Hell Study 11 January 2026

Hell is associated with pizzas, jokes, movies and cussing, but it is avoided by Christians, including preachers. Why?

Wayne Grudem describes hell as '…a place of eternal, conscious punishment for the wicked.'

If you could click your fingers and change Christianity in one significant way what would it be? Would you do away with the concept of hell?

Quotes to consider

David Bentley Hart, University of Notre Dame, describes hell as '….morally corrupt, contrary to justice, perverse, inexcusably cruel, deeply irrational and essentially wicked.'

Nikolai Berdyaev, Ukrainian philosopher, '….I can conceive of no more powerful and irrefutable argument in favour of atheism than the eternal torments of hell.'

Grady Brown, Bible teacher, '….The doctrine of endless punishment has for centuries been the crazy uncle that the church, with justifiable embarrassment, has kept locked in the back bedroom.'

Christians have grasped for alternatives to reduce the severity of damnation while still honouring Scripture. Surely a God of love will not subject anybody, even Hitler, to an eternity of torment with no possibility of escape, ever. Two main views have emerged:

1. Conditional immortality / annihilation. Eternal life is granted for believers. Unbelievers cease to exist. (John Stott and other theologians). They appeal to certain passages including these. See what you think. Discuss:

a. Matt 7:13	e. Romans 2:12	i. Phil 3:19
b. Matt 10:28	f. 1 Cor 1:18	j. 1 Thess 5:3
c. John 3:16	g. 1 Cor 15:18	k. 2 Thess 1:9, 2:10
d. John 10:28	h. 2 Cor 2:15, 4:3	l. 2 Peter 3:9

2. Universalism. Love wins. (Karl Barth, Rob Bell). Everybody is ultimately saved. God chooses good for people who do not have sufficient knowledge to choose correctly for themselves. Those who reject Christ are still saved by Him into relationship with God, even against their flawed and distorted will. These passages are used in support of the idea. See what you think. Discuss the concept of universalism.

a. Romans 5:18	d. 1 Tim 2:4
b. 2 Cor 5:19	e. 1 Tim 4:10
c. Eph 1:10	

What do we believe about hell, and what process do we go through in forming that belief? 12 points to consider. Discuss each point and weigh up what it actually communicates about eternal existence.

1. The Bible refers to eternal torment.
    a. The assumption in Jesus' day was eternal torment. Might Jesus have corrected this if it was wrong?
    b. Mark 9:43-48. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. [45] And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. [47] And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, [48] where "'the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched.'
    c. Jesus is picturing the valley of Hinnom. A continually burning rubbish dump of dead maggot-infested animals. This was a site where child sacrifice and other atrocities had once occurred. Wild dogs howled. When the wind blew from Hinnom the stench in Jerusalem was nauseating.
        - Gehenna/Hinnom - the spiritual and moral rubbish dump of the universe.

- Gehenna is referred to 12 times in NT, 11 by Jesus!

d. ***Daniel 12:2. 'Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and <u>everlasting contempt</u>.'***

e. ***Matthew 25:41. "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the <u>eternal fire</u> prepared for the devil and his angels.***

f. ***Matthew 25:46. "Then they will go away to <u>eternal punishment</u>, but the righteous to eternal life."***

g. ***Revelation 14:11. '….And the smoke of their torment will rise <u>for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image</u>, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name."*** 'Torment' in Greek means 'conscious suffering'.

h. ***2 Thessalonians 1:7-10. 'He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. [9] They will be punished with <u>everlasting destruction</u> and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might ….'***

i. ***Jude 7. In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of <u>eternal fire</u>.***

j. ***Jude 13. '….They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom <u>blackest darkness has been reserved forever.</u>'***

k. Bishop Polycarp's statement during his martyrdom. 'You threaten me with fire which burns for an hour, and is then extinguished, but you know nothing of the fire of coming judgment and <u>eternal punishment</u>….'

2. Metaphor? Is it possible that lake of fire / blackest darkness are likely metaphors not literal descriptions? Imagine a group of people, every one of them having every last vestige of divine image stripped from them. Degrees of grace, compassion, kindness, patience and empathy that remained in earthly life are gone. What might remain? Might this describe hell? Not fire, not literal darkness, but pretty awful???

3. Hell is a descent from true humanity. Heaven is where we become fully human, where Eden conditions are restored. Does this make sense and is this idea scriptural?

4. Sin is extremely serious – the OT teaches us that. Is it possible that if we understood the seriousness of sin, we might appreciate the price paid by Jesus and the penalty imposed for rejecting Christ and remaining unforgiven? David Kingdom states <u>'…Sin against the creator is heinous to a degree utterly beyond our sin-warped imaginations' ability to conceive of…'</u>

5. Torment is not torture. Torment is an <u>internal condition</u> due to regret. Torment means not being at rest, the opposite to 'resting from their labours.' Revelation 14:11. Discuss the difference.

6. God does not send people to hell. He allows them to enter hell only after seeking their salvation. Consider ***1 Tim 2:4. 'God our Saviour, ….wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.'***

7. God is good! ***Genesis 18:25 'Will not the judge of all the earth do what is right?'*** Rhetorical question. <u>God is morally good</u> and is the author of all that is good. Is it possible that we can simply trust that God will do what is right and just and that we will understand it when we need to understand it?

8. Hell is not the same for everybody. Degrees of torment and punishment are implied by the following passages. Discuss:

a. ***Matthew 11:21-22. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. [22] But I tell you, <u>it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you.</u>***

   b. ***Luke 12:47-48. The servant who knows the master's will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be <u>beaten with many blows</u>. [48] But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be <u>beaten with few blows</u>.***

9. Punishment in hell might vary over time (Mike Winger). Do we assume hell is static? If so, why?

10. Do we assume sin and rebellion ceases at death? If so, why? Is it possible that an ongoing state of rebellion incurs ongoing punishment. <u>Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord (Philippians 2:10-11), but some will do so begrudgingly, not from a worshipful, submissive heart</u> (Don Carson).

11. Do we assume everybody wants heaven? <u>Heaven is full of God</u>. God being worshiped, glorified, honoured. Is it possible that some people hate God and would prefer damnation? Would Heaven be a happy place for people who hate God.? Dallas Willard, Christian apologist, states, 'The fires of heaven burn hotter than the fires of hell.'

12. Heaven is obtained only by grace and never by works. But heaven and hell are logical endpoints on the journey of life and faith. Our progression of choices and the lifestyle we are characterised by should either prove conversion genuine or question its legitimacy. Saying a prayer as a 13-year-old at a camp is a start but it is just that, a start. Discuss the challenge that these passages present:
    a. ***2 Cor 6:1 'We urge you not to receive God's grace in vain.'***
    b. ***1 Corinthians 10:12 'So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!'***

What do we do with all of this? What do we take away? What do we apply?

1. What do we decide to believe about hell? Do we let Scripture inform our beliefs? Does postmodern relativism encourage us to carve something of convenience that we then lift high in worship? What process do we go through? <u>There is a lot we do not know about the afterlife!</u>

2. God is good and God is just. The Lord of all goodness will judge in accordance with his love and his goodness. One day it will make sense even if we struggle to accept it from the vantage point of this sin-soaked world, through the lenses of our finite, fallen reasoning.

3. Are our hearts moved by the thought of eternal destiny? If not, should we watch less Netflix and spend more time in prayer and outreach? After all, ***'God….wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.' (1 Tim 2:4).***

4. That said, is it right to promote a gospel of minimum requirements just to get people 'over the line?'

5. What motivates us to love God and be a good witness? What we are saved to (sonship and daughtership, and becoming a complete human being)? Or is the thought of hell a greater motivator?

6. Eternal destiny matters. God's glory matters. That's why he gave his disciples the Great Commission.
    a. Disciples make disciples. Disciples have the Great Commission as their calling. ***Matthew 28:18-20. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Therefore go and <u>make disciples of all nations</u>, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."***
    b. Disciples have their <u>hearts set on heaven</u> while their <u>feet tread the length and breadth of earth</u> saving as many lost souls as possible and encouraging them towards full humanity, knowing their heavenly Father, living in his love, becoming who each was created to be.

What does the Great Commission look like for you, for me, for Taupo Baptist Church in 2026?

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