

Sure Justice

2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

God brings to us a topic this morning that most of us would rather not consider. In our passage this morning, the LORD unveils the doctrine of hell in the most clear and descriptive terms. Our Father makes this matter so plain to all mankind not out of cruelty and meanness, but out of His immense love and mercy. Now the doctrine never goes out of style in any culture or age, but it carries practical relevance to every person. **In spite of our emotional aversion to the subject of hell, few subjects provide more practical help to us than this one.** I urge you to listen closely to what the Spirit says to our church.

Now there are a number of motivations to teach the doctrine of hell. The Bible teaches about hell to help us know that God is holy. The Bible teaches about hell to awaken people to the seriousness of sin and the eternal horror that awaits everyone who remains in their sin. The Bible teaches about hell to motivate believers to proclaim the Gospel. And the Bible teaches about hell to comfort those who are being afflicted by wicked people in this world. It is this last reason that motivates Paul to write about hell in 2 Thessalonians.

Remember that the church in Thessalonica is experiencing extreme persecution by the world.

“Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.” (2 Thessalonians 1:4 [ESV](#))

The believers in this precious church are losing their jobs, being imprisoned, some put to death . . . all because they have decided to follow Jesus. And Paul is saying, *“Friends, your suffering will not last forever. God will put an end to your oppression. And more, the LORD will bring justice upon those who are violating you. Do not think that evil is more powerful than God. It is not. God will reveal His righteous judgment on a Day in the future that He has appointed. No wicked and dark thing done against you will be forgotten. God sees all the viciousness done against you right now and will bring about a day when every vile thing done against you will be punished with an unending destruction. Be at peace. The LORD sees and will act in righteousness.”*

Perhaps some of you right now are thinking, *“Well, this seems below a Christian to be comforted by a message about the eternal judgment of God against those who do evil against you. Are we not to forgive those who persecute*

us?” Yes. But our personal forgiveness does not remove our right desire for justice.

Truth: Forgiveness does not dismiss justice; forgiveness simply places justice in God’s hands rather than our own.

I wonder if some Christians mistakenly believe that forgiveness dismisses justice because they have not experienced the kind of evil that these believers are experiencing. This is more than unkind words. This is more than prejudice in employment. This is more than being overlooked for party invitations. **This is deep, dark suffering at the hands of real people.**

I want you to imagine that you are a Jew in the early 1940s. You see your children taken from you. You learn that they are being abused in the most horrible ways . . . starvation, sexual abuse, horrific medical experimentation, physical assaults of so many kinds. I believe that most people would experience this terrible trial in two ways.

First, you would plead with the LORD for it to end.

Second, you would plead with the Lord for those who are abusing your children to be brought to account. Both of these desires are righteous.

God’s message in this passage addresses a people who are suffering under the wicked hands of evil men.

Main Idea: God will bring righteous judgment upon all who reject His Son. We do not have to take justice into our own hands. We do not have to despair over the wickedness that is part of our world. God will make all things right.

This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. (2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 [ESV](#))

This is perhaps the most detailed and clear passage in all the NT letters related to the doctrine of hell.

Five Truths about Hell that God wants us to know:

Truth #1: Hell is real.

We cannot read our text without acknowledging that God speaks of a real place called “hell”.

Yet Paul is not introducing something novel here. He is simply affirming what Jesus taught earlier.

“And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.” (Matthew 18:8-9 ESV)

No one disavows the doctrine of hell without in the same sentence disavowing Jesus.

Let me ask you, do you think that I would speak of a place called “hell” if God had not spoken of it? No pastor speaks of hell from his own imagination. The faithful pastor speaks of hell because God has spoken so plain about it. This subject disturbs me just as much as it does you. Perhaps more so because I give my mind to thinking about God’s descriptions of it. This is no cozy truth that helps us to sleep at night. But we dare not shut our eyes to it.

Hell is not an imaginary monster that we can wish away. It is a real peril and shutting our eyes does not remove it from our path. God tells us about hell so that we would benefit from the truth that He gives to us.

Without the doctrine of hell, how many would forget that there is a divine judgment to avoid?

Without the doctrine of hell, how many would skip along through life as though this world is all that really matters.

Without the doctrine of hell, how many believers would be apathetic in sharing the Gospel to their friends and family members?

Without the doctrine of hell how many of us would be careless in our praying for them?

This truth snaps us out of our lethargy. Hell reminds us that eternal misery awaits many whom we love. Hell urges us to pray in faith for a miracle to happen in their hearts. Hell arouses us to proclaim the Gospel in boldness by the leading of God’s Spirit.

Do you believe God's Word? Then you must not be silent about the reality of hell.

Illustration: Imagine you wake in the middle of the night and look across the street to see flames leaping from the roof of your neighbor's house. Clearly, they do not know it. The house is dark and no fire trucks are in sight. Do you think, "If I banged on their door, they might mistake my zeal for rudeness?" No. You go over to their house and do what you can to arouse them from sleep. Their lives depend upon it!!

It is no kindness to hold your tongue when your neighbor's house is on fire and it no kindness to be silent when so many are walking on the path that leads to eternal destruction. Let others hold their tongues in regard to hell's reality . . . I cannot and I will not.

J.C. Ryle wrote over 100 years ago, "Call it bad taste, if you like, to speak of hell. Call it charity to make things pleasant, and speak of smoothly, and soothe men with constant lullaby of peace. . . . My notion of charity is to warn men plainly of danger."

Perhaps you think, "Well, the Bible may speak of hell, but I still refuse to believe it is real." Friend, that denial of God's judgment has been part of Satan's plan to keep you from God's love from the beginning of creation.

Remember Satan's first lie to man.

"And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die." (Genesis 3:2-4 ESV)

This denial of eternal judgment is Satan's constant weapon. He used it in the day of Noah to convince people that a flood was not coming. He used it in the day of Sodom and Gomorrah to deceive people that fire would not fall from heaven. What a useful tool Satan finds in the denial of a real hell.

We may WISH there were no such place as hell, but wishing away something that is real does not make it less real.

Truth #1: Hell is real.

Truth #2: Hell is just.

*“2Thessalonians 1:5 This is evidence of the **righteous judgment** of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—since indeed **God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you**, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels” (2 Thessalonians 1:5-7 *ESV*)*

Truth: Hell is God’s ultimate expression of His resistance to evil. The doctrine of hell is always connected to God’s righteous response to evil. God reveals Himself all through scripture as being righteous and holy. . . as One who will not allow the guilty to go unpunished. **He describes Himself as One who will hold all men accountable to Him for their words, thoughts and actions that challenge His authority or that undermine His glory.** God will not allow evil and rebellion to continue forever and ever.

Keep in mind that everyone receives a fair trial in God’s courtroom. **No one experiences hell who does not deserve it. No one. Every person in hell is receiving the just penalty for his/her own sin.**

Protest: But it seems to me that hell is too harsh of a punishment for the sins that most people commit. It seems to me that VERY FEW if any person deserves this kind of judgment.

The problem here lies in one of two places:
 Either I have too weak of a view of the kind of punishment that man’s sin deserves OR God has too strong of a view of the kind of punishment that man’s sin deserves. **Which do you think is more likely? Satan loves to lie to your heart so that you evade conviction about hell.**

Two deceptions of the evil one stand out to me:

Deception #1: The doctrine of hell is unworthy of a God of love.

Yet a simple reading of both the OT and the NT reveals that God describes Himself as a righteous Judge who is angry over soul-destroying sin.

“God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day.” (Psalms 7:11 ESV)

God’s goodness and love require that God hates any evil that robs Him of His glory and us of our life.

Friends, beware of creating a god who thinks like you . . . a god of all love, but no hatred of sin . . . a god of all softness and no strength . . . a god of sentiment and not of severity . . . a god who places everyone in heaven. **This is a god of your own creation and is no more worthy of the God who is than a wooden idol created out of a fallen tree.**

Deception #2: If hell is real, we certainly have not done anything deserving of it.

We may not be perfect and we may have made some mistakes in our life, but we do not deserve God’s eternal judgment.

But God tells us that all of us are without excuse.

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Romans 3:23 [ESV](#))

Think of Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount:

But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell. Matthew 5:22

Even a careless word merits eternal punishment in God’s accounting.

Those who are condemned by God to hell are condemned, not because God *is sinister, but because He is completely righteous* . . . not because God delights in their torment, but because He delights in His holiness.

Is hell fair and just? Yes!

My former seminary professor John Hannah rightly observes, “No one who is in hell will be able to say to God, “You put me here,” and no one who is in heaven will ever be able to say, “I put myself here.”

Truth #1: Hell is real. Truth #2: Hell is just.

Truth #3: Hell is eternal.

“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](#))

Now that word translated “eternal destruction”. Do you know what that word means in the Greek language? It means “eternal destruction”.

The doctrine of the annihilation of unbelievers has no support in the Bible. The strongest possible language is used by the Bible to communicate the everlasting nature of hell. Jesus Himself made the perpetual nature of hell most clear.

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. . . .’ 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 25:31-34; 41,46 [ESV](#))

How long is eternity?

ILLUSTRATION: Hummingbird and mountain of sand in California. Every year the bird flies from east coast to the west. Picks up one grain of sand. And flies back with it. When bird has moved all sand from west to east, he begins all over again. After he completes this cycle, eternity has just begun.

Once a person enters hell, there is no hope for salvation. We must receive salvation in this life for none is offered in the life to come. Hell is forever.

Over a hundred years ago, J.C. Ryle wrote:

“A flood of false doctrine has lately broken in upon us. Men are beginning to tell us “that God is too merciful to punish souls for ever...that all mankind, however wicked and ungodly...will sooner or later be saved.” We are to embrace what is called “kinder theology,” and treat hell as a pagan fable...This question lies at the very foundation of the whole Gospel.” Anglican Bishop J.D. Ryle, about 100 years ago. Quoted in *The Berean Call*, April, 1993

Truth #1: Hell is real. Truth #2: Hell is just. Truth #3: Hell is eternal.

Truth #4: Hell is hot.

“when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels **in flaming fire**, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 [ESV](#))

Jesus comes in flaming fire on that last day because He will come in judgment and fire represents His judgment.

Listen to how Jesus describes this place:

“The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 13:41-42 [ESV](#))

The description of hell in Revelation 20 as a lake of should give us the idea of the suffering of hell.

“Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” (Revelation 20:14-15 [ESV](#))

Illustration: Burning my calf on the exhaust pipe of a mini-bike when I was about 12 years old. The memory still makes me wince. Hospital treated the burn but it was a torment that did not go away for days. Here a “lake of fire”.

God is the great communicator who does not use words haphazardly, but always purposefully. If this lake is not a literal lake, this symbol surely corresponds to a very painful reality. **Whether the pain is physical, spiritual, emotional or a mixture of these, the reality will be best described by the word, “torment.”**

One of the clearest pictures of the pain of hell is given by Jesus in Luke 16. You remember the story of the beggar Lazarus and a rich man. I believe that this is a true story and not a parable as no where in Jesus’ parables does Jesus ever call a person by their name like he does in this story. In Hades, the rich man cries out:

And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.' Luke 16:24

Some would make all the painful descriptions of hell as harmless metaphors. I think **Spurgeon** got it right when he preached:

"Now, do not begin telling me that that is metaphorical fire: who cares for that? If a man were to threaten to give me a metaphorical blow on the head, I should care very little about it; he would be welcome to give me as many as he pleased."

I have no doubt that the pain of hell will be MORE than physical. There will be the emotional pain of weeping and gnashing of teeth, the relational pain of complete loneliness and the spiritual pain of being separated utterly from God, cut off from everything beautiful and lovely. But hell is not LESS than physical pain. Hell is a real pain . . . terrible pain . . . insufferable pain.

Truth #5: Hell is avoidable.

Verse 5 teaches us that there are those who are "worthy of the kingdom".

Verse 8 teaches us that those who do not avoid hell are those who "do not know God and those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."

Verse 10 teaches that there are those whom God calls "**saints**" who we be glorified on that last day and not judges.

Hell is avoidable. God offers a salvation to every person. That is why the Gospel is the Gospel. The message of Jesus is GOOD NEWS to every person who believes.

But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."(Isaiah 53:4-6 ESV)

"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life."(John 5:24 ESV)

Point: Each of us needs a refuge from God's judgment. Where will we find a safe refuge? In our good works? No! In our religious actions? No! In our good intentions? No! In our Bible knowledge and affirmation? No! Only one refuge.

Jesus Christ. Run to Him while there is still opportunity for you.

Application #1: Be bold in your proclamation of the Gospel.

A number of years ago, one of the royal princesses from England was coming out of a cathedral service in England when she spoke to the dean of the cathedral, and said to him, *"Is it true, dean, that there is a place called 'hell?'"*

To which the dean apparently replied, *"Madame, the Scriptures say so, Christian people have always believed so, and the Church of England confesses so."*

To which she responded, *"Then in God's name, why do you not tell us so?"*

Application #2: Trust in God's justice. Entrust yourself and others to Him who does right.

The wicked do not receive what is due them in this life. But we can be confident that God will repay them for the wicked deeds that they do. If you have suffered deeply at the hands of wicked people, there is great comfort in this truth.

Application #3: Flee from the wrath of God that is to come. Flee to the One Refuge whom God has provided.

The blessings purchased by the death of Christ belong to those who repent and who believe in Him.

"And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12 ESV)

Come to Jesus, repent of your sin and believe in Him.

Hell is real.

Hell is just.

Hell is eternal.

Hell is hot.

Hell is avoidable.