, Pafbig Technologies
johnataha.ja@gmail.com
08142809795

Abstract

The doctrine of hell has been a contentious and complex topic throughout Christian theology, with varying interpretations on its nature and purpose. Traditional views often depict hell as a place of eternal, inescapable torment, but recent theological research and biblical interpretations suggest an alternative perspective—one where hell is neither eternal nor a final destination of suffering, but rather a temporary phase of punishment and transformation. This article explores the concept of hell as a refiner's fire, a tool used by God for the ultimate purification and redemption of humanity, culminating in the eventual salvation of all people. Drawing from scriptural passages such as Malachi 3:2-3, Acts 2:27-31, Ephesians 4:9, and 1 Peter 3:18-20, it proposes that hell is not a permanent state but a necessary process through which sinners are reformed, transformed, and prepared for eternal life in heaven. Through this lens, hell serves as a transformative experience, akin to a refiner's fire, that ultimately leads to the glorious future of eternal life with God. The research emphasizes that, despite the varying theological perspectives—be it Universalism, Calvinism, Arminianism, or Traditionalism—God's love and mercy ultimately prevail, ensuring that every soul will ultimately reach heaven, regardless of their earthly actions or the "time spent" in hell. This perspective challenges the conventional notion of eternal torment and offers a hopeful and inclusive vision of redemption for all humanity.

Keywords: Hell, torment, eternal, reformation, transformation.





Introduction

The Universalist notion of an “inescapable glorious future for all people” challenges traditional Christian doctrines of hell. Christianity presents hell as a place of eternal torment for unrepentant sinners who reject God. At the same time, it teaches that God is love and loves the world deeply. God is also just and does no wrong.

“It is unthinkable that God would do wrong, that the Almighty would pervert justice.” – Job 34:12

Universalists, however, argue that “a glorious end is ultimately inescapable.” This perspective claims that universal salvation ensures everyone will be saved— good or bad, repentant or unrepentant, accepting or rejecting Jesus.

Scholars highlight that both the Christian doctrine of hell and the Universalist view of salvation have roots in the Bible. For instance, Universalists assert that if God is truly *love*, the concept of





eternal torment in hell cannot originate from Him. Conversely, traditional Christian doctrine, while affirming that God is love, rejects universal salvation, emphasizing that God's justice requires sinners to face consequences for their actions.

That however makes clear the inconsistencies of the doctrine of hell to the personality of God, thus implying that reconciling these inconsistencies will present us with the true stance regarding the **problem of hell**.

Philosophers and theologians have at different times come up with different explanations and conceptions to **reconcile** these opposing notions and arrive at a single standing truth about the problem of hell, but often fail or end up proffering complex explanations that raise even deeper arguments.

Traditionalist School: Once You Are in Hell, It's Over Forever

The traditional doctrine within Christian theology upholds the belief in eternal conscious torment for those condemned to hell. This belief, which implies that "once in hell, it's over forever," was promoted by philosopher Ray VanArragon and aligns with the traditionalist perspective that hell is a final, irreversible state of separation from God, where the condemned endure eternal punishment without hope of reprieve or redemption.

Universalist School: How Can a Loving God Ever Think of Burning You Up in Fire?

Universalists emphasize that **God is love** (1 John 4:8) and argue that eternal torment contradicts the essence of divine love. They contend that **a loving God would not subject His creation to unending suffering**, as it would serve no redemptive or moral purpose.

They challenge the traditionalist interpretation of scriptures like Matthew 25:46, suggesting that the word "**eternal**" (from the Greek *aionios*) does not mean unending but rather "age-long," indicating a temporary period of punishment, possibly "in hell".

Annihilationists School: God Can Terminate Your Existence or Let You Do It

Annihilationists believe that God does not actively torture or torment the wicked but allows them to experience the consequences of their actions—namely, the cessation of existence.

Annihilationists argue that the concept of eternal suffering is incompatible with God's nature as a **just and loving being**. They assert that the punishment for sin can be proportionate and just without being eternal, and that death is a fitting end for those who reject God's offer of salvation.





Many other schools of thought tend to be accepting of the idea that a loving and just God cannot “burn people up in hell for eternity”. What then is to be expected?

The Middle Ground

Since many schools of thought have failed, often turning simple ideas into complex arguments, it is time to refocus on what defines God—His nature, His interests on earth, His desires for His creatures, and his ultimate intentions.

1. God Is Love

The Bible clearly and unequivocally states that God is love. All schools of thought and faith seem to agree on and accept this truth.

2. A Loving God Cannot Endorse Eternal Torment

A loving God cannot allow people to burn in fire for eternity. To disagree with this notion would imply that a loving God could watch people suffer eternal torment without intervention.

Consider this: if a human feels pity when witnessing the execution of a condemned criminal, how could God—a being of infinite love—endure such anguish for eternity? The bottom line is that eternal torment contradicts the nature of a loving God.

3. Hell as a Place of Redemption

Even if sinners are sent to hell, God, out of love, can provide opportunities for repentance and transformation there.

Imagine God as a refiner of gold: *hell is the fire, and the inherent, undeserved righteousness of the condemned is the gold*. According to Malachi 3:2-3, God purifies and refines:

"But who can endure the day of His coming? Who can stand when He appears? For He will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; He will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness."

This suggests that hell could be a refining process, where sinners are reformed and ultimately redeemed.





Hell as a Tool of Redemption

How was it possible for Jesus to escape hell in three days when, as Scripture states, "He descended into hell" (Acts 2:27-31; Ephesians 4:9; 1 Peter 3:18-20)?

At His death, Jesus was fully human (Hebrews 2:14-15). Though He was sinless, He took upon Himself the weight of all humanity's sins—a burden so immense that no single person could ever match it. By the traditional description of hell, such a monumental load of sin would, **of course, condemn anyone to eternal torment**. But here's the kicker—Jesus, despite bearing the collective sin of the world, managed to escape hell in just three days. Now, if hell is truly this eternal, inescapable pit of torment that some insist it is, how in the world did Jesus, carrying all the sins of mankind, descend into hell and then—unexpectedly (according to the eternal torment camp)—walk out unscathed?

The answer lies in the redemptive power of God and His ultimate use for hell. Jesus' case demonstrates that hell can serve as a place of reformation, **not eternal punishment that serves no divine purpose**, like, what will God gain by burning people in fire for eternity? What exactly is the end game? Pleasure? Entertainment?

Jesus destroyed the power of death and hell, took the keys, and rose on the third day, no longer as human but as a glorified spirit. This transformative event indicates that God's love is so profound that even hell can be a means of purification and redemption, and sinners who find themselves there can still be reformed, redeemed and transformed.

Evidence of Redemption in Hell

Jesus' experience shows that, because of God's love, sinners in hell can be reformed, transformed, and redeemed. If hell were purely a place of eternal torment, Jesus—fully human at His death and carrying the weight of humanity's sin—would still be there. Instead, He overcame it and was glorified.

In Jesus' case, hell was not the end but a transformative process. God turned His back on Him on the cross; Jesus committed His Spirit to God, descended into hell, and pleaded for mercy. God's love answered, leading to His reformation, redemption, and glorification.

This may suggest that accepting Jesus' sacrifice can lead to immediate transformation, sparing one from the torment of hell. It also implies that, even in hell, a sinner who accepts Jesus could be instantly reformed, redeemed, and transformed. Perhaps this is the only true avenue to escape hell and eternal torment: the embrace of God's love and mercy through Christ even while in hell.





Conclusion:

The gospel, at its core, is simple, suggesting that complex theological debates often find their answers in simple, sometimes overlooked or ignored truths. Jesus spoke of hell on several occasions, but typically through figurative language or parables. If we are to take the Biblical texts about hell literally, then Jesus—the man who died on the cross—should still be in hell, enduring its torment. Why? Because He bore the sins of the world, accepting the consequences of all human sin. However, Jesus is not in hell. Therefore, no one can remain in hell beyond the duration Jesus spent there, as no human can commit a greater measure of sin than the one Christ bore on the cross.

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Contacts:

