

Understanding Hell

Passages: Mt 5:25; Rev 20–21

Memory Verse

“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matthew 10:28)

Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word]	Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature]	Good Works [Behavior]
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. God rewards those who do good and punishes those who do evil.2. God wants to save us from eternal punishment.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. God is just.2. God is love.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Follow God’s will to the end.2. Break away from sin.3. Learn to fear God.

Overview

Events and Spiritual Teachings

- A. The Existence of Hell
- B. The Characteristics of Hell
- C. How to Avoid the Punishment of Hell

Life Application

1. Follow God’s Will to the End
2. Break Away from Sin
3. Learn to Fear God

Memory Verse

Conclusion: To avoid condemnation, we must put our best effort into striving for the blessings of the heavenly kingdom by putting our faith first in everything we do.

Spiritual Teachings

Introduction

When the Lord Jesus was preaching in this world, He often mentioned the existence of hell and what it looked like as a warning to the people. If we are condemned at the end time, there is no turning back. There will no longer be any chance for us to turn back to the Lord, and we will be unable to change any of our decisions. Therefore, it is important for us to understand how terrible the punishment of hell is, and how we can avoid being cast into it after we die.

A. The Existence of Hell

Like the heavenly kingdom, hell is a place that is difficult for us to comprehend, and for many to even accept. However, the Bible often refers to it and constantly warns us of the punishment that awaits those who do not follow the will of God. It is truly a place to be feared. But how exactly does the Bible describe this place?

1. A place to punish the devil

The Lord Jesus said, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Mt 25:41).

2. A prison for sinful angels

Sinful angels are incarcerated in the dark pit of hell, waiting for judgment (Jude 6; 2 Pet 2:4).

3. A place of eternal punishment for the condemned

Those who cannot be saved, and those whose names are not recorded in the book of life will be thrown in the lake of fire in hell to be punished for eternity (Mt 25:10; Rev 20:10).

God's righteousness is manifested in His rewards and His punishments. He cannot go against His own nature, and as a just God, He will judge all of us, angels and people alike. Hell is a place reserved as punishment for any who have disobeyed the word of God.

B. The Characteristics of Hell

From our understanding of it, hell is a miserable place. It is full of suffering and torment. However, even this cannot be called a truly accurate description because our understanding of the place is based on human terms. We know that in the end time, this world and everything in it will burn away (2 Pet 3:10, 12), leaving only heaven and hell. Like heaven, hell is beyond the realm of the physical. And like heaven, it cannot be truly described in human terms. Its torments are beyond our imagination. However, the Bible does offer some insight into what it is like.

1. A lake of fire

John wrote: "These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone" (Rev 19:20). Additionally, the Lord Jesus quoted Isaiah, describing hell as a place where the worms that eat them do not die, and "the fire is not quenched" (Mk 9:48).

2. Darkness

Jude wrote that those who have "gone in the way of Cain" are "wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever" (Jude 11, 13). And in this outer darkness, "[there] will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt 8:12).

3. A bottomless pit, separated from heaven

Revelation describes hell as a "bottomless pit" (Rev 20:1), and a legion of demons once begged

that Jesus “would not command them to go out into the abyss” (Lk 8:31). It is a place that even demons fear to go, and there is no escape from it, because between heaven and hell, “there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us” (Lk 16:26).

4. Eternal torment

Those condemned to hell “have no rest,” and they “will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Rev 14:11; 20:10).

Punishment in hell is a horror beyond imagination. Jesus was silent when He suffered the pain of punishment in His flesh. However, when He experienced the punishment of death for our sins, He cried out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Mt 27:46). The punishment of eternal death is unbearable for any human. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31).

C. How to Avoid the Punishment of Hell

No one wants to suffer this punishment. Even if we are already believers, we must still be extremely careful. The Book of Hebrews reminds us that “we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away” (Heb 2:1). We must be watchful so that we are not thrown into suffering. So how do we stay watchful? What do we need to do to avoid this second death?

1. Believe in Jesus

The Lord commanded His disciples, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mk 16:15–16). Therefore, to avoid condemnation, we need to believe in Jesus and accept His salvation.

2. Keep His word to the end

Only those who do the will of God can enter the heavenly kingdom (Mt 7:21; Jas 1:21–22). So, to avoid being condemned, we need to practice the word of the Lord. This is too difficult to do on our own, but with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can keep ourselves from straying from the Lord. Let’s read Jude 20–21. “But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” We need to keep ourselves in the love of God by following His word.

Paul wrote that “God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” (2 Thess 2:13). God chose us to be His followers even before we were born. And as His believers, all we have to do is to rely on the Spirit to sanctify us. When we do so, we will be able to keep God’s word until the very end.

3. Break away from sin

The Bible makes it very clear that sin gives birth to death (Jas 1:15). It repeatedly warns us that we must break away from sin, because if we willingly allow ourselves to sin, knowing that we should not, we can only have a “fearful expectation of judgment” (Heb 10:26–27). We need to remain in control of our bodies and eliminate sin entirely so that we do not lose the hope of our gospel (1 Cor 9:27).

4. Fear God and love men

The Bible tells us that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 9:10; Ps 111:10). This fear is not simply being afraid of God's power but can also be translated as a deep reverence or a deep respect for Him. When we respect God's almighty power and revere His sovereign nature, we will be more inclined to follow His will and avoid His punishment.

Let's read Matthew 22:36–40. God is love (1 Jn 4:8), and having love in our hearts is important to Him. Peter even wrote that "love will cover a multitude of sins" (1 Pet 4:8; cf. Prov 10:12), and John taught that "we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1 Jn 3:14–15). So, in order to avoid the punishment of eternal death, we must learn to fear God and love men (Gal 5:14).

Testimony

*(Teachers: The full version of the testimony is the same used in the previous lesson, which is too long to include. **Please collaborate with the teacher of the previous lesson.** If students already read the testimony in its entirety, you may simply want to review the relevant section before going over the concluding teaching. If they did not have the opportunity to read it the previous week, you can do so now, or give them a copy to read at home - a separate pdf with the full testimony has been included alongside this lesson.)*

The following is an excerpt from a testimony. The young sister had seen a vision of two paths, a narrow one leading to heaven and a wide one leading to hell. In her vision, she saw a vivid depiction of hell and described it as follows.

Those who chose the wide path became more tightly packed as the road grew narrower. At the end of the path, they saw a beautiful and magnificent bridge, and those who chose this path thought that this path led to life. Everyone who walked on the bridge thought that they would enter paradise at its end, and there were many who crowded onto the bridge in an attempt to cross. However, because there were so many, they were blind to what lay ahead: In the middle of the bridge was an endless abyss, and those who walked the path obliviously fell right into it.

Their lack of vigilance made them unaware of the danger, and their fall was so sudden that they had no chance to call out any warning to those behind them, or to shout, "The bridge is broken, stop walking!" Those who walked behind simply thought that the people ahead had successfully crossed the bridge. Sister Jia Yin described this abyss or vacuum as a deep, deep hole with no end, filled with skeletons. In it, she saw vast numbers of worms and fires that could not be quenched. It was truly a fearful hell (Jer 6:16–21; Mt 16:26–27; Lk 16:19–31).

The Lord Jesus told us that there are two paths for us to take. He said, "[Wide] is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Mt 7:13–14). Since we have now learned of the beauty of heaven and the terror of hell, "we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away" (Heb 2:1). We must put our best effort into striving for the blessings of the heavenly kingdom by putting our faith first in everything we do.

Check for Understanding

1. **How does the Bible refer to hell?** As a place to punish the devil; a prison for sinful angels; and a place of eternal punishment for the condemned.
2. **How does the Bible describe hell?** As a lake of fire with worms that do not die; the blackness of darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth; a bottomless pit that is an abyss separated from heaven; and a place of eternal torment.
3. **How do we avoid the punishment of hell?** Believe in Jesus; keep His word to the end; break away from sin; fear God and love men.
4. **Why is it so important that we keep God's word to the end?** Only those who do the will of God can enter the heavenly kingdom.
5. **What does it mean to fear God?** It is not simply being afraid of God's power but can be seen as a deep reverence or a deep respect for God.

Life Application

1. Follow God's Will to the End

We learned earlier that to avoid condemnation we need to keep God's word to the very end. To follow God's will is an active determination that we need to make. We need to make the choice to walk in the path of the Lord (Deut 5:33). Even having the Holy Spirit within us is meaningless if we are unwilling to put forth our own effort (1 Thess 5:19). The Spirit is simply our Counselor, not our dictator. According to some experienced ministers, when they pray for others, those people still need to be willing to rely on God. Otherwise, their prayers are ineffective. He may be all-powerful, but God will never impose His will on us, because He has given us the liberty to choose whether or not to follow Him (Josh 24:15).

Discussion: Reflect for a moment on your daily life. Have you ever chosen to follow God's will? Have you ever chosen not to? Share with the class an instance when you did or did not.

It is difficult to follow God's will. Our flesh is often weak and cannot do the good that we want to do (Rom 7:18–19). As a result, we have to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:13–14). Paul wrote that "the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses" (Rom 8:26–27), and there are many encouraging examples in the Bible of those who were strengthened by God when they were weak, either physically or spiritually. Even Elijah, a great prophet for the Lord, experienced a dip in his faith right after he emerged victorious over the false prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 19:1–7). But God encouraged him and gave him strength. Therefore, whenever we are lacking in our faith, we need to remember to ask God for help (Prov 3:5–6).

2. Break Away from Sin

In order to follow God's will to the end, we must learn to break away from sin. Jesus said, "And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell" (Mt 5:30). He is not telling us to physically harm ourselves, but to remove the root of sin from our lives. For example, if you have bad Internet habits, only use it in the presence of family. If a friend urges you to skip church or disobey your parents, then tell them frankly that it is unacceptable, or stop spending time with them. These types of solutions will probably be difficult for us to do on our own, so we need to ask for help not just from the Spirit, but also from those around us, such as our spiritual friends, parents, or R.E. teachers.

Discussion: What kind of sins do you need to break away from? Are there any particular temptations in your life that you face right now, or any personal characteristics that prevent you from following God's will? How can you change your environment or personal habits to benefit your spiritual life instead?

3. Learn to Fear God

How do we learn to fear God? It is unlikely that we would ever revere a random passerby on the street. But if we learn that they are someone with power—a king, a celebrity, or a leader—we are more likely to treat them with respect because of the power that they hold. Therefore, to attain reverence or respect for someone, we must first get to know them.

Before they entered the promised land, Moses instructed the Israelites to read the law every seven years. Let's read Deuteronomy 31:11–12. "[When] all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law." The more we study God's word, the deeper our fear of God will become.

Discussion: How closely do you study the Bible? Do you carefully read all of the passages during sermons, or try to understand verses that you do not? How can we learn not just to read, but also to study the Bible on our own?

Fearing God is not being constantly afraid of God's punishment, but being in awe of His omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. God's punishment on evildoers is fearsome, but simply being afraid of His punishment is a passive form of faith because we simply live our lives in fear of making mistakes. If we are simply afraid of Him, we will never boldly follow His word. But when we truly try to understand God, we will see that He is a loving Father who hopes for us to come back to Him every day (Lk 15:11–32). We will learn to respect His will, and as a result, prioritize His word in our lives. When we do so, God has promised that we will not be condemned to death, but instead will receive eternal life.

Memory Verse

"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matthew 10:28)

Meaning

1. We should not fear the death of our bodies. Rather, we need to fear the death of our souls—eternal punishment in hell.
2. People can only kill our bodies, but God can destroy both our bodies and souls.
3. The death of our bodies is not an end of our lives. There is an afterlife for our souls.

Conclusion

The Bible's descriptions of hell depict a truly terrible place that we would never want to experience. Knowing this, we must strive harder to avoid condemnation by keeping God's word, breaking away from sin, and learning to both fear God and love men. Since we have now learned of the beauty of heaven and the terror of hell, "we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away" (Heb 2:1). We must put our best effort into striving for the blessings of the heavenly kingdom by putting our faith first in everything we do.

Lesson 8 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. According to the memory verse, what is the reason we should fear God?
He can destroy not only our bodies, but also our souls. We should fear the death of our souls, which is eternal punishment in hell.

2. What are four characteristics of hell as described in the Bible?
 - a. *A lake of fire (Rev 19:20; Mk 9:48)*
 - b. *Darkness (Jude 11, 13; Mt 8:12)*
 - c. *A bottomless pit, separated from heaven (Rev 20:1; Lk 8:31; 16:26)*
 - d. *Eternal torment (Rev 14:11; 20:10)*

3. "But you, beloved, _____ yourselves up on your most holy _____, _____ in the _____, keep yourselves in the _____ of God, looking for the _____ of our Lord Jesus Christ unto _____." (Jude 20–21)
building, faith, praying, Holy, Spirit, love, mercy, eternal, life.

4. Why is it so important that we break away from sin?
Sin gives birth to death. We need to eliminate sin entirely so that we do not lose the hope of our gospel.

5. Do you revere God or fear His punishment? How can you remind yourself to fear God daily?
Personal answers.