

A Reasonable Faith

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Is There a Heaven and Hell?

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-2

We all die. Just as birth is our common starting point, so death is our common destiny. In fact, it has been said that death is the ultimate statistic. As George Bernard Shaw expressed it:

“The statistics on death are quite impressive. One out of one people die.”¹

There is an undeniable inevitability about death, yet no one knows quite when their appointment with death has been penciled in. As the epitaph on one tombstone expressed it:

I expected this but not just yet.

Ecclesiastes 7:2 echoes this sentiment:

“...death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart.”

In another cemetery there is a tombstone with the following epitaph:

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

Under these words, an unknown passerby had scratched this reply:

To follow you I'm not content,
Until I know which way you went.²

While everyone acknowledges the certainty of death, what is not so certain is what lies on the other side. Is death the end of life, the extinguishing of consciousness? Or is there a life after death? Does the soul survive the death of the body, and if so, what is life like in this bodyless existence? This is the Great Question,

Is the Christian Faith Rational?

Does God Exist?

Is the Bible God's Word?

Do Science and Scripture Agree?

Why is There Evil in the World?

Do Miracles Really Happen?

What Should We Think of Jesus?

Did Jesus Die and Rise Again?

Is There a Heaven and Hell?

Is There No Other Way of Salvation?

Can We Really Know the Truth?

How Do I Share My Faith?

and it has been asked from time immemorial. In **Job 14:14**, Job asks:

“If a man dies, will he live again?...”

Can a person survive death? One of the things that sets man apart from the animals is our ability to ask this very question. Unlike animals, man thinks about and plans for the future. And God has placed in our hearts a yearning for the future that he has prepared for us.

Eternity in Our Hearts

Read Ecclesiastes 3:11

Solomon tells us that God “has also set eternity in the hearts of men.” There is an “eternity instinct” within the heart of man, a deep-set conviction that death is not the end of the soul, that our consciousness somehow survives the grave. This homing instinct drives man to seek God, to search out what lies beyond death’s veil. As Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli describe it:

“However inadequately we may understand what we want, we all want paradise, heaven, eternity, the divine life. Augustine said ‘Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee’ – even if we don’t know who or what ‘Thee’ is. Something deep in our souls is not satisfied with this whole world of time and mortality. Even the atheist Sartre admitted that ‘there comes a time when we ask, even of Shakespeare, even of Beethoven, “Is that all there is?”’”³

This eternity instinct is almost universal. In fact, in all of recorded history, only an incredibly small fraction of humanity has ever believed that there is no life after death. This small group is called the materialists.

Refuting Materialism

The materialist believes that human life is defined by the sum of bodily functions. To the materialist, there is no such thing as an eternal soul. The functions of the brain can account for all that we understand to be human personality and once the brain dies, personality is extinguished forever.

Materialism claims science as the ultimate arbiter on all matters of life and death, yet by its very nature, science itself has nothing to say about the possibility of an afterlife. What lies beyond the grave is impenetrable to scientific investigation. In fact, there are only three possible types of evidence that can have any bearing on the Great Question:

The evidence of reason

People have produced many logical arguments to support not just the *possibility* of life after death, but the *necessity* of life after death. Examples of this kind of reasoned approach include:

- **The soul’s singularity** – Because the human soul is not composed of any individual parts (in other words, it is a singular whole), it cannot be

decomposed. Only something that is made up of multiple components can be destroyed. Therefore, by definition, the soul must be indestructible.

- **The difference between “being” and “having”** – In our language, we distinguish between “being” something and “having” something. For example, I *have* clothes and friends and a body. But I *am* myself. Now you can lose your clothes, your friends and your body. But you cannot lose yourself. You are you. As the *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* describes it, “There is a gap, or distinction, between haver and had, possessor and possession; and my body is ‘had’ as a possession; thus my body can be ‘un-had’ or lost in death. But not my soul, my self. There is no ‘death spot’ in me...no place for death to insert itself between me and my soul as there is between me and my body.”⁴
- **The justice of God** – If God exists, and if he is just, then his justice must have a final expression. Because we do not see it in this life, his justice must be finalized beyond death. Without this ultimate justice, we reduce all standards of right and wrong to private preference. In the words of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, “if there is no immortality, everything is permitted.”⁵
- **The meaning of life** – One of the things common to all human beings is the desire to find meaning in life. Yet if life ends in final annihilation, then life does not have an end worth living for. The atheist Bertrand Russell held that “the whole temple of man’s achievements is destined to be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins,” and wrote that we must build our lives on “the firm foundation of unyielding despair.”⁶ Ultimately, if there is no immortal soul, there is no real meaning in life.
- **The observation of nature** – There are many analogies in the natural world that can assist us in understanding life after death. When we look at nature, we see that the concept of transformation is everywhere. Take the butterfly, for example. At the end of its larval phase, the caterpillar disappears into a cocoon. Entombed in this chrysalis, unmoving and unresponsive, it has, to all outward appearance, died. Yet from the chrysalis emerges a butterfly. Life has transformed from one kind to another. Paul too uses the analogy of nature to show what lies beyond death’s door. In **1 Corinthians 15:35-44**, he likens death to the planting of a seed, which appears to die, but sprouts forth from the ground in a whole new stage of life.

None of these arguments provide absolute proof that there is an afterlife, but rather point out the logical reasons for believing that such a condition does indeed exist. Arguments such as these do not convince the staunch materialist, but may sway a person who is unsure of the reality of life after death.

The evidence of experience

There is no argument more convincing than personal experience, or the experience of someone known and trusted.

People die every day, and of these people, a small percentage has a close brush with death, yet live for a while longer to tell the tale. Such experiences are called Near-Death Experiences (NDEs) or Out-Of-Body Experiences (OBEs). According to one poll, twenty million Americans claim to have had them.⁷ And when a person has a near-death experience, they come out of the experience with one absolute certainty – life continues after death. “They cannot doubt because they claim to have seen, or experienced firsthand, life outside the mortal body.”⁸

A materialist would explain these occurrences as “the mind playing tricks,” yet time and again Near-Death Experiences have been shown to have an objective reality. Some patients, who died on surgical tables and were revived later, have described not only the out-of-body experience itself, but also such details as the layout of the operating theater, the words spoken by the surgeons, and even the location of lost objects.

The evidence of authority

We can try to argue the necessity of an afterlife from logic. We can evaluate the likelihood of life after death from eyewitness testimony. But is there an authority upon which we can firmly ground our belief in a post-death existence? As Christians, we believe we have such an authority – the Word of God.

Is there an afterlife? A person’s answer to this question is closely tied to his answer to one other important question: Is there a God? If the answer to the second question is, “No,” the answer to the first question is also “No,” and, as Paul states in **Ephesians 2:12**, we are indeed “without hope and without God in the world.” The existence of our “hope” is inextricably linked to the existence of God.

But if the answer to the question – “Is there a God?” – is “Yes,” then it follows that the answer to the question – “Is there an afterlife?” – is also “Yes.” And if there is indeed both a God and an afterlife, how can we possibly know what that afterlife is like? In exactly the same way that we can know what God is like – through the revelation of his Word.

This is what we mean by the argument from authority. Nine out of ten things that we believe, we take on trust from an “authority” that has assured us of their truth. How do you know that the earth is round? Have you followed in the footsteps of Magellan, who first circumnavigated the globe? No, you know that the earth is round because you learned it in a school textbook, from your teacher, from your parents, from those who are counted as “experts” in society.

But what authority can speak on the issue of life after death unless it is God himself? Once we accept that the Bible has authority to speak on matters that science cannot, we begin to discover the great hope that lies beyond death’s portal.

What the Bible Has to Say

The Bible has much to say about life after death. As with most things in the Bible, we see a progressive revelation of the afterlife – seed-concepts in **Genesis** that flower to their most detailed expression in **Revelation**.

The Old Testament

In the Old Testament, we find no developed theology of life after death. The first mention of the afterlife is in **Genesis 5:24**, where Moses records that “Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.” This verse implies that Enoch escaped death altogether (which is confirmed by **Hebrews 11:5**). The question is: Where was Enoch taken?

Much of the rest of the early Old Testament is also rather cryptic about the afterlife. In **Genesis 15:15**, God promises Abram (later to be called Abraham) that he “will go to [his] fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age.” In **Genesis 25:8**, we find that “Abraham...was gathered to his people” when he died. This phrase is similar to the expression “he rested with his fathers” which is used later in the Old Testament (see **1 Kings 2:10; 22:50**).

Read 2 Samuel 12:18-23

Here we find David expressing his simple faith in a life after death. Once his child had died, he refused to mourn further, for he recognized that he would yet see his young son again. “I will go to him, but he will not return to me.”

In the Old Testament, we find the following concepts expressed:

- There is life after death (**Psalms 17:15**).
- Upon death, both the righteous and the wicked descend to a netherworld, called *Sheol*,* a “land of gloom and deep shadow” (**Job 10:21-22**).
- In *Sheol*, life is a shadowy existence (**Psalms 6:5**), for although death is not seen as annihilation of consciousness, it is synonymous with destruction (**Job 26:6; Psalms 88:3-12**). While aware, the Old Testament indicates (although not emphatically) that the bodiless soul does not have the full gamut of expression that the embodied soul does.
- *Sheol* was not the final resting place for the soul. At some time in the future, God would redeem the righteous from *Sheol* (**Psalms 16:9-11; 49:15; 73:24**). At this time there would be a judgment of the wicked (**Ecclesiastes 3:17**) and a resurrection of the body (**Job 19:25-27; Daniel 12:2-3,13**).

Although the Old Testament doesn’t spell out what the afterlife is like, there is a clear promise that death will be reversed and the dead redeemed from *Sheol* (see **Isaiah 25:7-8; 26:19; Hosea 13:14**). This promise is fulfilled in the New Testament.

The New Testament

It is the New Testament that provides us with the clearest understanding of what is beyond the grave, and with this understanding comes a deeper revelation of the depth of the salvation that Christ has won for us.

* It is important to understand that *Sheol* should not be equated with “hell,” in its modern usage (although the *King James Version* renders *Sheol* as “hell”). As we shall soon see, *Sheol* and hell are two separate concepts.

Read 2 Timothy 1:9-10

Paul tells us that the Lord Jesus “has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” In fact, what is merely hinted at in the Old Testament is disclosed in its fullness in the New Testament. What is promised in the Old is fulfilled in the New.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:54-56

In bringing the full revelation of what life is like beyond the grave, the New Testament reveals the following:

- The dead are able to see, hear, feel and remember (**Luke 16:23-24**). In other words, although without a body (with its physical senses), the immortal soul still has sensory contact with the world around it with a range of senses that include at least sight and hearing, together with the ability to recognize the identity of others in the spirit world (note again **Luke 16:23**).
- The afterlife is qualitatively different from this life. There is no marriage or procreation (**Luke 20:27-36**).
- Death for the Christian now means entering into the presence of the Lord (**2 Corinthians 5:8-9; Philippians 1:21-24**). Prior to the Cross, both the righteous and the wicked entered Sheol and the two groups were divided by a large chasm. On one side the wicked were in torment, awaiting their judgment. On the other side, the righteous were in Paradise (read **Luke 16:19-31**). After the Resurrection of Christ, however, Paradise was taken to heaven (note **Ephesians 4:8-10; 2 Corinthians 12:2-4**). When a Christian dies, he does not enter the netherworld beneath the earth but goes straight to heaven.
- Although we grieve for loved ones who have died (feeling the loss of their presence), our grief is different because we have a unique hope. One day we will see them again (**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**).

Is There a Heaven?

Heaven is described in the Bible as a place of incomparable glory (**Isaiah 6:1-5; Daniel 7:9-10; 12:3; Matthew 13:43**). Upon entering heaven, we become immediately aware that it is a place of:

- Continual worship (**Revelation 19:1-6; 5:11-12**)
- Inexpressible joy (**Psalms 16:11; Luke 15:7; Jude 1:24**)
- Perfect holiness (**Psalms 89:2,14; James 3:17**)

Anyone who believes in a personal God has no trouble believing in a literal place called heaven. Once again, our understanding of God outworks in our understanding of heaven. Is God eternal? So is heaven. Is God pure and without sin? So is heaven. What God is like, heaven is like, for heaven is the place where the presence of God is expressed in its fullness.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:9

In many ways, heaven is beyond description. This is because the only way we can describe heaven is through comparison. But what can you compare heaven to? Our language is simply too limited to encompass the richness of what heaven is like. For this reason, heaven is not found in the Bible as a *description*. It is found as a *promise*. *The Message* puts **1 Corinthians 2:9** into these words:

“No one’s ever seen or heard anything like this,
Never so much as imagined anything quite like it –
What God has arranged for those who love him.”

You can almost sense the great joy that God has taken in preparing heaven for us. Like a father who has wrapped a birthday present for his son, knowing that it is even more his child has even expected, so God also waits for that great day when the package he has prepared is unwrapped and we see at last what we have barely even conceived in our wildest dreams. Heaven is all this, and much, much more!

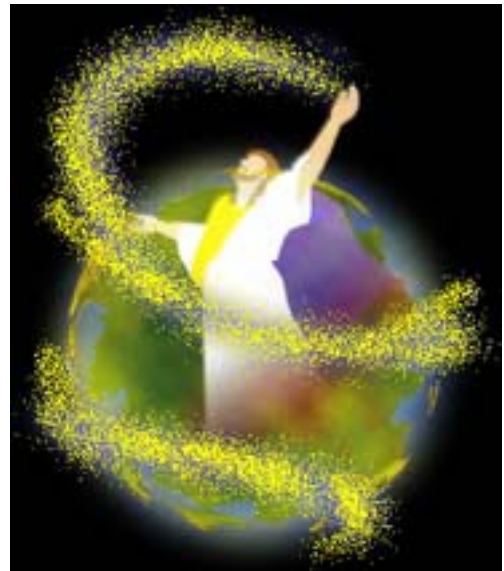
Read John 14:1-6

This is the ultimate promise, made by Jesus to you. Without actually using the word “heaven,” Jesus describes heaven in its essence:

- Heaven is a prepared place, personally designed by Jesus himself for each and every believer in him.
- Heaven is a place where the presence of Jesus himself resides. By going to heaven, we are joining Jesus and dwelling where he dwells. This is the primary definition of heaven – the place where the Lord is (**2 Corinthians 5:8-9; Philippians 1:21-24**).
- Heaven has only one access route and one entranceway – Jesus himself. He is the only way to the Father and to heaven.

Take note of Jesus’ expression, “if it were not so, I would have told you.” The disciples had a theological background that included a belief in heaven. The Pharisees all taught that heaven was a real place and the destiny of the righteous. Jesus assured his disciples that if this notion were not true, he would have corrected them. His statement – “Trust in God; trust also in me” – is also in relation to his promise of a prepared heaven.

Is there a heaven? Trust me, says Jesus, there is!



“...no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him”

Is There a Hell?

People find it much easier to believe in heaven than in hell. In fact, the modern mind tends to be repulsed by the idea of hell. More often than not, however, the common man's objection to hell is due to "street theology." God is a God of love, goes the argument. How then can a God of love send people to hell? Hell and love seem to be contradictory concepts.

This street theology is given succinct expression in the words of Charles Templeton:

"How could a loving heavenly Father create an endless hell and, over the centuries, consign millions of people to it because they do not or cannot or will not accept certain religious beliefs?"¹⁰

Donald Carson answers this objection by explaining that "hell is not a place where people are consigned because they were pretty good blokes but just didn't believe the right stuff. They're consigned there, first and foremost, because they defy their Maker and want to be at the center of the universe. Hell is not filled with people who have already repented, only God isn't gentle enough or good enough to let them out. It's filled with people who, for all eternity, still want to be at the center of the universe and who persist in their God-defying rebellion."¹¹

Scripture shows us that the existence of hell is just as much an outworking of God's nature as the existence of heaven is. In fact, Jesus himself states that hell was never intended for man at all, but for Satan and those angels that had joined him in his original rebellion against God (see **Matthew 25:41**).

Hell, in its essence, is the absence of heaven. As Donald Carson explains:

"...if God took his hands off this fallen world so that there were no restraint on human wickedness, we would make it hell. Thus if you allow a whole lot of sinners to live somewhere in a confined place where they're not doing damage to anyone but themselves, what do you get but hell? There's a sense in which they're doing it to themselves, and it's what they want because they still don't repent."¹²

You might say, but that's crazy! You'd have to be insane to prefer hell to heaven! But from God's perspective, that's exactly what sin is – a spiritual insanity. The Bible calls rebellion against God a "powerful delusion" (see **2 Thessalonians 2:11-12**) since the rebellious "love delusions" (**Psalms 4:2**). Those who oppose God are living out "the delusions of their own minds" (**Jeremiah 14:14**), since they have been "hardened by sin's deceitfulness" (**Hebrews 3:13**) and "corrupted by its deceitful desires" (**Ephesians 4:22**). For this reason, Jeremiah declared: "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure..." (**Jeremiah 17:9**).

Once we understand the power of the delusion that the Bible calls "sin," we begin to understand the nature of hell. Just as the holiness and purity of God define heaven, so the absence of God's holiness and purity – precisely the meaning of "sin" – defines hell.

Why should we believe in a literal hell? There are four principal reasons:

Because of the doctrine of free will

If there is no hell, then the doctrine of free will, as taught in the Bible, crumbles. The *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* observes:

“Free will and hell go together; scratch the idea of free will and you will find underneath it the necessity of hell.”¹³

There is no question that the Bible teaches that at the Last Judgment, God indeed judges people and consigns the wicked to hell (note **Matthew 10:28; 23:33**). But the Bible also indicates that hell is a place of its inhabitants’ own making, that no one is thrown into hell against their will. As C. S. Lewis once remarked, hell’s doors are locked on the inside.

Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli explain this further:

“The damned in hell do not *enjoy* hell, but they do *will* it, by willing egotism instead of love, self instead of God, sin instead of repentance. There can be no heaven without self-giving love. The thing the damned wish for – happiness on their own selfish terms – is impossible even for God to give. It does not exist. It cannot exist.”¹⁴

Because of the authority of Christ

If there is no hell, then Jesus lied (or, at best, was deluded). You cannot carve up the teachings of Jesus and pick out the parts that you like, leaving those that you don’t like at the side of your plate. If you don’t believe what Jesus said about hell, why should you believe what he said about heaven? “If there is no hell, the fundamental reason why Christians believe anything – the authority of Christ – is denied.”¹⁵

It is perhaps ironic that one of the reasons the modern mind finds it difficult to embrace the concept of hell is because it is generally accepted that God is a God of love. Yet this revelation of God’s nature is founded solely upon the authority of the Bible. As Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli state:

“There is one and only one reason anyone ever came to the idea that God is love, mercy and forgiveness – and only one good proof that this idea is true. That reason is the character of God revealed in the Bible, culminating in Jesus Christ. *The exact same authority which is our only authority for believing God is love also assures us that there is a hell.* Either we accept both on the same ground or reject both on the same ground, for they stand on the same ground.”¹⁶

Just because the concept of hell is not “in vogue” today does not mitigate its reality. The Bible declares hell to be real. Jesus declares hell to be real. In fact, it follows that the same Jesus who said of heaven, “if it were not so, I would have told you” (**John 14:2**), says in effect the same thing of hell: “If there were no such place, wouldn’t I have told you?”

Because of the mission given to the Church

Read Acts 26:17-18

Read Matthew 16:18

The mission of the Church is defined by the reality of hell's existence. "If there is no hell...[then] faith in Christ as Savior is not necessary, [and] we should recall all the missionaries and apologize for all the martyrs. What a waste of passion and energy and time and life! If there is no such thing as fire, fire departments are a distraction and a waste."¹⁷

A Christian's understanding of eternal realities – heaven and hell – will define not only how he lives his life here and now, but will also the urgency with which he shares the message of the Gospel with the unsaved. Those with a drive to share their faith with others have, on the whole, a clearer vision of both heaven and hell.

Because of God's justice

According to the Bible, hell is a necessity of God's justice. Without a hell, there is no expression of final justice. Wickedness has no penalty and righteousness no vindication.

But, some object, what about babies and young children? What about the remote Bushmen in Africa who have never heard of Christ? What about Mohatma Ghandi, who never became a Christian, though he loved the teachings of Jesus? Would God send such a man, held up universally as the modern example of a "good person," to hell? Once again, we find echoes of Charles Templeton's declaration of intellectual repugnance at the thought that God would "consign millions of people to [hell] because they do not or cannot or will not accept certain religious beliefs."

These are not arguments against the reality of hell, however. They are arguments that challenge the justice of God. There are two simply yet profound facts that we need to understand about heaven and hell:

- In the end, justice *will* be done
- In the end, justice will be *seen* to be done

In Lee Strobel's words:

"...at the time of judgment there is nobody in the world who will walk away from that experience saying that they have been treated unfairly by God. Everyone will recognize the fundamental justice in the way God judges them and the world."¹⁸

Defining the Biblical Hell

Jesus spoke of hell more than he did of heaven. In fact, no other person in the Bible spoke of hell more often than Jesus. This does not mean that hell is more important in Christian doctrine than heaven. Heaven and hell are equally important to the message of the Gospel. However, we cannot fully understand God's plan of salvation until we appreciate exactly what we have been saved *from*.

Here are the most important facts about hell as taught in the Bible:

- Hell is the absence of God’s presence. Jesus called it “outer darkness” (**Matthew 25:30**, KJV). In **2 Thessalonians 1:8-9**, those who are sent to hell are “punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord...” Hell is the state of eternal separation from God.
- Hell is a place of torment (**Matthew 13:41-42**), although it may have different levels of discomfort or torment (read **Matthew 11:23-24; Luke 12:48; 20:45-47**).
- Hell is not to be confused with Hades. Hades is the Greek name for Sheol, and is the temporary holding place of the wicked (located in the nether region of the earth), while hell (in Greek called *Gehenna*) is “the punishment of eternal fire” (**Jude 7**). **Revelation 20:13-14** describes how at the time of the Last Judgment “death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.”*
- The Bible gives no indication that there is any intermediate state between heaven and hell. In eternity, people will be in one of only two places – heaven or hell. There is no third state.
- Hell is eternal (**Matthew 18:8; 25:41; Mark 9:43; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Jude 7; Revelation 14:9-11**). There is no second chance, no general amnesty, no rehabilitation, no final reprieve. The choices we make in this life have eternal consequences (**Hebrews 9:27**).
- Hell is presently empty. It is a prepared place, but awaits the time of the Last Judgment before it receives those condemned to inhabit it.†

Despite the fact that it is unpopular to believe in hell, hell remains a harsh, biblical reality. In the March 1985 issue of *Omni* magazine Dr. Maurice Rawlings, a cardiologist and professor of medicine at the University of Tennessee College of Medicine, reported on near-death experiences described by many of the patients he had resuscitated. “It is now standard that those who have near death experiences later speak of having experiences of light, lush green meadows, rows of smiling relatives and tremendous peace...[Yet nearly] 50 percent of the group of 300 interviewed reported lakes of fire and brimstone, devil-like figures and other sights hailing from the darkness of hell. [Dr. Rawlings] says they later change their story because most people are simply ashamed to admit they have been to hell; they won’t even admit it to their families. Concludes Dr. Rawlings, ‘Just listening to these patients has changed my whole life. There’s a life after death, and if I don’t know where I’m going, it’s not safe to die.’”¹⁹

* For a fuller description of the difference between Hades and hell, we recommend that you review **ES104-19**.

† **2 Peter 2:4** tells us that God has already sent some fallen angels to hell. The Greek word used here for “hell” is *Tartarus*, which was used to describe the deepest and darkest dungeon of Hades. Demons were sometimes also incarcerated in the Pit or Abyss (**Luke 8:31**), a place where Satan is eventually bound for 1000 years (**Revelation 20:1-3**). Both Tartarus and the Abyss are holding places, places of temporary incarceration, where its occupants await the Last Judgment and transfer to hell itself.



Who is it that God condemns to hell? Because there are only two eternal states, it is actually of more value to examine the biblical credentials for entrance into heaven, since it is the *absence* of those credentials that results in being sent to hell. Of these credentials, the Bible is very clear.

Read 1 John 5:12

Christ himself is the sole credential required for entrance into heaven. This is what he meant when he declared in **John 14:6**: “I am the way and the truth and the life. *No one* comes to the Father *except through me*.”

In **John 3:3**, Jesus phrases this credential in terms of a new birth experience, then in **verses 18-21** explains the dynamic of God’s judging criteria:

“Whoever believes in [me] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”

We see in this verse the dynamic of heaven and hell already being played out upon the earth. On both sides of Judgment Day, the dividing line between heaven and hell is the issue of allegiance. Where is your allegiance? Is it with God or with Satan? Is it with the Truth or with the Lie? Is it with Light or Darkness? And that allegiance is evidenced in a person’s response to the message of the Gospel. The verdict is already in, Jesus says. Those who reject him are already condemned, for their decision has already been made.

In **Revelation 20:12-15**, we see this verdict in operation:

“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...If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

The books that were opened are the detailed records of the actions of each person, whether good or bad, done while in the body (note **2 Corinthians 5:10**). And each person is judged according to the content of these books. But notice that it is only upon one criterion, and that criterion alone, that a person is condemned to hell: if his or her name is not found written in the Book of Life.

The wonderful news of the Gospel of Christ is that it is possible now, *in this life*, to know for a certainty that your name has been inscribed in the Book of Life (**Luke 10:20; Philippians 3:20**). The Book of Life is the registry of those who already belong to heaven because they belong to Christ (**John 10:27-28**).

The most important thing for you to understand about hell is this:

- Hell is the default destination of *every* person. Because of sin, we are *all* condemned to hell.
- A way of escape from hell has been opened to *every* person. In the Gospel, the road to heaven has been clearly marked out.

This is the message of the Gospel that we preach.

The Final Resurrection

Read Philippians 3:20-21

If all we studied in this lesson were just heaven and hell, we would still not have a full picture of the afterlife as taught in the Bible. There is one missing piece to the jigsaw, a piece often left out in the understanding of Christians and non-Christians alike – the resurrection of the body.

Ancient Greek philosophy (particularly Platonic philosophy – the teachings of Plato) taught that the disembodied soul was the perfect state. While housed in the body, the soul was chained to the material world, but upon death, it was freed from this physical incarceration to enter the perfect, immortal state. This philosophy has entered the mainstream of modern thought. We see it in movies that have an afterlife theme, and it has even influenced Christian thinking. But it is emphatically anti-biblical.

The Bible teaches that God created you as a whole person – body and soul.* God’s never intended for you to die. From the beginning, God’s plan was for you to be a spiritual *and* physical being. What interrupted this plan, and brought physical death into human experience, was sin (**Romans 5:12**).

* Theologians call this a “psychosomatic unity” – which simply means that it as a body and soul together that we are a whole person. Of further note, the New Testament teaches us that this unity is actually a “tri-unity” of body, soul and spirit.

As we have seen in **Module 102**, the Gospel is God’s reversal of the fall of man. For this reason, the Bible doesn’t only teach about an *afterlife*; it teaches about life everlasting! The message of the Gospel goes beyond a description of “life beyond the grave”; it describes a time when the graves themselves will be opened! (**John 5:28-29**). It doesn’t just teach the immortality of the soul; it teaches the reversal of death itself! (**2 Timothy 1:10; 1 Corinthians 15:25-26**).

Read 1 Corinthians 15:50-56

The Great Question has been comprehensively answered in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In him and through the salvation he accomplished upon the Cross, death itself has been conquered. In fact, Jesus has personally pioneered this salvation, foretasting not only our death (**Hebrews 2:14-15**) but also our resurrection (**Romans 6:5; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23**). As James Hewett says:

“What death did to Jesus is nothing compared to what Jesus did to death.”²⁰

How do you answer the skeptic who challenges you to prove that there is a life-after-death? In the end, there is only one thing that truly convinces – a revelation of Jesus himself. As Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli conclude:

“...the Christian’s answer to the most skeptical question of all, ‘What do you really know about life after death, anyway? Have you ever been there? Have you come back to tell us?’ is ‘No, but I have a very good Friend who has.’”²¹

¹ George Bernard Shaw, quoted by Edyth Draper, *Draper’s Quotations for the Christian World*, excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0.

² James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988), p. 145.

³ Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press), excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0.

⁴ Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press), excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0.

⁵ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, quoted by Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press), excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0.

⁶ Bertrand Russell, *A Free Man’s Worship*, quoted by Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press), excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0.

⁷ Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press), excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0.

⁸ Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press), excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0.

¹⁰ Charles Templeton, quoted by Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), p.221.

¹¹ Donald A. Carlson, quoted by Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), p.222.

¹² Donald A. Carlson, quoted by Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), p.222-223.

¹³ Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press), excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0.

¹⁴ Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press), excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0.

¹⁵ Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press), excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0.

¹⁶ Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press), excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0.

¹⁷ Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press), excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0.

¹⁸ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), p.223.

¹⁹ Dr. Maurice Rawlings, quoted by James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988) p. 151.

²⁰ James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988) pp. 142-143.

²¹ Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press), excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0.

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