

Hell--Freedom's Greatest Compliment (Part Two)
(Rev. Dr. John Bartol)

"Hell remains the place where people who want to live without God get their wish."

Even though hell is ridiculed or ignored by many people there continues to be a rather strong belief in its reality. Gallup Polls between 1992 and 1999 indicate that 79% of Americans believe there will be a day when God judges whether you go to heaven or hell.

There are several reasons why Orthodox Christian doctrine must include teaching about hell and final judgment. God is a God of love, but he is also a God of justice. The just and holy character of God and his hatred of sin demands a time of final reckoning in regard to justice and impartiality. For example, it is estimated that in one century Hitler, Stalin and Mao were responsible for the death of over 100 million innocent people. Should they receive a free ticket to heaven as their award?

Almost every day we hear about the abuse of women and children, accounts of famine, corruption and all kinds of shameful behavior. Even today, it seems that there is very little justice in our world. If God does nothing to judge sin with a holy hatred, either in our present world or in the future, He cannot be a just and loving God.

Also, the cross where Jesus died demands it. If there is no divine judgment against sin then there would be no need for Christ to make his atoning sacrifice in our place. In those hours of darkness on the cross, Christ drank the cup of God's wrath against sin and he even tasted hell for us. Christ bore the judgment we deserve in order to bring us the forgiveness we do not deserve.

There is a sense in which hell gives meaning to our lives. It tells us that the moral choices we make day by day have eternal significance. There are those who say that they believe in heaven but not hell. But that would be a theological and philosophical impossibility. If there is any distinction between good and evil, between Mother Teresa and Adolf Hitler, we must believe in both.

The moral Constitution of the universe demands a time when all wrongs will be righted, justice vindicated, and truth prevail. Final judgment is not only reasonable, it is also absolutely necessary in order to guarantee accountability and give meaning to life.

GK Chesterton once said, "Hell is the greatest compliment God ever paid to the reality of human freedom and the dignity of human choice." God never sends anyone to hell. You and I can freely decide our eternal destiny – even if it means hell! You have a choice between becoming a part of a loving community within

the family of God or eternal separation from him in self-centered isolation. What a compliment! You decide, you alone! That's the heaven or hell of it!

"All that are in hell, chose it. Without that self- choice, there could be no hell."

CS Lewis