

The Doctrines of Heaven and Hell

I. Misconceptions about Heaven and Hell

- Heaven is a spiritual place but not a physical place.
While heaven is now a dimension occupied by non-physical beings (with the exception of the incarnate Son of God), in the future heaven and the physical universe will merge to become an eternal and very physical place (Isa. 66; Rev. 21-22).
- Heaven will be boring.
 - If heaven were simply a place where people become angels and sit on clouds forever, it would be boring.
 - The future, resurrected, immortal cosmos will be the most exciting, fulfilling, satisfying place that we have ever lived because it will be the complete fulfillment of human life according to God's good design.
- Hell is where Satan reigns.
Hell is not Satan's kingdom but rather the place of his ultimate, final judgment (Rev. 20).
- Hell is a place of destruction, not punishment.
If hell were a place where people, angels, and things are destroyed, then hell would merely be temporary (even if very long). But the Bible describes hell as eternal, not temporary.
- People in hell will get a second chance.
The Bible teaches that everyone will die once and then face God's final judgment (Heb. 9:27). There is nothing in the Bible that teaches or implies that people in hell will receive a second opportunity to repent or that anyone in hell would want to repent and enter heaven if given the opportunity.

II. What Heaven and Hell Teach Us about God's Character

- The reality of heaven and the promise of redemption in heaven teach us that:
 - God is generous. He delights to give good gifts to his children (Luke 11:5-13; John 14:1-3).
 - God is gracious. God bestows amazing undeserved favor upon rebellious people by saving us from sin as a free gift that will last eternally.
 - God is loving. God's ultimate goal is to live with his people and the rest of his creation in love.
 - God is faithful. He does not surrender his creation to corruption and death. He is faithful to the people and things he has created and the covenants he has made.
- The reality of hell and the promise of God's just/righteous judgment teach us that:
 - God is just. Evil demands a righteous response and consequence.
 - God has wrath toward sin, which means that he has a just, righteous anger at sin and its destructive effects upon the people and world that God made and loves.

- God has provided only one Savior and means of salvation, and there are grave consequences for rejecting God’s saving grace, which are, in part, the natural consequences that result from alienating oneself from the One who is the source of all truth, goodness, love, and beauty.

III. Heaven Defined

- Heaven Now

- Currently, heaven and earth are distinct realms or dimensions within creation, and heaven is currently populated only by non-physical beings (God, angels, the souls of people who have died) + Jesus, the incarnate Son of God Jesus (the only physical being in heaven at the moment).
- The souls of people of believers who die in Christ go to be immediately with the Lord (Phil. 1:21, 23; 2 Cor. 5:8). Their souls do not sleep in unconsciousness. Rather, they are made perfect in holiness, and they enter into the worshiping life of heaven (Heb. 12:22-24; Rev. 6:9-11; 14:1-3; 15:2-4). From there they await the final resurrection.

- Heaven Future

- The eternal place where God’s redeemed people will live forever with God and one another. That place will be the union of heaven and the physical universe, which will renew, purify, and transform our present physical universe to be immortal (Rev. 21-22). It will be a single “heaven-ized” cosmos.
- Before the renewed, glorified creation is established, there will be a sequence of transforming events at the end of this present age of human history:
 1. **Jesus will return visibly** (Matt. 24:44; Acts 1:11; Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 4:16-17; 2 Thess. 1:7; Heb. 9:28).
 2. **God will resurrect all of the dead** (Dan. 12:2; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; Rev. 20:12-13).
 3. **God will judge everyone** (Rev. 20:12-15) **according to their deeds** (Ps. 62:12; Matt. 16:27; 25:31-46; Acts 17:30-31; Rom. 2:5-16; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 22:12). The good deeds of believers will be judged favorably because they are evidence of living faith in Christ and of justification by the righteousness of Christ. God will also judge fallen angels (Matt. 8:29; 1 Cor. 6:3; Jude 6).
- Those who are justified and vindicated in God’s great final judgment are resurrected in glory to live in God’s renewed, glorified creation. This will be a world without sin, Satan, or death and all of the miseries and cursed effects of sin (Isa. 25:6-9; Rev. 21-22; 1 Cor. 15:35-56; Rom. 8:18-30). We will live in the resurrected creation with resurrected, immortal bodies in perfect health of body and soul forever. We will be servants (Rev. 22:3) who reign with Christ forever (Rev. 22:5), which means that we will be active and growing forever. We will be fully liberated from all the bondage and corruption of sin so that we can fully exercise and develop all of our created capacities with freedom and joy according to God’s good design. We will be able to get to know and continue building life, relationships, and civilization with many millions of other redeemed people. And we will finally be able to work and play as God designed, and the chance to develop all of

our talents and interests and all the potential of God's creation. It will be joyful, satisfying life of growing relationships and joyful work with God and his people and the whole creation forever.

IV. Hell Defined

- The eternal dimension of creation separated from the rest of God's good, resurrected, glorified creation where sinners who have rejected God's saving grace will live forever in continual rebellion against God and suffer the full consequences of sin and misery (2 Thess. 1:8-9; Jude 13; Rev. 20:10-15).
- Hell is God's final judgment for those who have chosen the rebellion and darkness of sin and thus reap the condemnation of eternal death (Matt. 25:46; John 3:18-21).
- Hell is God's final judgment for Satan and fallen angels in addition to human beings (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10).
- The Bible describes hell using many different metaphors or images:
 - fire (Matt. 3:12; 5:22; 7:19; 25:41; Jude 7; Rev. 20:14-15)
 - darkness (Matt. 8:12; 25:30; Jude 13)
 - separation from God and his glorious might (2 Thess. 1:9)
 - weeping and grinding teeth (Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30)
 - torment (Luke 16:23)

Not all of these images can be literal (literal fire would not be dark!), but they must refer to something so unimaginably horrible that it requires multiple images to convey the breadth and depth of its misery.

V. FAQ about Heaven

- What will we do in heaven?
We will be servants (Rev. 22:3) who reign with Christ forever (Rev. 22:5), which means that we will be active and growing forever. We will participate in building and enjoying human civilization and exercising dominion over creation under the lordship of Christ according to God's good design and purpose for us (Gen. 1:26-28). We will engage in the whole range of human cultural activities without the corruption and limitations of sin and death.
- Will there be animals in heaven?
Probably so, since they are part of God's good creation by his design.
- Will we recognize other people in heaven?
Yes. People recognized the resurrected Jesus, and he is the foundation and preview of the greater resurrection to come.
- Will people who are married in this life still be married in heaven?
No. Jesus taught that there will be no marrying in the age of resurrection to come (Matt. 22:30). Marriage is a sign in this present age that points forward and will give way to a greater fulfillment and deeper reality of love between God and his people (Eph. 5:22-33)

and between people. We don't know what this will look like, but it will be incomparably greater than any depth of human relationship that we can experience today.

- Will it be possible to sin in heaven?
No! Resurrection and glorification will raise us to a state of confirmed righteousness and maturity in Christ so that we will never sin again.

VI. FAQ about Hell

- Will Satan rule in hell for all eternity?
No. Hell is a placement of judgment for Satan, not his personal kingdom where he reigns.
- Will the presence of earthly friends provide any comfort in hell?
No. In many ways, people in hell will not be the same as we know them in this life since they will be given over to the full effects of sin without any restraining influences of God's common grace in the world.
- Will God be present in hell?
Yes. God is present everywhere, and he sustains every existing created thing or person in existence, including the dimension and beings in hell. Hell will not be the total absence of God, because it is impossible to be anywhere that God is not present (Ps. 139). Rather, hell will be an experience of the presence of God not as blessing, joy, and goodness but rather as holiness in judgment (Rev. 14:10), an experience that is both God's just response to sin and the natural consequence of ongoing rejection and rebellion against God.

Going Further

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Jeramie Rinne, *How Will the World End?* (Good Book Company, 2014).

N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (HarperOne, 2008).

Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Tyndale, 2004).

Tim Keller, "The Importance of Hell"
<https://timothykeller.com/blog/2008/8/1/the-importance-of-hell>