

# Christian Apologetics

## Foundations- Unit 316

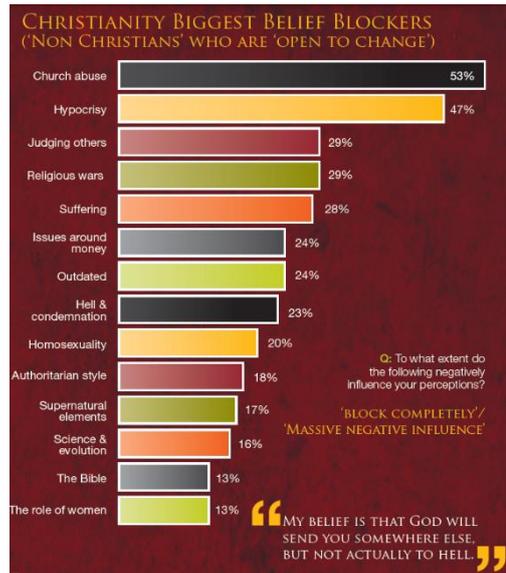


### **Week 4 – Hell and Condemnation**

## Introduction:

According to the Olive Tree survey people’s objection to the idea of a loving God sending people to eternal torment in hell rated as their 8<sup>th</sup> most frequent blocker to coming to faith.

Of course the challenge with this particular doctrine of faith is that if people find the doctrine objectionable, and the idea of eternal torment is the only way scripture is viewed, then there is not much room to move. If we dilute the doctrine then we are not being true to the faith. If we merely don’t speak about the doctrine, as seems to be the case with the doctrine of hell in today’s churches, then at some point in their study of what Christians believe, people are going to come across the idea of hell and so we are just putting off their reactions.



This area is again one of those topics in which you need to decide what is to be defended and what is not.

## What does the Bible say about Hell?

Three words are translated as “hell” in the KJV New Testament:

### Definitions:

- *Gehenna*: the Valley of Hinnom (a ravine south of Jerusalem)
- *Hades*: the place of the dead (*Sheol* in Hebrew)
- *Tartarus*: the lowest afterlife (Greek mythology)

Related metaphors: perishing, lake of fire, judgement, darkness, abyss.

Book	Gehenna	Hades	Tartarus
Mt	4	2	
Mk	1		
Lk	1	2	
Acts		1	

James	1		
2 Pet			1
Rev		3	

**Observations:**

1. The KJV fails to distinguish *Gehenna* and *Hades*, e.g. Mt 16:18.
2. Jesus talks more about *Gehenna* than anyone else (four passages).
3. Jesus threatens hell on Israel—especially their leaders—not unbelievers.
4. Parables such as Lk 16:19ff do not give a geography of hell (*Hades*).
5. James’ use is clearly a metaphor: a tongue set on fire by *Gehenna*.
6. Paul never uses the word *Gehenna*.
7. Those proclaiming the gospel in Acts never used *Gehenna*.
8. “Turn or burn” is not the gospel, and is not the motivation for evangelism in the NT.

**Background: *Gehenna***

The Valley of Hinnom was a literal valley, on the southern slopes of Jerusalem. It had a horrific history. Jeremiah announced that God would judge Judah, handing them over to the Babylonians because they were unfaithful to God. Apparently some had literally burnt their own children in the Valley of Hinnom as a sacrifice to false gods.

**Three Views of Hell**

Within the orthodox Christian faith there are a number of different views of hell;

- Universalism
- Eternal Conscious Torment
- Annihilationism

**Universalism:**

This is the view that everyone will eventually be saved. It is based on a few scattered sentences in the writings of Paul such

as Romans 5:18 one man brought death to *all* men so one man brought justification to *all* men. All means All.

However universalism disagrees with the bulk of Paul's writing in which he maintains that in order to be saved a person must accept Jesus as Lord, and there is no indication anywhere in scripture that this can be done after death.

### Eternal Conscious Torment (ECT)

This position says that the final end for the wicked is perpetual, conscious suffering as a result of the conscious rejection of God's self-revelation both in creation and in Christ. In the case of the uninformed it is seen as a consequence of 'original sin' (Augustine).

It is to this position that people make the statements about 'how can a God of love.....'

It is based on the presupposition that all humanity is given immortal life. For most people this has come to be seen as the immortality of the human soul.

### Annihilationism:

This position says that the final state of the wicked is ceasing to exist in any form what-so-ever, they are annihilated. Like ECT it has been held by a variety of Christian leaders over the centuries.

It is based on the pre-supposition that only God has immortal life in and of himself and he gives that immortal life to those who are saved, as a reward.

This view would read the same texts as the ECT view but make the point that eternal punishment is punishment that has consequences that go on eternally, not that the act of punishing goes on eternally. When the bible speaks of death it does not mean life but in a very bad place, it means the cessation of life.

Ravi Zachariah's answer:

"Isn't it rather unrealistic and perhaps self-centered for God to condemn a bunch of atheists who don't believe in him when he hasn't given them any convincing reason to believe in him?"

- There are assumptions that the question makes
- You have invoked a moral law in raising the question
- "it would be immoral of God to do this without giving someone sufficient evidence"
- If it would be immoral of God then there must be a moral law from which to judge
- What is that moral law and where does it come from?
- The question also assumes an autonomous human being
- "Even heaven would be hell for someone who wishes to be autonomous."

Final question:

If I were asked, "Why would your God send people to hell, what would I say?"

Ask:

- Do you think he will?
- Do you think he should sort out evil? Why? How?
- Do you think that there is a need for justice on the world?
- Have you considered that 'hell' is God's way of bringing justice?
- Hopefully with the view to talking about how Jesus faced evil and death.

Conclusion:

Regardless of the view of hell and condemnation you take, what the action of God does is to bring justice to the world. How do other worldviews believe that justice will be brought?