

(2) There is No Hell

Others feel secure through a fond persuasion that there is no hell, no judgment, and no punishment after this life, but that death ends all. So they encourage themselves in a wicked lifestyle. Such people live like beasts, and they persuade themselves that they shall die like beasts, that there is no immortality of the soul, no resurrection of the body, and no future punishment. Yet the Scriptures clearly reveal that the body shall be raised again at the last day, and both the soul and body of the wicked shall be eternally tormented in hell. These things are as certain as God is true.

(3) God is all Love and Mercy

Many are secure, and senseless of their danger, through an ignorance of God. They believe him to be made up of all love and mercy, with no wrath and no fury, so that however sinful they are or have been, yet God is so loving and merciful, that there's nothing more easy to obtain than a pardon, and if they call on his name and cry for mercy, though at the last gasp (whatever their wicked lives have been) they shall be saved; not considering that God is holy and jealous, just and righteous, as well as merciful, loving, and gracious; and that such as go on still in their sins have no share in his mercy or any of his promises.

(4) God is Patient and Longsuffering

Others do lull themselves to sleep upon the bed of security because God is patient and longsuffering with them, which should lead them to repentance, yet it causes them to grow more hardened and impenitent in their sins (*Rom 2:4-5*). "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil," and they feel secure (*Ecol 8:11*). God is long-suffering, yet he is not ever-suffering. His patience long and much abused will at length break forth into fury.

(5) They Promise to Repent in the Future

Others quiet themselves for the present, and have no fear of the fires of hell, because they intend to repent and reform in the future. So they go on in their sinful course, resolving shortly to become new persons, to turn over a new leaf, and lead a new life. These do not realize that repentance is not in their own power (*2 Tim 2:25-26*); nor do they consider how that everyday they provoke God more and more, and tempt him to deny them the grace to turn from sin; not remembering how many millions have perished with such foolish intentions, which never were put into execution.

(6) They just don't Think about the Danger

Others are quiet and secure through lack of serious consideration, what their guilt and danger is. They fill up their time so full with worldly business and secular

employments that they leave themselves no room or leisure to think of sin and their near-approaching death, and the future wrath, and the eternal burnings of hell, which they are in danger of. The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke their meditations. If guilty sinners would sit down one quarter of an hour every day, and look upward to an angry God who frowns upon them (*Psal 7:11*), and downward to the flames of hell, and forward to the judgment, where they will be sentenced to everlasting burnings—surely they could not rest so easy nor feel so secure.

(7) Their Friends are all Going to Hell

Others are secure, though they are going on in the way of sin which leads to death and hell, because most people are going on in the same course, and they hope they shall fare as well as others. Their forefathers trod in these steps, and their friends and neighbors are their companions in sin, and if they are punished at last in hell, they think they shall have company enough, and bear it as well as others; not considering how intolerable the wrath of God is, and that their company in hell will be so far from alleviating, that it will exceedingly heighten and aggravate their pain and torment.

(8) Their Lusts have Stupefied Them

Others and the most are secure through their frequent practice of sin. Custom in sin has taken away the sense of sin. Their lusts have enthralled them, and their lusts have stupefied them. However conscience did grumble at first, especially when they first ventured upon some more notorious sins, yet now they have shut the mouth of conscience, they have charmed and seared it as with a hot iron (*1 Tim 4:2*).

(9) They are Not as Bad as Other People

Others are quiet and secure under their danger of hell, because they are not as bad as others, because they do not run with others unto the same excess of riot, and have escaped the more gross pollutions, which are in the world through lusts; especially if they have a formal religious profession, a form of godliness, and a counterfeit of saving grace, never having truly come to be humbled for sin, emptied of themselves, and by faith engrafted into Christ.

Thus the devil and the deceitful hearts of men bewitch and befool them in these ways, to sit still in peace and security, until destruction comes upon them suddenly, and that without remedy; and they are not awakened out of their spiritual slumber until they are awakened in the midst of the flames of hell.

Sinners! How long will you sleep? How long will you slumber in such imminent danger, you graceless and Christless people? Will nothing rouse you, and awaken you out of this sleep? Are you resolved it shall prove the sleep of death? Shall it insensibly and effectually usher

you into hell before you are aware? Have you been called already so long, so loud, so frequently, so fervently, and yet you deafen your ear? Have you been told so often of your guilt and danger, and yet you harden your heart? Will you hold fast your sins, and not let them go whatever the cost? Have you been threatened with death, and wrath, and misery forever, and yet not startled, yet stupid and senseless? Oh, that yet at length you might be awakened, and by the Spirit of the Lord effectually persuaded to lift up your eyes, and look a little before you.

Yonder! Look sinner, yonder is a horrible burning tempest driving towards you! Look! do you not see a horrible pit filled with burning fire, and that fire filled with damned men and women? Lay your ear to the mouth of this pit, and hear the shrieks and yells of that cursed company. And do you not perceive yourself hastening forward in the way to this place of burning? And will you go forward still? Will you allow yourself to be carried on furiously by your impetuous lusts, until you are fallen into this pit, and there is no possibility of ever getting out again? Lost sinner, think what punishment in hell will be inflicted upon you: (1) the intolerableness of it, (2) the unavoidableness of it, (3) the nearness of it, and (4) the everlastingness of it.

The Fires of Hell are Intolerable

Consider the pain and intolerableness of hell's torments and think on both the pain which you shall feel in your bodies, and the anguish which shall be put upon your souls, if indeed you be found among the ungodly at the last. What is the extinguishable fire on earth, in comparison with the unquenchable fire of hell? What is the fire of man's kindling in comparison with the fire of God's kindling? No fire here can torment like the fire which God has prepared for the wicked.

You have heard of Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace. Should you be thrown into such fires, you would find them horribly painful. But the pains of hell-fire will be much more horrible and tormenting. Your bodies now cannot endure much pain without expiring, which brings relief. But hereafter God will strengthen your bodies to endure. They shall have greater strength and quicker sense, and more capacity for pain. Your bodies shall never die, but suffer pain in extremity, and that to eternity. This will be very sore. All the tortures that ever were invented by the most mischievous mind, or executed by the most cruel tyrant, are not so much as the least gentle touch in comparison with the punishment the damned shall endure in hell.

But the anguish of your soul will far exceed that of your bodies, and here words fail. Who can tell how the worm of conscience will bite! How dreadful the lashes of your consciences will be, when they are let loose (as God's executioners) with full rage upon you. Who can utter the anguish you shall endure under the immediate impressions of God's wrath upon your souls? Such as are

tender cannot without unutterable fear and grief bear the thought of being burned alive here on earth, and oh the shriekings of such people, when they have been brought to the fire, and the flames have begun to seize upon them! How intolerable then will hell-fire be!

Many martyrs have endured great tortures in their bodies with much patience. Some were slain with the sword, some burned with fire, some scourged with whips, some stabbed with iron forks, some their skins plucked off while alive, some their tongues cut out, some stoned to death, some starved with hunger and cold, some dismembered and naked to the shame of the world; and yet in the midst of all their pains they have had a composed mind. Yes, sometimes they have been filled with joy. God has not allowed man to inflict upon them more than he has given them strength to bear.

But there will be no patience to undergo the pains of hell. The spirit will utterly sink under the heavy burden and pressure of that pure and weighty wrath, which shall be immediately upon the soul. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?" (*Prov 18:14*). If the body be infirm and weak, full of pain, yet while the spirit is whole and sound, while there is peace within, the spirit may sustain this, and bear up under it. But if the spirit be wounded by the arrows of the Almighty shot into it, who can bear it? If God let fall some scalding drops of his wrath upon the spirit, if he kindle a spark of hell-fire in your conscience, who can endure it?

Should you fall in to the hands of the most cruel men to torture and massacre you, this would be fearful. Should you fall under the power of devils to tear and rend you, this would be more fearful. But to fall into the hands of God, this will be most fearful. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (*Heb 10:31*). This you cannot bear. And yet if you are wicked, you must bear it, and that to eternity. And can you sleep still in sin, under the thoughts of such danger? "Our God is a consuming fire" (*Heb 12:29*).

The Fires of Hell are Sure and Unavoidable

Consider the sureness and unavoidableness of hell-fire. Nothing is more sure than what God has revealed in his Word, and nothing more unavoidable than what God has threatened; and such is the tormenting of the wicked and ungodly in the flames of hell-fire.

While you are here upon the earth, there is a possibility of escaping the wrath to come. Pardon, peace, and salvation are attainable. If you lay your sins to heart, if you confess and forsake them, you may find mercy. If by faith you apply yourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ, you shall not perish, but shall obtain eternal life. But if you go on still in your trespasses, if you live and die in a state of impenitence and unbelief, it will be impossible for you to escape.

Indeed, could you make your battle good against God, could you gather forces together, and wage war against heaven and obtain the victory, you might avoid the threatened punishment. But alas, God is infinite in power, and will not permit any such attempts. You will not be able to hold up your head or hand against him. Who can stand in his sight when once he is angry? God will bind all the devils and wicked men and women together in chains of darkness, stronger than any iron chains, and none shall be able to make any resistance.

Could you hide yourselves at the last day from his eye; could you fly from his presence into some remote corner, could you creep under some rock or mountain, and there be covered from his view, you might think to escape. But this cannot be. God's eye will follow you, and his hand will reach you wherever you go. Could you by your prayers and tears move God to compassion, and prevail for mercy as now you may do, there might be some hopes of avoiding this punishment. But soon God's ear will be shut, and the doors of mercy shut against you forever (*Prov 1:23-31*). Your knocking at the door will be in vain. It will never be opened. Your cries and prayers will be to no avail. They will receive no answer. Hereafter the punishment of hell will be unavoidable by the wicked.

The Fires of Hell are Near

Consider the nearness of this punishment of hell. The sands of your life are running swiftly. The time of your abode here is wasting away with incredible speed. "What is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (*James 4:14*). Your bodies will quickly be in the grave, and if you die in your sins, your soul will be as quickly in hell. "The rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments" (*Luke 16:22-23*).

You cannot long escape this punishment. You may shuffle the thoughts of God and future wrath out of your mind for a time. You may busy your thoughts about other things while you are here. But all these things will shortly shrink away from you, and leave you naked, and you must stand before God to be judged by him, and to be condemned by him, and to be punished by him. God will meet you as a bear bereaved of her cubs, and rend your heart, or like a roaring lion, and tear you in pieces; when there shall be none to deliver. God will take you into his hand, and throw you out of his presence into the bottomless gulf of unquenchable burnings. I think this should awaken you and arouse fear in your soul.

The Fires of Hell are Everlasting

Consider the everlastingness of hell-fire, and your torment which there you must endure, if you be found in the number of unbelievers. The wrath of God will never be at an end. The worm of your conscience will never die, and the fire of hell will never go out; but the smoke of your torment will ascend up forever and ever.

When you have been the space of as many years in hell, as there are stars in the firmament, as there are blades of grass in the earth, as there are drops of water in the ocean, as there are sands upon the seashore, your torments will be as far from being assuaged, and as far from being ended, as at the first minute of your entrance into that dreadful place. And this whole eternity you must spend in extremity of torment.

The real length of eternal torment cannot be measured, but its true length will be greater (if I may so say) because of your misery. If a short time of misery here on earth seem long, what will an eternity of misery seem to be in hell? When the body is in health, and the soul is sweetened with delight, time steals away insensibly, years seem months, months weeks, weeks days, days hours. But when the body is sick and the soul embittered with sorrow, a short time seems long, and it passes away slowly in our apprehension. Hours seem days, days weeks, weeks months, months years. How we do count the clock, and reckon the sands that fall in the glass, and time seems to be moving in slow motion. How long then will the eternity of misery in extremity seem to be? I believe that the space of one quarter of an hour in hell will seem longer to the damned than a whole life of misery in this world. Yes, I think I may add that a minute's pain in hell will seem longer to the wicked than a thousand years of pleasure in heaven to the righteous. So that the eternity of misery in hell will be as it were a double, triple, yet thousand-fold eternity.

And now sinners what will you do? Will you dare to go on in that broad way of sin, which before long will open under you, and let you down into that horrible gulf to experience God's unquenchable wrath? Can you be contented with a portion in this life, and to receive all your good things here, when fire and brimstone, and everlasting burnings shall be the portion of your cup hereafter? Will any pleasure of the flesh and sin for a season compensate for that pain and misery which shall have no end? "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (*Mark 8:36-37*).

I think these considerations should startle all of you who are asleep in sin. I think they should make you afraid, and cause your hearts to quake, and every joint to tremble. "The sinners in Zion were afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" (*Isaiah 33:14*). As the jailor at Philippi cried out, when awakened by the earthquake, and the impression of guilt was made by God upon his conscience, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (*Acts 16:29-30*). Oh, that you would so cry out before it is too late! and in like manner, find relief and comfort in this: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (*v31*). □

—Adapted from the writings of Thomas Vincent (published in 1670)

ARE YOU BORN AGAIN?

Many professing Christians have none of the marks of being born again. John, in his first epistle, lists these marks that we might *know* if we've truly been born again.

(1) "Whosoever is born of God **doth not commit sin**" (*1 John 3:9; 5:18*). A man that is born again doesn't commit sin as a habit. There was a time when he did not think whether his actions were sinful or not, and never felt grieved after doing evil. But all that has changed. Now he hates sin, flees from it, fights against it, mourns when he falls under its influence, and longs to be delivered from it altogether.

(2) "Every one that **doeth righteousness** is born of God" (*1 John 2:29*). A man that is born again is a holy man. He strives to live according to God's will, to do things that please God. His desire is to love God with all his heart, and to love his neighbour as himself. He is continually looking to Christ as his example as well as his Savior, and shows himself Christ's friend by doing whatsoever Christ commands (*John 15:14*).

(3) "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we **love the brethren**" (*1 John 3:14*). A man who is alive in Christ has a special love for all true disciples of Christ. Like his Savior, he loves the worst of sinners, and can weep over them; but he has a peculiar love for those who are in Christ. A true Christian is never so much at home as when he is in the company of other believers. Others may value learning, riches, or rank in society—the regenerate man values grace. Those who have the most grace, and are most like Christ, are those he loves most.

(4) "Whosoever is born of God **overcometh the world**" (*1 John 5:4*). A man born of God overcomes the love of the world. The opinions of the world are not his rule of right and wrong. He doesn't mind going against the stream of this world's ways and customs. He overcomes the fear of the world. He's ridiculed; it doesn't move him. He loves the praise of God more than the praise of men. He's counted the cost. He's no longer a slave to fashion. His first aim is to please God.

(5) "He that is begotten of God **keepeth himself**" (*1 John 5:18*). He that is born again is very careful of his own soul. He endeavors not only to keep clear of sin, but also to keep clear of everything which may lead to it. He's careful about the company he keeps. He's very careful over his own behavior. He knows that his own heart is deceitful, the world is full of wickedness, and the devil is always working to do him harm. He desires to live like a soldier in enemy territory, to wear his armor continually, and to be prepared for temptation. He's watchful, humble, and prayerful.

The apostle sets forth these marks. What would he say about you? Are you born again? He says a person who is born of God: (1) does not commit sin (2) does righteousness (3) loves the brethren (4) overcomes the world, and (5) keeps himself. We must conclude that only those who have these marks are born again; and that all men and women, regardless of their religious profession, who have not these marks, are not born again. □

the vain securities of the wicked

"Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup" (*Psalms 11:6*)

Are the burnings of hell certain, being threatened by God? Are they dreadful beyond any burnings that have ever been, both in fierceness and duration? Are they indeed prepared for the wicked, and all graceless, Christless people as their deserved portion? And are not most people wicked, graceless, unrighteous, unregenerate, unbelievers, who are condemned already to this place of torment (*John 3:18*), and every single moment in danger of being dragged forth to execution?

Here then we may wonder at the senselessness and carnal security of such people, especially of those who sit under the light of God's Word. They are without any fear, they are fast asleep in sin and very secure—in spite of their danger, in spite of their sins which deserve hell, and in spite of God's threatenings of everlasting burnings. Though their conscience is full of guilt, their hearts full of lust, their lives full of sin; though their steps are carrying them forward in the broad way, which leads to destruction; though death has them upon the chase, and is at their heels, though the wrath of God pursues them hard, and is at their backs, though the day, wherein they must give an account, and be punished for their iniquities hastens greatly, and the Judge stands at the door; yet they care not, they fear not; none of these things move them, none of these things trouble them. They eat and drink, and sleep, and buy and sell, and plant and build, and go on in a sinful course, as if they should live here eternally, or as if their soul should perish with their body, and all these future judgments foretold in the Word were but nice fables. Why is there such carnal security everywhere and no fear of hell-fire?

(1) There is No God

Some feel secure through an atheistical persuasion that there is no God. Because they are enemies to God, and live in rebellion against him, it is in their interest and desire that there should be no God. Therefore they work themselves into this persuasion, that they might sin freely, and thereby avoid the stinging arrows of his threatenings, and the noise of their accusing consciences, which otherwise would give them no rest at all. But such people shall not remain long under their atheistical thoughts, but he will make them to know and feel that there is a God by the immediate impressions of his wrath upon their souls, and the dreadful flames of hell-fire, which his breath will kindle to punish them everlastingly.