

NIGHT THREE

Opening: We are so glad you are joining us, whether you are in the room with us, or joining us on the other side of the screen online. Over the next four weeks we will explore some of the tough questions that confront Christianity. This is an exploratory process and one that will hopefully encourage you and edify you as we wrestle with these questions in light of Scripture, history, philosophy, and culture. Maybe these barriers to belief in Jesus are actually signposts. Maybe tough questions are healthy and help us pursue God and truth. This handout and Rebecca Mclaughlin's book will provide the content to help us go deep.

1. Session 4 | Ch.12 How Could a Loving God Send People to Hell?

- a. **Recap of last week** the goal here is not just to gather Information, but to discover truth and meet God so that we can know Him and trust Him, which inevitably leads to our Transformation. The goal is to progress from Belief -> Truth -> Knowledge -> Faith. Last week we saw that the Bible undermines slavery and pulls the legs out from under it. The King of Kings and the Lord of Lords Himself took the form of a servant and humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a Cross. Jesus inverts slavery by removing the ability to have power over others. Those that want to rule or lead, must serve and love as He did. Slavery as the fallen and broken world has created it, is simply impossible in God's Kingdom and the rule of Jesus. The Bible is actually a weapon against the forces of slavery and the evils in the world.
- b. **Judgment and Justice** "We 21st century westerners hate judgment. We fear being judgmental and blame horrific crimes on mental health problems, religious extremism, or educational deficits. To be sure, all these things can be factors. And ye, when we hear of callous murder, carefully planned terrorism, or systematic abuse, we still yearn for justice...Each time we try to extract the hook of evil from humanity, at least one barb digs in." (p.210)
- c. **Has Science Murdered Sin?** Sam Harris, a well-known atheistic scientist wrote a book called Free Will, in which he basically says that there is no free will. None of us, including those who commit heinous crimes and those who do extraordinary acts of service and kindness had no real choice in the matter. They were determined to do what they did. No justice or commendation is necessary. But I think this betrays some of our bedrock beliefs as well as experience. There seems to be a moral fabric to the universe and that right and wrong are much more than dreams, and although we are weak and contingent, we are certainly capable of love and cruelty. Unless we are willing to rob humans entirely of their moral agency, we must sometimes say that evil is evil, and that it comes from the heart. If we cannot say this, we must also never say that love is love. C.S. Lewis frames it in such a way that I think it brings clarity as he connects it to what we are discussing here. He says "I would much rather say that every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before.

And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing into a Heaven creature or into a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow creatures, and with itself. To be the one kind of creature is Heaven: that is, it is joy, and peace, and knowledge, and power. To be the other means madness, horror, idiocy, rage, impotence, and eternal loneliness. Each of us at each moment is progressing to the one state or the other." C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

- d. **Looking in the mirror is scary** It certainly is for me. Wait, not in that way, albeit true, but in the sense of looking at who we are and what we think and have done. "It has been said that no friendship in the world would last a day if we could see each other's thoughts." Same with marriages and kids too! The transcript of my and your thoughts is highly classified info, right! Seriously though, my friends would leave, my children would be crushed. This is not to say that our thoughts are all bad. Far from it. But like a bag of flour infested with maggots, no part of me is pure.
- i. Alexander Solzhenitsyn had a revelation as he was locked up in a Soviet Gulag: "Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, not between classes, nor between political parties either – but right through every human heart."
 - ii. Much of our modern heartache flows from the search for identity. We are told that being our authentic selves is the key to happiness: "You do you" is our self-loving battle cry. So, we look inward.
 - iii. Our corruption begins with the heart deflecting the mind from God.
 - iv. Humans know that there is a God and have some idea of what He is like (Romans 1:19-20).
 - v. "God being God offends human pride" - Augustine
 - vi. Denial and Its Effects: In a world apart from God, the power of denial is absolutely essential if life is to proceed. When we deny God, we then must justify ourselves, because we have become our own gods.
 - vii. When man replaces God:
 - 1. Affections (feelings, emotions, sensations) = chaotic
 - 2. Mind = futile, foolish
 - 3. Lusts = paramount, legitimized
 - ii. Natural progression in the flight from God is a life of self-gratification = nothing forbidden, no boundaries. This hurts others and oneself.
 - iii. The result is a soul "filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of

God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful” (Romans 1:29-32).

- e. **Found Out** God is like a searchlight. He pierces darkness and brings light. He sees our thoughts, our words, our deeds. The parts we try really hard to hide are laid bare before him. The one with the only right to judge us truly has all the evidence. The cool part is that this God could expose us as criminals and yet looks on us as lost children. (p.214)
 - i. If you have kids and you have ever lost them for more than 30 seconds, you get what this is like as a parent. You look and search for your child and when you find them, you hug them and love them. We search because we love. That is what it is like for God. Like the Prodigal Son story. The son returns after squandering his inheritance and having wished his father dead, but the father runs to him and kisses him, hugs him, and calls for a party to celebrate. Not because the son is innocent, because he isn't, but because the Father loves him.
 - ii. Yet, God cares about Justice too. So, why aren't we criminals before him? Well, we are unless we trust and follow Jesus.

- f. **The Logic of the Cross** “The idea of the cross seems alien to us – a psychologically damaging relic from a bygone era. But, just as we cannot absolve people of moral accountability without also erasing their ability to love, so God's love and God's judgment cannot be pulled apart. Think of the anger you feel when you see school children shot, women raped, or people beaten because of the color of their skin. Think of your anger at the slave trade, the Holocaust, and global sex trafficking. When you analyze that anger, its root is love. No one who regards those of other races as subhuman cares about racial exploitation. No one who believes that women or children are property cares about sexual abuse. And the more we love, the more easily our anger is kindled. Anyone who harms our kids inspires our fury because we love our kids. (p.215)
 - i. Now imagine that this kind of love-motivated justice is so deeply entrenched in the heart of God that your own commitment to justice seems like a drop in the ocean. All of this justice and wrath was poured out on Jesus on the Cross. Sounds cruel, until we understand that Jesus was God and so was both executioner and condemned. It is the Way that allows for our forgiveness and redemption without wrath and judgment falling upon us. It is how God is Just and Loving. He saves us and takes the punishment Himself. It is His loving remedy to our fallenness and brokenness. It is the way to re-connection with God and transformation to become the kind of people that can be with God forever. But, as we said earlier, free will is a part of the equation and trusting and connecting with God through Jesus is something that we must choose.

- g. **The Real Meaning of Heaven and Hell** We tend to think of Heaven and Hell as destinations, places to be sent. Some believe this destination is completely based on our

deeds, our karmic record. Hitler and Stalin are toast, Gandhi and Mother Theresa are good to go. Others think Christianity sorts people into heaven or hell on the apparently arbitrary basis of their assent to certain statements. Those lucky enough to hear about Jesus and credulous enough to believe it, are sent to heaven. Those who haven't heard, or are simply too smart to believe all this crazy stuff of a resurrected man, are capriciously dispatched to hell. The Bible tells a different story. (p.218)

- i. John 17:3 This is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and the One You have sent—Jesus Christ. Heaven is primarily not a place. It is the prodigal son come home. It is the New heavens and new earth, where God's people have upgraded resurrected bodies and will enjoy eternity in intimate relationship with their creator. Heaven is home: an embodied experience of deep relationship with God and his people on a recreated earth.
- ii. Hell is the opposite. A door shut in the face of the prodigal son, the criminal receiving his just deserts. Someone lost and wandering further and further away from God and reality.
 1. Matt 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.
 2. Mark 9:43 - If your hand causes you to sin, 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.
 3. "Gehenna" in the NT means the place for the *lost*. It is a cosmic dump for the irretrievably useless.
 4. Something that is lost is something that is not where it is supposed to be, and therefore it is not integrated into the life of the one to whom it belongs and to whom it is lost.
 5. The fundamental fact about people who go to hell is not that they are *in* hell, but that they have become people so locked into their own self-worship and denial of God that they *cannot want God.*" - Dallas Willard
- iii. The Great Divorce by C.S. Lewis "I wish to arouse factual curiosity about the details of the after-world." C.S. Lewis
 - a. Passengers want to be allowed into a better place without being better people
 - b. The longer people reside in hell the less likely they are to reach the bus stop (chance at redemption).

- c. Lewis seems to be arguing that God does not send people to hell, rather to maintain their worldviews, these hell-bound souls must be separate from God.
 - d. If you don't repent or forgive, you can't come to the party.
- h. **Freedom, Life, and Love** "If Jesus is the Bread of Life, loss of Jesus means starving. If Jesus is the Light of the World, loss of Jesus means darkness. If Jesus is the Good Shepherd, loss of Jesus means wandering alone and lost. If Jesus is the resurrection and the life, loss of Jesus is eternal death. And if Jesus is the lamb of God, sacrificed for our sins, loss of Jesus means paying the price ourselves." (p.219)

Jesus says to us, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Me, even if he dies, will live. Everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die—ever. Do you believe this?" (John 11: 25-26).