

3. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU STAND BEFORE GOD?

It is sometimes hard for believers to conceive of hell. The more you understand God's love, his incredible Father's heart, and the lengths he has gone to save us, you question, "*Is there really going to be a hell that will last forever and will God really send people there?*" However, the Bible is very clear: there is a hell and we have to lay aside sentiment and false notions of the love of God. God is the God of love, but his love demands justice. If there was no justice there would be no love, because true love involves being fair. God will punish those that have rebelled against him, and reward those who have obeyed him.

There are three popular, but false, theories about hell:

1. **Annihilationism** - people cast into hell are exterminated; they cease to exist. This is not true for Jesus said, "*The smoke of their torment goes up forever.*" (See **Mark 11: 47, 48** and **Luke 16:19-31**)

2. **Universalism** – everybody will be saved, even if God gives him or her another chance after they die. Sadly, not all will be saved and though we may have a number of chances to receive Christ, they are confined to this life, for after death comes judgment (See **Hebrews 9:27**)

3. **Second probation** - you get another chance in hell and can come out of it, a little similar to purgatory. This is wrong - if you are in hell that's it. (See **Luke 16:19-31**)

We may struggle with this, but the word of God warns us that there is a heaven to be gained and a hell to be avoided. God has gone to extreme measures to make sure that nobody ends up in hell.

PEOPLE SAY THERE IS NO HELL AND JOIN ANY 'ISM' THAT TEACHES THIS.

The Bible says 162 times in the New Testament alone that there is a hell. God has gone to extreme lengths to ensure no one has to go there.

John 3:16 “God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

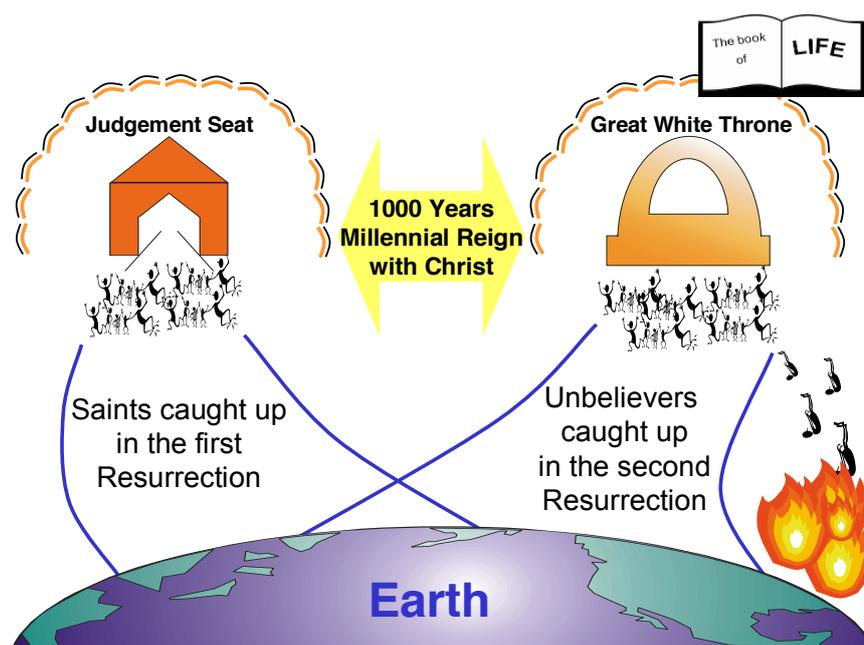
Romans 5:8 “But God shows his love for us in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

When a person ends up in hell it is not because God has sent them there; it is because they have sent themselves to that place by their own choices.

There is a judgment, a day when all of us will stand before God. **Hebrews 9:27** says, “It is destined that each person dies only once and after that comes judgement.” An immediate judgment takes place at death (to determine if the spirit goes to Hades or heaven), but there is another judgment that awaits both believers and non-believers. This happens later.

THE JUDGMENT OF NON-BELIEVERS

Revelation 20 teaches that at the very end of time, God will raise the dead in two resurrections. There will be a first resurrection of believers at the return of Christ to the earth. A thousand years later a second resurrection of everybody else occurs.



(This assumes a premillennial viewpoint. For other views see message one.)

Revelation 20:12, 15 *“I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before God’s throne. And the books were opened, including the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to what they had done...And anyone whose name was not found recorded in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire.”*

Now that is an awful judgement. Hell is a terrible place but it is going to be more terrible for some. There will be different levels of punishment in hell (see **Matthew 11:20-24** and **Luke 12:47-48**). The justice of God demands that the Hitlers and Stalins of this world will suffer a more fiery fate than others will. However, no part of hell is going to be easy to bear. I hear people say today, *“Well, my mates and I will just end up in hell together; we’ll just have a big party forever.”* This could not be further from the truth.

The judgment of non-believers is a judgment of punishment for sin.

How do you think God is going to feel on Judgement Day? I think he will be saying things like:

Why didn’t you believe?

Why didn’t you see the evidence I put in the earth for my existence?

Why didn’t you believe on my Son? I made it so clear why he came.

He died so that you would not have to go to this place.

2. THE JUDGMENT OF BELIEVERS

2 Corinthians 5:10 *“For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in our bodies.”*

God will judge or evaluate our words (**Matthew 12:36, 37**), works (**Ecclesiastes 12:14**), secrets and motives (**1 Corinthians 4:5**). He will give us whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in our bodies. The word 'evil' in the Greek language is the word 'kakos' and it means worthless. For example, I could say, "*That's a really bad paint job*" because it is not up to quality. When God judges believers, he will evaluate our works to determine if they are good or worthless.

Romans 14:10, 12 "*Each of us will stand personally before the judgement seat of God, each of us will give a personal account to God.*" This awaits every person; each of us will have our time standing before the Lord one day and we will give an account of our lives to him.

WHAT WILL CHRIST JUDGE?

Firstly, he will not judge:

1. Salvation.

John 5:24 "*He who hears my word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgement but has passed from death to life.*"

The very fact that you are in the first resurrection means you are saved and salvation is not decided then, it is decided now. John the Apostle wrote, "*I write to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have everlasting life.*"

I was raised in a traditional church that taught if you do enough good, go to church, and keep the commandments, God might let you into heaven. I never knew if I would go to heaven or hell when I died, until one day somebody said, "*You can know. Jesus died for you and you can know now by giving your life to Christ and believing on him.*" That was a revelation.

2. Sin

Hebrews 10:17 "*I will never again remember their sins and lawless deeds.*"

The best stain remover in the universe is the Blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. When he shed his blood on Calvary, he took the punishment for our sins. That is why Jesus could say, *“If you believe in me and receive my word you will not come into judgment.”* Why? Because the cross was the judgment for our sin, and what was judged there once will not be judged again. I am so grateful to the Lord for this amazing gift. This judgment of believers is not a judgment of SALVATION or SIN but of SERVICE. It is like a great graduation ceremony.

The judgment of believers is a judgment of service to determine reward.

Revelation 22:12 *“I am coming soon. My reward is with me and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.”* Note that reward, not punishment, is with him.

I Corinthians 4:5b *“And then God will give to everyone whatever praise is due.”*

Hebrews 6:10 *“For God is not unjust, He will not forget how hard you have worked for Him and how you have shown your love for Him by caring for other Christians as you still do.”*

HOW WILL CHRIST JUDGE OUR SERVICE?

How will Jesus judge us? The answer is by fire. **I Corinthians 3:10-15** says, *“Because of God’s special favour to me I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it but whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful, for no one can lay any other foundation than the one we already have, Jesus Christ. Now anyone who builds on that foundation may use gold, silver jewels, wood, hay or straw but there’s going to come a time of testing at the Judgement Day to see what kind of work each builder has done. Everyone’s work will be put through the fire to see whether or not it keeps its value. If the work survives the fire, the builder will receive a reward, but if the work is burned up the builder will suffer great loss. The builders themselves will be saved but like someone escaping through a wall of flames.”*

Jesus is the foundation. If Jesus is not the foundation then anything we build will not endure the fire. It has to be built on him. God will reward good works of service and growth and character; the bad works will be burned up. This is not a judgment of comparison where we complain, *“They received a larger reward than me.”* This is a judgment of potential, where the Lord says, *“This is what I gave you. I gave you my Son, the gift of salvation and relationship with me, and abilities from birth. I gave you spiritual gifts from the moment of salvation, my Holy Spirit, and my church to nourish you. Now what did you do with the life I gave you?”*

Two categories of works are given here.

The first category is gold, silver and jewels and the second is wood, hay and straw.

The fire of God will test our life’s works. Works of gold, silver and jewels will endure the flame and will be refined. Works of wood, hay and straw will burn up because they are worthless.

You may ask, *“Well what determines whether something is going to be gold, silver and precious stones so that it remains?”*

I Corinthians 13:13 says, *“So faith hope and love remain and the greatest of these is love.”* What remains? Works of faith, hope, and love.

I Thessalonians 1:3 *“We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Works done in faith, labour done in love, and trials of life endured in hope will remain at the judgment by fire. You may say, *“What if I have nothing, what if everything gets burned up?”* Jesus said that even a cup of cold water given in his name would not go without its reward. You really would have to be living very carelessly and foolishly to get no reward. Even the littlest thing done in his name will be rewarded. And some of the things we thought were so great may go up in smoke, and some of the things we thought were useless may come out as gold. How many know that God works like that? You think, *“Oh that was terrible*

Lord,” and he replies, “No that was good. Because you felt weak, my power could work through you.”

A JUDGMENT STORY

I like the following story about the judgment day of believers. Excuse its poor theology, but it illustrates the point. Everybody is lined up, and a man is standing in a great line of people. He is thinking, *“Oh my, what am I going to say to the Lord? I haven’t done all that much with my life and I’ve got to give an account.”* As he waits, he decides to talk to the person in front. He taps his shoulder and the person turns around. It’s the apostle Paul! He thinks, *“Oh no I’m behind the Apostle Paul, he’s going to get a huge reward and I’m going to get nothing.”* To cheer himself up he turns to the person behind him. To his shock, it’s Mother Teresa. *“Oh give me a break, this is not fair, I haven’t done anything like these two.”*

Then in the distance, he notices his wife and two children reach the Judgment Seat of Christ and they are standing before the Lord. He sees the Lord talking to them and then the Lord says in a loud voice, *“Who is the husband and father of this family?”*

Timidly the man goes forward and stands with his wife and children. Then the Lord says to him, *“Well done good and faithful servant you have loved your wife as I loved the church and you have raised your children in the faith so that they are here today.”*

IT’S ALL ABOUT FAITHFULNESS

Jesus rewards faithfulness in using what he has given us. You and I are not going to have to be Mother Teresa or the Apostle Paul or Billy Graham to obtain a reward. Jesus is looking for faithfulness with what he has given you.

We may have done some worthless things since coming to know the Lord and those worthless things will be burned up in the fire of his judgment. What remains – the gold, silver and jewels - will form the basis of our reward. Many believe they will be fashioned into crowns

that we will wear in eternity. Whether these are literal crowns or symbolic it means that we will rule; the rewards will be levels of authority and rulership in eternity. Eternity will not be sitting on a cloud playing a harp. It will be functional, it will be purposeful, there will be work, there will be worship, there will be tasks to do and we will be ruling with Christ. The Bible says we are even going judge angels (see **1 Corinthians 6:3**). Revelation chapters 2 & 3 mention incredible rewards Jesus promised to those who overcome and stay faithful.

Now, the extreme worst case is that everything is burned up and Paul talks about that in verse 15. He says, *“If the work is burned up the builder will suffer loss”* so there could be a sense of regret. There may be sorrow and regret for a time- perhaps not all of eternity - but the builders themselves will be saved. You are saved, you will be in heaven, you will have a resurrection body, and you will spend eternity with God but perhaps not have the rank or authority you could have had.

But why just scrape in? We should aim to enter eternity with great reward, for the reward glorifies the Lord. As I said before, we really would have to live carelessly and foolishly to have nothing. We need to be people who live with a sense of purpose, hope, and meaning.

I do not want to get to the Day of Judgment and see my life's works all disappear in smoke. I want to have something of value that comes out of my life - this 70, 80, or 90 years, whatever God gives me. I want to have something at the end of it that glorifies Jesus, which makes his dying for me on the cross worth it. The fact that I will be in heaven will be worth it for him, but I want to have something more than just making it into heaven. I want to have faith and hope and love and character and fruit that endures the fire so I can say *“Lord it's all for you.”* Do you want to be like that? It is possible.

Jude 24 says, *“Now to him who is able to keep us from falling and present us without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing.”* This is what God has destined for you and me.

THE RIGHT ATTITUDE

So what should our attitude be? We should not be fearful of judgment; we all make mistakes and they will disappear in the fire. However, we should be sober and motivated to live lives of purity and purpose. If we permit the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts and burn out the rubbish, then it will save us from seeing everything disappear in the fire on judgement day. The Holy Spirit is the fire of God and if we let him, he will shape us, motivate us, anoint us and help us. **Acts 10:38** says of Jesus, *“He was anointed with the Spirit and power and He went about doing good and healing all oppressed of the devil because God was with Him.”*

That is the kind of people you and I need to be: anointed with the Spirit and power, going about doing good, healing all oppressed of the devil. Whether the good is little or great, whether it is just in your neighbourhood or God takes you to the ends of the earth, it doesn't matter. It is doing the things that God has asked you to do. Raise those children, build that marriage, be the best employee in your workplace, shine out for Jesus, serve the people of God, serve the mission of making the gospel known to people, pray for those lost people that you live among and are in your family.

Colossians 3:23 & 24 *“Work hard and cheerfully at whatever you do as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and the master you are serving is Christ.”*

The master you are serving is Christ, and whatever you do for him in love, in faith, and in hope, he will reward. This ought to challenge us - if we are living carelessly, then we need to bring our lives into alignment with the will and purposes of God.

Perhaps you have never given your life to Jesus. Perhaps you did once but you are not really walking with God and you are far away from him. **Romans 3:23** says, *“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* **Romans 6:23** says, *“The wages of sin is death(not only death once but*

a second death in hell, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Salvation is the free gift of God - you cannot earn it and you can't get it by being religious. Being good will not save you.

What does the word 'saved' mean? It means you do not go to hell, you spend eternity with God, you are in the new heaven and the new earth, you receive a glorious resurrection body, and you will live with him forever - now that is being saved. If I was drowning and someone threw me a lifeline I would grab it and say, *“Thank you for saving me.”* Many people are drowning today because they don't know Jesus and they're headed for hell.

You don't need to end up there. Jesus Christ died on a cross for you. If you believe in him and receive him, he will give you power to become a child of God. That is salvation. I am so grateful for the cross. I am so thankful for the blood of Jesus. What Jesus did to keep us out of hell and make sure that we would be with Him forever is awesome.

I invite you to pray a simple prayer where you ask Jesus to forgive you, receive you, come into your life and take control, where you can have your sins forgiven. It's as simple as releasing your faith. I invite you to pray it yourself and really mean it with all your heart. God is listening and as you pray, he will do what you ask Him to do.

“Lord Jesus forgive me all my sins. Thank you for dying for me, for cleansing me, for giving your life in place of mine. Thank you for going to hell for me so that I can get to heaven. Jesus I believe in you, I receive you Lord. Forgive me, come and take control of my life, I give you the rest of my life Lord. Change me.” - Amen