

Beliefs Concerning Heaven & Hell

- x My Uncle Joe is up in heaven watching over us.
- x God desires to torture people in hell for eternity.
- x I'm going to hell and I really don't care.
- x Aunt Betty is in a better place now, free from pain and suffering.
- x Babies who died before being baptized will go to Hell.
- x Satan and his demons manage hell and torture human beings who end up there.

Our Loved Ones Are Up In Heaven, Watching Over Us

This is one of those beliefs designed to bring a measure of relief, especially to children. Trouble is, many continue to believe it. Here's what the Bible says:

The living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything, nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten. Indeed their love, their hate, and their zeal have already perished, and they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun. (Eccl 9:5-6)

While the context of Solomon's words come from the "old" testament, there is no evidence that the dead are aware of what is happening on earth.

In the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19), there is no indication that either the man in Hell or the one in Paradise were aware of ongoing earthly events. The word of God is also clear that after death comes the judgment (Heb 9:27), not some limbo where people stand, watch, or gaze down on their still-living relatives. When a Christian dies, he or she immediately goes to be with Christ (Phil 1:23).

This notion probably came from Luke 15:10, where Jesus said, "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." But this is not speaking of humans in heaven. The angels are doing the happy dance when folks come to God in repentance.

When Saul had the witch of Endor bring up Saul from the dead (1 Samuel 28), the dead prophet's response was something like, "Why are you interrupting my heavenly reward to inquire about your earthly troubles?" The context does not suggest Samuel's knowledge of Saul's circumstances, except what he had already warned to Saul while still alive. Add to this the words of the woman who raised Samuel's "ghost," and you have a house of cards supporting the notion of Uncle Joe watching his loved ones from heaven.

You'll also notice that Lazarus was silent concerning his time in the grave. (John 11) The story makes no mention of what he had seen or experienced if anything.

Paul told the Philippian church, "My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better." (Phil. 1:23) Far better than what? Worrying about keeping a bunch of folks focused on Christ. Being in heaven with Jesus was far better, but it would only have been bittersweet if he had to constantly look down on earth and fret over his brethren.

If you want to keep on believing that the dead are watching over the living, go on and

keep doing so. The Bible reveals precious little info on what transpires in the afterlife. I can only tell you what the Bible says, and it is on God's Word that we base our faith.

God Desires To Torture People For Eternity In Hell

To understand hell, one first has to understand God's nature. Since He's the One who created hell, ask yourself, what was on His mind when He did so? First of all, hell was designed for Satan and his angels, not us. After the Fall of Man, however, the human race became included in the package:

He will also say to those on His left, "Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire *which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.*" (Matt 25:41)

Secondly, God does not "torture" people; He punishes them accordingly for the evil they did in this life.

Take the law of gravity as an example. When you jump or fall from a cliff, you suffer the consequence of breaking that law, deliberate or not. God takes no pleasure when that happens, even though He authored the law of gravity. Jump from the roof of your house and you'll reap the "punishment" of trying to break that law—perhaps a broken ankle. Take a swan dive from a 70-story skyscraper, however, and breaking that same law will be fatal.

The same is true for moral laws. Breaking a moral law has consequences that occur as a result of the violation. Since God is a moral being, immoral behavior rouses His anger. A person doesn't have to answer at the Judgment as to why they jumped off a cliff. They will, however, have to answer for acts of fornication, adultery, and so forth. Why is this so? Because those things affect other peoples' lives—people made in the image and likeness of their Creator.

The wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23) The harder you work at doing wrong, the fatter the "paycheck" you'll receive in the end. You "earn" that check by committing sin. If that sin is not forgiven, it will be held against you at the Judgment. This is why it's so important to give yourself to Jesus. After all, He took the punishment that you deserve for the sins you committed.

Third, God is perfect; He doesn't make mistakes. When He designed us, He didn't have a "recall" and fix something He overlooked or goofed up on. For example, the earth was originally designed as a perfect biosphere, able to recycle and repair itself and supply us with almost anything we can think of. This total perfection also translates over to His love and justice. Even His hate is perfect, not tainted by cruelty or loss of emotional control. A person will reap what they sow. (Galatians 6:7) They are not going to be unfairly punished.

Argument: “I don’t think it’s fair that people go to hell.”

A curious thing to note is found in the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus. (Luke 16:19ff) When the rich man sees Lazarus in Paradise, he asks if Lazarus can bring him some water. He does not ask to be released from the flames. In the same way, people want to be where they fit in, so to speak. They also connect the place to the situation with which they’ve become involved. For example, a perfectly healthy person wouldn’t want to spend two weeks in the hospital. In fact, you’d demand to be let out. Hospitals are for the sick; a healthy person doesn’t want to be in a hospital. That said, the sick aren’t happy to be there either. The same goes for prison. If you were unjustly incarcerated, you’d demand release. The guilty person, however, knows they’re in jail for a reason. Like the sick person in the hospital, they may not like it, but they understand the legitimacy of being there.

How does this translate into heaven and hell? A microcosm of what goes where can be seen by placing an unrepentant, God-hating person into the middle of a church service. Imagine it’s Sunday morning, folks are getting ready for the opening song, catching up on the week’s events, shaking hands, and grabbing running children by the arm. All of a sudden, WHOOSH! A person is magically transported into the center of all this. How would this person feel? My experience tells me he or she would want to get out of there as fast as possible.

Put this type of person into heaven, and they would not be happy. Heaven is a place of perfect harmony and love. The intimacy that will exist in heaven will be beyond description. The apostle Paul was shown heaven, where he “heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.” (2 Cor 12:4) To put a self-centered or mean-spirited person in such an environment would be a nightmare for both him and those around him. In hell, however, they’ll have the “benefit” of total isolation from God and other beings. They won’t like it, but it will be compatible with what they are.

Argument: “Why does a person have to spend eternity in hell for temporal sins?”

Some folks think it’s unfair for God to exact eternal punishment for transitory sins. As finite and mortal beings, however, we don’t have all the facts. We have no knowledge of things eternal. Only God can see perfectly and understand such issues. His word provides us with this necessary fact: *sin results in death*. (Rom. 6:23)

On one side, God loved you and me so much that He gave His only Son to be the sacrifice for our sins. He paid the price for the wrong we do. On the opposite side exists an equally strong condition: a certain expectation of judgment. It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the Living God. (Heb 10:26-31)

I'm Going To Hell And I Really Don't Care

Sadly, I've heard folks make this declaration. They're not afraid of Hell because they either don't believe it exists or they don't understand what it entails. Since they prefer doing their own thing and don't want anyone, including God, telling them what to do, they figure the cost is worth it. It's spiritual suicide.

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. (John 3:19-21)

A construction boss once told me, “I'm going to hell where me and my buddies will be playing cards.” Such infantile views of hell are prevalent, unfortunately. Phrases such as, “better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven,”¹ are bogus definitions of what one's status will be once put there. Jude describes it as “the blackness of darkness forever.” (Jude 13) It's pretty hard to “rule” in a place where you're surrounded by eternal blackness.

Everything secular depiction of hell typically describes it as being underground, people are swimming in boiling lava, being tortured by demons, etc. Others can't reconcile how it can be both of “the blackness of darkness,” as Jude portrays it, and yet also be a place of fire. Doesn't fire cause light? they ask. Foolish questions.

Although scripture describes hell in metaphors, don't think the symbols relieve the reality, which is always worse. The Greek word for ‘death’ means *to separate*, referring to the separation of the soul from the body. Eternal death means eternal separation. You won't have any body, with hands, feet, eyes, and ears. You'll be separated from all of that. You'll also be eternally separated from other human beings and God Himself. It will be the worst Sensory Deprivation Chamber (SDC) you can imagine. People who underwent experiments in SDCs—where they float in 98-degree water, in total darkness, and in total silence—started going insane after only an hour or two. Imagine being without sight, hearing, speech, or the ability to move about and touch anything for all of eternity. Imagine not having any frame of reference whatsoever. Spend some time in such an environment, and having a demon prod you with a pitchfork would almost seem welcoming.

Just as there will be varying degrees of reward in heaven, so too will hell be worse for some than for others. While you breathe you have hope. My friend, do not cast away

¹ From Milton's, *Paradise Lost*, line 63

your eternal soul just because you harbor certain notions concerning life after death, or because someone convinced you that once you're dead, it's all over.

Once you die, there is no second spin of the wheel. It is appointed unto men once to die, and after that, the Judgment. (Heb 9:27)

Aunt Betty Is In A Better Place Now, Free From Pain And Suffering

If Aunt Betty had been a Christian, that would be a true statement. Aunt Betty may have been a faithful church-goer, but that isn't what determines her eternal state. There are lots of unsaved sinners sitting in churches on Sunday mornings. And many who thought they were Christians will be surprised to find themselves in Hell (Matt 7:21).

If Aunt Betty never believed in Christ, never repented of her sins, was never baptized, then she isn't in a "better place," but is certainly awaiting God's judgment. Regardless of our sentimental feelings for loved ones, God plays no favorites (Eph 6:9). His plan of redemption involves our becoming "conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom 8:29), not just being a "good" person, who attends church or doesn't smoke, drink or swear. Jesus said:

"The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me." (Luke 10:16)

Regardless of how kind someone may have been to others, if he or she was not "in Christ" at the time of death, they are doomed.

Babies Who Die Before Being Baptized Will Go To Hell

Someone reading this may ask, “Why in the world would anyone even consider such a horrible notion?” I googled the question out of curiosity and got 117 million hits. Most responses to this question are emotional but not necessarily scriptural.

The real motive for baptizing babies is not found in support of any biblical truth but was instituted to promote an agenda. In the very early days of the Catholic Church, bishops had the advantage over a relatively ignorant population. Priests gave their "sermons" in Latin, which left their listeners in the dark. Only the clergy had access to a Bible, so there was no way for anyone to confirm what they were being told. In fact, when Martin Luther translated the Bible into German, the church sought to have him put to death. Why? Because he had given the man on the street access to the truth—something the church didn't want them to have.

After Constantine made Christianity the official religion, the church became a powerful political entity. Church leaders quickly figured out that real estate and money made for political clout. Money and land came from the people. Historians tell us that giving land to the church became so common, the secular government feared for its own survival. The church had more political influence than any other entity. The church decided who was elected king. The church decided what laws were instituted. The church decided what was to be taught in the universities. The church decided what science could and could not examine. The church made decisions on how children were to be delivered during birth.

To establish a base of faithful givers, one of the doctrines the Catholic Church used to scare them into obedience was infant baptism. While evidence suggests infant baptism was practiced before the Catholic Church, the reason for it had been quite benign. Regional bishops vied for control of the country, seeking to broaden their political boundaries and influence. The competition was fierce and very un-Christ-like. To prevent followers from migrating to a competing church, subtle changes in certain doctrines and practices began taking shape. Infant baptism was a perfect tool. Infant baptism became a potent tool for getting followers to “stay in line.” You had folks locked in for life when their child’s soul was on the chopping block. The bishops modified the doctrine to teach that a baby would roast in the fires of eternity if it died before being baptized. It didn’t take much convincing to make it a routine practice. As the decades turned into centuries, no one questioned the practice. At least no one in the Catholic Church.

Today, the doctrine of infant baptism is a secondary issue. The real problem is one of scriptural authority—there is none.

If you believe that life begins at conception, and a baby dies (aborts) before birth, then you have to add the unborn to this question. They are not baptized. If you believe that innocent children can be delivered into everlasting damnation, you're worshipping a monster, my friend, not God.

See <https://www.bogadocious.com/lessons/InfantBaptism.pdf> for a more thorough treatment of the doctrine.

Satan And His Demons Manage Hell And Torture Humans Who End Up There

Most of us have seen paintings of hell, envisioned by artists of long ago. Even in Hollywood's depictions of hell, they share a common thread, namely, that Satan rules there. His demons are tasked with torturing human beings.

Bill Weise has sold millions of copies of his book, *23 Minutes In Hell*.² It describes his supposed actual descent into the nether world. While it seemed he was there a long time, when he woke up, only 23 minutes had passed, thus the title. I read the entire thing, front to back. In it, he describes demons as jailers, handing humans over to the torments that await them. Totally bogus. But I got quite a bit of enjoyment from reading it.

In describing the Final Judgment, Jesus said, "(God) 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.'" (Matt 25:41-42) Hell wasn't made for us, it was made for Satan and his demons! Why would *they* be given an advantage in hell, especially when *they* are culpable for humanity's heartache and suffering in the first place?

The book of Revelation is quite clear on Satan's final place in eternity:

The devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever. (Rev 20:10)

I would venture to say that the worst location within that awful place will be where Satan will be confined. Being tormented for all of eternity is a long way from having a throne.

² Available at Amazon.