

## Week 47

# Biblical Doctrine of Hell

### Key Verses

**Matthew 25:31-46** "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and <sup>33</sup> He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.

<sup>34</sup> "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. <sup>35</sup> For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; <sup>36</sup> naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' <sup>37</sup> Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? <sup>38</sup> And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? <sup>39</sup> When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' <sup>40</sup> The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'

<sup>41</sup> "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; <sup>42</sup> for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.' <sup>44</sup> Then they themselves also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?' <sup>45</sup> Then He will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' <sup>46</sup> These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

## + Introduction

It has been said, "If we don't accept the reality of Hell, we won't rightly understand the glory of the gospel."<sup>1</sup> It is so much easier to think about Heaven where there is no more crying, no more pain, and no more death (Revelation 21:4). Heaven is a place where all things are made new (Revelation

21:5) and a place of hope, peace, comfort, and glory. Yet just as Heaven is a reality, so also is Hell.

In his book on Heaven, Randy Alcorn writes,

“For every American who believes he is going to Hell, there are 120 who believe they are going to Heaven. This optimism stands in stark contrast to Christ’s words in Matthew 7:13-14: *“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.* Heaven is not our default destination. No one goes there automatically. Unless our sin problem is resolved, the only place we will go is our true default destination ... Hell.”<sup>2</sup>

In Matthew 25, Jesus responds to His disciples’ question about the *“end of the age.”* He gives them insights about tribulation, perilous times, and His Glorious Return. In verses 31-46, Jesus indicates that people who do not know Him are destined to *“eternal punishment.”*

This lesson will look at what the Bible says about *“eternal punishment”* and how a God of love can send someone to such a place. We believe that God’s Word is true and is a guide by which we can live. This perfect revelation from God tells us about a place called *“Heaven.”* We love to talk about Heaven and spending eternity with God in a perfect place. We must keep in mind that the same Bible that talks about Heaven also clearly indicates there is a place of eternal punishment called Hell. When we truly accept that our family and friends who do not know Jesus will spend eternity in that place, we are motivated to pray for them and share with them how to receive Christ as their Savior. The reality of Hell should break our hearts and take us to our knees and to the doors of those without Christ.<sup>3</sup>

## ✦ Hell: Its Theological Basis

Several attributes – some of God’s and some of ours – call for the existence of Hell. The characteristics of God that necessitate Hell are His justice, His love, and His sovereignty. The characteristics of humanity that require the same are depravity and dignity.<sup>4</sup> Hell is described as the place of future punishment of wicked or unbelieving persons; it is a place of great anguish from which God is absent.<sup>5</sup> The existence of Hell does not demand a lack of existence of God’s love, mercy, and grace. In fact, God’s clearly stated desire is for all to repent, accept, and enter Heaven (2 Peter 3:8-9). Norman Geisler explains in his book *Systematic Theology*:

- **God’s Justice Demands a Hell** – God is so pure and holy that He cannot even look upon sin (Habakkuk 1:13). There is no partiality with God (Romans 2:11 NKJV), and the Judge of all the earth [will] do what is right (Genesis 18:25).
- **God’s Sovereignty Demands a Hell** – If there were no Hell, there would be no final victory over evil (1 Corinthians 15:55; Revelation 1:18).

- **Human Depravity Demands a Hell** – There is no one who does good. The Lord looks down from Heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside; they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one (Psalm 14:2-3).<sup>6</sup>

## ✚ Hell: What Did Jesus Say About It?

The New Testament contains 1,850 verses that record the exact words of Jesus (dramatically highlighted in what is known as the “red letter edition”), and of these, fully thirteen percent are concerned with Hell. Christ had more to say about Hell than He did about Heaven. The whole issue of His divinity hinges on the accuracy of His statements concerning Hell because if He were wrong, it had to be because 1) He was sincerely mistaken, which negates the possibility of His being the Son of God because that would mean He does not know the fate of those who have died, or 2) He was being intentionally deceptive which also disqualifies Him from being God’s Son or even a “good man” because He knowingly misled people.

Jesus does not only reference Hell, but He also describes it in great detail. He says it is a place of eternal torment (Luke 16:23), of unquenchable fire (Mark 9:43), where the worm does not die (Mark 9:48), where people will gnash their teeth in anguish and regret (Matt. 13:42), and from which there is no return, even to warn loved ones (Luke 16:19–31). He calls Hell a place of “*outer darkness*” (Matthew 25:30), comparing it to “*Gehenna*” (Matthew 10:28), which was a trash dump outside the walls of Jerusalem where rubbish was burned, and maggots abounded. Jesus talks about Hell more than He talks about Heaven and describes it more vividly. There is no denying that Jesus knew, believed, and warned about the absolute reality of Hell.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus’ most descriptive story concerning Hell is found in the story of the rich man and a beggar named Lazarus, who died virtually simultaneously and wound up in two decisively different places (Luke 16:19–26). Jesus presumes His audience has a firm grasp of the basic facts concerning Hell. Several things can be deduced from this simple yet profound story:

- a. Hell is an actual place. There are three words, all translated as “Hell,” in most English versions of the Bible. “*Tartaros*” is used in 2 Peter 2:4 to describe the place where a special class of wicked angels has been sent. “*Gehenna*” is the most used word for Hell. Jesus uses it 12 times to describe the eternal destiny of those who reject Christ. It was the place the Israelites who rejected God burned their children as sacrifices to the pagan deity, Molech, during the reigns of Ahaz and Manasseh. The third word is “*Hades*,” which is the temporary location of the unrighteous dead who are awaiting the final Great White Throne Judgment. The reality of the location is revealed when Jesus said, “*I go to prepare a place (“topos”) for you.*” Jesus reveals Heaven and Hell to be real places. In speaking of the fate of the unrighteous, He says: “*These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life*” (Matthew 25:46).
- b. Jesus describes Hell as a place of horrendous sufferings. In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man declared he was “*in agony in this flame*” where “*the*

worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched." It is also described as a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

- C. Jesus taught that the suffering of Hell was forever. Increasingly, some Christians are embracing annihilationism, which purports that unbelievers do not exist forever in Hell as believers will live forever in Heaven. The reasoning goes that a compassionate God would never subject His creatures to such a harsh sentence. Revelation 19:20 says that upon the return of Christ, the beast and the false prophet are "thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone." A thousand years later, John sees Satan being thrown into the same lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are still alive and experiencing torment. Matthew 25:46 clearly comments on the duration of Heaven and Hell: "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." It is likely they both last forever!

In the words of Jesus:

**MATTHEW 5:29-30** – "If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into Hell. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into Hell." (NASB)

**MATTHEW 10:28** – "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in Hell." (NASB)

**MATTHEW 13:40-41** – "So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness," (NASB)

**MARK 9:43-48** - If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into Hell, into the unquenchable fire, [where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.] If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than, having your two feet, to be cast into Hell, [where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.] If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into Hell, where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.

## + Hell: Who Will Spend Eternity There?

(Hell) was prepared for the devil and his angels (Revelation 20:10). God never prepared Hell for people. There is no evidence from Scripture that God predestines people to go to Hell. If sinners listen to Satan and follow his ways, they will end up where he ends up – in the torments of Hell. There are only two eternal destinies: everlasting punishment for those who reject Christ or eternal life for those who trust Him.”<sup>8</sup>

This excerpt from *GotQuestions.org* is a great resource for this question:

“John 3:18 explains in the simplest terms who will go to Heaven and who will go to Hell: *“Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”* So, those who go to Hell are specifically those who do not believe in Jesus’ name. To “believe” goes beyond a mental recognition of the truth. To believe in Christ for salvation requires a transfer of allegiance. We stop worshiping ourselves, we forsake our sin, and we begin to worship God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Matthew 22:36–37; Mark 12:30).<sup>9</sup>

God desires that every person spend eternity with Him (Matthew 18:14; 2 Peter 3:9), but He honors our free will (John 4:14). Anyone who so desires can go to Heaven (John 1:12). Jesus already paid the price for our salvation, but we must accept that gift and transfer ownership of our lives to Him (Luke 9:23). Heaven is perfect, and God cannot take anyone there who insists on holding on to his or her sin. We must allow Him to cleanse us of our sin and make us righteous in His sight (2 Corinthians 5:21). John 1:10–12 shows us the problem and the solution: *‘He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.’*

We can choose to trust in Jesus’ payment for our sin, or we can choose to pay for our sins ourselves—but we must remember that the payment for our sin is an eternity in Hell. C. S. Lewis said it this way: “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’”

## + Hell: Its Nature

As comforting as Heaven is, Hell is as horrifying. The reality is that our finite minds cannot fully comprehend and imagine the anguish, pain, and suffering of Hell. The picture painted by Jesus and throughout Scripture is graphic and detailed, yet our minds turn away from the gruesomeness of the harsh reality. Geisler writes, “To borrow the title of a marvelous book, Hell is like a great divorce – an eternal separation from God (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:7–9). There is, in biblical language, ‘a great gulf fixed’ between Hell and Heaven so that no one can pass from one side to the other (Luke 16:26 NKJV).”<sup>10</sup>

The nature of Hell is the opposite of the nature of Heaven. Everything Heaven is reminds us of all that Hell is not. There is not a grey area described in any form or fashion. It is clearly laid out as cut and dry. There are two distinct locations of eternity. One is for those who believe in Jesus Christ, and the other is for those who have rejected Jesus Christ. It is a decision made in the human heart with the repercussions lasting an eternity.

## + Conclusion

Since Hell is a real place that real people will go to for eternity, we need to commit to personally sharing the "Good News" of Jesus with as many people as we can. The only way to God, and eternity in Heaven, is through His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus said, *"I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life, no one comes to the Father, but through Me"* (John 14:6 NASB).

This lesson is not designed to depress us, rather motivate us to live a life of fulfilling the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). We are to go and tell people the good news of Jesus Christ. We are to be active witnesses wherever we are for the sake of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8). It is our responsibility and opportunity to populate Heaven while being motivated in part by the reality of Hell.

The greatest need of our world today is not a cure for cancer or freedom from the COVID virus. There is a disease that affects every human and will result in an eternity in Hell; it is sin. The only cure for this disease is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Prepare yourself with the tools to be able to share your faith with others. There are various ways to share your faith:

- The Roman Road – Scriptures from the book of Romans
- Billy Graham's "Steps to Peace with God" Gospel Tract
- ABC's of Salvation

The method is not as important as a willingness and determination to talk to someone about their spiritual life. Make your commitment today to learn to be a witness for Jesus Christ!

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-uncomfortable-subject-jesus-addressed-more-than-anyone-else/>

<sup>2</sup> Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL, 2004, p.23.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.24.

<sup>4</sup> Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology In One Volume*, Bethany House, 2002, p.1271.

<sup>5</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *The Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology*, Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, 2001, p. 87.

<sup>6</sup> Geisler, *Systematic Theology In One Volume*, p. 1271-1272.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-uncomfortable-subject-jesus-addressed-more-than-anyone-else/>.

<sup>8</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary*, David C. Cook, 2007, p. 76.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/who-will-go-to-hell.html>

<sup>10</sup> Geisler, *Systematic Theology In One Volume*, p. 1274.