

A. God's Nature Challenged (1,3,7,11,17,30p662,29)

i. Loving and Just

1. The attributes of God include absolute justice and unconditional love.
2. If God is just he must punish sin.
3. If God is love he must forgive sin.
4. Love and Justice are not in conflict. God is justly holy and holy just, which mean his justice is administered in love, and his love is distributed justly. (6p31)
5. God's justice demands that sin be punished, but his love compels him to save sinners. This is why the nature of God send the Son and why the nature of the Son died on the cross. By Christ's death for sins God's justice was satisfied and his love was made available to all mankind.

ii. Good God and Hell (7,18)

1. God desires everyone to be saved (2 Peter 3:9, "**The Lord** is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, **not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.**")
2. God made a way for everyone to be saved (John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.")
3. Those who are not saved do not will to be saved (Matthew 23:37, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and **you were not willing!**")
4. Quotes:
 - a. C.S. Lewis, "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.' All that are in hell, choose it...without that self-choice there could be no hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened."..."All that are in hell choose it...The door to hell is locked on the inside."
5. "Forced love is a contradiction in terms. Hence, God's love demands that there be a hell where persons who do not wish to love him can experience the great divorce when God says to them, 'Thy will be done!'" (6p30-31)
6. Many people have questioned the existence of hell. Bertrand Russell said anyone who threatens people with eternal punishment, as Jesus did, is inhumane.
7. Why is Hell necessary:
 - a. God's justice demands a Hell. God is just in Romans 2. God cannot be just and allow sin to go unpunished.
 - b. God's love demands a Hell. God is love (1 John 4:16). God cannot force people to accept his love or his heaven. Force love is rape.
 - c. Human dignity demands a hell. Since people choose to accept God and salvation from their sinful condition, they also must be free to reject God and his offer of salvation from the results of their sinful behavior.

- d. God's sovereignty demands a hell. God is ultimately victorious over sin and death and evil. Hell is the result of that final victory of God. The wheat and the tares will not be allowed to grow together forever. There will be an ultimate separation. Just like societies punish evil for there to be a sovereign government, So in eternity the sovereign God will triumph over evil.
 - e. The Cross of Christ implies there is a Hell. Christ went to the cross to bear the penalty of eternal damnation. If there is no Hell and no damnation what was Jesus doing on the cross? It is only through the cross there is salvation from Hell.
8. False options for Hell and the concept of eternal punishment:
- a. Annihilation where people are not conscious of any suffering since they cease to exist. This is not punishment, but instead deliverance from suffering.
 - i. Annihilation would be a reward or deliverance.
 - ii. Annihilation is contrary to:
 - 1. the nature of God since God will punish sin. Annihilation would merely overlook it and cancel the sentence of justice
 - 2. the nature of humans since humans are made in the image of God to exist forever. Annihilation would be a conflict in the very nature of man's creation
 - b. Temporal and not eternal. This gives the impression (as does purgatory) that given enough time men will repent and be reformed in Hell. If God's grace cannot reach a man on earth then more time in Hell will not change his attitude toward God and his Son. Indeed, they may suffer, but suffering does not change the heart if it was not changed during life on earth.
 - i. Eternal separation is necessary for there to be an eternal heaven.
 - ii. Sin and evil must be quarantined because evil is contagious like a deadly plague.
 - c. Eternal suffering for temporal sins seems extreme. These "temporal" sins were committed against an eternal God and his eternal nature. It is necessary that the final state of rebellion against God and rejection of his grace be eternal.
9. Verses about Hell:
- a. Revelation 21:8 – "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."
 - b. Matthew 25:46 - "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."
 - c. Psalm 9:17 – "The wicked go down to the realm of the dead, all the nations that forget God."

- d. 2 Thessalonians 1:9 – “They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might
- e. Matthew 13:50 – “and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
- f. Acts 2:27 – “because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, you will not let your holy one see decay.
- g. Mark 9:43 – “If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out.
- h. Jude 7 – “In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.
- i. Jude 13 – “...wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.
- j. Proverbs 15:24 – “The path of life leads upward for the prudent to keep them from going down to the realm of the dead.
- k. Proverbs 23:14 – “Punish them with the rod and save them from death.
- l. Matthew 13:42 – “They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
- m. Matthew 25:41 - “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.
- n. Revelation 19:20 – “But the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.
- o. 2 Peter 2:4 – “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment;
- p. Revelation 20:10, 13-15 – “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...The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.
- q. Matthew 10:28 – “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

- r. Ezekiel 18:20 – “The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child. The righteousness of the righteous will be credited to them, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against them.
- s. Isaiah 66:22-24 – “For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the Lord, so shall your offspring and your name remain. From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the Lord. “And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.”
- t. Daniel 12:1-2 – “At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. 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.
- u. Revelation 14:9-11 – “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 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.

An example of Progressive Christianity on the concept of Hell written by Roger Wolsey an ordained United Methodist pastor (<https://progressivechristianity.org/resources/progressive-christianity-on-the-concept-of-hell/>):

We progressive Christians really would do well to have some thought out responses when our more evangelical friends ask us about these matters – as well as our agnostic, atheist, and spiritual but not religious friends ask us this same question. As with so many things, progressive Christianity doesn’t have any official stance about this, but it does seem to be the case that most progressive Christians do not have a concept of hell as part of their faith and practice. I cannot speak for all of progressive Christianity, but I can share how this progressive Christian understands things – hell isn’t even part of the Bible and shouldn’t be a part of Christianity. To be blunt about it, let me repeat, Hell isn’t Christian – or Jewish. It’s pagan.

*“The modern English word Hell is derived from Old English hel, helle (about 725 AD to refer to a nether world of the dead) reaching into the Anglo-Saxon pagan period, and ultimately from Proto-Germanic *halja, meaning “one who covers up or hides something”. [2] The word has cognates in related Germanic languages such as Old Frisian helle, hille, Old Saxon hellja, Middle Dutch helle (modern Dutch hel), Old High German helle (Modern German Hölle), Danish, Norwegian and*

Swedish *helvede/helvete* (*hel* + Old Norse *vitti*, “punishment” whence the Icelandic *víti* “hell”), and Gothic *halja*.^[2] Subsequently, the word was used to transfer a pagan concept to Christian theology and its vocabulary^[2] (however, for the Judeo-Christian origin of the concept see *Gehenna*). Some have theorized that English word *hell* is derived from Old Norse *hel*.^[2] However, this is very unlikely as *hel* appears in Old English before the Viking invasions. Furthermore, the word has cognates in all the other Germanic languages and has a Proto-Germanic origin.^[3] Among other sources, the *Poetic Edda*, compiled from earlier traditional sources in the 13th century, and the *Prose Edda*, written in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson, provide information regarding the beliefs of the Norse pagans, including a being named *Hel*, who is described as ruling over an underworld location of the same name.”

Jesus didn't speak of Hell, but rather, of *Gehenna*, as a potential punishing realm for those deemed unworthy. *Gehenna* was the name of the burning garbage pits outside of Jerusalem. Jesus was speaking in hyperbole in such instances – as a teaching tool to help some people be motivated to do right in this life; i.e., as a metaphorical stick. That said, he rarely spoke about “the stick” and spent far more time offering “the carrot” – describing the kingdom of God/Heaven and the merits and blessings of living in godly ways that demonstrate we're living “kingdom lives” in God's beloved community and realm.

“The truth of the matter is that there is not one single word in the Hebrew and Greek Manuscripts of the Bible that means hell. ...hell is a man-invented, pagan, unchristian, heretical belief that was first embraced and christianised by Roman Catholicism, and incorporated into the Bible by Jerome through his Latin Vulgate in the early history of Christianity.”

As a Jew, Jesus likely believed that human souls go to “*sheol*” – a nebulous, ethereal, and neutral realm that is thought to lie beneath the surface of the earth. *Sheol* being the place where all souls reside/rest/sleep until the judgment day where, in the Christian case, “Jesus returns to judge the quick and the dead.” But even those who go to *hades*, according to *Revelation*, don't experience “eternal suffering” as “hell” itself becomes swallowed up and obliterated”.

That said, I – along with many other Christians – am agnostic about the afterlife. I don't know if there's a heaven or a hell. I rather suspect that the only hells that exist are the ones that we create and allow at this time – and there are far too many of those.

I don't follow Jesus in order to go to heaven when I die — or conversely, to avoid going to hell. That's a cheap form of faith that is really nothing more than fire insurance. I follow Jesus here and now for the sake of experiencing salvation (which means “wholeness” and “healing”) here and now – and to help others do the same.

To the extent that I think that salvation has anything to do with what happens after we die, I believe in universal salvation. William Barclay wrote a classic essay arguing for this showing how this is biblically based. See: “*Why I am a Convicted Universalist*”

For many progressive Christians, going to heaven after we die, isn't the cake, it's merely the icing on the marvelous cake that is life's majestic pageant here and now. We're called to live “kingdom lives”

(lives in sync with and that reflect God's Beloved Community) – now – trusting that whatever happens afterward will take care of itself.

To those who say that it's important to hold fast to Jesus' teaching about "eternal" life. It is my understanding that the koine Greek words "perisson/perissos" that are often translated as "eternal" in English also mean "abundant/full" and so it's as much about a state and quality of being here and now as it is about infinite perpetual time. With this in mind, I tend to emphasize our invitation to experience abundant life by following the way and teachings of Jesus.

~ Roger Wolsey an ordained United Methodist pastor who directs the Wesley Foundation at the University of Colorado at Boulder, and is author of

<https://progressivechristianity.org/resources/kissing-fish-christianity-for-people-who-dont-like-christianity/>