

## **Week One: Hell and Judgement**

### ***Summary Document***

Here are the questions submitted that were considered in the first message:

- *How is the doctrine of eternal punishment, hell, biblical? How can it align with the character of God?*
- *Do all the people who don't believe in Jesus before their death go to hell?*
- *If God is love, why are most people who have ever lived condemned to eternal punishment?*
- *How is God just if He has already "damned" all those not predestined?*
- *Why did God create sin/a world where sin was possible?*
- *Why does everyone else seem so excited for eternity when I'm partly terrified of the idea, is it because I don't love God as much or don't understand it?*

#### **1. What is God Like?**

God is **love** (1 John 4:8, 16), and God is **just** (2 Thessalonians 1:6). These two qualities of God go hand in hand. God loves people so much that he gets angry and seeks justice when people are oppressed or exploited (Amos 2:6-7). In fact, there is a strong case that love's opposite is not hate but indifference. Love cares, hate cares, but indifference doesn't care. God love people, hates evil and seeks justice with a passion! God is certainly not indifferent. God cares.

#### **2. What does the Bible say about hell?**

Jesus speaks the most about hell in the whole Bible. Jesus describes hell in two ways:

(1) A place of suffering. Jesus uses the image of fire to indicate ongoing suffering (Matthew 5:22, Matthew 18:9, Mark 9:43). In Matthew 25:46, Jesus describes hell as *eternal punishment* and contrasts it to *eternal life*.

(2) A place of God's absence. Jesus uses the image of outer darkness to indicate God's absence (Matthew 8:12). God and his people are *inside*, hell is *outside*.

#### **3. Who deserves to go to hell?**

Perhaps **nobody** deserves to go to hell. Perhaps even the worst offenders don't deserve eternal punishment, eternal separation from God.

However, God has made us free, and respects the freedom we have. God does not force us to love him and live his way. He allows us to freely choose our life's path. However, we often freely choose ways that are harmful to both ourself and others. And yet, God respects our freedom, rarely directly intervening, and allowing us to do things that are harmful (Romans 1:28). We tell God to "get lost", and so God allows us to live without him, despite the grief our actions cause God. Respecting our freedom, God allows us what we seek, and the result is hell. C.S. Lewis describes hell as *the greatest monument to human freedom*, the place where humans can finally be free without God.

In Luke 16:19-31, the rich man who is sent to hell remains as he was while alive; self-absorbed and without God, demanding that the beggar he disregarded while alive be his waiter and serve him even in hell. As C.S. Lewis says, hell is the natural trajectory of a life lived without God.

Perhaps only **bad people** deserve to go to hell. Some candidates are straightforward; dictators and oppressors throughout history. But some are harder to place; many people's lives are such a mixture of good and bad that it is hard to draw a line. Really, we all draw the line just "under" ourselves. Everyone who's just a little "worse" than me deserves hell. But surely I don't deserve hell!

Romans states that all people have *sinned and fallen short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23). We have all fallen short of God's standard, the standard that matters. Which means that **everybody** deserves to go to hell. We have all enjoyed the freedom God has given us, freely rejecting our creator, freely living our own way. God loves us and allows us the natural end of these free choices, which is hell.

### **The scandal of grace**

The incredible news is that at the heart of God's love is the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins (1 John 4:10). God loves people, including oppressed people, and seeks justice for them. But God also loves the oppressors, God loves the people he's angry at. God loves me.

God loves me even when I hurt others. God loves me even when I tell God to get lost. God loves me so much that he sent Jesus to die in my place so that I might avoid hell (John 3:16). This is the scandal of God; not that we deserve to hell, but that God loves us enough that we can not go to hell! Not because we're actually not that bad. Not because of our wisdom or good deeds. But solely because of God's love and grace.

### **Some words of assurance**

Hell can be a scary concept. It can be easy to think sometimes that we're in danger of "slipping" into hell, through unconfessed sin, or mucking up somewhere along the line. At these times it's good to be reminded of God's strong promises of life and salvation. Let me encourage you to read these promises of God when hell seems most scary, and be confident in God's grace to you, that through Jesus, your future is life with God, and not hell.

Mark 10:29-30

John 6:37-40

John 11:25-26

Luke 23:42-43

1 John 1:9

Revelation 21:1-5

### **Further reading**

*Mere Christianity* and *The Problem of Pain* by C.S. Lewis (copies in the church office you can borrow)

"7 Truths about hell": <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/7-truths-about-hell/>