

1 Peter 4:12-19 – Part H

1Pe 4:17 (NKJV) **For the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?¹⁸ Now *'If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?'*¹⁹ Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to *Him* in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.**

What would you say to someone who told you that they did not believe in a place called “**The Lake of Fire**”? How would you respond to that remark? Yet still, how would you answer the question that Peter raises here when he says “**what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?**” The word “**end**” is “*telos*” and it simply means the final lot, the final and ultimate state that a person finds themselves in. It is the beginning of a different order of things.¹ If you are even halfway alert to what people believe, it should be crystal clear that the majority of people do not believe in a literal hell, or a final place of judgment and torment that is eternal. Let me make this even more personal just so that we do not lose perspective on the issue here. If I were to ask you to complete this sentence, how would you respond? IF I SHOULD DIE TODAY, I WOULD GO TO _____. How would you answer that question? Are you sure beyond any shadow of doubt? Are you absolutely certain? Are you actually willing to risk eternity on being wrong? If there is any hesitancy on your part in answering that question, the chances are excellent that you may never have been saved. Everyone is eternal. Everyone lives forever. It is just a matter of where. Death is not annihilation, but rather it is being placed into another dimension and another location in an unalterable state over which you have no power to change or affect whatsoever.

Ultimately the study of this portion of Scripture is going to be a doctrinal study on the subject of an eternal hell. If we are drawing nearer and nearer to the return of Christ in the rapture of the church, then it is critical that we be sure about where we might be headed eternally. Let us just assume that the rapture happened this morning during this service and you were personally left behind. You may be thinking “*If that actually happened, I would surely know that Christ is very real and I would immediately accept Him as my Savior?*” Well, I would not be so sure of that. If you were never willing to come to Christ on His terms for salvation when it was actually easy, there is a very good chance that you will not come when everything is quite difficult. Just listen to what Paul says God is going to do in [2 Thessalonians 2:9-12](#), speaking of what will happen once the church is removed. These are some of the most frightening verses in the New Testament and should be a sober warning to anyone who does not take what we are addressing seriously.

2Th 2:9 (NKJV) **The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders,¹⁰ and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, **BECAUSE they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.**¹¹ And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie,¹² that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.**

¹ Zodhiates, *telos*, 1376.

Now, no matter what someone wants to convince themselves of regarding those verses, they better make sure that they get it correct – right? No place to play around here – not with these verses. So as we begin, I have to be very transparent that my first motive for teaching on this subject is that of wanting everyone to be fully informed of the consequences of not entrusting their life to Christ as their Saviour. One day every single one of us will stand before God and give an account to Him of what we did with Jesus Christ. Everyone will give an account of their life to God and there will be eternal consequences of unimaginable proportions to anyone who has chosen to live as they choose.

If you are here today and you have never truly been born again, my most sincere prayer is that you will be deeply disturbed by every word that I speak over the next several messages. Why would I say that? Why would I even think such a thing? It actually sounds rude and insensitive and arrogant on my part, but to the contrary, it is the exact opposite. Why? It is because I do not want anyone to die without Christ and be cast into the lake of fire for eternity. In terms of time, our life is not even a blimp on the radar screen. We are not even a nanosecond in relation to eternity. If there is anything that you need to be sure about, it should be this one thing – where will I spend eternity? It is not where will I spend next week, or where will I spend my retirement, but where will I spend eternity? If you are here and you are not saved, or you are here and just living under the illusion that you are saved, you should fear to the fullest degree possible that you do not die before you come to Christ. I have said this often, but it is not that the return of Christ is imminent, but that death is imminent. Anyone of us could die in just the most unexpected way possible and be sent into eternity without Christ in just the blink of an eye.

I want you to both understand and appreciate that there is no middle of the road here. Either a person is saved, or a person is lost. The very moment a person dies, they enter into an eternal realm in which they are fully conscious and fully alive. Based on what that individual has done with Christ in this life, they will either be enjoying a place of indescribable blessing or they will be catching their first taste of torment as they have never imagined - and in either case, their future will be irrevocably fixed. There is no middle ground here – absolutely none. There will be no future reprieve. Either you are saved or you are lost. Either you are committed to Christ or you are not committed to Christ. You are either obedient to God or disobedient to God. You are either going to die and go to heaven or you are going to die and go to a place of eternal torment and suffering. There is nothing in the middle here.

So, my first motive is to help YOU be sure that you do not personally go to this place we call hell, or more correctly “**the lake of fire**”. My second motive is for those of you who know that you are saved, but for whatever reason, you have not come to that place in your life where you are deeply concerned and burdened for people that you know are lost, and who you know will be eternally separated from God if they were to die. In fact, you may actually be fairly indifferent to their plight, and have become unwilling to even confront people with their need for Christ. So, if you are here and are just casually indifferent to the spiritual needs of those whom God has placed in your life, I pray that God will also make you very uncomfortable with what I say and describe as we unfold this passage. The stakes are very high. We are talking about people – loved ones, family, children, spouses, friends, neighbors, co-workers, strangers. We are talking about them dying and going to a place of eternal torment forever and with no hope of either escape or relief. There are no relief valves or escape hatches in this place we are addressing. There is no back door so you can leave.

You may just be afraid and reluctant to share your faith with others. You may be afraid that they will reject you and think that you are just a spiritual nuisance. I am not talking about being obnoxious or nagging or abrasive with people. I am not talking about doing something without prayer and the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit. You never know what kind of impact you may be having on someone. On the outside they may be cold and indifferent and spiteful and ugly, but on the inside, they may be very disturbed and wrestling with God. That is exactly what needs to happen, so please do not give up on people just because they have previously rejected God's message and offer of salvation.

Probably 20 years ago the Barna Research Group did a survey to try and determine what people believed about heaven and hell. I was really somewhat surprised in what they published. The poll stated that 76% of the people they polled said that they **DID** believe in a heaven and 71% **DID** believe in a hell. However, the more telling results of the poll were that only one out of a hundred said that they believed that they would actually be the ones going to hell. Now, these polls can really be a little misleading based on who they poll and where they poll, and if you took the same poll today, I believe that the results would be quite different than even 20 years ago.. What seems to be fairly accurate in this particular poll, though, is that most Americans believe that God will punish some sinners, but not them. I think the overriding idea is that if there is a hell that it only exists for the really BAD people like Adolph Hitler or serial killers or child molesters.

I am sure that you have heard this statement before or have been asked this question when people say "*Would a loving God really send good people to hell?*" Now, the real answer to that question is that from our perspective there may be some "good" people out there, but from God's perspective there are no "*good*" people. The question is good by whose standard? [Romans 3:11](#) says that "**there is none righteous, no, not one**". From a purely human perspective, only the really bad people deserve hell. The bad guys that kill people and hurt people and steal people's lifetime savings in Ponzi schemes, and people that rape little girls and sell drugs to children – yea, they deserve to be punished because they are really bad. However, from a purely spiritual perspective, from God's perspective, there are no so-called "good" people. From a biblical perspective the Scriptures are clear that no one, not one single person is righteous, not one single person even deserves salvation, not one single person seeks after God without God's intervening work in their life, and not one single person can do anything whatsoever to merit salvation in any way. Our problem is that we see sin one way and God sees sin quite another way.

Now, let us be quite sure that the Bible has a lot of things to say to men that they will never like and will never want to hear. However, because the Bible is in fact the very Word of God itself, and because the Triune God is the sole author of Scripture, and because God cannot lie in any sense, what the Bible says on any and every subject is **TRUE**. So, it is a crucial thing that we take hold of that because if we do not, then most likely we will believe whatever we want to believe rather than believing that which is true. We all believe something, and what we believe is reflected in our life, in our words, in our choices, and in how we live.

I have to say that this subject has deeply moved me personally. It is a subject that has disturbed me, one that has troubled me, and one that has unsettled me. This is certainly not the first time that I have dealt with this subject at this church, and every time previously that I have studied and taught on this subject, it has created the same level of concern and uneasiness and discomfort in me. Just the idea or the thought of an eternity of conscious torment for someone without Christ overwhelms me. It makes me wonder

personally if I have been doing the right thing and approaching preaching the right way, or have I personally missed what is crucial and critical and of the utmost of importance?

Then to make it all the worse, I know that no one likes this subject. We would rather just not talk about it and just not mention it. Certainly none of us want to even think about actually going to this indescribable place. I bet if I went around the room this morning and asked the question as to whether or not we as an individual were going to hell, NO ONE would say “Yes”. In some churches I am sure you might hear “*I hope not*”, or “*I was baptized when I was 8*”, but no one would say. “*Yes, I know that I will go to hell when I die and I can hardly wait to get there.*” In fact, if the truth of the matter were known, there is probably not one person here this morning that thinks that they personally would even deserve such a fate as being eternally damned to a place of indescribable torment – no one.

This whole idea of a literal hell runs completely opposite to what the modern world values, or what they believe even exists. I have to at least validate theologically that the Christian culture for the last 200 years has been growing increasingly uncomfortable with even the idea of hell as it is defined by Scripture. The result is that because of that kind of intense cultural distaste for the subject, many believers have somewhat abandoned the subject and have casually dismissed it as not really being true. I can tell you this as a fact. If you believe that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God and the only Savior that can save men, then please be assured that He certainly believed in a literal lake of fire and place of torment. In the Sermon on the Mount listen to what Jesus said. This is His first recorded sermon and within the first 22 verses He mentions hell. [Matthew 5:22](#) says,

Mt 5:22 (NKJV) But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.

[Matthew 5:29-30](#) says,

Mt 5:29 (NKJV) If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast *it* from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast *it* from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

[Matthew 10:28](#) says,

Mt 10:28 (NKJV) And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Listen to what Jesus said in the story of the rich man and Lazarus in [Luke 16:23-28](#),

Lk 16:23 (NKJV) And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. ²⁴ Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' ²⁵ But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.' ²⁷ Then

he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house,²⁸ for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.'

This is just a smattering of what Jesus had to say about this place of torment. So, it would be the gravest of errors to make a miscalculation at this point just because we may not like this doctrine, or because we may not think it is “fair”. Once again, and I simply repeat it for emphasis and as a reminder, but it is crucial that we hold on the fact that what the Bible says is true no matter what we may think about it or like about it. The teaching of Scripture is very clear and lucid at this point. There is no uncertainty or doubt as to what is clearly taught and identified on this subject.

We need to think of it this way. Unless Jesus returns in our lifetime, one day every single one of us will die. One of us will be the first to die and one of us will be the last to die, **BUT WE WILL ALL DIE**. I have stated it often, but the mortality rate in America is 100%. Everyone dies. **THERE ARE NO EXCEPTIONS**. [Hebrews 9:27](#) says,

Heb 9:27 (NKJV) **And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,**

So the sequence here is simple – **we die and THEN we enter into judgment**. You may miss your doctor’s appointment or your dental appointment, but you will not miss this appointment.

Now, this morning I am not trying to convince you that you are lost. As your pastor, I do not really believe that about you at all. However, what I am trying to do, and will continue to do over the next several weeks as we digest the content of v17-19 is that this is NOT a subject that you can just casually ignore – lost or saved. Jesus died to keep us from having to go to this place of torment. So, the real issue that has to be addressed is not what you believe about heaven or hell, but what do you believe about Jesus. Have you truly committed your life, every part of your life to Him as your personal Lord and Savior, or is the only thing you really want from Him is fire insurance. If the latter is the case, then I would have no confidence whatsoever that you have ever been saved.

Jesus, and your relationship to Him is not something that you can trifle with as if He is unimportant. The bottom line is that He is the only reality that is important. You can tell me that you do not believe that a loving God would send anyone to a place called hell, but if you believe that, then you will stand before God on the wrong side of judgment – the Great White Throne Judgment and then be cast into the Lake of Fire. You need to make perfectly sure that your relationship to Jesus Christ is very real and very true to the Scriptures. I say this as your pastor who loves and cares for you deeply, but I personally believe that many professing Christians will not enter into God’s kingdom because they never took their relationship to Jesus Christ seriously. May the Lord God Almighty give us clarity and understanding about this potential reality for many who only profess the name of Christ, but who really have no meaningful relationship with Him whatsoever.

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