

Exploring Heaven Week 5 February 12, 2012
Is There Really a Hell?

Where in the Bible do we find the most talk about Hell?

Are the images of fire, brimstone, darkness and gnashing of teeth to be taken literally?

If God is infinitely good and infinitely powerful, how can He allow Hell?

What does Kreeft mean with: “Hell is eternal death, rather than eternal life with pain”?
Does that make Hell less horrible?

If the loved ones of the redeemed are in Hell won't that spoil their Heaven?

Main Thought

Week One: Heaven gives hope, purpose and meaning to life on earth.

Week Two: The Redeemed will not be disembodied spirits, but redeemed spirits, in redeemed bodies, in a redeemed universe.

Week Three: “Each soul will be eternally engaged in giving away to all the rest that which it receives.”

Week Four: Heaven is earth restored

Week Five: ????

Handout

CS Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, excerpts

Some will not be saved. There is no doctrine which I would more willingly remove from Christianity than this, if it lay in my power. But it has the full support of scripture and, specially, of Our Lord's own words. If the happiness of a creature lies in self-surrender, no one can make that surrender, but himself and he may refuse. This doctrine (of Hell) is one of the chief grounds on which Christianity is attacked as barbarous and the goodness of God impugned. We are told it is a detestable doctrine ... and are reminded of the tragedies in human life which have come from believing it. Of the other tragedies which come from not believing it we are told less. For these reasons, and these reasons alone, it becomes necessary to discuss the matter.

Forgiveness needs to be accepted as well as offered ... and a man who admits no guilt can accept no forgiveness ... think of the bad man's perdition not as a sentence imposed on him but as the mere fact of being what he is. The characteristic of lost souls is their rejection of everything that is not simply themselves.

Do not confuse the doctrine (of Hell) itself with the *imagery* by which it may be conveyed. Our Lord speaks of Hell under three symbols; first, that of punishment; second, that of destruction; thirdly that of privation, exclusion, or banishment. The prevalent image of fire is significant because it combines the ideas of torment and destruction. All these expressions are intended to suggest something unspeakably horrible, and any interpretation which does not face that fact is out of court from the beginning. But it is not necessary to concentrate on the images of torture to the exclusion

of those suggesting destruction and privation. ... in the parable (Matt 25), the saved go to a place prepared for them, (verse 34) while the damned go to a place never made for men at all (verse 41). To enter Heaven is to become more human than you ever succeeded in being in earth; to enter Hell, is to be banished from humanity. What is cast (or casts itself) into Hell is not man; it is “remains”. To be a complete man means to have the passions obedient to the will of God; to *have been* a man – to be an ex-man would presumably mean to consist of a will utterly centered in itself. It is impossible to imagine what the consciousness of such a creature would be like.

Our Lord usually emphasises the idea, not of duration but of *finality*. That the lost soul is eternally fixed in its diabolical attitude we cannot doubt; but whether this eternal fixity implies endless duration, - or duration at all – we cannot say. It (Hell) is in no sense *parallel* to Heaven; it is “the darkness outside”, the outer rim where being fades away into nonentity.

I introduced ... the sort of bad man whom we most easily perceive to be truly bad. But when the picture has done that work, the sooner it is forgotten the better. ... we should keep steadily before our eyes the possible damnation, not of our enemies, nor our friends, but of our selves. This is not about your wife or son, nor about Nero or Judas Iscariot; it is about you and me.

Peter Kreeft, *Heaven: the Heart's Deepest Longing*, excerpts

(Hell is) ... the spiritual garbage dump of the cosmos. God makes no garbage, but we do; and a good cosmos must eventually purify itself of spiritual garbage like egotism, hate, greed, cowardice, or lust. Hell is the cosmic Roto-Rooter service. We can even rejoice that it exists, for we should want our spiritual garbage burned away, if we do not identify ourselves with that garbage. If we do, we are burned eternally. God cannot allow that garbage into Heaven; and if we do not want to throw it away, if we clutch our garbage so close that we become garbage, there is only one place for us.

Kreeft, *Everything you Ever Wanted to Know about Heaven*, excerpts

The images of Hell in scripture are not to be taken literally, but they are to be taken seriously. Hell is a state of mind. In reality, the damned are in the same place as the saved – in reality. But they hate it; it is their Hell. The saved love it, and it is their Heaven. Hell is not thrust upon us from without. Hell grows up from within, a spiritual cancer. Hell is not just punishment for sin; Hell is sin itself in its consummation. It is the state of spiritual death. The popular concept of Hell is eternal life with pain rather than eternal *death*. The soul's life derives from God. The soul dies when cut off from God. ... when the life of God leaves the soul, the soul is neither annihilated nor remains a soul; it dies. It becomes spiritual garbage, and Hell is the dump where the garbage is burned.

God's life is offered us every moment. If (we accept), Heaven enters the soul, Christ is reproduced in us. If not, not. And this “not” is Hell. If a free proposal is made, a free refusal is possible. Hell is not passive suffering but active rebellion. If we see sin as Hell wearing an earthly mask, we will fly to the Father in fear. Such fear is not a bad thing; “While there are wild beasts about, it is better to be afraid than secure.”

Though the damned do not love God, God loves them, and this is their torture. Love received by one who only wants to hate and fight thwarts his deepest want and is therefore torture. “Our God is a consuming fire.” All that can be consumed, will be consumed, so that only the inconsumable will remain. Self must be consumed, must die in order to rise. Heaven and Hell are the very same objective reality, the fire of God’s love, which is His essential being. In a sense, everything is Heaven. Earth is Heaven as a seed. Hell is Heaven refused. Heaven is Heaven accepted.

Bierma *Bringing Heaven to Earth* p. 116

“The idea of a hell located in a lake of fire is nearly as pervasive as our pictures of heaven located on a cloud. The true nature of hell, though, is not fire and brimstone but *loneliness*. Isolation from other people and alienation from God – these are shadows whose blackness is unmatched by any other form of suffering”.

Aldcorn, *Heaven*, excerpts

In the absence of God, Hell will have no community, no camaraderie, no friendship. I don’t believe Hell is a place where demons take delight in punishing people and where people commiserate over their fate. More likely, each person is in solitary confinement, just as the rich man is portrayed alone in Hell (Luke 16). Misery loves company, but there will be nothing to love in Hell. Hell is a place of torment and isolation, where friendship and good times don’t exist. Everything good, enjoyable, refreshing, fascinating and interesting is derived from God. Without God there’s nothing interesting to do.

Jesus asks, “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?” Or, what can a man give in exchange for his soul?” The price has been paid. But still, we must choose. Like any gift, forgiveness can be offered, but it isn’t ours until we choose to receive it.

CS Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, excerpts

Christians have often disputed as to whether what leads the Christian home is good action, or faith in Christ. . . . it seems to me like asking which blade in a pair of scissors is most necessary. The Bible really seems to clinch the matter in one amazing sentence; the first part, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” – looks as if everything depends on our good actions; but the second half, “For it is God who worketh in you” – looks as if God did everything and we nothing. I am puzzled, but I am not surprised . . . (for) this is near the stage where the road passes over the rim of the world. No one’s eyes can see far beyond that.