

LESSON ESSENTIALS

CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

LESSON 10: HEAVEN AND HELL

Question 19. Have you a soul as well as a body?

Answer. Yes; I have a soul that can never die.

Question 20. How do you know that you have a soul?

Answer. Because the Bible tells me so.

(from the Westminster Shorter Catechism for Young Children)

Some people believe that this life is all there is; that when we die our existence and our experience just stops. This is not what the Bible teaches. But what does the Bible teach? Do you know how to explain what happens after death?

The doctrines of the Christian faith say that every human is an eternal being with a soul that will live forever. The only question is where will that soul live?

“This life is the only hell believers will ever know. But for those who die in their sins, this is their only heaven.”

- Ray Comfort

No one takes a journey without first considering their destination. If you are planning to travel, you look at maps, means of transportation, what to pack, how long it will take to arrive, and what to expect when you arrive. Knowing where you are headed is crucial to getting ready for, and to enjoying, the trip.

The same is true for life's journey. Finding joy in our day-to-day living is dependent upon knowing our ultimate destination. So many people live as if this life, this journey, is all that there is. There is no 'ultimate destination' at the end of this life. As a result of that belief, they make decisions to act certain ways and to prioritize certain things. Their lives become characterized by living for the moment, by pursuing instant gratification and cheap thrills, by doing whatever makes them feel good regardless of the consequences.

For believers, that kind of lifestyle is not an option. We do believe that there is a destination for every human being. The doctrines of the Christian faith say that every human is an eternal being with a soul that will live forever. The only question is where will that soul live? Those who are in Christ will spend their eternity in heaven in the very presence of God. Those who have rejected Christ will spend their eternity in hell, separated from the God they avoided for their entire physical life.

Knowing the two eternal destinations that exist, and understanding the glories of the one and the horrors of the other, ought to fuel in each believer a radical passion for evangelism. When we look around at our loved ones, and even at complete strangers, we ought to be moved with compassion for them as we consider to which end their life without Christ will lead. Surely we cannot believe in the doctrine of heaven and hell and then blithely let our neighbours, our co-workers, our family members, and our friends live this life as if there is no afterlife, or as if heaven is available to everyone.

No: we must come see the imperative nature of evangelism. True love for our neighbour (as we are commanded to have) must drive us to warning them of hell and wooing them with heaven.

Fear of hell is not, in itself, a good enough reason to turn to Christ. But informing unbelievers of the reality of what happens when we die is a crucial worldview filter through which they ought to view their lives, their intentions, and their thoughts about and responses to Christ.

This present earth is full of troubles. Since the Garden of Eden, the world has been broken. Relationships, health crises, material concerns: all of these and more can make this life feel very hard. Many times people want an escape from the difficulties of this life. They may ask, “Is this as good as it gets? Is this all there is to life?” For the Christian, the good news of the Gospel says that there is more to be experienced. Jesus spoke of it as ‘abundant life’. While that does not mean that everything will work out perfectly in this life, it does mean that we can find joy in the trials, and that we can look forward with hope to the glorious eternity with Christ in heaven.

Unbelievers do not have that hope-filled focus on the future. Ray Comfort, an evangelist and minister from New Zealand, has said, “This life is the only hell believers will ever know. But for those who die in their sins, this is their only heaven.”

Yes, in this world you will have troubles. But in the next life, you will have the very presence of God as your constant joy and reward. For the unbeliever, their only joy is what temporary entertainments they can manufacture in the physical world.

This ought to break our hearts to see our neighbours and loved ones so desperately trapped. The doctrine of heaven and hell ought to shape the decisions we make in our personal lives, but more so, it ought to drive us to our knees in prayer for the unsaved, and it ought to drive us to the streets for gospel conversations with those who do not know Jesus Christ.

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IN REVIEW

- We all have souls that will never die and so we ought to be very aware of where our soul will spend eternity.
- What you believe about what happens after you die significantly impacts the decisions you make of what is a priority or what is worth pursuing. Understanding your final destination changes how you plan to live your life now.
- Holding to the doctrine of heaven and hell should cause us to be passionate about evangelism.

HAVE YOUR SAY

- How does believing in heaven shape the decisions you make today? Would you be proud of the decisions you are making right now if you had to defend them in heaven? Pray for a spirit of conviction to see what might need to be changed in your life.

- What trials are you currently facing? How can you find joy in the midst of them by yearning for heaven?

- Who can you tell the good news of the gospel to today as you warn them and instruct them about their eternal destination? Pray for an opportunity to speak.

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