



Reinforcing Your Faith

Zoom Bible Study
led by Mary Lowman

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Reinforcing Your Faith – Session 5

The Hard Question: Hell

Introduction

Everything you and I believe hinges on whether or not the Bible is God's inspired word to us. The progressive Christian movement attacks the authority of Scripture. They say that the Bible is an ancient book and therefore we should accept that it acts like an ancient book. But reading the Bible this way brings us many questions.

- How do we think we are now wise and smart enough to give a complete and final interpretation of the Bible?
- What parts do we keep and what parts do we change?
- Who decides what the right interpretation is?
- Who determines when it's time to re-interpret the Bible?

"If we treat Scripture this way, we effectively make the reader the authoritative standard for what is true. With a Bible remade in our own image, we are no longer obeying God; instead we're following our own thoughts, feelings, and preferences" (Childers pg. 164).

Jesus said: *But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.* (Matthew 7:14) Have you praised God lately that somehow in his great mercy and grace, he led you to that right road and you have found it because God found you?

What was Jesus' view of Scripture?

Matthew 5:17: *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."*

The Jewish "Law and the Prophets" contain the same books as what we call the Old Testament.

How did Jesus respond to Satan when he was tempted?

Luke 4:1 – 13:

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

³The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

⁴Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'"

⁵The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. ⁷If you worship me, it will all be yours."

⁸Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

⁹The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. ¹⁰For it is written:

"He will command his angels concerning you

to guard you carefully;

¹¹they will lift you up in their hands,

so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

¹² Jesus answered, "It is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

¹³ When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

Over and over again Jesus stated explicitly that the Scripture is the very word of God.

Matthew 15:4: *For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.'*

Here he quotes from Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

Matthew 22:31 – 32: *"But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.'"*

Jesus also predicted and promised that the "Holy Spirit would speak through his apostles to give the final revelation of God to humans—our New Testament" (Childers pg. 171).

John 14:25 – 26: *"All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."*

John 16:12 – 13: *"I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. ¹³ But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come."*

A Hard Question: Hell

Why do people find it hard to believe in hell? Progressive Christians try to explain it away:

- Hell is simply the literal experience of evil on earth.
- Jesus never said that Christians go to heaven and non-Christians go to hell.
- Universalism is the belief that all human beings will be saved and spend eternity with God.
- They do not believe that sin separates us from God.

Hell is not included in the original creation in Genesis 1, where God created and called everything he created "good." Hell would not exist if it were not for Satan's choice to rebel:

Matthew 25:41: *"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.'"*

Jesus himself described hell as:

- Eternal punishment (Matthew 25:46)
- A blazing furnace where 'there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth' (Matthew 13:50)
- A place where the fire never goes out (Mark 9:43)
- A place where 'their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched' (Mark 9:48)
- Outer darkness; that place where 'there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth' (Matthew 8:12) (Childers p. 189-190).

Jesus uses three different types of images for hell: fire, darkness and worms. Hell is like fire because it is a place of torment. It is like darkness because people are lost there forever.

"J. I. Packer wrote: 'Hell is. . . the negation of fellowship with the Lord. It's the negation of pleasure. It's the negation of any form of contentment'" (Childers pg. 191).

Alisa writes: "The nature of hell is debated, but three things are made clear. First, hell is eternal. Second, in hell souls are conscious. Third, hell is torment" (Childers pg.193).

Some Misconceptions about hell:

1. People in hell are repentant.

People in hell are not innocent souls weeping in repentant remorse. It's the opposite of repentance and godly sorrow. "In this way, hell is not some kind of divine torture chamber in which God sadistically enjoys the torment of those who reject him. It's God giving them their way. Hell is a place for those who reject God." P. 194

2. The Devil is in charge of hell.

Matthew 25:31-34, 41, 46:

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

⁴¹ "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.

⁴⁶ "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Jesus makes it "clear that hell was not created for people. It was created as a type of quarantine for evil—namely, the devil and demons" (Childers pg. 195).

3. Everyone gets the same punishment.

The Bible teaches that there are different punishments for different sins and sinners. Speaking to Pilate at his "trial," Jesus said this:

Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." (John 19:11 – 12)

In Luke 12 Jesus tells a parable about different servants receiving different degrees of punishment:

Luke 12:47- 48: "The servant who knows the master's will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. ⁴⁸ But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."

Most of us tend to gloss over the fallenness of humanity. The root problem that gives rise to all the other problems is that we are sinners—all mankind are sinners.

Conclusion

In **Revelation 16** the seven bowls of God's wrath are described. Here is an excerpt from verses 4 – 11:

The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. ⁵ Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say:

"You are just in these judgments, O Holy One, you who are and who were; ⁶ for they have shed the blood of your holy people and your prophets and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve."

⁷ And I heard the altar respond: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments."

⁸ The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was allowed to scorch people with fire. ⁹ They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.

¹⁰ The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in agony ¹¹ and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.

“We live in a culture in which it is considered arrogant and even hateful to make dogmatic claims about reality. But if we believe the Bible is true—if we follow our Lord Jesus—we must affirm this alongside him: Heaven is real. Hell is real. And one day, the door will close” (Childers pg. 200).

Childers, Alisa; *Another Gospel? A Lifelong Christian Seeks Truth in Response to Progressive Christianity*, Tyndale, 2020.