So What About…? 2026
Part 5: Hell Explained: What the Bible Actually Says (And Why Christians Don't Agree)
Matthew 25:45-46; Mark 9:47-48; Romans 6:23; John 3:16; Colossians 1:19-20; Romans 5:18; 1 Timothy 4:10

Summary: Explore what the Bible actually says about hell, examine the three main Christian views, and wrestle with how each one shapes our understanding of God, justice, and the ultimate victory of Jesus.

Main Ideas:
A belief that can't hold up to honest questions… isn't worth holding onto.
What you believe about hell shapes how you see God… and how you live your life.
Whatever hell is, it has to be consistent with who Jesus is.
Eternity isn't just a destination to figure out… it's a Person to trust today.

Invitation:
Step 1. Write down what you currently believe about hell.
Step 2. Ask yourself:
- Why do I believe this?
- Did I choose it… or did I inherit it?
- Does it actually reflect the Jesus I see in the Gospels?

Step 3. Talk about it with someone you trust.

For Further Study: All You Want to Know About Hell by Steve Gregg

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Transcript:

IN: What kind of God comes to your mind when you think about hell?

Because for a lot of people, that word carries heavy pictures and heavy emotions.

For some of us, it's fear… because there are people we love, and we honestly don't know what happens to them.
- Or maybe fear of hell was used to control you… manipulate you… or keep you afraid.

For others, it's tension… Because you've thought, "I just can't believe in a God who would send people to suffer forever."

For some, it's guilt… Because you remember conversations you didn't have, words you didn't say, opportunities you think you missed.

And for a lot of us, we've simply inherited whatever we believe about hell.

Which is why we said at the beginning of this series:
- We all have beliefs… but most of us rarely stop and ask why we believe what we believe.

And a belief that can't hold up to honest questions… isn't worth holding onto.

Often in church circles, topics like this become tests of who's "in" and who's "out."

- We're not doing that here.
- We can disagree and still be in the same family.

So today, I want to give you permission to wrestle, to question

- To think deeply… with the biblical writings, with your mind, and with your heart.

Because… Some of the most important questions we ask… don't come with easy answers.

And that's okay.

What we're doing today is learning how to think well about something that deeply matters.

- Because… What you believe about hell shapes how you see God… and how you live your life.

So before we talk about hell… we need a framework.

GOD: Jesus talked about hell.

- The New Testament writers talked about hell.
- So we can't ignore it or pick and choose what we want

But what actually is hell, what is it for, and who is it for?

And to even begin, we have to start where we start with everything else… Jesus.

Because if Jesus shows us what God is like… then whatever hell is, it has to be consistent with who Jesus is.

It has to make sense His love, His mercy, His justice…

- and the way He treats people throughout the Gospels.

And honestly… the more I got to know Jesus, the MORE questions I had about hell.

For 2,000 years, sincere followers of Jesus have wrestled with the same questions and arrived at three primary views.

So let's wrestle honestly, too.

- Not to avoid truth… but to pursue it humbly.

We'll start with the most familiar… **Eternal Conscious Torment.**

This view says, those who trust Jesus spend eternity with Him…

- and those who reject Him experience eternal separation, punishment, and sorrow.

Because this is the most familiar view, we'll examine it carefully.

- Because familiar doesn't always mean correct.

And historically, this view did not have universal agreement in the early church.

- It became especially dominant in Western Christianity through Augustine and later tradition.

It's often supported by passages like **Matthew 25:45-46** *And he will answer, 'I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.' "And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life."*

For many, that settles it.

But the Greek word translated "eternal" can also mean "of the age to come," not necessarily endless duration.

And the word for punishment can carry the idea of correction or discipline.

So even passages that seem straightforward at first… become more complex when you dig deeper.

And there's **Mark 9:47-48** *And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out. It's better to enter the Kingdom of God with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, 'where the maggots never die and the fire never goes out.'*

But the word Jesus uses there is 'Gehenna'... which was an actual valley outside Jerusalem associated with destruction, shame, and judgment.

Some scholars see this as imagery connected to the coming destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD…

- Not necessarily giving a literal map of the afterlife.
- That doesn't remove judgment…it reframes the picture.

This view also assumes the soul is inherently immortal, a concept shaped in part by Greek philosophical thought and later theological tradition.

For many, this view feels like the clearest way to uphold both the seriousness of sin and the justice of God.

But through the lens of Jesus, it raises hard questions:

- How does eternal punishment fit proportional justice?
- If hell is eternal, does evil exist forever somewhere in God's creation?
- And what does ultimate victory look like if a large portion of humanity remains eternally lost?

And most personally… why would Jesus tell us to forgive our enemies if He ultimately refuses to do the same?

Eternal Conscious Torment takes sin seriously.

- But it leaves us with questions about justice, proportion, and victory.

None of that proves this view wrong.

- But it does show why many sincere Jesus-followers continue wrestling with it.

Another view is what's often called **Annihilationism or Conditional Immortality.**

This view says that eternal life is a gift… not something humans naturally possess.

- So those who trust in Jesus receive eternal life…
- while those who reject Him ultimately cease to exist.

For many people, this feels more consistent with both the justice and love of God.

This view is often based on passages like…

Romans 6:23 *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord*

Death… not eternal torment.

And **John 3:16** says *For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.*

"Perish" meaning destroyed or lost.

So sin is judged… and ultimately ends.

- Justice is carried out. Evil is not preserved forever.

But again, when looking at who Jesus is, we still have questions…

It can feel like ultimate destruction is still too small a response to profound evil and suffering.

If billions of people ultimately cease to exist… then death still seems to have the final word over much of humanity.

- Which raises questions about what Christ's ultimate victory really looks like.

And again… why would Jesus tell us to forgive our enemies if He destroys his

So while Annihilationism takes both sin and Scripture seriously… it still leaves tension when viewed through Jesus.

The third view is called **Restorationalism or Christian Universalism**

This view says God's ultimate purpose is to restore all things through Jesus… and nothing can ultimately stop that purpose.

- Those who trust Jesus in this life immediately go to be with him.
- Those who reject Him face real judgment, but that judgment is ultimately corrective, not final.
- The goal is restoration
- Jesus doesn't conquer sin by destroying people… but by restoring them.

Now this is probably the most misunderstood and controversial of the three views.

Critics worry this could minimize the seriousness of rejecting God or make human freedom feel less meaningful.

They may ask things like:

- If everyone is ultimately restored, does human choice still matter?
- Does judgment lose its weight?

And many people argue this is just wishful thinking.

But supporters ask:

- What is the overarching story of Scripture… Condemnation… or restoration? Destruction… or redemption?

Because again and again we see the biblical writings show a God who pursues, rescuues, and reconciles.

For example…

Colossians 1:19-20 *For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross.*

Or **Romans 5:18** *Yes, Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ's one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone.*

Or **1 Timothy 4:10b** *…for our hope is in the living God, who is the Savior of all people and particularly of all believers.*

Or Philippians 2, where every knee bows and every tongue confesses Jesus as Lord.

This view still insists salvation is only through Jesus.

- Not all paths lead to God.
- The question is whether surrender to Jesus can ultimately happen beyond this life.

But it raises real questions:

- What about justice?
- What about the worst evil?
- What about urgency?

Supporters would say there is still judgment… still consequences… still refining fire.

But the question becomes whether God's love and victory are ultimately stronger than human rebellion.

And once again, we're left wrestling with the same question:

- Why would Jesus command us to love and forgive our enemies… if He never ultimately does the same?

And even if you disagree with this view… it forces a question worth sitting with:

- What would the complete victory of Jesus actually look like?

So now what?

Sincere, followers of Jesus have wrestled with this for centuries and come to different conclusions.

So the question isn't just: "Which one is right?"

The deeper question is: "Which one best reflects the God we see in Jesus?"

- His love / His justice / His mercy / His victory

Because whatever you believe about hell… shapes your picture of God.

Maybe the reason we this topic stirs something in us… is because deep down, we hope love really is stronger than death.

And the story of Jesus is that death does not get the final word… Jesus does.

And if you only remember one thing today, remember this…

- The good news of Jesus is not that God is looking for reasons to keep people out.
- It's that God, in Jesus, is relentlessly working to bring people home.

So before you decide what you believe about hell…

Let me ask you a more important question: What are you going to do with Jesus?

Because every view agrees on this…

- Jesus is the center
- Eternal life is found in Him
- And that life doesn't just begin after death… it begins now.

This isn't just about where you end up someday.

It's about whether you will trust and follow Jesus today.

YOU: We could stop here and leave it all theoretical… but then what's the point?

So what do we do with this now?

Here are three simple next steps:

Step 1. Write down what you currently believe about hell.

- Be honest. No filtering.

Step 2. Ask yourself:

- Why do I believe this?
- Did I choose it… or did I inherit it?
- Does it actually reflect the Jesus I see in the Gospels?

Step 3. Talk about it with someone you trust.

- Don't wrestle with this alone.

And keep coming back to this question…

- Not… "What do I believe about hell?"
- But… "Do I trust the God Jesus reveals?"

WE: So whatever view you lean toward… whatever questions you still carry… here's what we can say with confidence because of Jesus.

Jesus took sin and death seriously… so seriously that He went to the cross for us.

God's love for humanity isn't abstract or theoretical… it's been put on display in Jesus.

Eternal life is not something we earn… it's a gift offered freely through Jesus to anyone who will receive it.

And in the end… Jesus will be victorious over sin, death, and every force that stands against life.

So yes… hell is real and important.

- But it is not the center of the story… Jesus is.

And the most important question isn't "What do I believe about hell?"

It's… Do I trust the God revealed in Jesus… enough to give Him my life?

Because in the end… He's not just trying to answer our questions.

He's inviting us into life with Him.

And that invitation is still open today.

Because eternity isn't just a destination to figure out… it's a Person to trust today.

Bothered/Intrigued? Want to go deeper? Check out… All You Want to Know About Hell (Steve Gregg)