

The Day of Reckoning

Series: AfterLife

Brad Bailey – May 18, 2014

We're continuing in our series entitled "**AfterLife**"... where we've looked at the reality of life after death... of eternity with God. Over the **past two weeks** we heard **what God reveals** about a climatic renewal or restoration in which a **new heaven and earth emerge...and merge.**

Even as physicists begin to recognize that there must be another dimension that operates outside of time and space as we know it...the Scriptures have always been revealing a dimension where time and space as we know it exist...an eternal realm... from which an eternal God reigns.

Today... we must consider the significance of **where we stand in relationship to eternity.**

There's a **cemetery in Indiana** with a tombstone (over 100 years old) which bears the following epitaph:

"Pause stranger, when you pass me by, As you now are, so once was I.
As I am now, so you will be, So prepare for death and follow me."

An unknown passerby read those words and underneath scratched this reply:

"To follow you I'm not content,
Until I know which way you went."

This passerby had great wisdom... for **in our culture today** we tend to **give little real thought to heaven and even less thought to hell...to facing an eternal judgment.**

This morning I want to **let the light of God's Word** fall on this **sensitive subject.**

The subject of eternal judgment and hell **comes with a lot of barriers** in our **minds** and **hearts**...that we may need to transcend.

- **There are barriers** that come from the way we have created **cartoonish images** of hell.
- **There are barriers** that arise because of the way it has **been misused.**
- **There are barriers** with **reconciling** how God could **both love a world...and also bear wrath** and judgment.
- **There are barriers** because **we love people...people we just don't know how to awaken to their need to turn** to God.

While the scope or sensitivity of such issues is beyond our short time to fully engage...I believe whatever light we can gain is vital.

[**PRAY** – We come as those with perceptions that are limited. As Jesus prayed, we pray that we would **have eyes to see** and **ears to hear.**]

The central issue we're engaging...is that of SEPARATION.

What is the ultimate destiny of that which is now separated from God?

That is what the Scriptures speak of... beginning with some general images in the Old Testament writings.... to very pointed warnings by Jesus...to the apostles ...and to the vision of Revelation.

In the Book of Revelation, we are given a **vision of the final judgment** that comes at the end of "this age"... the culmination of history as we know it.

Revelation 20:11-15 (NIV)

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. ¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵ If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

In five verses John discloses the **end of cosmic time** and thus the **end of this world's history**. God's plan has been fulfilled and **everything that had to be taken care of has been completed**. **God now calls everyone into his courtroom**, ...all those who ever lived are brought before God... it is a scene in which it says **even the former earth and sky (heavens) cannot remain...**for they too are about to be given a re-created eternal state.

The throne is described as **great**...a term John used several times in Revelation to describe something that is **larger than life**...something of dimension beyond earthly proportion. And it is **white**...which does not refer to a color but to its **purity...and perfection**.

Every life will be judged... books... reflecting a judgment of actions and possibly rewards...and the **Book of Life** which reflects **the position towards God one has chosen... reliance.. or defiance**. **The division** between the saints and the ungodly is **irrevocable and final**. The ones whose names are recorded in the book of life are forever with the Lord, but **those who have rejected him are forever cut off**. [1]

It is a day of reckoning that **culminates with a 'lake of fire.'** **This is part of what is often spoken of as "hell."**

But what is really being described here?

Is this a literal description or symbolic imagery?

What lies in the future for those who die in unsundered autonomy from God?

There are some aspects of interpreting the nature of this state of "hell" which are simply beyond our apprehension...and some aspects that seem clear.

- **There is a tragic consequence that is very real**
- **The nature is likely drawing upon meaningful imagery rather than literal meaning**

The two leaders of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther and John Calvin regarded hell as a **real place**, but they believed **its fiery torments were figurative**.

John Paul II articulated a long-standing Roman Catholic teaching which proclaims that "the chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God." but with "images" that are used "figuratively" and that must be "correctly interpreted." [2]

In particular we know that the initial image was drawn from the ancient burning trash heaps outside a cities walls.

Jesus drew upon that common word....and further made references to fire. But what does it really mean?

It's a question that deserves more time and sensitivity to than we have this morning...but let me offer [3]....

A very brief mention of the views of what happens to those separated from God.

The most commonly held idea of hell is that of ...

Eternal Conscious Torment

Is rooted in a few key references to "eternal fires" ... and other phrases that imply something inescapable.

Some have noted that the language may be more figurative...but still reflect some form of a conscious ongoing state of suffering.

This is the view that is **often referred** to as the **traditional view**...and has certainly been held by many throughout the early centuries.

I have become drawn to a second view...which is often referred to as...

Conditional Immortality / Annihilation – ultimate death of body and soul

This is the view that what is described is that of both body and soul being destroyed.

- Most consistent with the **fundamental nature of being “spiritually dead”** apart from God. We **do not bear ultimate immortality** unless regenerated by God's Spirit...and therefore there is no basis for presuming eternal existence. It is noted that the concept of an immortal soul separate from the body comes from Greek philosophy, particularly from Plato...and is not rooted in the Biblical worldview.)
- Most consistent with the **more common meaning of “eternal fire”** (and such) actually referring to a limited duration but with lasting consequences.
 - We read of "Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them ... suffering the vengeance of eternal [aionios] fire." Jude 1:7. Are those cities, set ablaze long ago as a divine judgment, still burning? No; their ruins are quite submerged by the Dead Sea. The Bible itself specifically states that God turned "the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes." 2 Peter 2:6. Now the fate of these cities is declared to be a warning to all wicked men of the fate that impends for them.
 - “Unquenchable fire” is fire that cannot be put out, but which goes out when it has turned everything to ashes. Jeremiah 17:27 says Jerusalem was to be destroyed with unquenchable fire, and in 2 Chronicles 36:19-21 the Bible says this fire burned the city "to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah" and left it desolate. Yet we know this fire went out, because Jerusalem is not burning today. To quench means to extinguish or put out. No one will be able to escape from it by extinguishing it. [4]
- Most consistent with the **dominant language** that says that such lives shall be “destroyed” and “perish.”
 - Jesus said,
 - **“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”** (Matthew 10:28)
 - This explains best why the Scriptures refer to the Lake of Fire as **“the second death.”**
- Most consistent with a **moral sense of justice...and complete restoration.**

One other view that has been embraced by few and deemed more difficult to reconcile with Scripture is that of...

Universalism (Christian Universalism / Ultimate Restoration)

This view draws upon the idea that **the dominant over-riding theme** of Scripture is “the **restoration of all things**”...and only a universal restoration reflects this. They note that God’s will has always been to “**bless all the nations**”... and that “**none would perish**”...and that God’s will must prevail. Therefore this view proposes that the judgment that will come to those set against God will **lead to their eventual surrender**. The fire is not a punishing fire...nor a destroying fire...but rather a **refining fire**. (While certainly a positive idea...like most I think this view is impossible to reconcile with the Scriptures.).

While I will post notes for those interested in exploring these views more [4], what is clear is that there is a day of eternal reckoning... and **Jesus said** it what **we should fear more than physical death**.

What can we hear and see in this day of reckoning?

There is a day of reckoning that declares that...

1. Life is accountable.

Romans 14:12 (CEB)

“Each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.”

This is the **ultimate inconvenient truth**.

This is the truth we **try so hard to avoid...to dismiss**.

Actually we believe strongly that other people should get their just due... what we try to suppress is our own accountability. **What we really do** is to **form our own very undefined blend of judgment and grace**...and have it wrap right around us...**so that we fall within the parameters of grace**...of being “good enough.”

The vast majority create some **unspoken bell curve**... we admit we are **not Mother Teresa** but are quick to note that we are **not Adolf Hitler**.

We can learn to accept that we violate goodness...but we may accept that as simply regrets we can downplay and learn to live with. But each of us will give an account to God. Jesus warns us of this... that we don’t ultimately face our own standards...but God’s.

Matthew 24:36-51 (NIV)

"No one knows about that day or hour...⁴²"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. ...⁴⁸ But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,'⁴⁹ and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards.⁵⁰ The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of.⁵¹ He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Jesus declares that we will be **judged by the real master**... by **His standards**... and **warns us not to be like a servant** who thinks they won’t be seen.

Matthew 12:36 (NIV)

I tell you that men will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every careless word they have spoken.

“Every word”...it’s even more revealing than that...

Luke 8:17 (GW)

There is nothing hidden that will not be revealed. There is nothing kept secret that will not come to light.

That’s a truth that cuts through our sense that we can just present our best side... that we get to write a resume that only shows our best deeds.

Matthew 7:13-14 (NIV)

"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.

Jesus was constant in his warnings about hell.

We **must overcome** our **smug presumption** that we can **simply overrule or correct Jesus**. We need to hear again the pleading love of a Savior’s voice.

> **We are in fact subverting the much larger truth of our lives**...which is that we have been **willful rebels...living as if we are God’s rivals**. We are bent on autonomy. This leads to the second point, which is...

2. Sin is ultimately self-imposed separation

Sin is not simply failing to believe the right doctrines. Sin is not simply making a few mistakes. What stands condemned is a declaration of self-deification. It is rebellion of the first order. It says to the Creator and Judge of the World, “My will be done!”

This is why it is wrong to think of Hell as the place where sinners are sent to “pay for their sins”. They are not. Rather, they are sent there because of their sin...their defiant separation from God which leads by it’s very nature to eternal separation.

In a profound sense, hell reflects freedom.

Our separation has always been that which we have chosen. It’s we who have sought a freedom of autonomy...led by a delusion that if we glorified God, we would lose our human greatness...even when the truth is that what we lose is who we really are.(Genesis 3...Prodigal Son)

C.S. Lewis captured this when he said [5]...

- “Though our Lord often speaks of Hell as a sentence inflicted by a tribunal, He also says elsewhere that the judgment consists in the very fact that men prefer darkness to light, and that not He, but His “word” judges men. We are therefore at liberty—since the two conceptions, in the long run, mean the same thing—to think of ... 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.” (Problem of Pain, page 122-123)
- “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’ (The Great Divorce, ch. 9, pp. 72-73)
- "Hell is the greatest monument to human freedom."

What of those who never hear? (In actual sermon, this section was just summarized and notes are here as follow up.)

It's a question beyond our time to fully address this morning... and I believe beyond our ability to ever be absolutely conclusive about. (A question thoughtful people and theologians have naturally sought light on for centuries)

In particular it is the question of what of

Those who lived and died before Christ

Children too young to have fully developed their own understanding and choices in life

Those throughout history and even now to whom the Gospel has never been proclaimed.

Let me offer a brief response...

- We know that all are held accountable to what is known of God through creation itself
- We know that those prior to Christ coming, to whom God spoke further, were saved by faith... not works... but faith in his promises... such as Abraham...
- Regarding children... it has been recognized throughout most of church that God's Word implies an accountability... a decision of adult nature... and as such, that there is an age of accountability. Christ made unique pronouncements regarding children... and the innocence of their state... not a perfect innocence in thought and behavior... but in the nature of their will development and decisions.

(It's in this light we have chosen to see children first dedicated to the Lord... that they might know and follow God... and only later be baptized as a personal choice emerges which gives place for public declaration... we have simply chosen the age of 12 as a minimum.) We believe that children

- SO WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER HEARD? How are we to understand the accountable nature of our lives... the ultimate judgment for those who haven't a witness of Christ to respond to?
- God's Word is clear that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23)... 'Christ is the only sacrifice that atones for our sins'... Jesus said, 'No one comes to the Father but by me.'
- Yet... we know of God's provisions for those prior to Christ and children... and we see the emphasis on response and responsibility... that is, the ability to respond.
- How do we see the particularity of Christ at work with any broader provision of saving faith?
- Some propose that there is some form of second or later chance after death... applying only to those WITHOUT the knowledge of Christ.
 - o While this is an appealing way to imagine justice... I simply see no hint of this in Scriptures are rather clear that "people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Hebrew 9:27.)
 - o God's word points to our responsibility lying in this life.

Some point to the responsibility of responding to the light of truth that each has been given; and believe that Christ will somehow justly judge the response and repentance of those who turn towards God's mercy outside of knowledge of his saving work on the Cross.

- I see far more basis for such thought but would caution us as well.
 - o Such thought is never as explicit as our mission and mandate to bring salvation to the ends of the earth through the Gospel
 - We must never let the mystery of God's justice change our mission and mandate.
 - One is speculation, the other is specific
 - o There is no such mystery to those who have known Christ...

- To those who have known of Christ, we much let the warning of God awaken response.

3. Love is not indifferent to what destroys

People ask, *“How can a loving God bear wrath...anger?”*

Our problem lies not with God’s anger but with our own. The Scriptures tell us that “man’s anger cannot bring about the righteousness of God.” I think it reflects something very important when it makes the distinction with our anger. **Our anger is so woven in to our own self interest...** Reacts for others but so much for ourselves. **So we hear of God’s wrath and think how mean...** that he **wants to hurt people...to punish out of spite.**

> **We are projecting our nature upon God.**

For there is anger that flows from love...and we know something of it...even if corrupted.

Any truly loving person does know the place of wrath. In *Hope Has Its Reasons*, Becky Pippert writes, 'Think how we feel when we see someone we love ravaged by unwise actions or relationships. Do we respond with benign tolerance as we might toward strangers? Far from it....

Anger isn't the opposite of love. Hate is, and the final form of hate is indifference.

'Human love here offers a true analogy: the more a father loves his son, the more he hates in him the drunkard, the liar, the traitor.' (E. H. Gifford)

“God's wrath is not a cranky explosion, but his settled opposition to the cancer of sin which is eating out the insides of the human race he loves with his whole being.” – Becky Pippert

"God's wrath is the full weight of His Being brought against that which destroys the object of His affection" - Wayne Jacobsen

Many people today put Hell in opposition to the love of God. But Jesus combines them. Here is an important truth:

No one loves you more than Jesus Christ. And yet, no one spoke of or taught on Hell and Judgment more than Jesus Christ. There is from him, warning after warning, parable after parable, that speak and warn, even shout judgment and the reality of Hell.

4. God is reaching beyond justice with mercy

2 Peter 3:9 (NIV)

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

God’s heart is that none would perish.

God only created what was good...and heaven as what reigns. Whatever we are to understand about hell...we are told it was only created out of what is involved with bringing an end to that which rebelled from the good... beginning with the fallen angel referred to as Satan or the devil.

Hell is not even seen as parallel to heaven... it is **merely the darkness that surrounds it...** that lies outside.

> God's heart is that none should perish...and he does not forgo justice...and become indifferent to what destroys life... rather he REACHES BEYOND justice... with mercy.

It all comes down to **a choice between** our own **pseudo justice**...or the reality of **justice and mercy**. He comes in Christ to bear the ultimate consequences of our judgment upon himself. When Christ was crucified...he bore our shame...our separation. If we give ourselves to Him...we can be united in his eternal life. That is mercy. It is this mercy that destroyed the power of death and judgment. This is why we can join God in declaring **'Mercy triumphs over judgment.'**

Today our world is trying to find peace through ideas of tolerance...and inclusion.

The common idea is that the **more inclusive means to eternal life** is about **being a good person**. But the apparently inclusive approach is **really more exclusive**. It says, 'The good people can find God, and the bad people do not.' "But what about us moral failures? We are excluded."

The universal religion of humankind is:

We develop a good record and give it to God, and then he owes us. The gospel is: God develops a good record and gives it to us, then we owe him (Rom. 1:17).

"The gospel says, 'The people who know they aren't good can find God, and the people who think they are good do not.'

In Revelation we read of a second book...the Book of Life...that which secures every name who will receive eternal life...based on what? Based on God's mercy...through Christ.

I want to suggest that there can be a great danger in how we think about "believing in God."

In the story Jesus tells we hear the cry for mercy that had refused it all along.

The rich was not an atheist...he believed in the God of the Bible...prayed to the God of the Bible...and obeyed some elements of the law of the God of the Bible.

We have a tendency to think that what we need to do is believe in God...and that means agreeing with God's existence....and so we presume this implies some process of mental deduction by which we can say we believe or not...and perhaps it changes along the way.

> If that is what we think We do not know God.

To know God...to believe... is not to agree to His existence... but to bow before His mercy.

CLOSING:

Such a day of reckoning is a hard reality to face.

I've come to the place in which I had to face myself...face my fundamental sinfulness.

I don't mean 'how I did bad things'I mean something much harder to face...my sheer demand of self...for which I needed a grace I didn't deserve.

John 3:16-18 (NLT)

"For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ "There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son.

The good news is that through Christ our sins have been paid for. In Christ there is eternal life.

How can we be united in eternal life with Christ?

A – Admit your need

Admit that you are in need of a savior to get to heaven. That means I admit I'm not perfect. Only God is perfect. Admit that you have blown it and made mistakes. Recognize that you are a sinner in need of salvation. Owning up to it and recognizing your need is the first step.

B – Believe that Jesus died for you

Believing means more than just head knowledge. You can believe in something but not practice it. What I mean here is that you *place your trust* in Christ. You reach out to Him and *rely* on Him, you *surrender* to Him.

C – Commit yourself completely to Him

Making someone Lord of your life means that they call the shots. Surrendering your life to God means that you give Him control. It's a decision of the heart and will.

If I could summarize the breadth of all we have engaged today... I would say we must hear a word of warning... and if we do... we will join God in declaring '**Mercy triumphs over judgment.**'

Resources: Tim Keller, Leadership, Fall 1997, p. 42-48; Tim Keller sermon titled "The Dark Garden,"

Notes:

1. Kistemaker, S. J., & Hendriksen, W. (1953-2001). Vol. 20: Exposition of the Book of Revelation. New Testament Commentary (545). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

2. John Paul II articulated a long-standing Roman Catholic teaching which proclaims that "the chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God." This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called 'hell.' " And while the catechism cites without comment New Testament passages that refer to the punishment of hell as "eternal fire," the pontiff described these as "images" that are used "figuratively" and that must be "correctly interpreted."

3. Isaiah says of that fire, "Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor a fire to sit before it" (Isaiah 47:14).

4. Two websites which provide a good presentation of conditional immortality / annihilation are: <http://www.helltruth.com/> (Draws on Edward Fudge from his book, "*Hell, A Final Word.*") <http://www.rethinkinghell.com/explore/>

Scott McKnight summarizes some of the points for annihilation from Edward Fudge, in [*Hell: A Final Word*](#) ...

1. Gehenna, Jesus' typical term, is a trope for the place of destruction/fire south of Jerusalem.
2. What happens there? The wicked are destroyed, they perish there. [Matt 10:28](#): "fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell/Gehenna." The issue is if "destroy" means "destroy" or "preserve forever in a destroying state." Fudge thinks traditionalists ruin the meanings of words on this one: destroy means destroy, not preserve forever. Had he meant preserve forever he could have said it that way. He then lists eleven uses of "destroy" in the NT and shows that each means "destroy": why not in [Matt 10:28](#)? [[Matt 8:25](#); [12:14](#); [16:25](#); [21:41](#); [22:7](#); [26:52](#); [27:20](#); [John 11:50](#); [Acts 5:37](#); [1 Cor 10:9-10](#); [Jude 5](#), [11](#).]
3. Gnashing of teeth means anger, not pain.. CF. The Stoning of Stephen "When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth." - Acts 7:54
4. Eternal punishment fits with other uses of "Eternal" as an adjective: salvation ([Heb 5:6](#)), redemption (9:1), judgment (6:2), punishment ([Matt 25:46](#)), destruction ([2 Thess 1:9](#)). Big conclusions: the term refers to something in the Age to Come, it is endless and it refers *to the result of an action*. An action leads to something being permanent: one is not redeemed forever, one is redeemed and then lives forever; one is not judged forever, one is judged and then has consequences forever. [I sense a technicality here that is not as tight as Fudge says it, but there's a good observation here.] Eternal punishment refers to eternal capital punishment. The second death. [2 Thess 1:9](#) says it is "eternal destruction" so that eternal punishment is eternal destruction — and eternal fire refers to fire that destroys forever.
5. Rich man and Lazarus: it's a parable; Fudge sees Jewish folklore at work here; it's Hades not Gehenna; this parable says nothing about hell; it's not literal; it aims to motivate Jesus' contemporaries to care for the poor with the threat of irreversible consequences.

Below is further points regarding consideration of annihilation rather than eternal conscious torment. Adapted from - <http://www.helltruth.com/>

Doesn't the **story of the rich man and Lazarus** in Luke 16:19-31 portray and therefore teach that hell is a place of conscious eternal torment?

No...it's a parable used to emphasize a point. Many facts make it clear that this is a parable. A few are as follows:

- Abraham's bosom is not heaven (Hebrews 11:8-10, 16)
- People in hell can't talk to those in heaven (Isaiah 65: 17)
- The dead are in their graves (Job 17:13; John 5:28, 29). The rich man was in bodily form with eyes, a tongue, etc., yet we know that the body does not go to hell at death. It is very obvious that the body remains in the grave, as the Bible says.
- Men are rewarded at Christ's second coming, not at death (Revelation 22:11, 12)
- The lost are punished in hell at the end of the world, not when they die (Matthew 13:40-42). The point of the story is found in verse 31 of Luke 16. Parables cannot be taken literally.

Why does the Bible say that the wicked will be destroyed with **unquenchable fire**?

Unquenchable fire is fire that cannot be put out, but which goes out when it has turned everything to ashes. Jeremiah 17:27 says Jerusalem was to be destroyed with unquenchable fire, and in 2 Chronicles 36:19-21 the Bible says this fire burned the city "to fulfill the word of the Lord by the

mouth of Jeremiah" and left it desolate. Yet we know this fire went out, because Jerusalem is not burning today.

To quench means to extinguish or put out. No one will be able to put out the fire of hell. That is the strange fire of God. No one will be able to escape from it by extinguishing it. Isaiah says of that fire, "Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor a fire to sit before it" (Isaiah 47:14). After it has accomplished its work of destruction, that fire will go out. No one can deliver themselves from its flame by putting it out, but finally not a coal will be left. So say the Scriptures.

But the Bible speaks of the wicked being tormented "**forever,**" doesn't it?

The term "forever," as used in the Bible, means simply a period of time, limited or unlimited. It is used 56 times in the Bible in connection with things that have already ended. It is like the word "tall," which means something different in describing men, trees, or mountains. In Jonah 2:6, "for ever" means "three days and nights." (See also Jonah 1:17.)

In Deuteronomy 23:3, this means "10 generations." In the case of man, this means "as long as he lives" or "until death." (See 1 Samuel 1:22, 28; Exodus 21:6; Psalm 48:14.) So the wicked will burn in the fire as long as they live, or until death. This fiery punishment for sin will vary according to the degree of sins for each individual, but after the punishment, the fire will go out.

The teaching of eternal torment has done more to drive people to atheism and insanity than any other invention of the devil. It is slander upon the loving character of a tender, gracious heavenly Father and has done untold harm to the Christian cause.

Also from John W. Wenham, *The Case for Conditionalism* From "Re-Thinking Hell"

"Unending torment speaks to me of sadism not justice. It is a doctrine that I do not know how to preach without negating the loveliness and glory of God. From the days of Tertullian it has been the emphasis of fanatics. It is a doctrine which makes the Inquisition look reasonable. I believe that endless torment is a hideous and unscriptural doctrine which has been a terrible burden on the mind of the church for many centuries and a terrible blot on her presentation of the gospel I should indeed be happy if before I die, I could help in sweeping it away."

5. C.S. Lewis also said:

"I willingly believe that the damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the INSIDE." (Problem of Pain, ch. 8. p. 127)

Another central teaching by Jesus that reflects the choice and regret of "hell."

Luke 16:19-31 (NIV)

"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day.²⁰ At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores²¹ and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.²² The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried.²³ In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.²⁴ So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in

water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' ²⁵ "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' ²⁷ "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, ²⁸ for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' ²⁹ "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' ³⁰ "No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' ³¹ "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

It's important to realize that Jesus is telling a parable like story to address the false assumptions that lie within the religious leaders and lives he is responding to. The setting is fictitious. There are many factors that don't fit as a literal depiction of hell, including that they are in bodily form and able to see and speak between heaven and hell. [5] There is no reason to presume that this parable establishes that hell is a place of literal ongoing physical torment.

Jesus is **quick to tell of two lives...**and the **great shift that occurs immediately after death.**

By representing the beggar as being in heaven and the rich man as lost, Jesus taught His hearers that, **contrary to the prevailing view**, wealth was not an indicator of divine favor, just as poverty was not a sign of God's judgement upon a person.

Contempt and indifference toward the poor is a damnable sin. Note too, the rich man does not change after death. He is locked into his patterns. He does not ask to come to heaven, he wants Lazarus sent to Hell. He still does not regard the dignity of Lazarus, he still sees him as an errand boy. The Rich man, after death is miserable, but cannot and will not change.

Jesus was also seeking to educate the Jews that **salvation would not be theirs by birthright.** The rich man in torments **calls out to "father Abraham,"** just as the Jews of Jesus' day were mistakenly pointing to heritage as proof of their assurance of salvation.

Not an indictment on wealth, but on what this man gave ultimate worth to.

Sin is not just breaking the rules, but also "making something besides God our ultimate value and worth." These good things, which become gods, will drive us relentlessly, enslaving us mentally and spiritually, even to the point of "losing our life."

Furthermore, Jesus was seeking to lead His hearers to understand **the reality of accountability...** of **how we respond** to what God has made known.

He told them, **"If they hear not Moses and the prophets,** neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:31).

We are reminded that God's judgment does not reflect a lack of love...as we hear Abraham in heaven **addresses the rich man...as "Son."**