

Eternity – Smoking or Non-Smoking

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"Then he will say to those on his left, Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me. "They also will answer, Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?" He will reply, I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me. "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." (Matt 25:41-46)

There has been an ongoing controversy in the theological community on the existence of Hell and Satan and what it means to Christian. Some believe that Satan is not this Angel of Darkness who will be locked into hell when Jesus comes again; and even those who believe that all people will go to Heaven regardless what they have done or what they believe; that hell is simply a metaphor and no one will actually be condemned there.

When we look at the fact that Jesus became man and died on the Cross, we have no doubt in our minds that He died for each person of this world, giving all mankind eternal life and the chance for forgiveness through repentance. Unfortunately people stop here and fail to realize that there are two eternal resting places, Heaven and Hell and each will have occupants, and those who reside in Hell will have a joyless eternity before them. Before we continue, we will examine a few important points.



First we must recognize and understand the spiritual battle that is raging around us each day. We see this many times through God's word, for example in Eph 6:10-18, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints". If there was not an ongoing battle then this would not be necessary. We

also hear more about this battle in Rev 12:7-9 & 17 “And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down-that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring-those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.” In this passage from God’s Word we see that the angels of God are at war with satan and the angels that follow him. What some do not understand or admit is that good and evil are in this continuous battle that will rage on until Jesus comes again. Next we must also acknowledge that:



Satan has control on the earth.



Satan’s army is large, at least one third of the angels of heaven follow him.



Satan will try to turn as many from Jesus as possible; thus we must be on guard.



Satan, his army, and his follower will spend eternity in hell.

Satan roams or has control on the earth (For Now). This is probably one of the more difficult statements for people to accept, but critical if we are to comprehend the picture of evil in the world and their final residence; hell. We see that satan current controls the earth when we look back to when Jesus was in the desert for 40 days then faced the temptations of satan. During his third attempt, satan tells Jesus if He will bow to satan, he will give to Jesus all the kingdoms, or the earth. “Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. All this I will give you, he said, if you will bow down and worship me. Jesus said to him, **Away from me, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.**” (Matt 4:8-10) We also see this in the book of Job when satan appears before God and is asked where he has been, **Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it."** (Job 1:7) Satan is busy doing his best to tempt those who follow Jesus and to pull our focus off of Jesus and onto things of the world. **We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.** 1 John 5:19

Satan’s army is Large. When satan turned from God and was cast to the earth he was not alone, he brought with him one third of the angels in heaven, “**His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth**” (Rev 12: 4) and we do not know how many souls he has working for him now. So this is not merely a battle against satan, it is against satan and all of his demons and followers.

If Satan cannot turn you he will try to destroy you. Satan will attempt to win over as many people, or souls, as possible and we see in Revelation 12:17 that he has waged war against those who obediently follow Jesus and will not turn towards the darkness. This is why God has ordered us to stay on guard, as He did in Eph 6 and why He commands us to raise our children strictly and teach them His word, so that they will not fall into the temptations of evil; **“Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death. My son, if your heart is wise, then my heart will be glad; my inmost being will rejoice when your lips speak what is right.”** (Prov 23:13-16) We also see Satan’s vain attempts to destroy the faithful played out in the story of Job. **“One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD. (Job 1:6-12)** And we later hear that no matter what Satan did to Job, no matter what he took and destroyed, Job stayed faithful to God.

Satan and his followers will reside in Hell. What is hell and does this place exist? The final Hell will be occupied when Jesus comes to claim the earth and bring those who are of Him to the new Heaven. This is when the true or final hell will be a reality; that which is not of heaven, just as the new heaven will be revealed to those who have been faithful. Whether it is actually to be created in the mist of fire or not, is not important to us, but we do know it will be a place of great misery. It has been described in many ways, like in 2nd Peter where it is compared to a gloomy dungeon, **“For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment”** (2 Peter 2:4) It is also referred to by many names, the Lake of Fire (Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Rev 20:14); the “Abyss” (Rev 11:7); "the congregation of the dead" (Prov 21:16); and many more. We can also see another emphasis put on how bad hell will truly be when Jesus tells us, **“Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come! If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.”** (Matt 18:7-9)



So hell exists, for we cannot believe in heaven without accepting the fact there is a hell, just as we cannot recognize the good of God without also being aware of the evil of Satan. But what

exactly does that mean for all of us and why do others still refuse to recognize the existence of hell?



Hell is a realization of the poor choices some have made and the result of those who do not believe. Many choose to deny its existence because to do so brings peace to their minds that they do not have to face an eternal life of misery. We see repeated examples of what those who are not of Jesus, or ungodly, may face; like in 2 Peter 2:6, **if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly.** We also have a vivid reminder from Jesus, **I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell.** (Luke 12:4-5) We need to fear the one who has the power to send us to the damnation of hell, and that is Jesus. This is why it is so critical that we spend each day of our life reading the teachings of Jesus and then applying them to our daily lives. Jesus also sets a standard for us to live by placing the importance on why we should follow Him and stay focus on what He would have you do; **If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.** (Matt 5:29)



It is quite clear that if Jesus is the one who will decide where we will reside for eternity, that we should do what He has set forth for us to do and live our lives for Him. This brings up another important question, if we go to church at least once a month or more, are we complying with the requirements of Jesus? I would have to say no. Setting in a pew for one hour a week is not all that is needed to have a growing faith, just as having nothing but water to drink is all the body needs to grow. It is a part of it, but falls far short of what Jesus has asked us to do. And just because we sit in church does not mean we truly believe. God realized this when He establish one of the requirements to be saved, **That 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. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.** (Rom 10:9-10). We can say many things but God has put the one requirement that we cannot fake, to believe in our heart. For many have deceived others in believing they are of God or from God, but He cannot be deceived.



Jesus also gave us two parables to reflect the fact that Heaven many not be as crowded as many believe. The first one is from Matt 7:13-14, **"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.** Then another is from Luke 13:24 **"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. We know that those who are condemned to hell will face an eternity of misery but the greatest loss will be an eternal life away from God, for**

if they did not take the opportunity to get to know Him, they will then surely understand who He truly is.



So what are we to do now? The existence of hell should not in itself cause us fear, as Jesus said, **“Fear the one who can send you there”**. What this tells me is that it is critical we do the following:



Read God’s word and follow what He instructs us to do. And read all of God’s word, not just the parts that sound appealing or tell us what we want to hear. It is far too easy to read a single scripture and twist it into what you want it to say or mean. Read all of the scriptures before and after then cross reference those scriptures to other examples in the Bible.

For example let’s look at one of the abused phrases “Let him without sin cast the first stone”. This has been taken way out of contents and misused to meet the needs or clear the conscience of those using it. John 8:1-11 tells us: **But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."** Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, **"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"** "No one, sir," she said. **"Then neither do I condemn you,"** Jesus declared. **"Go now and leave your life of sin."**

What this is telling us is that the Pharisees were reminding Jesus of the requirement of stoning for this offense (Deut 22:23-24), these leaders sought his verdict on the matter. They were tempting him by putting him in a dilemma. If he upheld the Law, which was apparently not being applied rigorously in such cases, he could be made to appear heartless. If he advocated mercy, he could be heralded as having too lenient a view of the application of the Law. What they failed to do is to properly follow the Law of Moses which required that the man also be punished at the same time. In their attempt to trick Jesus, He turned it all around because no one could truly condemn her without condemning the man also. And it also should be noted that Jesus told the woman to go out and leave your life of sin.

Deut 22:23-24 If a man happens to meet in a town a virgin pledged to be married and he sleeps with her, you shall take both of them to the gate of that town and stone them to death--the girl because she was in a town and did not scream for help, and the man because he violated another man's wife. You must purge the evil from among you.

Jesus gives us the ability to distinguish the sins of others and in some case to take action. In Luke 17:1-4 Jesus said to his disciples: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." Here is the important part that many overlook If he repents, forgive him. We are also given further guidance in this are in Matthew 18:15-17. "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector."

If we are not willing to let others know when they have gone astray, or listen to when others tell the same too us, then we have forgotten some of the valuable teachings of Jesus and the meaning of being a Christian. In a true family, we help each other, love each other, support each other, and have to be willing to let each other know when one is sinning so that they may have the opportunity to repent and be forgiven. Many people do not know that there is an unpardonable sin. If they are committing this sin, and you see it and do nothing, are you not going against the teachings of Jesus, and therefore sinning yourself by doing nothing. You see an example of this in Acts 8 where Peter points out the sin of Simon.

We can point out sin without being judgmental or casting the first stone. Just because we point out to our brother he is breaking God's word does not mean we are judging or condemning him. It should mean that we care, that as brothers and sisters in Christ we are watching out for their best interest. Did not Jesus do the same for us?



Focus on the life and teachings of Jesus. When Jesus came as man it was so that He could experience what we go through each day and to set the examples that we are to following as we struggle to live a righteous life. He did not tell the parables to confuse or entertain, but to teach us what we are to do and what God expects from us. We are to study these teachings and actively apply them to our daily lives. If we do are best to emulate the perfect man and teacher, then when can say we have strived to be the best we can be.



Repent for your sins each day. We never know the moment when we will leave this earth and most do not stop and think about the reality that they will carry with them the baggage (sins) they accumulated while of the flesh. The baggage we carry with us as we come before Jesus on judgment day will be a reflection of our life and relationship with Him. We know that He came to pay the penalty for our sins, but this is only applied through our repentance of those sins to the one who intercedes for us. Jesus came and died for our sins because as man the sentence we face for our sins is an eternal life in hell; and He desires each of us to be with Him in heaven. But just

as the Father is just, He will judge us accordingly and though we all will be found guilty of our sins, many will have our penalties lifted because they have already been paid in full. So to stand before God on the day of judgment and claim forgiveness will be futile for it only comes through Jesus, and if your sins have not been forgiven through repentance, your verdict may be an eternity without Him. And just as we sin most everyday, we must take the time each day to spend with Jesus, giving Him these burdens and asking for the strength to fight the temptations which lead us to break His commandments and laws. To be like those who believe repentance is not required is to make a mockery of the death and resurrection of Jesus.



Let your Faith be true. Jesus knows that it is sometimes a struggle to have the right kind of faith. Because of this He provides so much for us to utilize during our journey with Him to help us know what to do and what is expected. We also must look at what a true faith is. Many have heard that they cannot earn their way to heaven, so they are baptized, confirmed, and waiting for their name to be called to enter heaven. They have failed to see what God has to say about a true faith in James 2:14-26, **What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.**



Spread the Gospel and Share Jesus. One of the requirements for our salvation, set in Romans 10:9 is the we must **confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord,"** This does not mean that we are to stand in front of a mirror and confess to ourselves, but we are to go out into the world proclaiming that Jesus Christ is Lord. This also goes hand in hand with the fact that Jesus also told us to go out and spread the gospel. This task is not designated to any certain person or group of persons, but was made to all of us. Whether we go to a far off country and bring the gospel, pastor a church, or go and proclaim Jesus to someone we meet, we need to be proactive. Jesus must be first in our lives at all times. I often use the example of how you would react if you just won a 100 million dollar lottery. You would call everyone you know and share the news of your good fortune with everyone you meet. You would run through the hallways at your work making sure everyone knows of your new wealth. Well having Jesus in your life is far more important and valuable than

winning any lottery, so you should show even a great enthusiasm and desire to share the good news of Jesus



Put Jesus First. As we read God's word we see many examples of the position Jesus is to be placed in our lives. This is best portrayed in Matt 10:37-40 when Jesus say **“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me.**

There was a young boy who had his friend come over one day and when he walked in his room, saw a sign which said “Jesus is First, other are Second and I am Last”. Upon seeing this, the visitor asked what it means. The young boy explained that he lives his life putting Jesus first in all situations; I do my best to always help others; then place myself last.

We need to put Jesus first always, living our lives for Him and following His teachings that were meant to help us understand how to live a Godly Life. If we are to be a Christian then we must not only follow Jesus but also His teachings!

All the Praise and Glory to the Father and the Son

Pastor Scott Jones