

What Jesus Taught Concerning Hell and Eternal Punishment

What is hell? Is it for real? Grace Chapel affirms that Scripture teaches the reality of a place of conscious, eternal torment away from the presence of God called variously, hell, eternal punishment, eternal fire, outer darkness, the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, etc. It is as real and as eternal as the place called Heaven. In Matthew 25:31–46, we have from the lips of Jesus His sobering declaration that this place of eternal punishment (hell) is just as real as eternal life.

31“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His glorious throne. 32All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left. 34“Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35For 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, 36I needed clothes and you clothed Me, I was sick and you looked after Me, I was in prison and you came to visit Me.’ 37“Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You something to drink?’ 38When did we see You a stranger and invite You in, or needing clothes and clothe You?’ 39When did we see You sick or in prison and go to visit You?’ 40“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine, you did for Me.’ 41“Then He will say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42For I was hungry and you gave Me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite Me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe Me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after Me.’ 44“They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help You?’ 45“He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for Me.’ 46“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” (NIV)

As we have seen, this place was originally ‘prepared for the devil and his angels’ but will also be the destiny for all those whose deeds are evil. Since all have sinned, all mankind are bound for this awful place of torment unless they respond in faith to the Good News that the penalty has been paid by the death of a Substitute—Jesus Christ—the perfect Lamb of God. (Romans 3:23 ‘for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;’ Romans 6:23 ‘For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord;’ Romans 5:8 ‘But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us;’ Ephesians 2:8–9 ‘For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast;’ John 1:29 ‘The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world;’ 1 Corinthians 5:7b ‘Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.’)

So, as we saw in Matthew 25, if hell does not exist, then neither does Heaven, for Jesus taught them as the only two possible eternal destinies for mankind. And if Heaven does not exist, then what does the resurrection accomplish? (1 Corinthians 15:16–17 ‘For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.’)

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What about Heaven? Grace Chapel, therefore, affirms that Scripture likewise teaches the reality of a place of eternal blessedness in the presence of God and His angels called Heaven. It is also then the abode of those persons who have trusted in Jesus Christ, the One who has paid for their sins by the blood of His cross, has been raised from the dead for their justification, and has reconciled them to God the Father, whose infinite holiness has been offended by our sin. In 1 Corinthians 15:3–7, we have these words:

³For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵and that He appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. ⁶After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.

Colossians 1:20 adds, *'and through Him [the Son of God] to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in Heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.'*

Isn't eternal punishment overkill? Grace Chapel denies that hell is only a temporary punishment. Some have offered defective assertions that a temporal hell is more in line with the heart of the God whose love requires justice to fit the punishment with the crime than a place of unending agony as the punishment for sin committed over the course of a finite lifetime. Such assertions assume a god whose holiness is bounded by the same temporal and spatial limitations that characterize mankind. On the contrary, the infinite holiness of God must require an infinite penalty for any offending sin. What is more, can the temporary punishment of any mere man in hell ever equal the infinite sacrifice of the righteous Son of God? Not once does Scripture ever intimate that hell is anything but permanent.

Wouldn't a merciful God give us a second chance to repent once we realize how bad hell is? Grace Chapel denies any implication that hell is a place where sinners who rejected the Son of God in life will have a second chance to repent after we die. Further, after death, no one will ever have any desire or opportunity to move from hell to Heaven. (Hebrews 9:27 *'People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,'* Luke 16:26 *'between us [in Heaven] and you [in hell] a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'*)

Why is hell so awful and why does it last forever? Grace Chapel affirms that our sin against God's infinite holiness demands an infinite penalty. This is why hell is a place of eternal torment and is also why only the infinite sacrifice of Jesus' death could atone for sin. Grace Chapel also denies any statement or implication that those who reject God or His Son, Jesus Christ, are not sent to hell for eternity. Jesus described the reality of the eternal torment of hell in terms as plain as His description of the reality of the eternal blessedness of Heaven (See Matthew 25:31–46 above).

Isn't hell and eternal punishment just a figure of speech? Grace Chapel affirms that hell is a place of conscious torment that is sometimes called flames, outer darkness, or a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. Since hell is also eternal, these flames are not normal combustion as we know it, nor can the pain be

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merely physical. Jesus told a story about a rich man who was in hell. He described this man as being in torment and agony in the flames, and yet expressed concern, speaking to Abraham, who was in Heaven, about his unbelieving brothers who were still alive but destined to join him in torment unless they repented. This man oddly did not ask for release from hell, but rather asked that Lazarus, who was in Heaven with Abraham, come to him to relieve his pain with a drop of water. The implication is that the rich man, having rejected God in life, continued to reject His presence even after death. Further, the rich man implied that God had not done enough to convince him to repent in life, but that if Lazarus returned from the dead and spoke to his brothers, the miracle of his appearance would bring about their repentance. Abraham indicated that this would not bring about the brothers repentance anymore than the testimony of the Bible already could.

19“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 20At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’ 25But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. 26And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’ 27He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, 28for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ 29Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’ 30‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ 31He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”
(Luke 16:19–31)

Whether this passage passes muster as a parable (as many orthodox scholars assert) or not, Jesus’ teaching points regarding the terrible everlasting plight of this man remain undiluted in light of other passages in Matthew and Mark that also affirm the reality of the same terrible features mentioned here. (Matthew 5:22)

‘But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell;’ Matthew 5:29–30 ‘If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell;’ 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;’ Matthew 18:8–9 ‘If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better

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for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell; Mark 9:43, 45, 47–48 ‘If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out ... And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. . . . And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the Kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where “the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched.”)

Is Jesus really the only way to avoid hell? Grace Chapel affirms that Jesus Christ is the only way to Heaven and thus the only way to avoid hell (1 Timothy 2:5–6 ‘For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time;’ John 14:6 Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me;’ Acts 4:12 ‘Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under Heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.’)

How can we enjoy Heaven knowing that loved ones are in hell? Grace Chapel denies additionally that any knowledge of persons being currently in torment in hell shall so disturb those in Heaven that it would destroy the blessings of eternal life, or that the existence of anyone suffering in hell is incompatible with the bliss of Heaven. It is God Himself who shall wipe away every tear (Revelation 21:4 ‘[In Heaven,] He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’)

Since we are finite creatures, wouldn’t we just cease to exist once we die unless we received eternal life? Grace Chapel affirms that man has been created in God’s image by means of which he shall exist forever (Genesis 1:27 ‘God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them;’ Genesis 2:7 ‘Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.’) Further, by his own choice, man will live either in the presence of God or away from Him forever. This life with God forever is often referred to as “eternal life” in Scripture and begins immediately upon trusting in Jesus. (John 5:24 ‘Very truly I tell you, whoever hears My Word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.’) But, if the resurrection is false, then we are still in our sins and our faith is in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:16–17, ‘For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.’) Those who choose to reject God will also continue to exist eternally apart from God who is the source of life. This abnormal existence is often referred to as the “second death,” the agony of which can hardly be imagined for beings who were created to live in an eternal relationship with God. Since the Scriptures say nothing about annihilation but plenty about Heaven and hell and the destiny of all men, Grace Chapel denies that God would ever annihilate or cause any man to cease to exist who has rejected Him or His Son.

¹¹Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from His presence, and there was no place for them. ¹²And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according

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to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. ¹⁴Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.
(Revelation 20:11–15).

If this is so, how can the Gospel be called Good News? While this doctrine of eternal punishment is terrible in its scope, the Good News is made all the more awesome in that it answers every question as to its necessity as well as to its breadth. It is no wonder that Christians ought to be joyous in light of the ‘severe mercy’ they have obtained by faith in the Holy One of God. (Romans 11:22 ‘Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in His kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.’ KJV has ‘Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in His goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.’)

All Scripture quotations are from the NIV except as noted otherwise. Helpful resources include *Hell Under Fire* by Christopher Morgan & Robert Peterson, Eds.; Chapter 9 of *If God, Why Evil?* by Norman F. Geisler; and *Erasing Hell: What God Said About Eternity, and the Things We've Made Up* by Francis Chan & Preston Sprinkle.