

Heaven and Hell 2

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[0 : 00] Thank you, Gary. Once again, we will be sharing with you some comments, some propositions that we have put together preparatory to actually engaging the subject of heaven and hell.

And we will be doing that next week. My plan is that we will be spending one session on the subject of heaven, and we will be spending probably two sessions on the subject of hell.

And the reason for that being the Bible has a great deal more to say about hell than it does about heaven. So we will try to assign the time accordingly.

These are very, very important subjects, and they are, of course, predicated upon the reality of life after this life. So in our introductory session last time, we wanted to take time to lay sufficient groundwork, and we are continuing to do that.

Groundwork for considering the existence, the nature, and the purpose of heaven and hell. These are highly controversial subjects, and as you look at human history, you can see that public opinion regarding both of them has varied greatly over the years.

[1 : 24] But I do not think that there has ever been a time in the history of the human race that hell, in particular, has been so greatly denied as it is to this day.

If you were to go back a couple of generations, and even if you were to go back several hundred years, you would find almost unanimous consent that people believed in the existence of hell as a real place.

Today, there is what is passed off for intellectual sophistication that denies the reality of these things.

A great many people deny the existence of hell. Not as many deny the existence of heaven, because heaven is a whole lot more pleasant to think about than hell is.

So if you've got to opt out of one of them, make sure that it's hell and not heaven. But we know enough about objectivity and subjectivity to know that nothing is true because you want it to be.

[2 : 38] And nothing will cease to exist because you don't want it to exist. It is what it is, or it isn't what it isn't.

And we cannot bring something into being by positive thinking. Granted, we have attitude adjustments, and we have goals that can be achieved through a positive approach, etc.

But that's not what we're talking about. We're talking about our inability to change reality. You cannot make your own reality. Life is what it is.

Things are what they are. It is not up to us to call them to adjustment. It is up to us to make the adjustment to what is real. And that's what we must do in every case, and in particular, something as significant and as important as this.

So, before we engage these subjects of heaven and hell as particulars, we want to consider at least two universals in our thinking.

[3 : 46] And they are, first of all, does God exist? And secondly, is the Bible a reliable revelation from this God whom we presume to exist?

And we are taking this approach because the questions of heaven and hell's existence and nature are both predicated upon these preceding realities or unrealities.

By realities or unrealities, we mean the reality that God exists, and the Bible is an accurate revelation from God who exists, and therefore, the existence of heaven and hell, their nature and their purpose, are valid, legitimate considerations.

By unreality, we simply mean that if God does not exist, then the Bible is not a revelation from God, and it is not trustworthy.

Ergo, there is no such thing, then, as heaven and hell. Actually, biblical revelation is also as predicated upon the existence of God, as is the subject of heaven and hell.

[4 : 59] Everything. Absolutely everything is predicated upon God's existence. This is why we say Genesis 1-1 is the most critical verse in all of Scripture.

And I do not think it is coincidental that God the Holy Spirit put it first. Without Genesis 1-1 and its attendant consequences, nothing makes any sense, at least to the theist.

If Genesis 1-1 is not true, forget everything else, including John 3-16. Because if Genesis 1-1 is not true, then John 3-16 is not only redundant or superfluous, but it is meaningless, has no value at all. Theism was mentioned in our previous session. We talked a little bit about what a theist is. Not all theists are Christians, but all Christians are theists.

Consequently, we all know the position that we hold, and we all know where this study is going, and what it will reach by way of conclusions.

[6 : 23] Yet, it is important for you to see how we get there, and why we will reach these conclusions, even though we are now admitting that they are foregone conclusions.

I am sure you already know what our findings are going to be as we pursue the subject. I just want to admit that up front.

Are we biased? Yes, we are biased. Are we prejudiced? Yes, we are prejudiced. We have already examined and evaluated the evidence and have reached a conclusion, and we are sticking by it. None of our conclusions or positions are true because we hold them, however sincerely we may hold them.

How many times have I told you, nothing I say is true because I say it. No one can say that unless he is the very source of truth, and we have only one such person.

[7 : 34] And he is found in Genesis 1.1. So everything that anyone says, excepting that person in Genesis 1.1, is suspect.

It is open to suspicion. And you must always take everything that mere human authority says with a grain of salt. It may be true.

It may not be true. It is not true because someone very intelligent or someone whom you respect or someone who is very learned and has two or three PhDs said it.

That doesn't make it true. If the thing is true, it is true because of its inherent truthfulness. It is true because it corresponds to reality, not because of who holds the position, unless the one holding the position is the originator and the repository of truth.

And we have only one who fits that description. So, does such a person that we regard as the embodiment and the source of truth actually exist?

[8 : 50] And can we prove it? Can the existence of God be proved? The answer must be met with another question.

Proved according to whose satisfaction. What constitutes proof? Proof requires evidence.

Proved according to whose satisfaction. But evidence must be validated by examination. Evidence must be weighed and evaluated before a conclusion is reached.

And like beauty is in the eye of the beholder, evidence is often in the eye of the evaluator. Bias and prejudice tend to creep in and color the evidence in favor of the evaluator.

We all tend to see what we want to see. It is really important that you understand that. That is true across the board of humanity.

[10 : 06] It isn't true only of atheists who do not want to evaluate correctly or see the evidence for their being a God.

And it is true of Christians who do want to evaluate the evidence and conclude that it points to the existence of a God. Everybody has their bias.

And to say that you have no bias at all, no preference at all, no prejudice at all, is simply dishonest and an instance of denial.

We all want things to be as we want them to be. That's just part and parcel of humanity. We are all afflicted with that.

We have a vested interest in the outcome and we want to preserve our position. Consequently, objectivity can be very hard to come by and we should admit it.

[11 : 10] Every time I come to the scriptures and study a passage of scripture that I am preparing to expound before you, I have a natural tendency to want that passage of scripture to fit the theological mold that I already hold.

That just validates me all the more, proves my position all the more, increases my comfort factor all the more, gives me more confidence and boldness in what I am proclaiming.

But it is also a very dangerous thing to do. We have to constantly strive for objectivity, intellectual openness and honesty. And it can be very hard to come by because, as I said, we tend to want things to be as we want them to be.

We tend to see things as we want them to appear and to interpret it accordingly. And we have to guard against that. So in some respects, we can be our own worst enemy when it comes to deciding what is true and what is not true.

And you need to know, this is true of Christians as well as non-Christians. It is a human condition. For Christians, or theists in general, we are persuaded that the evidence that is given by creation, by history, and by God incarnated in Jesus Christ, constitute overwhelming evidence.

[12:40] The atheist does not agree. He is not persuaded and poses his numerous objections to our evaluation of the evidence.

And we briefly mentioned some of their objections. And we pointed out to you, as we named and reiterated some of the books written by the world's leading atheists today, some of whom have written best-selling books.

And we pointed out to you that these are not stupid men. We are well aware that there is a verse in the Psalms that says, the fool has said in his heart that there is no God.

And spiritually speaking, and in reality, these people who are atheists are fools. I call them intellectual fools.

They are very intelligent, very smart, very well educated, very sophisticated. But their sophistication and intelligence begins and ends with human wisdom.

[13:45] And the lie is given to that in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, particularly in chapters 1 and 2, where the apostle recognizes that man has considerable intelligence, but man's intelligence compared to God's intelligence is as foolishness.

And man's intelligence allows him to think, evaluate, consider, probe, exercise reason, logic, and all the rest of it.

But if we do that merely through human wisdom and do not take into account the revelation that God has given, which colors everything, then we are indeed being foolish.

Because we are not actually considering the best information that is available. Human beings can be gifted with great intellects and great intelligence.

But you must understand that having a great intellect, great intelligence, great IQ, is no guarantee that the positions you hold regarding spiritual matters are valid.

[14:56] And some people are just so impressed with anything that anybody who is very well educated and very well spoken says, because they are so brilliant.

They are so smart. Everything they say has to be true. And you would be amazed at how many people are unduly influenced by that. They are just overwhelmed by somebody's intellect.

And they may be an authority in nuclear physics, but that doesn't make them an authority in every other field. And yet, we ascribe that to them. I'm amused all the time.

We see this on some of the talk shows and television and through media, etc., where some very popular Hollywood personality or showbiz figure is quoted as saying, and it raises everybody's eyebrows, this is a very famous person, a very well-connected person, a very wealthy person, a very popular person.

And this is their position on whatever it is, world hunger or global warming or whatever. And people are drawn to that like a magnet, like this person.

[16:00] Oh, wow, they said that? Oh, well, if they said that, then that has to be my position. Such stupidity. But it is out there. And let me tell you something. It elects presidents and governors.

And I'm not being facetious. I'm being as serious as I can be. There is an incredible amount of non-thinking that is taking place out there, where people abdicate their responsibility for reason and logic and just turn it over to somebody else and let them do their thinking for them.

The results are disastrous. So, can the existence of God be proved? Yes. To the satisfaction of theists.

Can the existence of God be proved? No. Not to the satisfaction of atheists.

And I remind you of the quote that I gave you earlier by Bertrand Russell when being interviewed. And this man was an outstanding atheist, an outstanding intellect, a super intelligent person, very

gifted philosopher and mathematician.

[17 : 16] And I don't know why so many philosophers are also mathematicians. But they seem to go hand in hand. And I'm sure it has something to do with the way the intellect is wired or the way the brain is put together by God.

But an amazing number of super intellects philosophically were also great intellects mathematically. And maybe it's got something to do with mathematics being the only true science or the only pure science.

I don't know. My brain isn't able to handle that. I can't understand that. But when Bertrand Russell was interviewed and asked, if God should someday ask you why you didn't believe in him, what would you tell him?

And Russell said, I would tell him that he did not give me enough evidence. Well, the existence of God cannot be proved in a conclusive way because there are unconvinced evaluators of the evidence who remain.

They insist that they are not persuaded. But the scriptures tell us they have adequate evidence to believe.

[18 : 39] And yet their will chooses to ignore it or deny it. There are none so blind as those who will not see.

And if you don't want to see and evaluate the evidence, you won't. If you do want to see and evaluate the evidence, you will.

And in both cases, what we have been talking about over the past few months comes into play again. And that is the dynamic and the centrality of human volition.

The will that you have that you've been given by God, you have the power to make choices, to make decisions.

God says that the evidence that he has given is sufficient. And let's go for just a moment to Romans chapter 1, a familiar passage, but I ought to at least give you the reference and you can read it.

[19 : 53] Romans 1 and verse 18 we read, For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

because that which is known about God is evident within them.

It isn't evident unto them, it is evident within them. How did it get within them?

The creator put it there. part of the human psyche comes constructed by the almighty with an innate knowledge that there is a maker.

There is a God. We can deny it all we want. We can say, no, that knowledge isn't inside me. Oh, yes, it is.

[21 : 11] But if you don't want to see it and you don't want to acknowledge it, you don't have to. But as the old saying goes, in your heart of hearts, I suspect you know better.

No matter how much the atheist trumps his idea of there being no God. That which is known about God is evident within them for God made it evident to them.

And in the processing of information, conclusions that are reached are unavoidable. Since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes, his eternal power, and divine nature have been clearly seen.

Clearly seen. Not obscurely seen. Not suspected as being there, but clearly seen. being understood through what has been made so that they are without excuse.

God says the evidence is sufficient. It's sufficient for anyone who is willing to honestly evaluate and investigate the evidence.

[22 : 32] It is there. So the existence of God cannot be proved in a conclusive way.

And by conclusive I mean it isn't conclusive as long as you have detractors. it will be conclusively proved when there are no detractors.

When everyone, and I mean everyone, including the best selling atheists, have to agree, yes, indeed, there is a God.

So how can they evaluate this evidence and come to any other conclusion? Well, if I might offer a couple of possibilities, one suspects the presence of a moral issue that prevents their belief, there very often may be lurking within the heart and mind of that individual who denies that there is a God, a moral issue that he does not want to deal with.

And this moral issue or this sin issue is one that he clearly knows and understands this God disapproving of.

[23 : 55] And that were he to acknowledge the being of God, he's going to have to make some kind of change or alteration or rejection of this moral issue that is impeding him.

and he does not want to do that. This is the meaning of John 3 when it says men will not come to the light lest their evil deeds be reproved for men love darkness rather than light because darkness covers up and hides our sin and lightness the light exposes it and we don't want it exposed there may be a sin issue a moral issue or an issue of personal autonomy there are numbers of people I am convinced who will not embrace the existence of God nor the lordship of Jesus Christ and acknowledge his rightful place in their life because they value and they treasure their own personal autonomy they themselves want to be and insist on being the lord of their life

I am the captain of my fate I am the one who determines my own destiny I want to be in charge this is natural to humanity it is natural to the human condition we all want to run our own show we all want to be in charge we want to make the decisions we want to call the shots that is part and parcel of the fall and it is all wrapped up in the self centeredness that we all have in the core of our being we pointed out to you in our series on the dynamics for biblical relationships how that self centeredness selfishness is the main enemy of every relationship marriage friendship everything else we are by nature in our fallenness self centered what can you do about that well

I'll tell you something there is a great deal that you can do about it when once you recognize it and acknowledge it but as long as we are in denial and say it's always somebody else's fault it's never mine I'm never the guilty person it's always some that's denial as long as you're living in denial you cannot address the issue so when we come to reality then that's a whole different matter so if there is not a moral issue or a sin issue it may be an issue of personal autonomy or the rejection and the abhorrence to the idea of a future accountability I was talking with a man this was many years ago when I worked part time evenings and weekends for John Alderson selling shoes and a fellow came in and he was telling me about his college days and

I told him that I was going to college and he said what are you planning to be and I said I'm thinking about the ministry and we chatted a little bit and he was trying on shoes and he said well I'm from I'm from Yellow Springs and I'm a graduate of Antioch and I thought the plot was sickening and we were coming upon Easter and we were talking about it and women in particular were in there buying Easter shoes you know as gals do come Easter time and the subject of Easter and the resurrection came up and he said I don't believe in the resurrection and he said no no I just when you're dead you're dead that's it there is no resurrection and you don't believe in the resurrection of Christ no no no he didn't he didn't buy that and and I said well the time may very well come when you're going to be tremendously surprised when you stand before your maker and he said oh [28 : 41] I've got that covered too he said I don't believe there is ever going to be a time like that but just in case I am ordering that when I die I will be cremated so that there won't be anything to stand before God that I'm just going to put myself out of his range and that slick now do you see you see why the psalmist said the fool had said in his heart there is no God just in case there is a God I don't ever want to stand before him and face him so I'm going to have myself cremated and then my ashes can rise up to God and say you couldn't get me well it's just not going to work that way the time is coming when all of the biased and prejudiced evaluators of evidence will be brought in line and the time is coming when the existence of

God will be proved conclusively and there will not be one individual anywhere who will be able to deny it even if they want to and I'm thinking for starters of Matthew chapter 24 and verse 29 that tells us in no uncertain terms that that will be the case and it is in the Olivet discourse and in verse 29 of Matthew 24 immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light and the stars will fall from the sky and the powers of the heavens will be shaken this is going to be cataclysmic cosmic and cataclysmic a conflagration the likes of which the world has never seen and we cannot imagine and I'm satisfied that

Hollywood not even with their special effects geniuses would be able to put on the screen and then verse 30 and then the sign of the son of man will appear in the sky and all the tribes of the earth will mourn and they will see the son of man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory and no one is going to be able to say this isn't happening this isn't real this isn't true then his existence will be proved conclusively there will not be one single objection there will be a great deal of remorse and regret but no rejection and we could turn also to

Philippians 2 and verse 10 how that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father and there will not be a cave

anywhere that can hide or conceal the atheist or any unbeliever every knee will bow some will bow eagerly and willingly and gratefully and some will bow unwillingly and ungratefully but they will bow make no mistake about it so preparatory further to our considerations of heaven and hell let me just insist that the

Bible insists and by the way this has got to be our only source of authority because I feel that it will do no good to the understanding and investigation of this subject if we pull into place a whole host of utterly brilliant influential people who have existed before and what they say about heaven or hell I may break down and use a couple of them but and even so we are we are in a way uncontrollably drawn to influence and acceptance of positions because we respect the source and the authority that we presume is there that is behind them and

[34 : 33] I found this to be so in my own case I have library shelves in there filled with books written by men whose intellect is towering whose scholarship is unparalleled who had very fine minds and they use them for the glory of God and to say that I am not influenced by those people is silly because I am and I have been and there's nothing wrong with that we we are automatically I think influenced by those whom we respect and their scholarship their life etc and you can't deny that and I'm not taking anything away from that and I think scripture actually endorses that but never never lose sight that that person whether it is your pastor a famous bible teacher an author whoever never lose sight of the fact that they are mere human authorities they are not the authority and that's why we are going to spend virtually all of our time not quoting this preacher that one this philosopher that one we're just going straight to the scriptures and see what the scriptures say about it because that's the final word and that's the only final word that there is it's the only thing that you don't have to worry about being contradicted so up front let me insist that the bible insists and we will see this with chapter and verse number one heaven and hell do exist as actual places two heaven and hell are both final destinations number three heaven and hell allow for nothing in between number four heaven and hell both reveal and reflect the sinfulness of man and the graciousness of

God and lastly heaven and hell both reflect the critical and strategic importance of the death of Jesus Christ in payment for man's willful sin heaven is the consequence of those who acknowledge their sin and the payment that Christ made for it hell is the consequence of those who reject that payment and do despot to the grace of God and as we are going to limit ourselves to what the scriptures actually say let me warn you up front that we are not going to deal with a whole number of issues regarding heaven and hell about which you and I are just incurably curious and we cannot help but have our curiosities about this and about that and about and mine have increased greatly since in 1995 our daughter was taken from us very suddenly and then in 2006 my wife Barbara went into the presence of the Lord almost with equal suddenness and my curiosity factor since the death of both of them has risen sharply and I cannot go by a day without asking myself I wonder what they're doing I wonder what they're seeing I wonder what they're experiencing I wonder what it's like I wonder who they've seen wonder who they're talking to I wonder and these are all curiosities and I don't think we can help but have those things we just automatically do and do you know the frustrating thing about it is the Bible does not address our curiosities about heaven and hell it speaks in rather straightforward terms regarding them but the revelation that God gives of both heaven and hell are for the most part rather general not real specific so that it answers our curiosities and I take it that that's just something that he wants us to leave with him and when we get there we will have those curiosities satisfied and frankly

I can't wait I know I know that God does not need our permission to end our life and take us to glory he doesn't need our permission he can do that anytime that he wants but if he did need our permission I'm eager to grant it and we need to recognize each of us that we are at his complete disposal and then be comfortable with that death is a reality and it's coming to all of us unless Christ comes first but for those who are in him he has taken the sting out of death and he's changed that into a glorious glorious anticipation and the most wonderful thing about heaven more than anything else most wonderful thing about heaven not the streets of gold and the gates of pearl and blah blah blah and the mansions and all the rest the wonderful thing about it is we will be with him and we will be like him and we will see him as he is

I've often told people only a couple of things I can assure you about heaven one is there will not be any disappointments and there will not be any boredom and there will not be any goodbyes that's going to be wonderful and heaven is going to be as good as God can make it how good is that I tell

you that's going to be something well let's see if you have comments or questions now and we have a roving microphone back there ready to go anybody a question or comment feel free to because if you don't have any I'm going to turn you all loose and let you descend on the local restaurants my my well no that wouldn't be fair

[42 : 21] I was going to say if you don't have any questions I've got a few but that wouldn't be fair would it well let's stand then loving father once again we want to thank you for what you have been pleased to give us by way of revelation both through the things that you have made and through the wonderful scriptures that we have and the enlightenment that they bring to our inner man and particularly through the incarnation that you provided in the person of Jesus Christ who came to manifest the father and he did such a wonderful job of it thank you for the objective that he accomplished and he who knew no sin was made sin for us that we might be the righteousness of God in him we bless you for that reality and we look forward to an exploration of what you have prepared for life after this life should there be anyone in our midst who does not have the peace and the joy and the assurance of knowing their sins are forgiven we pray you will weigh heavily upon their hearts the fact that Christ died for their sin and that they but need to acknowledge that put their confidence their trust their faith in the finished work of Jesus

Christ and receive the eternal life that he died to provide we bless you for it in his wonderful name amen