

# ON HELL AND FINAL JUDGMENT

---

Dr. David McDonald

## INTRO

This paper is comprised of three sermons given on one Sunday at Westwinds Community Church during the Cue. They are about Hell. Given that our overarching emphasis at Westwinds is on grace, we felt like it was appropriate – given the significant amount of biblical teaching on judgment and the afterlife – to spend at least one Sunday unpacking the other side of the equation.

Up until this point we've been all carrot and no stick, so to speak.

We have no plans to completely change our orientation, but out of devotion to Christ and the clear teachings of Scripture we do want to make sure we teach both sides of the story.

This paper, then, is a summary of the biblical doctrine of Hell and Final Judgment. Please don't pass it around. Don't give it to others in hopes of scaring them into becoming Christians. Don't use this as leverage to get others to feel guilty or do what you want them to do. Instead, read and study this for yourself. Pray and invite the Spirit to change you. Open your heart to God more fully and more sincerely.

Stay right with Christ, and stay out of Hell.

It's bad there.

## WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT HELL?

Five or six weeks ago I started feeling this nudge that maybe Hell was a topic we should investigate further at the Winds. At the time I recognized this as a prompting from the Spirit because I'm not personally all that keen on the doctrine of Hell, nor do I particularly enjoy thinking about how to introduce the topic of Hell to people that I love. However, once I began my study on the topic I was convicted and embarrassed by precisely how much there is in the Bible on Hell. Since I am deeply concerned with being a faithful student and teacher of the biblical text, I feel compelled to – perhaps for this one time only – spend a little time teaching on Hell and why it is an issue of some significance for us today.

A church like ours tends toward either indifference or oblivion when it comes to Hell. We don't really think about it, and because we don't really think about it we tend not to really care that much about it either. Yet, if we're going to be faithful followers of Jesus and students of the Scriptures, we ought to know what the Bible actually says about our final judgment and the alternative to eternal life with Christ in new creation.

This is my real problem with Christians: They say they believe in Hell, but they never talk about it. You've got to really hate someone to believe in Hell and never tell them it's there or how to avoid it. I think Christians hate me, because they've never warned me about Hell.

**Penn Jillete, magician**

There are four words in the Bible used to describe Hell— one Hebrew word (*Sheol*), three Greek words (*Hades*, *Gehenna*, *Tartarus*). At first, these four terms might seem contradictory, but – in reality – they are easily harmonized. Part of this harmonization process is the realization that Hell is a very complicated issue. We should be mindful of this whenever we are tempted to trivialize the ultimate fate of humanity or the judgment of God.

First, in the Old Testament the only word that's used to describe Hell is the Hebrew word *Sheol*, which also means "the grave." For example, in Deuteronomy 30.19, *Sheol* is used synonymously with death:

*Brought low, you will speak from the ground; your speech will mumble out of the dust. Your voice will come ghostlike from the earth; out of the dust your speech will whisper.*

From this passage, and many others, we come to understand that *Sheol* didn't just mean "death" or "the grave" or even "Hell" exclusively, but a kind of deathlessness, emptiness, and misery.

*Sheol* is not just a place, it's a state of being that you can enter now as well as once you've died if your relationship with God isn't right or if you've been unfaithful to the people around you.

Listen to what I'm saying. Our first understanding of Hell isn't so much about torment and brimstone, but about misery and sadness. It's about living like a specter, a ghost, without hope or substance, flitting here and there about the world. That's what the afterlife will be like if you died and your relationship with God and others is out of whack. That's life now before you die if your relationships are out of whack.

Think about it this way: If you die miserably, *Sheol* is the extrapolation of that misery for all eternity—sadness, heartache, emptiness, and isolation.

In our contemporary context, we use images like *Sheol* to describe misery in this life. Think about some of our more common colloquialisms:

*... you look like death warmed over*  
*... you smell like you've got one foot in the grave*  
*... you are so dead when she finds out what you've done*

The ways in which we use these colloquialisms are similar to the ways our spiritual ancestors used *Sheol* and, later, *Hades* – which is the second word in Scripture used to define Hell. In the New Testament, *Hades* is the place where the wicked go after they've died but before they're judged.

Jesus references *Hades* several times, most notably in Matthew 16:18:

*I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.*

*Hades* is the Greek version of *Sheol*, but only as it concerns the afterlife. Whereas *Sheol* is something you could experience now and after your death (i.e.

both a state of being and a place of deathlessness), *Hades* is only a place in the afterlife (or perhaps more accurately, in the afterdeath).

The third, and arguably most important, word used to describe Hell is *Gehenna*. Jesus, by the way, teaches about Hell more than anybody else. In fact, most of our understanding of Hell comes almost exclusively from the teachings of Jesus, and Jesus' preferred understanding of Hell is defined by his use of *Gehenna*.

The word had some significance, because *Gehenna* was the local garbage dump outside of Jerusalem. *Gehenna* was a stinky, filthy, reeking, rotting place known as the Valley of Ben-Hinnom.

The Valley of Ben-Hinnom had a very dark history. In 2 Kings 23, for example, we read that this was where child sacrifices were offered to the pagan god Molech. Other human sacrifices were offered there. This place was anathema, to be avoided at all costs, fit only for refuse. It was a place of condemnation.

In our contemporary context, the best (and still woefully inadequate) comparison would be like saying Hell is Auschwitz, or – more locally and inadequately – 8 Mile.

Jesus says that to be separated from God, to willfully choose to reject Him, to disavow yourself of the life God wants you to have, is to choose to live in the garbage, in Auschwitz, in *Gehenna*. What goes there is the garbage of our sin, and if we choose not to let go of our sin, we will perish with it.

It is important to recognize that *Gehenna* is the exact opposite of the Garden of Eden. Remember, God's original intent for His creation was a world of beauty and goodness, with harmony between the created order and the creator. Over time, we have taken that beautiful and good creation and destroyed it through violence and selfishness.

God made Eden, we have made *Gehenna*.

God wants to restore Eden in the New Creation that Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 15 (and Isaiah talks about in Isaiah 65 and 66), but if we refuse to cooperate with God in His project of New Creation, we will find ourselves in the eternal refuse of *Gehenna*.

He is bringing heaven to earth. We are resisting heaven-on-earth and so we will spend eternity in Hell unless we repent.

Jesus sets up these polar opposites to let us understand the things we do now, the choices we make now, the actions we take now, are always taking us one step closer to new life and new creation or to Hell, the stinking, festering, garbage dump of eternity.

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 10.28**

The last image we get of Hell comes from the Book of Peter and it's the "place of torment," known as *Tartarus* in Greco-Roman mythology. In 2 Peter 2:4, Peter says:

*For God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into Hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment.*

There are people who sometimes make the mistake of thinking that Hell is *just* separation from God. In their minds, this isn't really such a bad thing; after all, we all experience a little separation in the here and now, so what's a little separation for eternity?

The difference, of course, is that the separation we experience now is limited in degree and duration. We don't now experience full separation from God – for, even if we are separated from Him, others are not and we get a kind of spill-over benefit from their intimacy with God. And we still have now the potential for reconciliation – meaning, it doesn't have to last for eternity since we could choose to embrace God and allow that separation to evaporate.

But ultimate, eschatological separation from God would be much worse than what we now experience because we would have no protection whatsoever –no spillover effect – and this final separation would have no possibility of ceasing.

Given all of this, there are three things I want you to remember:

1. The clear emphasis of the Scriptures is not on Hell or death. It's on new life and that life more abundantly. When you read the Bible cover to cover, when you study the Scriptures, you realize the emphasis of the

Bible is on how to live well and how to enjoy living in the presence of God.

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

**John 10.10**

Even though we're touching on Hell, please don't anybody get excited about it. The Bible spends far more time on, and is far more specific about, what good life looks like rather than bad life. It's far more explicit about what heaven, the new heaven, and the new earth are like than about what Hell is like. So our emphasis should be on living and living well.

2. But that doesn't mean we can completely ignore what the Bible says about death and judgment. Death and judgment are a pretty significant theme, not the main theme, not the dominant theme, but a significant theme in the Scriptures and we need to take them seriously.

Let me give you one Scripture from John 5:25-29 that will bring this home. These are pretty harsh words from Jesus himself and they ought to disturb us just a little bit. Jesus says:

*Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so He has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And He has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.*

Some translations say, "Those who have done what is good will rise to everlasting life and those who have done what is evil will rise to everlasting torment."

One of the things about Hell we often forget is that Hell is physical. Just as people who love and embrace Jesus Christ, who choose to be with him, are given new bodies at the resurrection, so too are those who hate

Jesus and reject God are given new bodies at the resurrection. However, those who choose the side of life, who choose to embrace God biblically, are said to inherit life – the blessings of the Kingdom, peace with God, harmony in this world and in the next; whereas those who reject life, reject God, are in store for all kinds of bad things, to which this text synonymously refers as judgment, condemnation, torment, and punishment.

3. Because Scripture teaches on both life and judgment, we must find ways to avoid “death” in the here and now. We have to find a way to embrace the life of Jesus now, so that when we are in fact appraised for all of the things we’ve done in this life, and we are evaluated on our allegiance, we will have taken whatever steps necessary to avoid what the Book of Revelation calls “second death.”

We need to be very, very careful about the way we live now so we don’t embrace or encourage any kind of spiritual death. Have you ever heard anybody use the colloquialism “I just feel dead spiritually” or “I feel dead inside” or “I feel like I’m dying?” Those words speak to the reality of Sheol, they speak to the reality of Hell on earth and they intimate the reality of Hell to come. We’ve got to do whatever we can to avoid being spiritual dead. We’ve got to avoid the death of our eternal selves.

Spiritual death has four key qualities in the Bible.

**I. To be spiritually dead is to stop trying.** You know somebody’s marriage is doomed when one of them just checks out and stops trying to control their tongue, to control their behavior, to control their sexuality. Their marriage is over. To be spiritually dead is to stop trying.

People say, “I have such a hard time praying and reading the Bible and understanding it.” Who said it was going to be easy? What spam filter are you using that you didn’t get the memo saying you’re going to fight through some stuff? The Bible is not a coloring book. It’s going to be hard to understand at some point, but if you want to be spiritually alive, you’re going to keep trying even though you don’t feel like it, even though it’s hard. If you want to stay married, you’re going to keep trying even though it’s hard.

**II. To be spiritually dead is stop feeling.** We don't have as much control over our feelings, so they are like a litmus test. When we ask ourselves, "Am I spiritually vibrant?" we can usually tell by our feelings. Am I in love with my wife still? You can usually tell by your feelings. If you even have to ask yourself that question, it might be a little moment of concern for you.

**III. To be spiritually dead is to stop thinking.** If you're not wrestling and engaging with your faith, you're dying spiritually. My dad used to tell me when I was a kid, "Son, everyday God is asking us to make a decision." I never understood what that meant. I thought I already made the decision. I prayed the prayer, I signed up for Team Jesus and I'm good. I thought there was only one decision I had to make. My dad in his wisdom understood that, yes, that's the big decision you have to make, but every day. In fact, God is asking you every moment to make other decisions:

To choose him,  
To choose life and not choose death,  
To choose Eden and not choose Gehenna,  
To choose to live in a blessed existence now,  
To welcome the Kingdom now,  
instead of being stuck in Sheol or some  
kind of Hell on earth, some miserable  
existence, some dying marriage, some  
thoughtless work.

To be spiritually dead is to turn your mind off and believe that whatever you don't know doesn't really matter. Whether you've been following Jesus ten minutes or ten thousand years there is more.

**IV. To be spiritually dead is to stop repenting.** We are so rightfully afraid of sin. We should understand sin is bad because it is a violation against God's holiness. But because we recognize sin is bad, we often lie about whether or not we sin. We justify it by saying, "That wasn't really a sin though." "I told my wife I hate her, but that's really not that bad; God understands." No,

that's a sin. "I cheat on my income tax; that's not really a sin."  
Yes, it is. I get why you did it, but it's still a sin.

We have to find recognize there's a lot of sin in our lives and that it's all really bad. We need to repent of all of it and turn away from the way we would otherwise live apart from the Spirit of God and turn toward the way Christ wants us to live.

What have you done that you have not repented of? What have you thought that you have not repented of? There's something about coming to terms with your own sin that's liberating, that's life-giving. As you get rid of that garbage, as you confess it to the Spirit, he breathes new life into you and you become spiritually more alive.

The bottom line is that *what you do right now really matters*, because:

God gives us the opportunity to choose life,  
Jesus wants us to choose life,  
We're asked to make a decision about life,  
We need a posture of repentance in order to experience abundant life.

The alternative to life is not just one death, but:  
A second death,  
A punishing death,  
An empty death,  
An extrapolated death,  
A burning death.

We've got to understand the way we live now has either eternal consequence or eternal significance.

Everything you do matters.

What we need to do in the face of these huge and weighty issues is take some very simple advice from Jesus. In Mark 1:15 Jesus begins to preach the Kingdom of God with two very simple words—repent and believe.

Repent — Jesus says change the way you live. Turn away from the death life and turn towards the God life. Turn away from Gehenna and turn toward Eden. Turn away from death and judgment and turn toward more abundant life.

Change the way you live from living for yourself to living for the King of the Universe.

Believe — you've heard the expression that someone's actions belie their intent. That's really what belief is. The way you live gives evidence to what you think way down in your heart. So, if you're really proud of one of your children, they're going to know it, because there will be evidence to support what you believe about your son or your daughter.

If you're proud of them, you're going to:

- Have pictures of them,
- Spend time with them,
- Tell them,
- Love them,
- Hug them,
- Edify them,
- Encourage them.

Your actions will belie your beliefs.

When we talk about what it means to believe in Jesus, we talk about the fact that our lives give evidence. People look at you and recognize you are living not for yourself, but you are living with the very sincere belief that there is a clear choice in every moment between the way of life and the way of death, between the way of living for God and the way of living for yourself.

I hate to boil a very large and complicated issue down to something very, very simple, but I'm going to take my nods and tips from King Jesus here. We can get lost for at least another four hours of teaching on Hell. But, the real issue is not figuring out what the furniture or the temperature is going to be in Hell. The real issue is figuring out what to do with the life God has made available to us. Life—made available through repentance and belief.

## THREE COMMON ERRORS ABOUT HELL

In a church like ours, there are three common errors about Hell.

1. People like us tend to think there is no Hell.
2. People like us tend to think if there is a Hell, nobody goes there (universalism).
3. People like us tend to think if there is a Hell and some people go there, it's probably not that bad (annihilationism).

I'd like to deal with each of these three issues in turn, examining the biblical teaching on Hell.

### **The first error**

First, let's talk about the fact that Hell does, in fact, exist according not only to our Scriptures (in general), but to the teachings of Jesus (specifically). This, by the way, blew my mind. I didn't know that Jesus talked about Hell more than anybody else. Half of Jesus' parables have to do with Hell. Thirteen percent of Jesus' teachings are specifically about Hell. With the exception of money, Jesus talks more about Hell than any other topic.

Let's begin in Matthew 13:41-43 with Jesus' teachings concerning the final judgment and Hell:

*The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*

This makes it pretty clear: we cannot deny that the Bible refers to a Hell. We cannot deny the fact that Jesus preached about the final judgment and that there would be those who to Hell.

So much for error number one.

### **The second error**

The second major error for people like us is we think nobody goes there. We think eventually everybody ends up singing "kum ba ya" in heaven, BYO harp and halo.

But, Jesus speaks of a coming judgment, a dividing time that will precede the full manifestation of his Kingdom.

That means:

Before God recreates the world,  
Before things are here as God wants them,  
Before God's presence saturates us,  
Before we ever get to be with him in the realm called heaven,  
there will be a judgment,  
a dividing, an adjudication.

At this judgment people will be separated into two groups  
sons of the Kingdom and sons of the evil one (Mt 13.38)  
wise and foolish (Mt 7.24-27)  
sheep and goats (Mt 25.31-46)  
those who enter life and those thrown in Hell (Mk 9.42-48)

The judgment will be based on works (Mt 7.21-23, 12.36-37, 25.31-46), but the outcome will be based on relationship (Lk 12.8-9). Everyone will be judged (Heb 4.13, 13.17, 1Peter 4.5-6). Christians are not exempt from the final judgment precisely because its purpose is to show, by the evidence of people's deeds, whether or not they are in relationship to Christ (cf Gal 5.19-21, 1 Cor 6.9-10, Eph 5.5). For those without Christ, their works - however insufficient - will be the criterion upon which they are judged and condemned.

Those who sow the wind shall reap the whirlwind  
**Hosea 8.7**

Sometimes people will say, "Yes, we're all sinners but God throws our sins into the Sea of Forgetfulness." Actually, that's not in the Bible. That's a lyric from a hymn—a good lyric, a nice bit of imagination, but not biblical theology. In the Bible, it's clear that we are appraised by the way we live.

But the outcome, again, is based on grace. It's based on our relationship with Jesus. As I'm fond of saying, "It's not what you know, it's who you know." You pick Team Jesus, you give your life to Jesus, you do everything you can to make Jesus proud, and you're good. But you'd better give your life to Jesus, do everything you can to make him proud and make sure the way you live lines up

with what you say you believe, because there's going to be that awful moment in TiVo heaven.

The sad truth, my friends, is that there is a Hell and not everybody escapes it. The only way to escape it is not by being moral. Behavior is only the evidence that you are connected to the author of life, Jesus Christ.

### **The third error**

The third common error that people like us make is that we think if there is a Hell and somebody goes there, it's probably not that bad.

I wish that were true. However, I've been wide-eyed over the last month while studying Hell because of how specific the Scriptures are about how bad Hell is.

Those in Hell will suffer intense and excruciating pain:

- i. This will be *both emotional and spiritual* (John 5.28-29)
- ii. Hell is a fate far worse than being thrown into the sea (Mark 9.42)
- iii. *Worse than being maimed* (Mt 5.29-30)
- iv. *This suffering never ends* (Mt 25.31)
- v. Those in Hell will be *thrown into a lake of fire* (Mt 3.12)
- vi. There will be *weeping and gnashing of teeth* (Mt 8.12, 13.42)
- vii. *The suffering is proportional to the wickedness of someone's deeds while alive* (Romans 5.2-8)

While it's popular to acknowledge that the way the Bible talks about Hell is often by employing metaphors, that doesn't mean it's not going to be bad. The very fact that the biblical writers talk about it as a place of:

Fire,  
Judgment,  
Destruction,  
Darkness  
Isolation,  
Being cut off,  
Where you're being eaten by worms for eternity,

doesn't make it less bad just because those are metaphors. The fact they use so many metaphors and they are so explicit and terrifying ought to make us say, "These people don't have good language for how bad Hell really is."

Let's read from Luke 16:19-31. This is really a peculiar piece of the Bible where Jesus tells a story about a man in Hell:

*There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.*

*The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So 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.'*

*But 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. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'*

*He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'*

*Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'*

*'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'*

*He 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.'*

I'm reading this puzzling piece of Scripture primarily just to show that the rich guy doesn't want to be where he is. He's tormented, he's in agony. He's not only in physical agony, he's in emotional agony for two reasons. The first is personal. He says, "Look at what I did with the rest of my life. Look at how I treated Lazarus. Look at the mistakes I've made. Look at all the different things I could have done with my wealth, with my life, with my influence." He's in

emotional torment as the full realization of the way he lived—the fraudulence, corruption, and selfishness—comes crashing down on him.

But the second reason for his emotional agony is about his loved ones. He says, “I’ve got five brothers and you’ve got to go tell them.”

What does Abraham say?

“No.”

He says, “Why not.”

“They’ve got everything they need.”

“Hey, but they’re not paying attention to it.”

“Well, they’re not going to listen to me or Lazarus or Jesus. They’re just not going to listen.”

Are *you* hearing this? People like us think there is no Hell, and if there is, no one goes there, or if they go there, it’s not so bad.

The truth is there is a Hell, some folks are going to end up there, and it’s bad.

The point?

Make sure you don’t go there.

We have to come to terms with the fact that our few years on this earth are not all the years there will be. This life isn’t the only thing that matters. Something endures.

At the same time, we must keep from falling in love with death and judgment, as some other Christians have done. We’ve got to keep ourselves from fantasizing about who goes to Hell and whether or not we get to be part of sending them there.

What I’m really hoping for in my own Spirit and for our church is that we go home, fall on our knees, and say, “Oh, Jesus, forgive me for not taking you seriously enough, for not taking my life seriously enough, for not thanking you enough for your gracious and atoning sacrifice. You don’t want me to go to Hell so much you were willing to die to keep me out of it. You threw yourself in front of the bus for me. Please forgive me for not acknowledging that.”

We've got to keep ourselves from falling in love with the sadism of final judgment. Instead, while not dismissing it, we need to focus our efforts and our spirits on thanking God for the grace he has extended to us.

One final thing, and I want to make this real clear: We need to remember that God *doesn't want* anybody to go to Hell. According to 2 Peter 3:9, "He's not willing that any should perish." Again, Jesus gave up his own life to keep people from experiencing death, the second death, judgment, isolation, and fire. God is not the punisher—he revealed himself to us, instead, as the self-sacrificing hero Jesus Christ so we should have an appropriate sense of gratitude to him for saving us from that.

So, what does this mean in real life? There are a couple of Scriptures that are often quoted at this point. They're good Scriptures, justifiable Scriptures:

For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him would not perish but have eternal life. For I did not come into the world to condemn it or to judge, but to save it.

**John 3:16-17**

What does this mean for you? Again, as I mentioned earlier, the way you get away from Hell—and not only the Hell that comes later on, but the all the Hell and the garbage and the crap that assails us and sticks to us in this life—is by embracing Jesus, by holding fast to him, by knowing and loving him, by holding the precious sacred heart of Jesus in your mind and in your will and in your spirit.

There's a very famous Scripture in Romans 10:9 that coincides with and further develops John 3:16:

*If you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

What does that mean? "Confess with your mouth" means you need to speak about the fact that Jesus is Lord, not in some vague way, but that he's Lord of your life.

Have you ever stopped to consider how often we say the word Jesus around Westwinds, instead of God or Lord? We're specific about using the word Jesus. We're specific about using the Father. We're specific about using the Spirit. It's because we want everyone to know specifically who is in charge. It's King Jesus; Jesus: the Senior Pastor; Jesus: the Leader; Jesus: the President; it's Jesus.

When you talk about religion or spiritual things, the afterlife or the invisible world, you've got to be sure you're confessing that Jesus is in control of you. When you make decisions with your spouse about how you're going to spend your money, you need to confess that Jesus has a place in the conversation. In fact, he has first place in that conversation. When you're talking with your children about why you do the things you do and about why the things you do are important, you'd better confess that the reason they're important is Jesus. It's Jesus. It's not like some little prayer you say. It's like a river just coming out of you. That's the confession that Jesus is Lord. He's Lord over everything.

Why are we preaching about Hell today? It's Jesus. He talked about it. He chastises us for neglecting it. It's Jesus.

Isn't that hilarious? Not just believe in your heart that he's real, not just believe in your heart that there is a God, not just believe in your heart that Jesus is important somehow or even that Jesus is Lord, but believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, that the supernatural power of God Almighty, the Being above Whom there is no other, conquered death.

Jesus—more terrifying, more powerful, more astronomically magnificent than Hell or death. What do you believe? Believe the Author of life is alive and at work in you like He was alive and at work raising Jesus from the dead.

Confess and believe and you will be saved. What is the promise of salvation? Is it that you won't go to Hell? Yes, that's part of it. Is it that you get to go to heaven? Yes, that's part of it too. But, let's be crystal clear about what heaven is. The New Testament is explicit that heaven is not some blissful, wispy, ghostlike, spectral existence, but it's the promise of God:

Healing the world,  
Restoring everything that's been broken,  
Healing Jackson County,  
Healing Michigan,  
Putting our city back together again,  
Putting you back together again.

Not just the promise of heaven, but the promise of the new heaven and the new earth and new bodies. In heaven everything wrong gets made right and things are then as God wants them to be, because he is *completely* in charge, *completely* present.

Salvation is the promise of heaven, the new heaven, which is this world remade and your body restored. Salvation isn't just some future thing. We know from the Scriptures and from Christian history that that word salvation is better translated "wholeness" or "healing."

You will be whole not just then, but now.

When you confess that Jesus is Lord to your children, something happens in your relationships and your family. When you confess that Jesus is Lord over home, something happens in your household, something happens in your job, something happens in your marriage, something happens in your heart: you are being saved, you are being healed.

When you believe God raised Jesus from the dead, you're not just saved for later, you're saved now because you know that no matter what problem you're facing, no matter what difficulty you're facing, you know that God is greater than whatever you're facing. Salvation is a promise for later, but it's also being realized now, right now, right this very moment.

To get to that point is the real value of talking about Hell. God offers you life and life more abundant. Take it now; take it right now.

Confess. Believe.

## HOW COULD GOD SEND ANYONE TO HELL?

If God is good and loving and values his creation, how can he justify sending anyone there?

I suppose we want to just beg the question a little bit, because God doesn't really send anyone to Hell. People choose Hell. In fact, in 2 Peter 3:9 we're told God doesn't want anyone to go to Hell. His desire is for everyone to experience the free gift of his love, his grace.

Romans 5 tells us that Jesus did everything possible to keep people out of Hell including dying on the cross in our place, becoming sin for us so we would never have to suffer punishment for all the stupid stuff we've done.

So, does God send anyone to Hell? No. Emphatically, no. But there is still a Hell and people still end up there. What are we supposed to do with that?

### **It's all about choice**

C. S. Lewis, the philosopher and writer, wrote a fantastic book on this topic called *The Great Divorce*. In the book Lewis paints a picture that the only people who are ever in Hell are the people who choose to go there. It's a very biblically consistent picture.

God comes to each of us in the person of Jesus Christ, through the power and presence of His Holy Spirit, and says, "I want you to have the best life imaginable. I created you, I love you, I want you to have:

Love,  
Harmony,  
Fulfillment,  
Satisfaction,  
Pleasure,  
Untold wonder,  
Joy,  
Exuberance,  
and Expectation

in this life and in the life to come."

This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.

## **Deuteronomy 30.19**

For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will.

### **John 5.21**

God offers life, but there's a condition attached: it only comes through Jesus, by the Spirit, submitting to the will of the Father. God says, "You get life by virtue of being connected to me. So choose life, choose me."

There's another choice... the choice of saying, "All that sounds cool, but I don't like the part where I have to get God in order to get all that other stuff. Because I don't want God, I'm willing to risk having or not having that abundant life on my own." There are really only two choices. By virtue of not choosing God we choose something else.

So, we might say that Hell is for those who persistently choose not-God, which is the same as persistently choosing other gods or choosing to be your own god.

It's actually quite difficult to get into Hell if we take the teaching of the Bible seriously. That doesn't mean that all kinds of people get into heaven by accident. It does mean you have to really choose to walk away from God. As Jesus said, "Whoever is not against us is for us" (Mark 9.40). You really have to pick not-him. You have to say "No" to God.

Hell, in many ways, is simply a matter of God giving His creatures what they want. If you don't want to live with God now, why you would want to live with God for all eternity? Biblically speaking, that's really what heaven is— it is the place where God is. Hell, in many ways, is the extrapolation of our selfishness, our desire to rule ourselves. It's that selfishness and that "No" to God extrapolated through all eternity.

God doesn't just get mad at a bunch of people and send down the holy sledge hammer to squish them and then scrape them off into the fireplace. In fact, Jesus tells this fantastic story about a master giving a banquet. This master puts on a fantastic feast and invites all the special people in the community to come. "Come," he says, "the feast is ready, prepared especially for you. Time to eat!" Nobody invited to the feast goes—they just don't show up. That's the picture Jesus gives about who gets into heaven and who doesn't.

The Kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.'

But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless.

Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie his hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

For many are invited, but few are chosen.

**Matthew 22.2-14**

God doesn't send anyone to Hell. C. S. Lewis also said, "In this life people do not choose God and in the next life they cannot any longer choose God." They choose something other than God. We find here the spiritual truth that we irreversibly become the decisions that we make. The decisions we make over time add up to something. We get stuck not only in a fate that seems undesirable to us later, but even in this life we get stuck living a life we don't want because we consistently and persistently choose not-God. We choose Option B. We choose something other than him.

This is what Paul is referring to in Romans 1:18 where he talks about the wrath of God being poured out over all humanity. That sounds a little harsh until we realize that God's "wrath" is simply God giving people what they want:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness... therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another... because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts... furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done... although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

**Romans 1.18,24,26,28,32**

So, if you're selfish, then the wrath of God for you looks like God letting you be as selfish a jerk as possible and suffering the full consequences of your selfishness.

If you're an adulterer, the wrath of God for you looks like God letting you sleep with whoever you want and suffer the full consequences of the children and the relationships involved.

If you've got a little problem with gambling, then the wrath of God for you looks like God letting you lose everything or be corrupted by everything you win.

So, when we talk about the wrath of God and mistakenly think God is out to punish everybody or get everybody, it is actually God no longer protecting everyone from the full measure of their actions. Hell, then, is the place where God no longer offers you protection. He takes his hands off and you suffer the full measure of consequences for your selfishness, your greed, your isolation, your horror, whatever.

### **Hell on earth**

Let me give you an example of what this looks like in real life. We had this old gal a few years ago, she was in her late eighties or nineties, who had been jilted as a young lady by her fiancée. To hear this old lady describe herself in her youth, she was the belle of the ball. She was engaged to this handsome young man and they were all set to be married, but in the process of their courtship her fiancée fell in

love with her sister. He decided to break off the engagement to marry the sister instead.

Sixty-five years later this old lady is living alone in a musty old apartment with a bunch of cats. There are pictures of herself in her beauty days all over the place. She's bitter and angry because she refuses to forgive her sister. She says, "For six decades they've been calling and asking for forgiveness and I won't give it to them. I won't even pick up the phone. I won't see them at Christmas. I won't see them at New Year's. I'm going to make them suffer for what they did to me."

Who do you think is really suffering in that instance?

The people who ended up together, who admittedly maybe didn't get off to the best start, but who have had children and a life and Christmas and Thanksgiving and feast days and presents and memories and home movies and Polaroid's together . . . are they suffering? Or was the old lady with her cats, surrounded by pictures of how beautiful she used to be, refusing to let go of her hatred and her bitterness?

That old lady is in Hell.

We've seen how the First Testament of the Bible used the word *Sheol* to describe Hell. It literally means "the grave" and the way you ended your life is the way you would spend eternity. So, if you ended your life on a trajectory of bitterness and misery and unforgiveness, then Hell for you was an eternity of bitterness and misery and unforgiveness.

In *The Great Divorce*, C. S. Lewis talks famously about the example of Napoleon Bonaparte being in the furthest, most remote region of Hell where no one can bother him. He doesn't have to see anyone else because the furthest most remote region of Hell is where Napoleon is unquestionably the emperor of everything. Everyone around him, which is to say no one, does exactly what he says. That's Hell—this phantom-like, spectral, empty existence where you get what you want for eternity. How very different is that to the picture Jesus gives in the Gospel of Matthew of a feast and a banquet where everybody is ready, where everyone is excited, where everyone is welcome, where everyone gets to eat their fill and be in the presence of God, in the presence of life.

Deuteronomy talks about choosing life, Jesus talks about the opportunity to have life and to have life more abundantly, God extends to us the promise of once again being unified with our creator and join the fullness of life. What a huge contrast to the other alternative, which is getting what we want so long as we don't have to be with God.

But Hell is not merely a place of rejecting God, and this is where Lewis gets it wrong. This is where I'm ashamed to say for most of my life I've been getting it wrong. Hell will hurt. There are two kinds of pain in Hell. There is the pain of loss, meaning at some point you're going to wake up to the fact that you've made a bad choice, or maybe a hundred and fifty thousand bad choices. There's the pain of sense, meaning everyone gets resurrected (John 5), both the just and the unjust, both the righteous and the wicked. There will be physical pain in Hell because the "resurrected unjust" will have physical bodies that will not be renewed but – instead – deteriorate over the eons of torment and disregard.

### **The pain of loss**

The pain of loss is like when you do something that hurts someone and you can't take it back. I had this girlfriend in eighth grade and, like most eighth grade boys, I was insensitive. I made a joke about her weight and when I saw her after we graduated high school, she reminded me about that comment and how it stayed with her. She had wrestled for years with low self-esteem and battled bulimia because of her inability to cope with the pressures that I (and others) had placed on her to be thin and pretty. It was then that I realized the things we say actually hurt people for a long time and there's no way to make it right.

In the movie *Crash* there's this terrifying situation in which an angry elderly gentleman goes to shoot a Hispanic deliveryman. He's mad at this guy because he thinks he broke into his store and stole a bunch of stuff. He didn't, but the elderly shopkeeper thinks he did. He drives up to this Hispanic deliveryman's house, takes out a pistol, and pulls the trigger just as the deliveryman's beautiful little daughter jumps into her daddy's arms and holds onto his neck to protect him. Thankfully, the shopkeeper didn't know the gun was full of blanks.

That feeling of finally getting revenge on the person who screwed you over, doing everything to spray his brains all over the lawn only to realize you just shot a kid—that's going to be Hell.

When you realize that when you told her she was fat, when you told him he was a bad father, when you said, "I'm not your son anymore," and you realize how much damage you did—that's Hell. That's the pain of loss.

### **The pain of sense**

The pain of sense, on the other hand, is physical pain. Hell in the Bible is described as being:

Fire (Mt 13.42)

Darkness (Mt 25.30)

Punishment (Rev 14.10-11)  
Exclusion from God's presence (Mt 7.23)  
Restlessness (Rev 14.11)  
Second death (Rev 2.1)  
Weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mt 13.42)

All of those things, by the way, are just metaphors and they're acknowledged as such, but because they're metaphors that doesn't mean they're not describing something horrible. People don't use metaphors when they could use just use plain language to describe something. The fact is we don't have language for how bad Hell is.

Somebody once said to me, "Yes, but God wouldn't just create a big torture chamber in Hell and torture people." I said, "No, I don't think he would. It seems like he's strongly opposed to violence. It seems very strange to me that God would set up a torture chamber and be after everybody." If it's true we all get resurrected, some to everlasting life and some to everlasting judgment, what do you think happens when all the bad people who have been resurrected live together? What kind of neighborhood will it be where Stalin, Hitler, and Napoleon get to play cards together after work?

Let's look at Matthew 25:31-46. This is Jesus describing the final judgment about who gets in and who gets out to heaven. The recognition of loss, the anguish and torment I've been talking about is best represented in this Scripture:

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'

Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will

answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.'

Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'

*And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*

**Matthew 25.31-46**

I want to stop there for just a moment. Notice, in contrast to what many of us loosely believe, that at the final judgment we are judged on our works, on the way we live, and by what we actually do. Remember that the outcome of our judgment according the Book of Romans and to Jesus' teaching later on in the Gospels, particularly in Luke 12, is based on God's grace and whether or not we are associated with Jesus. It's Jesus' grace that "gets us in" to heaven. But when the time comes for judgment, we are judged by what we do.

The purpose of that judgment is for us to show what it looks to be filled with the Spirit of Jesus. The way you treat your husband, the way you are at work, the way you treat your friends, the way you treat your children, is all going to matter and most of the time most of us don't think our little mistakes really add up to much.

So then, the question about whether or not God sends people to Hell is answered.

No, he doesn't send them to Hell. We choose Hell. And once we choose Hell, we quickly realize that it is a place of "everlasting punishment."

I'm saying this again here because nearly everyone's impression of how people end up in Hell is all wrong and I want to drive this point home. We choose Hell by choosing our selves over God. We choose Hell by choosing false gods over

the True One. We choose Hell by choosing not to be with God. Hell is the extrapolation of our selfishness, our sin, our pride, our violence, and that extrapolation of who we really are is bad, causing incredible emotional and physical suffering.

Remember, we are holistic beings comprised of spirit, mind, and body. These are all interconnected. Mental and emotional anguish – the realization of loss and the resulting weeping of gnashing – takes its toll in the here and now; there’s no reason to think that this same mental and emotional anguish will not take its toll later on. Even though we will receive new bodies, if those new bodies are resurrected into judgment (cf. John 5) we have to understand that they will be subject to the same “toll-taking” as the bodies we have now. Hell’s physical pain may largely result from the torment we suffer mentally and spiritually and be experienced as being bathed in fire.

### **Judgment of sin**

Some might say, “This all sounds a little impish or vindictive on God’s part, like he’s bloodthirsty and just itching for us to finally get what we deserve. Is this God’s bloody judgment on humanity?” No, it’s his bloody judgment on sin. God, in his justice and in his holiness and his righteousness, cannot abide sin at all.

We have the same sense of justice inside of us. If somebody told you a serial rapist was about to go free and move next door to your house, how would you feel? You would be infuriated because of your sense of justice. But because of the Fall and our own sin, our sense of justice is cracked up a bit; it’s not quite as properly put together as with Him.

God cannot abide our sin so he has to judge it. In order for the world to be the way God wants it be, in order for you to have the best life possible, to have life and life more abundantly, God has to get rid of sin. He has to judge it.

The only time we suffer God’s judgment of sin is when we refuse to let go of our sin. If we let go of our sin and take hold of the life God offers us in Christ Jesus through his Spirit, then we have nothing to be afraid of.

Recall that Jesus paints the picture of Hell as being like a burning garbage dump and he intends for sin to get tossed out and burned up with the trash. People worry: “Will I be burned up in judgment?” Only if you refuse to let go of your sin.

The fire of God’s judgment is a refining fire. It is a fire of purification – like the fire used to refine gold (cf. Malachi 3.2). We will all walk through fire. Some of

us will be refined by it, some of us will be destroyed by it. If we let go of our sin, God will destroy it. If we cling to our sin, we will be destroyed along with it. All of us that is not the gold of Jesus will get burned up in the fire of judgment.

### **The Way**

Just so you have something to hold onto, something to pull out of all of this, what I really want you to know about is not Hell, but life. I want you to believe that Jesus did not design you for Hell. He did not design you to be burned up, to be tormented, to be tortured now nor later. He designed you for life. He designed you for goodness. He designed you for relationship. He designed you for peace. He designed you for harmony. All the crap you go through right now in this life—the Hell on earth, the way you feel like Hell, when everything's shot to Hell—all of that is going to be fixed.

According to Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:15 and Romans 8, according to Isaiah 65 and 66, all the stuff that is wrong is going to be set right in the new creation, what we commonly refer to as heaven. I want you to know that there's something better in store. So, please:

- Trust in Jesus.
- Hold onto Jesus.
- Pick the team of Jesus.
- Accept the way of life Jesus taught us.
- Study the Bible.
- Listen to teachings.
- Fill yourself full of the teachings of the way of Jesus.

Even though it's going to be mean sacrifices, even though it's going to be hard, even though it's going to be counter-cultural in ways, you're never going to have to worry about Hell. Just live the way Jesus tells you to live.

Lastly, and most importantly, accept the help of Jesus, the guidance of Spirit of Jesus, and submit to the will of the Father. That's maybe a bunch of gobbledygook, and I don't have time to explain it here, but it just means that in every moment of every day say, "Lord, I want your will to be done in me now, so my will doesn't screw it up and I have to suffer consequences later."

## COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT HELL

### **What about Purgatory?**

Purgatory is an “in-between” state in Catholic theology meant to delineate the space between when we die and when we go to heaven. It is a condition in which the souls of Christians are made ready for heaven.

Evangelical Christians find the doctrine of purgatory suspicious for three reasons: [1] because it’s not found in the canon of the Scriptures, only in the apocrypha (specifically 2 Maccabees 12.41-16); [2] because the doctrine didn’t appear for almost 1100 years after Jesus left the earth; and [3] because purgatory depends upon special “revelation” given to the Catholic church during the Middle Ages. By appealing to the authority of the church at a time when it was selling indulgences to release souls from torment, this doctrine has no credible basis for belief among Protestants.

### **What about people who have never heard about Jesus—do they go to Hell?**

Jesus said “no one comes to the Father except through me,” meaning that there is only one way to escape Hell and enter Heaven: a relationship with Jesus.

However, just as Jesus is the only way to Heaven, we must understand that there are many ways to find Jesus. Some find Jesus through intellectual belief, some through dreams (like Pharaoh), some through visions (like Balaam), or prophecies or strange experiences.

We cannot overlook the creativity of God to get the gospel out. God wants people to be saved and is capable of revealing Himself to all in order for every single person to be given a justifiable opportunity to embrace their Creator.

### **What about babies? Do they go to Hell?**

This is a disturbing question that’s asked a lot, especially among people who grew up in very religious homes where there is a lot of anger and hellfire and brimstone kind of talk. If they lose a child, they get terrified that the baby is going to end up in hell.

Consider this, however: “Shall not the Judge of all the Earth do what is Just?” (Genesis 18.25).

Since we know God is good, and He is the Judge of all, we can be confident that God will not unfairly damn any soul – especially innocents or invalids – to eternal torment.

In 2 Samuel 12, we read about King David's son dying as an infant. It is a sad story, but in the midst of that sadness we read about David's assurance that he will see his child in the next life. David has this unshakeable confidence that he will be with his dead child in the presence of God.

Finally, we know that Jesus had a special concern for children. Jesus gathers the children to himself and said: "Suffer not the little children to come unto me" (Matthew 19.14).

If you know someone who has lost a child and they're worried about this (God forbid that you would ever be in that situation or that they would), you can give them all manner of comfort.

### **Is there a last chance for redemption at the time of our death?**

No. There is a spectacular responsibility on the way you live right now. Live now the way you want to live for eternity. If what you want ultimately is to be with God then, then you must begin to be with God now.

### **Is there anything wrong with "Last Rites?"**

Not necessarily. In fact, I think the idea of giving your life to God and committing your soul into His care with your dying breaths is a beautiful and sincere notion. Some people, however, use the Last Rites as a cop out. They plan to live like fools, rejecting God in this life, and then quickly beg for forgiveness at the end to sneak their way into God's good graces. In a case like this, which – sadly – is surprisingly common, we must ask ourselves how sincere our "last-minute" repentance truly is—if it is insincere, we risk Hell. Are you willing to risk an eternity in torment on a gamble like that?

### **Do you believe eternal positions are fixed at death forever more? Why or why not?**

The people who go to Hell are there because they don't want to be with God. The Scriptures really seem to indicate that once you are there in Hell, there is no way out.

## **I love God, but have made mistakes and still prospered. Am I going to Hell?**

That's such a sad, sad question. I, too, love God and I have made mistakes and still prospered. I make mistakes all the time. I get mad at my kids. I lose my cool. Ben jokingly said that it's never safe to take me to a conference of church leaders because it's like taking a Pit Bull to a playground... you're just waiting for an "incident" to occur.

I am riddled with sin and God has still prospered me. I feel so gracious, so grateful and thankful to God for the life I have. I don't think I've ever been happier. I don't think my family has ever been better. That's what we call grace—God's grace for me, loving me in spite of my sin that while I was still a sinner, Christ died for me. He died just because he loved me in all my crap and all my garbage. He would die again tomorrow for me, for the person I am now. Whatever good things in this life I enjoy, I enjoy because of his grace, his common grace poured out to all humanity.

*The last question I would separate from the previous statement.*

"Am I going to Hell?"

I don't know. I don't even know who you are. Even if I knew you, I wouldn't know if you're going to Hell. The question is: Are you right with Jesus? If you make mistakes, do you repent? Do you thank God for his grace? Is your life oriented towards Jesus, to make him Lord, to confess that he is Lord? Do your actions belie your belief that he is, in fact, raised from the dead and God is, in fact, at work in you?

## **What does it mean that Christ descended into Hell?**

Jesus proved his love for us by descending into Hell – a theological bit of pizzazz rarely talked about, though ultimately very significant.

Here it is in a nutshell:

We believe that Jesus died and descended into the depths of Hades (Ephesians 4.8-10). He did not suffer, for his suffering was completed on the cross (John 19.30). He preached to those tormented because of their sin (1 Peter 3.18, 20; 4.4), spreading the fragrance of himself even into Hell (2 Corinthians 2.14-16).

He departed (Acts 2.27, 31), bearing the keys of Hades (Revelation 1.18) and destroying Death itself (Hebrews 2.14).

The doctrine of the descent into Hell is first and foremost a doctrine about love, God's love for us, and the power of that love to go to all lengths, to descend to all depths and to go through virtually every barrier in order to redeem a wounded, huddled, frightened, paranoid, alienated, and unfree humanity.

**Did God create Hell? If so, why did He create something from which we need saving?**

The most accurate theological answer is that Hell is not necessarily a place that God created. It's a place from which God has withdrawn. It's the place where he is not, rather than the place where everything is as he wants it to be.

So, why did he need something from which we need saving? The question is maybe misplaced. The question is: Will you live with him? That's the real question.

**If you're a Christian and you continually sin, is there ever a point where you can cross the line, where you sin too much and are condemned to Hell?**

No, you can't sin too much for the grace of God to make up the difference. There is always grace for you (cf 2 Corinthians 12.9). Think about when Jesus told his disciples to forgive not only seven times seven, but seventy times seven (cf Matthew 18.22).

When I worked for Campus Crusade, we used to say that question is misplaced. Imagine that in order for you to get to heaven, figuratively speaking, you would have to live on the moon and the only way you could get to the moon was to jump high enough to arrive there under your own power. In other words, you had to be good enough or athletic enough or whatever super power enough to jump from here to the moon. Some of you might be able to jump only 6 inches and some of you might be able to jump four feet, but nobody can ever jump all the way to the moon.

So, in effect, the question of our relative sinfulness is moot, because nobody is sinless enough or not quite so sinful as to ever make up the difference. God's grace covers for everybody, no matter how crappy you are, which I'm particularly happy about.

The question as to whether there is ever a point where you can cross the line or sin too much—the question refers to that scripture about the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. There's a blasphemy of Holy Spirit—one sin which can never be forgiven (Mark 3.29). Basically, if you do this one sin, you blaspheme the Holy Spirit and automatically go to hell. The whole idea of the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is the ultimate rejection of God.

The only way you can blaspheme the Holy Spirit is to reject God, reject God, reject God, reject God, and then die. Even if you were still alive and rejecting God and rejecting God and rejecting God, there's still grace. There's still grace for everybody. There's still space for everybody, because Jesus, again, is standing there saying, "Come, come to the banquet. There's room for everyone."

So, if you're a Christian and continually sin, is there ever a point where you can cross the line or sin too much? No, not if you keep fighting and trying to live as God intends you to live, not if you keep repenting, not if you keep inviting the Spirit to change you. Just don't give up.