

What Happens After Death?

Lesson 3:

The Judgement And Eternity



Discovering God's Word

Bible Study Series

What Happens After Death Lesson

3: The Judgement And Eternity

Learn about the things that will happen on the Judgment Day and the two possible places people will spend eternity

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Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

Study Number: DGW77

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My plea: It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

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Lesson 3:

The Judgment And Eternity

In our first study, we established that mankind possess a soul that survives physical death. We established that this separates mankind from all the rest of God's earthly creation – as it is only mankind that has been made in the image of God. Then, we established that physical death is a certainty. We identified two things involved in physical death and answered the question, “Why do we have to die?”

In our second study, we established that Hades is the realm of the dead (where those who have died in the past are today – and where we will all be if we die prior to the return of Jesus Christ). We established that this realm of the dead consists of two parts – a place of comfort and a place of torment. Then, we established that Jesus Christ will return at a time unknown to mankind and discussed some things the Scriptures tell us will happen whenever Jesus returns. We have also concluded (based on 2 Peter 3:9) that Jesus has not yet returned because God is giving people the opportunity to repent of their sins.

This third lesson picks up where lesson 2 left off. One of the things that will take place whenever Jesus Christ returns is the final Judgment of all those who have ever lived. Then, after this great Judgment, eternity will begin. However, the Judgment Day and eternity have also been the focus of a great amount of speculation and false teaching (in addition to the

things we discussed in lesson 2 regarding the return of Jesus). Some say that there is no Hell (i.e. that a loving God could not condemn anyone to Hell). Some say that everyone will go to Heaven (at least everyone who is morally good and religious). At least one religious organization claims that only 144,000 will be permitted into Heaven.

Remember that the only things we know about what happens after death and the end of this world are those things which have been revealed to us by God in His written word! Therefore, let us determine to speak where the Bible speaks – and remain silent where the Bible is silent, speaking only as the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11).

The purpose of this third lesson is to establish what the Bible teaches about (1) The final Judgment and (2) Eternity (both in Heaven and Hell).

The Final Judgment

In lesson 2, we concluded by observing what the Bible teaches about the return of Jesus Christ. Specifically, one of the points we saw from the Bible was that a final Judgment will take place whenever Jesus Christ does return. But, who will be judged? How will they be judged? What is at stake in this judgment? These are some of the questions I now want us to begin to answer.

To take place after Jesus' return

Matthew 24:36 through Matthew 25 primarily deals with the return of Jesus Christ (note that prior to Matthew 24:36 the discussion is about the destruction of Jerusalem that occurred in A.D. 70). In Matthew 25, specifically, Jesus tells two parables at the beginning of the chapter. One parable is about the need to be prepared for the time when Jesus will return (the parable of the wise and foolish virgins in verses 1-13). The other parable is about the responsibility to be good managers over the things entrusted to our care while we live on this earth (the parable of the talents, verses 14-30). Then, in verses 31-46, Jesus turns His focus entirely to the final Judgment (although lessons about this final

Judgment should also be applied from the two parables just mentioned).

Notice that the things Jesus describes in Matthew 25:31-46 (with reference to this final Judgment) are said to take place, “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” (Matthew 25:31). While the Scriptures do not reveal where this will take place, the Scriptures clearly place this great event between Christ’s return and eternity! Therefore, any teaching that would pervert the Bible’s teaching on the return of Christ (as noted in our previous lesson) or change the order of these events is false doctrine!

There is, though, one additional point that must be made before we move to consider additional aspects of this final Judgment. As we discussed in relation to the return of Jesus Christ, once Christ returns, there is no more opportunity to change your life! Therefore, the spiritual condition you are in when you die or when Jesus Christ returns is the condition you will be judged in – whether you are prepared for the Judgment or not! So, as we will discuss in our next lesson, you must be ready for your death and ready for the return of Jesus Christ at all times (Matthew 24:42-44).

Everyone will be involved

Now, having established that this Judgment will take place whenever Jesus Christ returns, understand that everyone will be involved. Consider the following passages.

(1) Matthew 25:31-46. I encourage you to read Matthew 25:31-46 in its entirety (we will just be looking closely at a few verses and summarizing the rest). In verse 32, Jesus says, “All the nations will be gathered before Him.” No one is going to be left out of this Judgment! Just picture this mass of humanity, consisting of all who have ever lived – all being gathered before the Judgment seat of Jesus Christ! Verse 33 pictures each one of these individuals being divided into one of two categories (just as a shepherd divides His sheep from the goats), either on the right or left side of the Lord! Imagine: Everyone who has ever lived will be able to be placed into one of these two categories. These two categories have very

different eternal destinations – and, *you* will be placed in one of these two categories!

Verses 34-40 then describe those who faithfully executed the Lord’s will while they lived on this earth (specifically relative to doing good to others) – and their eternal reward. Verses 41-45 describe those who have unfaithfully executed the Lord’s will while they lived on the earth (specifically relative to failing to do good to others) – and their eternal punishment. Then, verse 46 summarizes what we have learned: “And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” Again, everyone will be in one of these two categories – including you!

(2) Romans 14:10-12 and 2 Corinthians 5:10. Notice the language of these two passages, particularly focusing on the fact that everyone will take part in this final Judgment. Romans 14:10 says that “we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.” Romans 14:11 says every knee will bow to God and every tongue will confess to God. Romans 14:12 says that “each of us shall give account of himself to God.” Then, 2 Corinthians 5:10 says that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” Clearly, every one of us will stand before God and be judged! None of us will escape this Judgment. Everyone will confess Christ as Lord (whether he/she believed and obeyed Him on earth or not)!

(3) Galatians 6:7-8. Galatians 6:7-8 says, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.” Don’t be fooled (or, deceived) into thinking that you will escape the Judgment of God! You will reap what you have sown. If you have lived to please your fleshly desires, you will reap corruption/destruction. However, if you have lived your life according to God’s word (as revealed by the Spirit of God), you will reap everlasting life.

(4) Revelation 20:11-15. Take a moment to read this text in its entirety. The picture presented is

one of the great mass of humanity (consisting of all who have ever lived) standing before the throne of God! What an awe-inspiring and fearful scene! What are they all doing before the throne of God? The passage simply identifies that they are all being judged “according to their works, by the things which were written in the books” (v. 12).

Jesus Christ, the Judge

The Scriptures are clear that the God will be the Judge of the world. Romans chapter 2 makes this perfectly clear. Romans 2:2-3 says that the “judgment of God is according to truth” and that surely no man will “escape the judgment of God.” Then, Romans 2:5 references the Judgment Day as “the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” Verse 6 goes on to explain that God will simply “render to each one according to his deeds.”

However, I want you to specifically observe the fact that God will carry out this Judgment through Jesus Christ. Continuing in Romans 2, verse 16 says, “in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.” Acts 17:31 says that God “has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.” This is a clear reference to Jesus. Acts 10:42 (with a clear context of speaking about Jesus) says, “And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead.” I would also encourage you to go back and consider how Matthew 25:31-33 and 2 Corinthians 5:10 also make the point that it is Jesus Christ who will be the Judge of the world on this Last Day.

Now, consider some attributes of our Judge in order to develop a greater appreciation for how He is qualified and capable to judge the world. (1) He is the eternal and all-powerful Creator of the world (Genesis 1). (2) He is the Creator and Savior of mankind (Genesis 1:26; John 3:16) who wants all men to be saved eternally (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). (3) He is all-seeing and all-knowing (Proverbs 15:3; Hebrews 4:13) and has perfect knowledge of how we have all lived our lives (so, we can have

confidence that He will not get any part of our judgments wrong). (4) He is entirely holy and calls mankind to be holy (Revelation 4:8; 1 Peter 1:15-16). (5) He is a righteous, fair, and an impartial Judge, simply judging each individual according to his/her works (Romans 2:5-11).

The criteria for the Judgment

Now that we have seen some basics about this final judgment, let’s firmly establish what standard/criteria will be used to make the judgments that will be made on that Day. Surely, God will fairly judge individuals based on the law He had given them to live under. Romans 2:12-24 indicates that (prior to the time of the gospel), Jews would be judged by the Law of Moses and the Gentiles would be judged by their natural law.

However, for us, now that we live under the gospel of Jesus Christ (note that this is the universal law God has given to govern all people today), we will be judged according to that standard. Look at what Jesus said in John 12:48: “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him — the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.” However, we will not only be judged by the things said directly by Jesus Christ, but, by all of the things that are part of Christ’s new law (i.e. the entirety of the New Testament).

Think back to the Revelation 20:11-15 picture of the Judgment. On this great Day, the picture that is presented for us says, “And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books” (Revelation 20:12). So, you notice that all of the dead are judged “by the things which were written in the books.” Now, what books are these? It is fair to conclude that these are the books containing the law of God that has been revealed to mankind.

To understand that the criteria by which you and I will be judged will be more than *just* the words specifically spoken by Jesus Christ, consider a couple of passages. In 1 Corinthians 14:37, Paul said that the things he wrote “are the commandments of

the Lord.” Then, in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul said, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” So, every word that is inspired of God will be the standard/criteria that will be used to judge the world on the Last Day! Specifically, those who are living today are living under the new law of Jesus Christ (revealed in the New Testament), as the old Law of Moses has been taken away (Colossians 2:14).

Now, in addition to understanding what the criteria/standard for judgment will be, please also consider what the criteria/standard for the Judgment will *not* be. (1) You will not be judged by the opinions of men. (2) You will not be judged by the doctrines/teachings of men (please heed the warning, then, in 2 Peter 2:1-3 about false teachers). (3) You will not be judged solely by your own conscience (though the Bible does teach about the importance of the conscience). (4) You will not be judged by the decisions and actions of the majority. (5) You will not be judged by the Old Testament Law (because you live under the New Testament of Christ and the Old Testament has been taken away, see Colossians 2:14). (6) You will not be judged by the traditions of men (not even the religious traditions of men). (7) You will not be judged by any other standard besides God’s word! This is why you must be diligent in searching the Scriptures on a daily basis in order to learn and apply God’s teachings to your life (see Acts 17:11 and James 1:22-25) – and you must be diligent to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12)!

What the Judgment will consist of

As we have already seen, the standard that will be used in Judgment is God’s word. But, what will be evaluated by God’s word? Let’s consider.

The Bible is clear that everything you have ever done will be judged (as is true with everyone who will be present for the Day of Judgment)! Look at Ecclesiastes 12:13-14: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every

secret thing, Whether good or evil.” Again, everything will be brought into Judgment – even the things that we thought were done in “secret.” Notice that these “secret” things were not unknown to God! Similarly, 2 Corinthians 5:10 says that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (see also Romans 14:10-12). Revelation 20:12 (again) says that the dead will be “judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.” And, as we saw previously, “whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

So, nothing that is done on this earth will escape God’s attention or will be missed on the Day of Judgment. Consider Matthew 12:36 and 1 Corinthians 4:5 to even see that every idle (empty) word and all the motives of the heart will be subject to this Judgment. Matthew 12:36 says, “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment.” 1 Corinthians 4:5 says, “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise will come from God.”

Now, using this foundation, let’s establish some things which we must consider. First, consider the reality of God’s grace and mercy. God’s grace refers to His giving us what we do not deserve (shown in giving us eternal life in Heaven). God’s mercy refers to His *not* giving us what we do deserve (shown in not sentencing us to eternity in Hell). Without God’s grace and mercy we would all be entirely without hope on this great Day of Judgment! For, without His grace and mercy, we would all be hopelessly lost in our sins. Romans 6:23 simply states: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” I encourage you to read and consider Ephesians 2:1-10 and Titus 3:4-7 to see how we could never (as sinners) earn eternal salvation in Heaven. Rather, it is because of His grace and mercy that we have the opportunity to avoid the eternal condemnation in Hell we deserve due to our sins and be saved eternally in Heaven!

Second, having recognized the reality of God's grace and mercy (knowing that we are saved by God's grace and not by our own righteousness), we must also consider the necessity of obedience. Now, again, I want to emphasize the fact that we cannot earn (deserve, merit) our own salvations through our own good works. However, just as clearly as the Bible identifies the essential nature of God's grace and mercy, it also identifies the essential nature of our own works of obedience (note that works done in obedience to God's instructions are far different than works that are done to attempt to earn salvation for ourselves).

Works of obedience are said to be essential for salvation. Hebrews 5:9 says that Jesus Christ became "the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him." James 2:24 says, "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only." Faith in God without works of obedience is said to be dead (read James 2:14-26 and Matthew 7:21-23 to see that true faith will include works of obedience, not exclude them). Therefore, the Bible warns that those who "do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" will be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9)!

Realizing this, take a moment to consider what the gospel you will be judged by requires you to do in order to be saved (please read all of the passages I will cite along these points to see that these are truly the commandments of God, not the traditions, doctrines, or opinions of men). (1) You must hear God's word (Romans 10:17; Acts 18:8). (2) You must believe (John 8:24; Romans 10:9-10). (3) You must repent of your sins (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30). (4) You must confess Jesus Christ (Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37). (5) You must be baptized (immersed) in water (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; Galatians 3:26-27; 1 Peter 3:20-21). Upon your obedience to these commandments, the Bible calls you a Christian and says that your sins are washed away/forgiven. Then, (6) God requires you to faithfully follow Jesus throughout your life by doing the things He expects you to do as a Christian (Revelation 2:10) – because it is possible to fall from God's grace (Galatians 5:4; Hebrews 10:26-39).

Think about it for a moment. If God's grace and mercy saved everyone – without requiring obedience, then it would make no difference how an individual lived while he/she was alive on this earth (contrary to the passages we've considered – i.e. Matthew 25:31-46; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Galatians 6:7-8; etc.). Furthermore, if God's grace and mercy saved everyone – without requiring obedience, then all (or the majority) would be saved. However, Jesus said that few will be saved (Matthew 7:13-14)! Therefore, we must live our lives in faithful obedience to God in order to be counted among the "few" who will be saved on the Day of Judgment!

Eternity will be based on the Judgment

What is at stake in this great Judgment? The principles we have already established demonstrate that each individual's eternal destination is at stake! Again, consider Galatians 6:7-8: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life."

Clearly, the reaping is dependent upon the sowing. If you live your life to fulfill your own earthly desires, you will be punished eternally; but if you live your life according to God's instructions, you will be rewarded with eternal life in Heaven! The fact that your eternal destination will be based on the Judgment has also been seen in 2 Corinthians 5:10 and demonstrated in Matthew 25:31-46.

Eternity

Now that we have observed what the Bible teaches us concerning the Day of Judgment and the connection between that Day and eternity, let's focus on what the Bible teaches concerning eternity. Since everyone who has lived on this earth will be subject to the Judgment we have studied, then everyone will also take part in eternity. Furthermore, the Bible only describes two possible eternal destinations: Heaven and Hell. Matthew 25:46 makes it clear that after all people are judged before the throne of God, those

judged to have been unrighteous will “go away into everlasting punishment” but the righteous will go “into eternal life.” Therefore, let’s consider what the Bible helps us to understand about each of these eternal destinations.

What is eternity?

First, let me say that we have been given just enough information about eternity for us to be fully persuaded as to where we desire to spend (and not to spend) our eternities. We do not, though, have all the answers to the many questions we have. We do, however, have enough information (expressed in terms that are familiar to us) to make proper decisions relative to our two possible eternal destinations.

“Eternity” is a difficult concept for us to fully understand. This is probably because of our constant awareness of time. Everything that we do is measured in a sense of time. However, eternity is not based upon time! Eternity refers to the never-ending period after life on this earth ends (after the return of Christ and the Judgment). Some have tried to help our minds grasp just how long eternity is by offering some illustrations. (1) Imagine a two-ton iron ball. Now, suppose that a butterfly flew by that ball once every year, brushing its wing against the large iron ball. When this has happened so many times that the ball has been worn out and turned to dust, eternity has just begun! (2) Suppose it was the job of just one ant to transfer all of the sand on the earth – and deposit it on the sun. This the ant did, traveling nearly 93 million miles in each direction, with each grain of sand. When this one ant is finished with this task, eternity has just begun!

While I realize that these illustrations are not based in reality, they do help us think about how long eternity really will be. That’s certainly an important concept to grasp – because you will spend your eternity *somewhere*, either in Heaven or in Hell! And, as we discuss each of these two possible eternal destinations, please realize that Hell is just as eternal as Heaven is (go back and look at Matthew 25:46)!

Eternity in Heaven

Let’s begin our consideration of these two eternal destinations by considering the place you should desire to go – Heaven. As we do so, let’s consider three points: (1) Heaven is real, (2) Description of Heaven, and (3) Who will go to Heaven.

(1) Heaven is real! If you accept the Bible as containing the true words of God, then there can be no doubt that Heaven is real. John 14:1-6 demonstrates that Jesus ascended into Heaven in order to “prepare a place” for His people. And, He says that if He would go to prepare a place that He “will come again” and receive His followers to Himself – so that His people will be able to be with Him. Furthermore, Jesus demonstrates that He is the only way “to the Father.”

Then, 1 Peter 1:3-9 clearly demonstrates that Heaven is real. Listen to the language of verses 3-5: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” Then, as Peter goes on in this passage to describe this “living hope” God’s people have that is “reserved in heaven,” notice this hope will be realized whenever Jesus Christ is revealed (when He returns, vs. 7). It is at this time that you will (if you have been faithful to God) receive “the end of your faith – the salvation of your” soul (vs. 9).

Heaven is real! The Bible describes Heaven as being a real place in which real people will spend their eternities. In fact, we might say that Heaven is a prepared place for prepared people!

(2) Heaven described. Now, given the fact that Heaven is a real place and that you have the opportunity to live eternally in this place, take a few moments to consider how Heaven is described in the Bible.

It is described as being eternal life. Matthew 25:46 says that the righteous will go away into

“eternal life” following the Judgment. It is, therefore, the never-ending inheritance of the children of God. Matthew 25:34 says that the King (Jesus) will say to those on His right hand (the righteous on the Day of Judgment), “Come you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” And, as we have already seen, 1 Peter 1:3-5 describes Heaven as being the “inheritance” of God’s people that is “incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away.” Therefore, this inheritance can accurately be described as being “eternal life” because it is in a place where there is full fellowship with God, the Giver and Sustainer of life!

It is described as being a beautiful place. Take some time to read the entirety of Revelation 21:1-22:5. Heaven is described in magnificent terms throughout this passage. However, please remember that Heaven is a spiritual place (remember that we will be transformed and have spiritual bodies because our flesh and blood cannot go to this place, according to 1 Corinthians 15:50-58). Therefore, the terms that are used to describe this place are used to present ideas to our human minds that ought to create a great desire to spend eternity in this place. Even still, this place is far above anything that is known to us on this earth! In fact, it can be accurately pointed out that the most precious things to us here on this earth are only described as being building materials in Heaven (i.e. gold, precious stones, pearls, etc.)!

It is described as being a place without pain, sorrow, or death. Revelation 21:4 says, “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” What a great point of comfort this provides to us as we live on this earth! This world is full of pain, sorrow, and death (as we discussed in lesson 1). However, all of these things will be absent from Heaven! Furthermore, this passage was intended to bring great comfort to those who were persecuted for the cause of Christ! Although they would be called to suffer temporarily on this earth, they would be rewarded eternally – and all of their suffering would end!

It is described as being a place without evil. Revelation 21:27 says, “But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an

abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.” How often we encounter things that are evil here on this earth! Not only is Satan at work in this world, but, we also interact with wicked and immoral people in this world. However, there will be nothing and nobody evil in Heaven! Since God is completely holy and separate from all that is evil (1 John 1:5), anything connected with sin will be left out of Heaven (Note: That is why we must have our sins washed away through the blood of Christ).

It is described as being an eternal home with God. Although there are many desirable aspects of Heaven that ought to cause us to want to spend eternity there, the most desirable aspect of all is the fact that God is and will be in Heaven throughout eternity! Passages like Revelation 21:22-23 and Revelation 22:1-5 picture the fact that those who will go to Heaven will forever be in the presence of God! Therefore, spending an eternity in Heaven is an opportunity to be in the presence of God eternally and to see Him as He is.

(3) Who will go to Heaven? Now that we have considered how the Scriptures describe Heaven and why we should desire to go to Heaven, let’s consider who will take part in these joys.

First, those who have not sinned will go to Heaven. Sin is what will keep folks out of Heaven (Romans 6:23) – because sin separates the sinner from the holy God (Isaiah 59:1-2). However, young children have not had the opportunity to sin. Contrary to popular teaching, the Bible demonstrates that we do not inherit sin from others when we are born (i.e. Ezekiel 18:20). Therefore, if a child dies while still innocent of the law of God, he/she will go to Heaven! In addition, some do not have the mental ability to sin (i.e. some who are mentally handicapped). These individuals also do not possess the ability to sin. Therefore, if they die in that situation, they will go to Heaven!

Second, those who are obedient to God will go to Heaven. As we have already seen (regarding God’s grace and mercy), God has given mankind the opportunity to be forgiven of sin. This forgiveness is only possible through Jesus Christ (Romans 6:23)! However, as we discussed previously, this

forgiveness and salvation will only be given to those who are obedient to God (see Matthew 7:21-23; Hebrews 5:9; Revelation 22:14). Go back, then, and review God's plan of salvation that we discussed earlier in this lesson (hear, believe, repent, confess Christ, be baptized, and remain faithful). If you have sinned, you must be obedient to this plan of salvation in order to go to Heaven!

Eternity in Hell

Now, let's continue our consideration of these two eternal destinations by considering the place you should desire to avoid at all costs – Hell. As we do so, let's consider three points: (1) Hell is real, (2) Description of Hell, and (3) Who will go to Hell.

(1) Hell is real! If you accept the Bible as being true, then there can be no doubt that Hell is real. Clearly, the Bible speaks of a punishment for those who refuse to do the will of God. Matthew 7:13-14 speaks of the majority of people living in a way that will lead to destruction – while there are only a few who will live in a way that will result in eternal life. Matthew 25:30 says that the one who does not serve God properly will be cast into a place of “outer darkness.” Matthew 25:46 says that those who are unrighteous will “go away into everlasting punishment.” John 3:36 says that those who do not believe in Jesus will “not see life” and will have the “wrath of God” abide on them. Certainly, this is only a sample of the many Bible passages that demonstrate the punishment the wicked will endure.

Now, not only should we realize that the Bible speaks clearly concerning a future eternal punishment for the unrighteous, but that this punishment will be in the place identified as “Hell.” The Greek word that is translated “hell” in the New Testament is the word “Gehenna” (geenna). The word originally referred to the valley of Hinnom (just south of Jerusalem), where filth and dead animals were cast out of the city and would be burned. However, this word is figuratively applied to the future punishment of the wicked.

Consider a couple of passages in which we can see the word being used in this way. Matthew 5:22 says, “But I say to you that whoever is angry

with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.” Matthew 5:29 says, “If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.” Matthew 10:28 says, “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Clearly, Jesus was speaking about a future punishment in this place. However, this would certainly not be the literal valley of Hinnom (south of Jerusalem) – since this world will be destroyed when Jesus returns. Instead, it is being used figuratively in reference to an eternal place of punishment for the enemies of God.

Hell is real! The Bible describes Hell as being a real place in which real people will spend their eternities. In fact, we might say that Hell is a prepared place for unprepared people!

(2) Hell described. Now, given the fact that Hell is a real place and it is possible for you to live eternally in this place, take a few moments to consider how Hell is described in the Bible.

It is described as eternal punishment. Matthew 25:46 says that the unrighteous will “go away into everlasting punishment.” First, notice that this is punishment. If this was the only thing we knew about “Hell,” it should be enough to deter us from desiring to go there! Second, it is eternal. Though some claim that Hell involves total annihilation, the Bible says that Hell is just as long as Heaven is. Again, Matthew 25:46 says that it is “everlasting punishment” – in contrast with “eternal life.” They are both never-ending! Hell is never-ending punishment.

It is a place depicted by fire. Matthew 25:41 describes that Jesus will tell the unrighteous to “Depart” from Him “into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” on the Day of Judgment. Revelation 21:8 identifies that those who live lives of unrighteousness will all “have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” Furthermore, Mark 9:43-

48 pictures this place of punishment as being a place where “the fire...shall never be quenched” and their worm “does not die.” Now, as you consider these pictures, remember that this language is used to convey ideas to our human minds. I firmly believe that this is the worse language that can be used to describe what the punishment in Hell will be like. However, I believe that words cannot fully express the true horror and agony of Hell (just like words cannot fully express the joy and beauty of Heaven). Heaven is a place of comfort, beauty, and spiritual life. Hell is a place depicted by all that is painful and indicates torment and spiritual death. Just imagine being dropped into the middle of a burning lake – with no way of escape and no end to the suffering!

It is a place depicted by darkness and the weeping and gnashing of teeth. Matthew 25:30 says, “And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” In Heaven, Revelation 21:22-23 says that God illuminates the city. However, Hell is described as being complete darkness. It is entirely absent of any source of light. Furthermore, the intensity of the pain is also visualized in Matthew 25:30 by the weeping and gnashing of teeth! Then, remember that this pain is never-ending.

It is a place of eternal separation from God. Listen to the words Jesus will say to the unrighteous on the Day of Judgment: “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’” (Matthew 25:41). 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 says that the punishment those who fail to obey God will be given will be “from” (away from) “the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.” Revelation 21:8 calls the punishment in Hell the “second death.” We have seen that those in Heaven will spend eternity with God. However, Hell will be an entirely God-less place. He will not be there in any form. Just imagine what an existence completely separated from God will be like. This eternal separation from God is why Hell is called the “second death” (physical death being the “first death”).

(3) Who will go to Hell? Now that we have considered how the Scriptures describe Hell and why

we should desire not to go to Hell, let’s consider who will take part in these punishments.

First, those who have sinned and have never been forgiven of their sins will go to Hell. Remember, the wages of sin is spiritual death (separation from God, see Romans 6:23; Titus 1:14-15; Revelation 21:8). This is what sin pays! The Bible clearly identifies that those who participate in sin (and are not forgiven of their sin) will spend eternity in Hell and will miss out on Heaven (read Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21; Revelation 21:8). Again, God has given mankind the opportunity to be forgiven of sin. However, each individual must determine to believe and obey God (obeying His plan of salvation – hear, believe, repent, confess Christ, be immersed in water, and remain faithful).

Second, those who have once become Christians but have not remained faithful to God will go to Hell. The Bible teaches that the one who becomes a Christian and is forgiven of his/her sins can fall from God’s grace by committing sin (Galatians 5:4; Hebrews 10:26-39). This individual, then, needs to repent of his/her sins, confess the sins to God, and ask God for forgiveness (Acts 8:14-24; 1 John 1:8-2:2). Therefore, God tells His people to be faithful to Him unto death (Revelation 2:10)! This involves continual obedience to God throughout life!

Conclusion

We have not exhausted all that could be said about the final Judgment and eternity in Heaven and Hell. However, I hope the things we have studied have been beneficial to you. First, we have established that there will be a final Judgment in which you will take part and be judged for all that you have done, said, thought, left undone, left unsaid, etc. – according to the words contained in the Bible. Second, we have established that everyone who has ever lived/will ever live will one day spend eternity either in Heaven or in Hell (including yourself)!

I would encourage you to read what the Bible says in Romans 2:5-11 in summary to the things we

have studied in this lesson and seriously consider your soul's condition: "But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who 'will render to each one according to his deeds': eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness — indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God."

In our next (and final) lesson, we will discuss the need to be ready for the things we have discussed up to this point in our study. We will be attempting to make application of all the truths we have established relative the Bible's teachings about the things that will happen at and after our physical deaths.

Study Questions

What was established in the first two lessons?

1. The Final Judgment

When will the final Judgment take place?

Who will be involved in this Judgment?

Who will be the Judge? What are some attributes of Him?

What will the criteria for Judgment be? What will the criteria for Judgment *not* be?

What will the Judgment consist of?

What is the connection between the Judgment and eternity?

2. Eternity

What is eternity?

Discuss the following about eternity in Heaven.

*Is Heaven real?

*How is Heaven described?

*Who will go to Heaven?

Discuss the following about eternity in Hell.

*Is Hell real?

*How is Hell described?

*Who will go to Hell?

***Summarize what you have learned in this study.**