

The Moral Problem

(...) There is one very serious defect to my mind in Christ's moral character, and that is that He believed in hell. I do not myself feel that any person who is really profoundly humane can believe in everlasting punishment. Christ certainly as depicted in the Gospels did believe in everlasting punishment, and one does find repeatedly a vindictive fury against those people who would not listen to His preaching - an attitude which is not uncommon with preachers, but which does somewhat detract from superlative excellence. (...)

You will find that in the Gospels Christ said: '*Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?*' That was said to people who did not like His preaching. (...) I really do not think that a person with a proper degree of kindness in his nature would have put fears and terrors of that sort into the world.

Then Christ says: '*The Son of Man shall send forth His angels and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth*'; and He goes on about the wailing and gnashing of teeth. (...) I must say that I think all this doctrine, that hell-fire is a

punishment for sin, is a doctrine of cruelty. It is a doctrine that put cruelty into the world and gave the world generations of cruel torture; (...)

You remember what happened about the fig-tree. 'He was hungry; and seeing a fig-tree afar off having leaves, He came if haply He might find anything thereon; and when He came to it He found nothing but leaves, for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it: "No man eat fruit of thee hereafter forever," ... and Peter ... saith unto Him: "Master, behold the fig-tree which thou cursedst is withered away".' This is a very curious story, because it was not the right time of year for figs, and you really could not blame the tree. I cannot myself feel that either in the matter of wisdom or in the matter of virtue Christ stands quite as high as some other people known to history. I think I should put Buddha and Socrates above Him in those respects.

Bertrand Russel

Matheus 23:33 serpentes genimina viperarum quomodo fugietis a iudicio gehennae

Matheus 13:41 mittet Filius hominis angelos suos et colligent de regno eius omnia scandala et eos qui faciunt iniquitatem

13:42 et mittent eos in caminum ignis ibi erit fletus et stridor dentium