

Lesson 6 – Hell: Isn't the God of Christianity an Angry Judge?

Introduction

- Common cultural objection: *How can a loving God send people to Hell?*
- Key Text: Luke 16:19-31
- Misunderstanding of Hell as fire and brimstone vs. a deeper metaphor for something worse.
- Hell as a crucial doctrine for:
 1. Understanding the human heart,
 2. Living in peace in a broken world,
 3. Truly knowing the love of God.

I. Understanding Hell is Crucial to Understanding Your Own Heart

- **Luke 16:19–31:** Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus
- Only parable with a named character—**Lazarus** (rich man is nameless).
- Rich man's identity built on wealth/status—now lost and he is *nameless*.
- Hell is identity loss: building life on anything other than God leads to *disintegration*.
- **Kierkegaard:** "*Sin is building your identity on anything but God.*"
- Religion and moral performance (Pharisees) are just as damning if identity is misplaced.
- **Addiction as a metaphor for Hell:**
 - Brings disintegration, isolation, denial.
 - We are all addicts to something—career, approval, comfort, etc.
- **C.S. Lewis:** Over time, these unchecked flaws become “absolute hell.”
- Fire as metaphor: consuming, collapsing from within.
- **Hell is a freely chosen identity that goes on forever.**
 - The rich man is in denial, still acting superior.
 - He blames God for lack of information rather than repenting.

II. Understanding Hell is Crucial to Living in Peace in This World

- Cultural accusation: Belief in Hell leads to *exclusivity* and *oppression*.
- Biblical picture: **Hell is not imposed; it is chosen.**
- **Luke 16:25** – Abraham calls the rich man “child” – tone of sorrow, not condemnation.
- The Bible views the lost with **heartbroken compassion**, not disdain.
- **Miroslav Volf:** Belief in divine vengeance is essential to non-violence.
 - Only belief in God's ultimate justice can break cycles of revenge.
- Hell as a concept *restrains violence*, not encourages it.
 - Knowing God will judge allows humans to forgive and refrain from retaliation.

III. Understanding Hell is Crucial to Knowing the Loving Heart of God

- Fear of Hell leads to self-centered morality, not transformation.

- **Luke 16:27–31:** Rich man asks for a miracle to warn his brothers.
 - Abraham: *“If they don’t listen to Scripture, they won’t believe a resurrection.”*
 - Miracles or fear of Hell do not lead to saving faith—only **love** can transform.
- Fear makes people morally selfish, using God to avoid punishment.
- **Only the love of God changes the heart.**
- God’s love is shown not in avoiding judgment, but in **bearing it**.
 - **Isaiah 53:** Christ suffers to make others righteous.
 - **Martyn Lloyd-Jones analogy:** The depth of love is understood by the size of the debt paid.
- **Hell reveals how much it cost God to love us.**
- Jesus experienced Hell on the cross—forsaken, disintegrated, isolated—for us.
- To deny Hell is to **diminish the love of God**.
- **Final point:** “Jesus came not to bring judgment, but to bear it.”

Conclusion

- Removing Hell may make God seem more loving, but it actually reduces the depth of His love.
- True transformation comes only from understanding what Jesus suffered in our place.
- A proper view of Hell leads to:
 - Deeper self-awareness,
 - Greater peace with others,
 - A more profound experience of God’s love.