

# discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership  
Study Guide

## CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE LESSON 10: HEAVEN AND HELL

### INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Discipleship Essentials module titled Christian Doctrine. This series of lessons examines doctrines which are foundational to our faith, with an emphasis on how incorrect doctrine can negatively impact true faith. Doctrine is the set of beliefs that determine how we practise our faith. It is critical that Christians understand correct doctrine about the nature of God and salvation, especially if they are engaged in teaching and discipling. This module examines scriptures related to a number of core doctrines of the Christian Church, and also some of the areas of confusion and error associated with each doctrine.

The Study Guide is intended for an individual to look deeper into a specific lesson on their own. The lessons can be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials, such as the video and audio productions found on [www.discipleshipessentials.org](http://www.discipleshipessentials.org).

---

Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

All other content is © 2019 Trans World Radio Canada, and may be used in any way you like as long as you use it with the purpose of reaching the world for Christ and do not charge for the use of the material. See more license details at [www.discipleshipessentials.org/licensing](http://www.discipleshipessentials.org/licensing).



# CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

## LESSON 10: HEAVEN AND HELL

### WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

This lesson looks at the doctrine of the afterlife as it is presented in the Bible, and the importance of correct beliefs in this regard.

### JUST SO YOU KNOW...

It is sometimes uncomfortable to talk about heaven and hell, but the Bible actually has a great deal to say about them. The Christian should not deny that there will be punishment and rewards in the afterlife. It is important to understand the nature and character of God (His holiness, righteousness and justice) in order to understand eternal judgment. Jesus spoke about hell more than anyone else did in the Bible, not to frighten or shame us, but to help us take seriously that which is to come. Remember God's nature as you go through this lesson, and keep in mind that the topic of death and the afterlife can be very emotional for some people.

## GETTING STARTED

1. What do you imagine life in heaven to be like? Describe your feelings about living in the presence of God.

2. Do you think avoiding hell is good motivation for people to come to faith in Jesus Christ? Or does hell turn people off from even talking about God?



## STUDY

❖ **CONSIDERING ETERNITY:** As human beings, we sometimes forget that we are finite, and live as though we will do so forever. Unless we face the reality of death through war, illness, or the death of loved ones, we become consumed with the details of living our life. It is good to remember that our bodies are temporary. However, the way we live our lives has eternal consequences.

- **Finite, Yet Eternal:** We are finite creatures; we have a beginning and an end to our days here on earth. Yet each individual created in the image of God has a soul that will live beyond the physical realities of this world. Our relationship with God will determine our eternal future.
- **Souls With Temporary Bodies:** Because we are well acquainted with our physical body, it is sometimes easier to think of ourselves as a physical body that possesses a soul. However, the Christian view is that we are a soul that has come to temporarily live in our body.
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:1. It likens our bodies to ‘tents’ that are our earthly homes. What does it say about what we will receive in the future? Who has made this, and how does it compare to our current bodies?

- **Spirit, Soul, Heart, Mind and Body:** We sometimes refer to different aspects of ourselves in conversational language. We might feel something in our heart, or analyze something with our mind, do something with our body, or be moved in our soul. Because the Bible uses all of these words, we may wonder what part of us will survive death. We can use the word ‘soul’ to describe the immaterial part of ourselves (our intellect, memories and personality). This soul is what will live on after our death.
- **The doctrine of heaven and hell can be stated this way: At physical death the soul departs from the body. The soul of the redeemed enters into eternal fellowship with the Lord and awaits resurrection of their body to eternal glory in the presence of God. The soul of the unrepentant enters into eternal separation from God, and awaits the resurrection of their body to judgement and condemnation.**

❖ **The Character Of God:** When discussing the afterlife it is important that we have a clear picture of why God must punish sin and reward righteousness. Our world today has a high view of humankind and a low view of God. On the day of judgement, God’s eternal perspective will give us a very humble view of ourselves, and we will see how we have failed Him during our lifetime. We will recognize that all of us deserve His wrath because God is holy and we are not.



- Look up [Isaiah 6:3](#) and [Revelation 4:8](#). What characteristic of God is repeated in these verses? And what does this word mean when applied to God?

Of all the descriptors used for God, “holy” is used more than any other. In both Isaiah’s and John’s visions of God’s throne, the inhabitants of heaven call out, “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty*”. God is without sin. Jesus took our sin on Himself and gives us His holiness in return. It is because of this that those who are in Christ can stand faultless before God, not because we are sinless, but because we are forgiven.

- What other qualities does God have that would require Him to punish sin and remain separate from it?

- **God is just:** God will punish evil and reward good. We may wonder why God has delayed His response to evil in the world, but He will assert justice completely in His time. God hates anything that destroys His beloved creation; therefore, God hates sin. We hate anything that would harm our spouse whom we love. We hate cancer that is killing a family member. Love does not allow us to be neutral. Neither can God think lightly about what harms His creation.
  - **God is merciful:** Just as God must execute judgement over rebellion, He has also chosen to be merciful to those who love Him and grant them what they do not deserve – the reward of heaven. We cannot be perfect, holy or righteous enough to earn our way to heaven. There is sin in all of us, and we deserve God’s punishment. God chooses to be merciful and offer salvation to those who will repent of their sin and follow Jesus.
- ❖ **THE BIBLE’S REVELATION OF THE AFTERLIFE:** The Bible gives us many word pictures to reveal some aspects of the afterlife. The revelation of these details in the Bible becomes clearer and more specific with Jesus.
- **Pictures in the Old Testament:** Some phrases in the Old Testament to describe the afterlife are ‘gathered to their people’ and ‘to go down to the grave’, or *Sheol*. It was understood to be a place where both the righteous and wicked went, with some separation between them.
  - **Pictures in the New Testament:** Jesus taught about the afterlife throughout His ministry, and God also spoke through the Apostles to give us a clearer picture. The words used in the New Testament are:



- o **Gehenna:** Sometimes translated Hell, this is based on the Hebrew word for an actual location outside the city of Jerusalem where human sacrifices were practiced and garbage was burned. This title is used symbolically.
- o **Lake of Fire:** This is a place of punishment where Satan, his angels, and those who oppose God will be thrown after judgement.
- o **Hades:** This is a Greek word used by the writers of the New Testament to describe Sheol. It is a holding place until judgment for those not in Christ.
- o **Paradise:** The place where those who are redeemed by God go immediately after death. It is also translated heaven.
- o **Heaven:** The home of God, the place from which Jesus came, the dwelling place of angels, the place of our citizenship.
  
- o Read Luke 16:19-31. Where do souls go before judgement?

- o Read Luke 23:43. Where does Jesus say that the criminal beside him on the cross would be that very day? What happens to our souls after death?

➤ **The Order of Events:** There are many events of the end times that Christians have debated for centuries. For this study, we will not go into great detail about everything mentioned in Revelation. However, the following points, though possibly viewed differently by some, are generally upheld as Bible-based:

- o **Death:** At death, the soul and the body are separated. The body goes to the grave, and the soul enters a place of waiting (hades or paradise).
- o **The Tribulation:** A great tribulation will happen before Christ returns to set up His kingdom of peace (Matthew 24:15-30).
- o **The Resurrection and Rapture of Christians:** When Jesus returns to reign on the earth, He will bring with Him all believers in their glorified resurrected bodies (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).
- o **The Millennium:** Jesus will reign over the earth for a period of time during which Satan will be bound (Revelation 20:1-10).
- o **Final Judgement:** At the end of time, unbelievers will be judged by Jesus, and believers will receive rewards for what they have done (Matthew 25:31-46).



- **Eternal Destinations:** Those who have not passed from death to life (John 3:24) are thrown into the Lake of Fire. Those who are in Christ will live with Him eternally in the New Heaven and New Earth (Revelation 21:1-4).

❖ **HEAVEN AND HELL:** From this order of events we get an idea of what happens to a soul after death. All souls go to a place of waiting. After the resurrection, they are judged and sent to either the place of reward in the presence of God, or the place of punishment and separation from Him. For simplicity, we will refer to those two destinations as heaven and hell.

- **Heaven:** Jesus is now preparing a place for us and will recreate the heavens and the earth. This will be our new home, where we will live in our resurrected bodies.

Read the following four passages, and answer the questions below. They are longer passages and will take some time to read.

[Isaiah 65:17-25](#)

[Revelation 7:9-17](#)

[Revelation 21](#)

[Revelation 22:1-5](#)

What will heaven be like physically?

What will our relationship with God be like?

What will our relationship with others be like in heaven?

What will we be doing in heaven?



Are the descriptions of heaven focused on our pleasure or God's glory?

Heaven is full of God's glory. While God is everywhere, His glory is on display there. In the new creation, heaven and earth will join and God's glory will be seen by us. Here is a brief summary of what we know about this Heaven:

- o **We will have fellowship with God** (Revelation 21:3, Job 19:25-27).
  - o **We will have fellowship with people from all nations** (Revelation 7:9-10).
  - o **We will experience joy and celebration** (Revelation 21:4, Matthew 25:21).
  - o **We will be free from pain, death and sorrow** (Revelation 21:4).
  - o **We will be in a place of great beauty** (Revelation 21:10-12).
  - o **We will have rest, but also actively serve God** (2 Timothy 2:12, Revelation 14:13, Revelation 22:3).
- **Hell:** Hell is eternal separation from God. The Biblical picture of hell is graphic. It is a place where sinners suffer and are punished.

What does Revelation 19:1-3 say will happen after God's righteous judgement?

- o **God has a right to judge:** Jesus talked about hell in great detail, and warned us that there are consequences for sin and rebellion against God. God, who is just, could sentence all people to hell, but He displays mercy by saving everyone who by faith accepts Christ as their Saviour (Ecclesiastes 3:7, 2 Timothy 4:1).
- o **Unrepentant people end up in hell:** Hell is not a place where people can repent and turn to God. At the judgement, they will acknowledge Jesus but it will be too late to be saved. Hell is a place where God's grace is no longer available. The unrepentant will be cut off from God and everything that is good (Philippians 2:9-11, Luke 13:28, Psalm 81:12, Psalm 16:2).
- o **Hell is agony and torment:** Hell is described as a place of agony, torment, darkness and terror. It is not a place of rest or peace, but where ultimate justice will be carried out. Sinners will pay for their rebellion against a holy God (Luke 16:22-28, Matthew 8:11-12, Matthew 13:42, Revelation 20:11-15).



- o **The Duration of Hell:** Finally, there are two prevalent opinions in Christianity about the duration of this torment. Some believe the Bible teaches that hell is eternal torment (Matthew 25:46). Others believe that it is torment that totally destroys both soul and body which are, therefore, annihilated forever (Matthew 10:28). These are things we do not know for sure, but we must conclude that sin will be punished, and God takes sin very seriously.

❖ **OUR RESPONSE TO THESE DOCTRINES:** What are we to do with the knowledge of heaven and hell? It is difficult to picture the future and these realities. The descriptions were never meant to give us an exhaustive explanation of all the details, but rather to provide enough information so that we will trust God and have hope for our future.

- What response should Christians have to these doctrines? How should they change the way we live?

Additionally, these doctrines should cause us to respond in these ways:

- **Forgive:** Our sins have been covered by Jesus Christ. So making others suffer for their sin in this lifetime insults the work of Jesus. Extending love and forgiveness because of what Jesus has done for us is our only choice (Colossians 3:13, 1 John 2:2, Romans 2:12-16).
- **Take sin seriously:** When we see someone continuing in sin, we should bring it to their attention and help them to overcome it. We want to encourage one another through total commitment to Christ (Philippians 3:12-21, 1 Peter 1:13-21, James 5:20).
- **Remember that the pleasures of sin are temporary:** Keeping in mind our eternal home and the rewards of following Jesus, we should compare the pleasures of sin to the eternal pleasures of heaven (Hebrews 11:25, Colossians 1:28).
- **Proclaim the Gospel:** Our silence about the realities of judgement to those around us is a demonstration of a lack of love. In fact, failing to share the Gospel is to be indifferent as to where they spend eternity.

What does Mark 16:15 and Romans 1:16 tell us about this?

❖ **Errors in Doctrine of Heaven and Hell:** We must be very cautious not to make the following errors in our doctrine:





- **Error #1 — Belief that everyone goes to heaven:** The truth is that all of us earn our place in hell. The Bible does not leave any room for the idea that everyone who tries to be good is rewarded with heaven.
  - **Error #2 — Belief in purgatory:** This is the belief that all people go for a time to a place of purgatory, where they suffer temporarily in order to purify themselves enough to enter heaven. This belief supposes salvation by works, or that we must pay a price in addition to the price Jesus paid for our sin.
  - **Error #3 — Belief in nothing after death:** There are those who believe that after physical death we simply cease to exist, and the mention of soul, spirit and eternal life are figurative, or connected to the legacy we leave here on earth. This idea comes from human philosophy and contrary to the Bible's teaching that we are more than just a body, and that there are eternal consequences to how we live our lives.
  - **Error #4 — Belief that at the time of death we become one with God:** It is false to say that we are absorbed into the person of God. For Christians in the age to come, our whole person will be renewed and recreated, and we will live in an eternal state in a physical place. Heaven is not merely a spiritual existence or a state of mind, but will be a new world in which we will be in fellowship with others and with God.
  - **Error #5 — Belief that we can pronounce who goes to heaven or hell:** The Bible was written to show us the way to eternal life, and to give those who believe in the name of Jesus assurance of their *own* salvation. No one can judge where others will spend eternity. What we do know is that God will judge every person. Only those whose names are written in the book of life will be given everlasting life.
- ❖ **CONCLUSION:** We often think that God will rescue us out of our present trouble and take us to a better place. This will be true only for Christians when they die. That better place is heaven. The alternative is to reject God's free gift of eternal life and spurn the love of Jesus. The final destination of unbelievers is hell. The choice is ours. As difficult as these doctrines are, we know that Jesus will judge everyone based on their acceptance or rejection of Him. Let us trust God and be assured that His plans for us are very good.

## SUMMARY

- ❖ We are finite beings – we have a beginning and end to our days on earth, and yet we possess a soul that will live on after our death.
- ❖ At physical death, the soul departs from the body. The soul of the redeemed enters into eternal fellowship with Jesus and awaits the resurrection of their body to eternal glory. The soul of the unrepentant enters into eternal separation from God, and awaits the resurrection of their body to judgement and condemnation.



- ❖ Heaven is full of God's glory. We will have unbroken fellowship with Him and with people from all nations. We will experience joy and celebration. We will be free from pain, death and sorrow. We will enjoy rest, but also actively serve God.
- ❖ Hell will be a place of torment, separation from God and all His goodness.
- ❖ The knowledge of the afterlife should motivate us to make sure we are right with God and not take sin lightly. It should challenge us to spread the Gospel and live in light of what is eternally important.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1.

There have been many books written by people who claim to have visited heaven and returned to their bodies. The description of heaven in these accounts is usually filled with imagery, such as possessing wings, halos or angelic features. How do these accounts compare to the Bible? Could you visit heaven without having had a life-changing encounter with God on earth? Do you believe these accounts to be true or fiction?

2.

Where do you see the errors of doctrine about heaven and hell in popular opinion? How can you guard against passing these false doctrines on to others?