

## Hell — Is There A Way Out?

**July 21, 2019**

Each of us have seen them. Some of us have visited them. They are called escape rooms. We have one in our own community. Escape rooms are fun rooms where you and your friends solve puzzles, crack codes, and work together to escape from a room or a maze in 45-60 minutes. Escape rooms can have a space theme, an adventure theme, or a pirate theme, just to name a few options.



The first escape room was opened in Boston at 2004. From there, they spread like rabbits around the country. In 2017, there were 8,000 escape rooms worldwide.

Cracking codes and solving puzzles to escape a locked room is not just something we have done in our culture for the last 15 years. Getting out of a locked room is something people in the church have tried to do for almost 2,000 years. No, I am not talking about the junior high student that finds himself stuck in the church furnace room during an all night lock-in. I am talking about something much more serious. This morning, you will see what I mean.

This summer at CrossWinds, we are studying what the Bible says about hell. In the first week of our hell series, we looked at some of the crucial verses that describe hell in the Bible. In the second week of this series, we looked at the day of final judgment. We learned that all the souls who have died apart from Christ and that reside in Hades will be raised, reunited with their bodies and judged by Jesus before being sent to just eternal punishment in the Lake of Fire.

Today, as we continue our study of hell, we are looking at how people have attempted to escape from eternal punishment in hell. Today we will see if those attempts to escape from the Lake of Fire will meet with success.

Our outline for this morning is as follows: First, we will briefly review a few verses to remind us what the Bible teaches us about hell's permanence and punishment. Next, we will examine the two ways people have tried to escape from hell. Like adventurers in an escape room, we will evaluate their attempts to find a way out and see if they will work. Lastly, we will learn why an eternal hell is meant to bring tears to our eyes as we are filled with gratitude to Jesus for saving us from it. Let's begin by briefly reviewing what the Bible says about hell.

### **The Bible says hell is eternal and without escape.**

And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire... It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.' Mark 9:43–48 (ESV)

The Bible describes hell as unquenchable fire. It is described as a place where the maggots do not die and fire is not quenched. Jesus said the agonies of hell will never cease. They will never diminish. Hell is never-ending punishment.

Those are not my words. Those are Jesus' words.

Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels... And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." Matthew 25:41, 46 (ESV)

In the parable of the sheep and the goats, which describes the day of final judgment, those who do not know Christ are sent to the eternal fire originally prepared for the devil and his angels. They will face eternal punishment. The righteous on that day will be given eternal life. Notice eternal punishment and life

are both eternal. The Bible says there is no end to either one of them. There is no way to switch from one to the other.

And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name. Revelation 14:11 (ESV)

Those who worship the beast will be sent to the Lake of Fire. They have no rest day and night forever and ever. There is no rest in the Lake of Fire. There is no ending of suffering in the Lake of Fire for ever and ever. The Lake of Fire is locked. There is no way to escape.

They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might... 2 Thessalonians 1:9 (ESV)

In this letter, Paul talked to the church of Thessalonica about those who were persecuting them. He reminded these Christians that there is coming a day of justice when those who tormented them for loving Jesus will face the just punishment of eternal destruction. This is not momentary destruction but continual, never-ending destruction. The agonies of hell never end.

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Daniel 12:2 (ESV)

Daniel said there are only two places people will end up for all eternity. Either they will enjoy eternal life or eternal shame and everlasting contempt.

In summary, at least to me, the Bible appears to be very clear about the permanence of hell and about never-ending just punishment in hell. An eternal suffering in the Lake of Fire is not my idea. It is God's idea. The Lake of Fire is a locked room without escape. There is no puzzle to solve or secret lever to turn that transforms the Lake of Fire into an escape room.

In spite of the Bible's clear words, many people refuse to believe what it has to say. They claim there is a way to escape from hell. Let's look at the two ways people claim you can escape then evaluate them to see if they will work. They are called universalism and annihilationism.

**Universalists claim everyone will eventually escape hell and go to heaven.**

Universalism is the belief that everybody will either immediately upon death or eventually sometime after death go to heaven. It doesn't matter if you were a Boy Scout who helped people or mob butcher who killed people. Everyone will eventually end up in heaven. It will just take some longer to get there than others.

There are a few varieties of universalism.

**Hollywood Universalism.** This is what we find at every funeral. Everybody dies and goes to heaven. Nobody wants to talk about people going to hell. Nobody wants to believe people will go to hell. Funeral homes do not offer funeral plans for people that ultimately end up in the Lake of Fire. They wouldn't sell if they did. They would be too depressing. While this is what everyone believes, this is not the universalism we will talk about this morning.

**Liberal Universalism.** There is a more sophisticated form of universalism that was made popular by many liberal churches. They view hell as temporary punishment for sin so people only go there for a brief period of time while they suffer for their sin. Once they have paid for their sins, they graduate to heaven. They claim it may take some people longer to pay for their sins in the Lake of Fire than others, but everyone will eventually graduate. The Lake of Fire will continue burning for eternity, but it will ultimately be empty.

A slightly more orthodox version of universalism that is still untrue is the belief-after-death salvation. In this version of universalism, people continue suffering in hell until their will breaks down and they bow the knee to Jesus and accept him as their savior. This makes the Lake of Fire the punishment for those who continue to resist Jesus. The suffering of hell is designed to wear down people's resistance.

In the mind of most universalists, hell is not just designed to wear down the resistance of human beings, but all demonic beings, including Satan himself. They claim that one day even Satan in the Lake of Fire will willingly bow the knee to Jesus and all of Christ's creation, including Satan, will be restored.

If you show universalists the verses we began with this morning, they will admit universalism, is not clearly taught in the Bible. Nevertheless, they still believe universalism is true. They want it to be true even though there is no evidence in the Bible that it is true. To show you this belief, let me quote Madame L'Engle, who is an avid universalist.

"God will not rest until all of creation, including Satan, is reconciled to him, until there is no creature who cannot return his look of love with a joyful response of love. I cannot believe that God wants punishment to go on interminably any more than does a loving parent. The entire purpose of punishment is to teach, and it lasts only as long as is needed for the lesson." — Madame L'Engle, [The Irrational Season](#)

That sounds good. The only problem is that it is not biblically true. The Bible never says Satan will be reconciled to God. The Bible says Satan will be tormented eternally in the Lake of Fire. The purpose of punishment is not always to teach. The purpose of punishment in the Lake of Fire is justice for sin.

## What is the history of universalism?

Understanding the history of universalism is helpful to evaluate it.

Universalism began with a man named Origen in Egypt. He lived 185-254 A.D. He was a prolific writer and included a good deal of Greek philosophy into his writings about the Bible.

He taught that God was in the process of restoring every human being, every angel, and Satan himself back to God. He didn't find this in the Bible, just Greek philosophy. He ended up in serious trouble for these non-biblical teachings. His teachings were condemned as heresy at the Council of Constantinople in the year 553 A.D. The claim that every human being and every demonic being would eventually escape hell and go to heaven was silent for almost 1,500 years. It popped up again in the 1800s in England by a Methodist preacher named John Murray. Eventually another preacher named Hosea Ballou taught this idea in the late 1800s. Hosea Ballou was the founder of the Universalist Church. They are a denomination that threw away belief in the Trinity, the deity of Christ, sin, and the need to trust in Jesus to be saved. They pretty much chucked most of the Bible. That is not a good pedigree. The Universalist church later merged with the Unitarian church in 1961 to create the Unitarian-Universalist fellowship.

Universalism popped up again in the teachings of the Swiss theologian Karl Barth. He not only taught the Bible was full of errors but he taught that hell would eventually be empty as every spiritual being and human being would end up in heaven. Another prominent universalist is William Barclay. Many people use

his commentaries without realizing he is a universalist who believes everyone will go to heaven.

A more recent and popular universalist is Rob Bell. He wrote the book Love Wins. The claim of that book is that at the end of time, God's love wins. He says hell will be emptied and everybody, including Satan, will be restored to God. At the end of his book he uses these words, "Jesus forgives them all, without their asking for it."



Lastly, John Paul II at times also claimed to be a universalist. Here is an example of his thinking.

Man—every man without exception whatever—has been redeemed by Christ and ... with man, with each man without any exception whatever, Christ is in a way united, even when man is unaware of it. - John Paul II

The problem is it doesn't matter what Bell, Barclay, and the pope think about hell. What matters is what the Bible says about hell. Universalists claim they have a number of Bible verses that prove hell is temporary and everyone in hell will eventually go to heaven. Let's examine their verses and see if they prove what they claim.

#### What verses are used to support universalism?

But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself. John 12:32

We know what "lifted up from the earth" is talking about. It is talking about Jesus' crucifixion. What did Jesus mean when he said he will draw all men to himself? Is this verse teaching that everybody will eventually be saved? How would you answer a universalist who showed you this verse?

The first thing to realize when the Bible talks about all men, all people or the world, in many cases it is not referring to them statistically but ethnically. This is especially true in John's Gospel and his letters. All people doesn't refer to all people on the planet but people from every nation, culture and background. This is saying Jesus is not just the savior for Jewish people but he is the savior for all people. Jesus was not claiming that all people will be saved but that he is the savior of people from every nation, tribe and culture. Jesus is the only savior in the world. The fulfillment of this is found in Revelation 5:9 where we see that around the throne of God are people from every race, nation, tribe. Around the throne of God is not all people who have ever existed.

Additional proof that this verse does not mean all people will be saved is found by reading what Jesus said immediately prior to this verse.

Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. John 12:25 (ESV)

Some people will lose their lives and others will save their lives based on what they do with Jesus. There are two options for eternity. Everybody does not go to heaven. Let's see another verse they use to attempt to escape the eternal Lake of Fire.

Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. Acts 3:19–21 (ESV)

Universalists point to this verse as proof that one day Jesus will restore all things to himself and everyone will one day be in heaven. What do you think? Is this a verse that means everyone goes to heaven?



If you have been with us for earlier messages in this series, you already know the answer. Two weeks ago we talked about a great day, the final day, judgement day. On that day, Jesus will judge those in Hades and populate the Lake of Fire. He will also take this creation and make it new. He will combine heaven and earth as one. The earth will be renewed and stripped of sin. We will reign and rule with Christ on the new creation.

The day when Jesus will restore all things is the day when he won't just combine heaven with a renewed earth but it is the day Jesus will populate the Lake of Fire and confine all evil beings to that location forever. Everyone will not go to heaven on that day. Let's look at another verse universalists use to try to escape eternal hell.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. 1 John 2:1–2 (ESV)

Universalists claim this is evidence that Jesus died for the sins of the entire world, that everyone will eventually be saved. What do you think?

As we learned earlier, in John's writings, he didn't use the term world in a statistical sense, describing all people. He always used the term world in an ethnic sense, describing people from all different kinds of nations and backgrounds.

John was writing to Jewish Christians. He was saying Jesus didn't just die for the sins of the Jewish people who trust in him but for all people who trust in him. To further prove this verse is not telling us everyone will be saved, look at what John said in this very same letter.

Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. 1 John 5:12 (ESV)

The only way to have life is through Jesus and clearly some people will not have it. Let's look at another favorite universalist verse used to escape hell.

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 1 Corinthians 15:22 (ESV)

Is this claiming Jesus will make all people alive? Absolutely not! In this verse, Paul was talking to Christians. He was talking about Adam and Jesus being representative heads. Adam, as our original head, passed sin to all of our lives. That is why we die. When we trust in Jesus, we become part of a new family with Jesus as the head of the family. All who trust in Jesus are made alive through the family tree of Jesus. It is not saying Jesus will take all people out of hell and save them. Let's look at another verse universalists like to use.

...that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:19 (ESV)

This is another attempt by the universalists to prove that everyone in the world will be saved. Read this passage in context and it will make better sense. By the world, Paul was not claiming everyone will be saved. He was saying people from every race, tribe, and nation will be saved through faith in Jesus Christ.

There are many more verses universalists use to claim everyone will go to heaven. The problem is none of them hold up under scrutiny, especially when they are read in context.

### Where does universalism go theologically wrong?

If universalism was true, we could save ourselves. If people simply need to suffer long enough to graduate to heaven, we can save ourselves. If you adopt the view that the agonies of hell are merely a reform school God will use to break our will so that eventually all in hell will wear down, bow the knee to Christ, and be saved, that also makes us the authors of our own salvation. We are the ones who choose when we want to escape the agonies of hell.

In addition, if universalism was right, so many parts of the Bible would need to be different. When Jesus was dying on the cross, he hung between two thieves. The one thief hated Jesus and mocked him. The other thief repented of his sin and trusted Jesus. Jesus turned to the thief that trusted in him and said, "Today, you will be with me in paradise." If universalism was true, after Jesus turned to the thief that trusted in him and said, "Today, you will be with me in paradise," he should have turned to the other thief that hated him and said, "You will be with me too but it will just take you a little longer to get there."

Just as the liberal church has promoted universalism as a faulty way to escape the eternal punishment of hell, some in the evangelical church have also tried to escape an eternal hell through something call annihilationism.

### Annihilationists claim people will escape hell by ceasing to exist instead of suffering eternally.

There are a number of varieties of annihilationism.

**Secular Annihilationism.** This is the belief that at death all people cease to exist. There is no life after death for anyone. This is what is taught in our school science classes. Just as people didn't exist before they were born, we are

told people no longer exist after death. While that is what is popular today, that is not what we are going to look at this morning.

**Theological Annihilationism.** This is the belief that either immediately after the Day of Judgment or sometime in the Lake of Fire, those who are suffering for their sins will cease to exist. While hell may be eternal, human beings won't be there eternally. They will be burned up and snuffed out like a piece of wood in a campfire.

**Conditional Immortality.** The people who are educated beyond their intelligence have a fancy name for this to make it sound sophisticated. They call it conditional immortality. The idea is that God alone is immortal. Christians alone will become immortal and last forever because we are united to Christ. Those in the Lake of Fire will not be united to Christ. They will not be given the gift of immortality, so they will eventually be burned up and destroyed by hell's flames. Let's look at the history of annihilationism and then examine some of its arguments.

### **What is the history of annihilationism?**

The first person to propose the idea of those in the Lake of Fire being annihilated was a man named Arnobius. He lived in the fourth century. He was a teacher of public speaking in Numidia, Africa. He spent most of his life opposed to Christianity and came to faith late in life. The bishop of his church went on record doubting the genuineness of his conversion. That is never good to hear. In his writings, he doubted the immortality of the human soul and said immortality was a gift God only granted to Christians. Interestingly, he almost never quoted

the Bible in his writings to support his views. When people are not quoting the Bible to support their ideas, especially claims as controversial as Arnobius', that is concerning.

In 553 A.D., at the second council of Constantinople, his ideas about hell were condemned as heresy, along with the teachings of Origen, the ancient universalist. At a second church council a thousand years later, in 1513 A.D., called the Lateran Church Council, Arnobius' annihilationist ideas were condemned as heresy for a second time. In spite of two major church councils condemning these annihilationist ideas, in the 16th century, annihilationism was taught as fact by the Sozzini brothers, Fausto and Leilo. The Sozzini brothers were the founders of what later became the Unitarian church. Remember that the Universalist church, which taught Universalism, and the Unitarian church, which taught Annihilationism, joined in 1961 to become the Unitarian Universalist fellowship. If you want a church that doesn't read the Bible and nobody goes to hell, that is the church for you.

The idea of those in hell being burned up and ceasing to exist was next taught by the Jehovah's Witnesses. They are not Christians. They deny the Trinity and that Jesus is God in the flesh.

The Seventh-Day Adventists also took up the belief that people are annihilated in hell. While the Seventh-Day Adventists are solid in some areas, this is one of the areas they struggle. It is never a good idea to teach as doctrine something that was twice condemned in church history as a heresy. That should be a red flag. Annihilationism has an unimpressive pedigree.

In recent years, some theologians usually considered solid in the evangelical world start teaching annihilationism and have caused many people to consider it.

One of those theologians is a man named John Wenham who wrote two books against an eternal hell; they are The Goodness of God in 1974 and Facing Hell in 1998. Let me quote from one of his books.

I believe that endless torment is a hideous and unscriptural doctrine which has been a terrible burden on the mind of the church for many centuries and a terrible blot on her presentation of the Gospel. I should indeed be happy, if before I die, I could help in sweeping it away. - John Wenham, Facing Hell.

Another famous theologian that joined the annihilationist bandwagon is John Stott. I have great love for him and for many things he has written but most of the church world thinks he stepped over the cliff on this one. He authored a book with David Edwards in 1988. Edwards is a liberal. Stott is a conservative. Here is what Stott said in that book.

I also believe that the ultimate annihilation of the wicked should at least be accepted as a legitimate, biblically founded alternative to their eternal conscious torment. Edwards and Stott, Evangelical Essentials

While most universalists base their universalism on Bible verses that are taken out of context, most annihilationists don't turn to Bible verses. They know the teaching of the Bible is already clear. Instead of Bible verses, they turn to human reasoning to prove that those in hell will one day cease to exist. Let's examine some of their arguments and respond to them from the platform of the logic they use to make their points.

## Are human beings essentially mortal?

Annihilationists who believe in conditional immortality claim we are essentially mortal. Just as we once did not exist, unless people are Christians and united to Christ, they will one day cease to exist. The primary verse they use to support this is 1 Timothy 6:15-16.

...he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. 1 Timothy 6:15–16 (ESV)

This is claimed as evidence that God alone is immortal and only those connected to him through Christ will live forever. This seems logical but upon closer examination doesn't withstand scrutiny.

It fails to distinguish between what theologians call essential immortality and endowed immortality. God alone has essential immortality. He alone has no beginning and no ending. However, God can create things and endow immortality to them so they will last forever. For example, the devil is a fallen angel. As an angel, he was created by God and did not always exist. Now that he exists, God has endowed immortality to him. The Bible is clear that he will always exist in torment in the Lake of Fire. He will never pass out of existence. He has endowed immortality.

...and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Revelation 20:10 (ESV)

It is not just Satan that has endowed immortality but all human beings; even those who are not united to Christ but are still associated with Satan and his rebellion have endowed immortality.

Matthew 25 reminds us of this truth. All human beings have endowed immortality and will exist forever in one of two destinies.

And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. Matthew 25:46 (ESV)

The only way to have eternal punishment and eternal life is that all human beings have endowed immortality from God. This is not just for Christians. It is for all people, even those in the Lake of Fire.

### Why do annihilationists claim hell is not eternal?

Let's look at some of the annihilationists' reasons for their claims.

#### **Eternal punishment for a few earthly sins doesn't seem to make sense.**

It just does not make sense to say that a God of love will torture people for ever for sins done in the context of a finite life ... It makes no sense to suppose that, alongside the new creation, tucked away in some corner of it, there exists a lake of fire with souls burning ceaselessly in it. — Clark Pinnock

Clark Pinnock is an outspoken advocate for annihilationism. At first, his argument sounds good until we ponder it a bit. His argument doesn't rest on what the Bible says is right. It rests on what he feels is right. He makes himself the determiner of truth rather than letting God's Word determine truth.

If we don't like something the Bible says, we don't get to find another explanation. Clark says the reason an eternal hell can't exist is because it doesn't make sense in his mind. What doesn't make sense in my mind is not why an eternal hell exists. I am a pretty sinful person. I know I deserve punishment for my sin. What doesn't make sense is that God loves us. It doesn't make sense that he loved us so much he sent his own son to die for us. What doesn't make sense is forgiveness of sin. What doesn't make sense is a new identity of being



the most blessed beings in all the universe. What doesn't make sense is you and me being adopted and having Jesus as our elder brother. That is what doesn't make sense.

**An eternal hell would mean God did not achieve complete victory over evil.**

The eternal existence of the impenitent in hell would be hard to reconcile with the promises of God's final victory over evil. Edwards and Stott, [Essentials](#).

John Stott reasoned that the eternal suffering of the wicked would mean God had failed to completely conquer evil because evil continued to exist. I don't think his conclusions are valid.

Why is eternal punishment of the wicked inconsistent with complete victory over the wicked? The devil will not be in charge in hell. He will be tormented in hell. Hell will not be a demonic colony that gained independence from God. A victor can gain triumph over his enemies in more than one way. A victor can conquer his enemy by wiping the enemy out of existence, or a victor can conquer an enemy by subjecting his enemy to hard labor with no chance of escape. Hard labor with no chance of escape lives on to continually validate a victor's conquering of an enemy, while wiping an enemy out of existence can leave the victory forgotten. The continual existence of hell with no chance of escape serves to eternally proclaim God's complete victory and power to subject even the fiercest enemies that will ever rise against him.

**There should be a time when people have suffered enough to pay for their sin.**

The idea that a conscious creature should have to undergo physical and mental torture through unending time is profoundly disturbing... — Clark Pinnock, [The Conditional View](#)

Annihilationists reason as follows, if the wicked are punished in hell and the degree of punishment is graded to fit the extent of their sin, one can assume the wicked will eventually be annihilated once they have paid for their sin.

There are a few problems with this logic as we think about it. To pay for your sin then to be annihilated after you pay for it is immoral. If people eventually paid for their sin, they should be brought home to heaven, not snuffed out of existence. Sin is what keeps us out of heaven. If given enough time we can pay for our sin, we should be promoted to heaven when our debt is complete.

Secondly, this would cut across a very clear teaching in the Bible. Jesus Christ alone is of adequate worth to pay for sin. People can suffer for all of eternity and our suffering would never be enough to pay for our sin against a holy God. Only Jesus is of infinite worth to pay for the sin against an infinite God.

### **The punishment of hell doesn't fit the crime of earthly sin.**

But unending torment would be the kind of utterly pointless and wasted suffering which could never lead to anything good beyond it. Furthermore, it would amount to inflicting infinite suffering upon those who have committed finite sins. It would go far beyond an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. There would be a serious disproportion between sins committed in time and the suffering experienced forever. Pinnock, [The Destruction of the Impenitent](#)

How can God punish for eternity sins that only took 20, 60, or 80 years to commit? It appears infinite punishment far outweighs the crime of finite sin. Let's think through the logic of this objection.

- 1. The amount of time spent committing evil does not equate with the amount of time appropriate to punish evil.** If you read the news, this week MS-13 gang members were arrested in California. They were guilty of multiple murders. One of those murders was a homeless man who fell asleep at night

in a park they claimed as their gang territory. When they found him asleep, they cut the heart out of his body and watched him die. That murder took five minutes. I hope the justice they are given for that murder lasts a lot longer than five minutes.

2. **God alone is the one who can determine the true nature of sin and the punishment for our sin.** We are blind to the darkness of our own sin and the seriousness of sin. We must remember that it was one act of sin that introduced spiritual death to all people in the world. That same one act of sin introduced physical death and suffering to all people in the world. That one act of sin introduced eternal death to all people in the world. That was the ramification of one sin of disobedience. We have sinned millions of times. Sin is incredibly potent. In God's eyes, we are in a far worse situation than any of us realize. If God says eternal punishment is the appropriate punishment for our sin, we shouldn't doubt that he is telling the truth.
3. **In hell, we have no reason to believe that sin will cease.** We have no reason to believe that in hell people will cease their sin. Conviction of sin and repentance for sin is a gift from God. Those in the Lake of Fire will never have this gift. Those in the Lake of Fire will not be repenting of their sin, they will stay hardened in their sin. In addition, the agonies of hell will only serve to more fully reveal their sin. Imagine I dropped a brick on your foot. Would you sin less or sin more in the 60 seconds that followed? Our mouths would be full of cursing, not blessing. It is the same way for those in the Lake of Fire.

For all of eternity they will continue to heap up their sin, further justifying their eternal condemnation.

### Application

We began by looking at escape rooms. When you are locked in, everybody tries to find a way out. In the church, for the last 2,000 years, the Bible has told us the Lake of Fire is locked and there is no escape, yet many have tried to find a way out. This morning, we have seen all attempts at finding a way to escape have failed.

If you are like me, you are still wondering what possible good God can achieve with an eternal hell. If God always has a reason for everything he does and if everything he does is intended to bring more glory to his son and to help us love him more, how can an eternal hell serve that purpose?

In Romans 9, the apostle Paul peered behind the curtain of God's master plan for the universe to reveal one of the purposes for an eternal hell and how it brings glory to Christ and helps us love him more.

What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? Romans 9:22–24 (ESV)

God's desires to show his wrath against sin and to demonstrate the greatness of his power. This is why he has allowed hell to exist and why he will let it grow until he uses his mighty power to confine Satan and all evil in the Lake of Fire forever.

The Lake of Fire will exist for all of eternity to proclaim the riches of God's glory to the object of his mercy — that is you and me. For all of eternity hell will

be a beacon proclaiming what we justly deserve so it will never be forgotten. As we look at the Lake of Fire, for all of eternity tears of joy and gratitude will burst from our eyes and we constantly thank Jesus for saving us, for forgiving us, for adopting us, and making us the most loved beings in the universe when we deserve to be enduring God's just wrath. Every time we see the Lake of Fire from our vantage point in the new creation we will look to Jesus and be overwhelmed with gratitude and joy.

The best way I can describe this is what sometimes happens to us when we are driving on the road. We make a mistake and pull in front of traffic and miss a disastrous accident by a hair's breadth. We know if we were a split second slower or faster, we wouldn't have survived. In the next few moments after that close of a call, all of use can't help but speak to Jesus and say, "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you for saving my life." We are overwhelmed with gratitude for Jesus saving us. That will be the same type of feeling that will overwhelm us in a much greater way for all over eternity as we see who we are compared to the Lake of Fire we deserve.

That is why every Sunday we pray to Jesus. That is why we sing to Jesus. That is why we love Jesus.



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