

Hell—But Longer

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[0 : 00] All right, welcome to Hell But Longer, some extended teaching and explanation of the Christian concept of hell, what it's about, what it is, what it isn't.

This is going to go on for some time, so buckle in. So, returning to some assumptions, assumption number one, I believe that there is an afterlife, that the soul endures after our bodies die.

So, that's the first thing to begin with, that there is some afterlife. Number two, the Bible gives us some access to information that we otherwise wouldn't have about our eternal fate, about the afterlife, about what happens to our souls and to our bodies when we die and when Jesus returns. So, those are my assumptions. That's what I'm bringing to this teaching. But, there is no one biblical view on hell.

The Bible offers a multifaceted, poly-vocal, multi-voiced bunch of perspectives on the afterlife and on hell in particular.

[1 : 13] So, let's speak first about Jewish thought. What have the Israelites, Hebrews, Jews taught, both in Hebrew scriptures and in the rabbinical thought, about hell?

So, the earliest kind of stratum, earliest text documents from the Hebrew scriptures, from Hebrew thought, the earliest thinking about the afterlife was that there was no afterlife.

Hebrew thinking, Jewish thinking is very, it's very modest, meaning that, like, Greek thinking is very dualist. There's a body and there is a soul and there are two distinct things.

Platonism, Platonism, from Plato, believed that the body was kind of like this dirty, rotten thing and that the soul was pure and holy and, well, they wouldn't use the word holy, but like this unadulterated thing that was waiting to escape the body.

In Hebrews, Jews did not think that whatsoever. The body was combined with breath and became a nephesh, a living soul. And now, when the body died, the soul necessarily ceased to be because there was no more body, living body, so there was no more soul.

[2 : 26] This was some of the earliest thinking in Jewish thought. So, you get to Ecclesiastes, you get to Job, you get to Psalms, you get to the stories of the forefathers of the Israelite nation dying.

And, you know, they use phrases like, he was gathered to his forebears or gathered to his fathers, which literally meant, we took his bones, we put it next to the bones of someone else, and that's it. Ecclesiastes will say things like, you know, both the righteous and the unrighteous, they all end up in Sheol. Psalms will say things like, if I go down to Sheol, can I praise Yahweh down there?

And the answer is no, that no one will ever escape the pit, Sheol, the grave. Okay, that's some of the earliest thought. Now, first temple, Israelite religion, Yahwist, Yahweh religion, which we see through the, you know, David, Solomon, the dual kingdoms, the monarchy of Israel, first and second kings, first and second Samuel, first and second chronicles, all of those long historical books.

There we get a little bit of differentiation of, you know, those who are unrighteous. Well, they don't get to go to be buried with their fathers, that they will be forgotten, that there will be no remembrance of them, whereas the righteous, they will be remembered, and they will live on in their progeny, their seed is the Hebrew word, that their afterlife is what happens to those that, their kids and their grandkids and their great-grandkids and etc.

[4 : 00] This is developed even further after the first temple is destroyed, after Israel and Judah are exiled, and the Hebrew writers and thinkers and prophets began to encounter all sorts of other belief systems, like Babylonian and Assyrian and things like that.

So they start encountering all these belief systems, and that begins to affect how Jews think about these things. So now there are clear strata of the unrighteous, who will experience some amount of paradise or peace in the afterlife, and a continuation of the soul, and the unrighteous, who will still

go down to Sheol, the pit, but it will be either unpleasant or just unconscious, that they won't really experience anything anymore.

And quite often in Jewish-Hebrew thought, everybody went down to Sheol, but maybe there were two different sections, like a smoking and non-smoking section of Sheol, where there might be some amount of torment or some amount of unconsciousness for the wicked or the unrighteous or the unrepentant, and some amount of pleasantness and paradise and remembrance for the righteous, for those who turned to Yahweh, for those who were repentant.

By the time you get to Jesus, there had been a fully developed kind of personal eschatology, what happens at the end. So you see this in the book of Daniel, you see this in some of the literature between the Old and New Testaments, the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, where the book of Daniel says that there will be a resurrection, that all of those who are in the grave, they will experience life again, and that they will be like the stars in the heavens, whereas the unrighteous will also be resurrected, but to everlasting or eternal destruction.

Now, what does that destruction mean? Well, it meant probably some form of either annihilation, or for some Jewish rabbis, they taught that maybe you went down into some fiery or torment-y kind of abode, but you wouldn't stay there that long.

[6 : 04] 11 months, maybe 12 months if you were particularly bad, but then you would experience the same resurrection that everybody else did. Okay, so what about Christian thought? Well, we'll get into the Bible specifically.

Let's just talk about how Christians have thought about this. Now, big, big picture, you've got two camps. If you were to go to your theological library and start looking at some different books on this topic, or if you, and I don't suggest this, do a Google search on universalism and internal conscious torment, you'll find two camps.

Camp 1, we'll call them infernalists. This is the technical term for those who believe in some sort of infernal hell. The infernalists will quote lots of early church writers' views on hell, and they'll generally admit that the language of flame and heat are probably metaphorical, but still, the Camp 1 infernalists will argue that the early church believed in some form of hell or place of discipline or punishment for the wicked and unbelieving, the unsaved.

Camp 2, let's call them universalists, will quote the same early church writers, but this time insisting that many, if not most, believed that all eventually would enter into paradise, the new heavens and new earth, heaven, whatever you want to call it.

So how can both camps quote the same early church writers, but for different purposes? Well, this is how I think we can get out of this.

[7 : 34] The general assumption by the early church for the first four centuries was, one, yes, there was a hell. There was a place where souls would go and experience some subjective experience of torment, of unpleasantness.

And two, it was not eternal. It was temporary. It was not punishment for punishment's sake. It was, key word here, purgative. It purged the soul of anything that was unworthy of heaven.

And once that part was purged, then the soul could feel at home and at rest in the unmitigated glory of God. And this, of course, is where some years down the road, we get the idea of purgatory.

Now, if you know church history, you might think that this kind of view was only associated with one particular writer and theologian named Origen, who, his views, let's be clear, were eventually labeled as heretical, okay?

But Origen was not the only one who had these views. Many other respected, well-respected, well-renowned church, early church theologians, we're talking 1st, 2nd, 3rd century, held to a view or held out for the possibility of something called apokatastasis, a Greek word that means the redemption of all things, apokatastasis, which, by the way, that Greek word actually comes from a passage of Scripture, Acts 3, verse 21.

[9 : 10] Jesus must remain in heaven until the time of, translation, universal restoration, apokatastasis, universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophet.

So there were theologians in the early church, not just Origen, but other well-respected ones, who held out for this possibility. One guy named Gregory of Nyssa, he's got some nicknames, the father of the church fathers, the flower of orthodoxy, he was the great defender of the Nicene Creed, a Nicene Creed, one of the longer creeds that established the base foundational level of belief for early Christians.

So Gregory writes of those who had evil mixed in with their nature, that they will have it separated from them like a surgeon removes an illness or a tumor or cancer.

And because of this, quote, a harmony of thanksgiving will arise from all creation. There's St. Macrina, the younger, the older sister, teacher and mentor of Gregory, who wrote, Now, Now, this prevailing opinion, and I would argue this was the prevailing opinion of the early church, began to change with St. Augustine, Augustine of Hippo, massively important church theologian in the 300s. Now, Augustine, interestingly, coincides with when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, and it's war machine. It was an empire, and so we could have some discussions about correlation and causation here.

[11:16] Augustine had a pastoral concern. Are we training, Augustine wondered, are we training people to presume upon God's grace? If there's no fear of condemnation, no fear of hell, then will people be sufficiently warned away from evil acts?

To be clear, the early proponents of apocatastasis, the universal redemption of all things, still saw that there would be a purifying fire of God's glory in the future.

But it was a purifying fire, not a punishing fire. Some may experience it more painfully than others, but it was never intended to be seen as eternal duration, everlasting torture or punishment for its own sake.

It was meant to be understood as purifying, cleansing, healing. Augustine and later generations of Christians saw this differently. Unrepented sin against an infinite God deserved an infinite punishment.

Yes, there was such a thing as purgative fire, they argued, before being allowed into heaven. But this was only for Christians, for those who explicitly confessed the name of Jesus as Lord and Savior.

[12:29] The everlasting and punishing fire was meant for everyone else. Now, there's a side doctrine here that it's important to understand before we get into what does the Bible say.

And that is the idea of the harrowing of hell. Now, in American evangelical Christianity, we don't talk a lot about this. But most creedal Christians, so Christians who confess the Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, Athanasian Creed, have some version of this story built into the faith, the harrowing of hell. And the harrowing of hell basically answers this question. Between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, what was Jesus doing? Where was he? In the Apostles' Creed, we confess he descended into hell, or some translate it, he descended to the dead.

And did what? What did he do between cross and resurrection? Well, 1 Peter 4, verse 6 answers this question. And for this reason, the gospel, the good news, the glad tidings, was proclaimed even to the dead, it says.

So that though they have been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, judgment as a thing that happens here on earth, they might live in the spirit as God does. So Peter, 1 Peter 4, is claiming that the gospel was proclaimed to those who have died.

[13:48] They've experienced judgment already on earth. They've experienced judgment by being dead. And now by the gospel being proclaimed, they might live in the spirit as God does.

Ephesians chapter 4 says this. When Jesus ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people. So Jesus dies, descends into hell, Hades, the grave, and takes captives with him, proclaims the gospel, and brings them out of hell.

This is Ephesians 4. Continues, what does he ascended mean except that he also descended to the lower earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens.

Why? In order to fill the whole universe. There's a whole idea about like hell is being eternally separated from God's presence. Scripture does not really recognize that kind of idea.

There is no place that is absent of God's presence. So, a heroine of hell is the belief that Jesus descended to hell, proclaimed the gospel, took people out of hell, and left the doors unlocked.

[14:57] Revelation chapter 1 has Jesus saying, Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last. I am the living one. I was dead. And now look, I am alive forever and ever. And I, Jesus says, hold the keys of death and Hades.

There can be the kind of like folk religion, folk Christianity, that sees like Satan and demons, the devil, being the ones who are in charge of hell.

There are these like little tormentors and tempters who are, you know, poking people's eyeballs out and all that kind of stuff. But scripture does not really say anything close to this. In fact, it says Jesus descended to hell, proclaimed the gospel, holds the keys to heaven and hell, and we'll get to this in Revelation chapter 20, throws heaven and hell into the lake of fire, destroys it.

Not heaven and hell, I'm sorry. Death and Hades. Death and hell. Okay, so what does the Bible say? Again, key thing to note.

But there is not just one perspective within the pages of scripture. Let's talk about the different issues. Okay, you've got translation issues.

[16:04] So you're dealing with ancient languages, dead languages, that you have to translate into, in our case, English or some sort of modern language. So the classic problem is the Greek word *Ionian*.

In many cases, *Ionian* is translated as eternal or everlasting. It's where we actually get the word *eon*, okay? Oh, that lasted eons and eons when I was waiting in line for my COVID test.

Whatever. We waited eons. Okay, it comes from a Greek word, *Ionian*. How do you translate it? There are very smart, intelligent translators who differ and wrestle and argue about this.

Do you translate it everlasting, eternal, or do you translate it of the age? That's seriously the question, which sounds very striking to our ears. But *eon* does not just only mean a long duration of time.

It can also mean a particular age, epic way of measuring the different massive periods of history. And so is it that when Jesus says that the goats will be thrown into everlasting fire, are they thrown into fire that goes on and on forever?

[17:13] Or are they thrown into the purifying fire, the destructive fire of the age? This age? Well, that means that this age is going to come to an end. Okay, so there's that translation question.

There's the question of fire itself. What kind of fire are you talking about? Is this fire that's used for, like, gold, jewelry? We see this kind of language in 1 Corinthians and other places where fire is purifying.

It's cleansing. You see this language in the prophets all the time. In the Hebrew Bible, fire does not exist only for consumption and for destruction. It also exists to bring out the best out of something. The worthless, the thing that you don't want, the dross, the chaff is burned away. And what is purer and purified is left. Fire.

What kind of fire? Destruction. What does destruction mean? Translation issue. Is it something that is annihilated and destroyed and is no longer? Or can something subjectively, so in a personal experience, experience destruction for an aeon, for an endless duration, or for an age?

[18:20] What kind of destruction? Well, yes, the evil shall be destroyed. Eternal conscious torment? Or they just cease to exist. You've got the issues of Sheol, Gehenna, Hades, and Tartarus, a mix of Hebrew and Jewish and Greek concepts.

And Bible translations vary dramatically on how to translate all of this. Some just throw all four terms into a blender, and they all get translated as hell, which does violence to all of the cultural knowledge that you would know, need to know to see how all those are different.

Sheol is a Hebrew concept. It's a place where both the righteous and the unrighteous go. It's a grave. It's a pit. It's a shadowy place. Hades is a Greek concept. It sometimes has fire. Sometimes it's just shadowy wraiths.

Tartarus is not for people at all. It's for, like, bad gods and demigods and daemons and things like that. But, yeah, you've got all these questions, and you've got Gehenna, which is this valley outside of Jerusalem where there was child sacrifice and where there were fires that were burning, and it eventually gets treated as, like, a landfill or a dump.

And then eventually there's a siege on the city, and people die because of the siege, and they have to be taken out of the city to prevent the spread of illness. And so they throw them into the valley of Gehenna. Is Jesus talking about that?

[19:33] Or is he talking about the later rabbinical concept of, you know, a place where you go for 11, maybe 12 months, and then you go to paradise? Translation issues.

Okay, let's talk about cultural issues. So you've got Gehenna Valley outside of Jerusalem. You also have something interesting, the Dead Sea. Okay, the Dead Sea, in Jewish thought, is connected to Sodom and Gomorrah, where Lot lives in the book of Genesis.

Sodom and Gomorrah, a place of wickedness, evil, lack of hospitality. God says he's going to destroy it. Lot and his family make it out. Brimstone and fire falls down.

Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed. And what's left is the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea, from, like, people writing around the time of Jesus, you've got Philo of Alexandria, you've got Josephus, the Jewish historian, talk about this place as a lake of fire.

Because it was made out of sulfur and sodium, and sometimes, you know, if lightning struck at the wrong place, it would spontaneously combust. And so people would refer to it as this lake of fire.

[20 : 48] It was also a place that if you had something useless that you didn't need anymore, you would take it to the Dead Sea and throw it out. Okay, so then you get to Revelation, and it says that the devil and death and Hades and those whose names are not written into the book of life are thrown into the lake of fire.

Well, is this a place of, like, literal burning, or is it the Dead Sea, the place where you take things that don't belong in the city anymore? You've got interpretation or hermeneutical issues.

Hermeneutics is the art, skill, science, somewhere in between, of how do you interpret Scripture, and how do you allow Scripture to interpret itself?

What verses take priority over other verses? Should Scripture be read as a flat line, where every verse is equally authoritative?

Or do we say, well, no, when Jesus says this, this holds authority over that, Matthew chapter 5.

You've heard it said, Jesus says, referring to the Torah, the Old Testament, that I say to you.

[21 : 52] Well, should we take Jesus more seriously than other parts of Scripture? Do we put priority on Colossians 1, that says all creation will be reconciled to God? What does all mean? Does all mean all, or does all mean, like, the part that didn't get destroyed?

Or do we listen to Hebrews 10, that says that there is a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume God's adversaries? Do we listen to 2 Corinthians chapter 5, that tells us that God's love compels us to view everyone as already reconciled to God, and therefore that's how God sees everyone as well?

Or do we pay attention to Revelation chapter 20, that says, anyone whose names were not written in the book of life were thrown into the lake of fire? Do we fear God, as Scripture tells us lots of times, and therefore the possibility of hell?

Or do we listen to 1 John chapter 4? There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, for fear has to do with punishment. And whoever fears has not reached perfection in love, which means that if God is love, then God does not want us to fear punishment, because that would not be part of God's nature.

So, if anyone comes along and says, well, the Bible is clear on issues of hell, well, you've got, you just received a big long list of all the ways that it is not quite clear.

[23 : 09] So, if you listened to the sermon, you heard me talk about the horseshoe of possibilities. And again, I like horseshoe rather than just like a spectrum, because I feel like the two extremes of the spectrum are actually closer to each other than you might otherwise realize.

So, let's go into this horseshoe with a little bit more detail. So, on the one extreme of the horseshoe, the spectrum of what you could possibly believe about hell and the afterlife, you have a broad category called infernalism.

Infernalism are those who believe that there is an infernal element to what happens to the unrighteous, the wicked, the unrepentant.

And so, sometimes this is called ECT, eternal conscious torment. And there's kind of two versions of this, okay? So, there are those who believe in predestination, double predestination, that God, before the creation of time and the universe and the galaxy and everything, God foreordained, predestined, predetermined who was going to be elect, so who would be saved and join God in heaven and the new heavens and new earth and new creation, and who wouldn't be.

And that decision was not based off of knowledge of who would choose or not choose God. That would be called conditional election. It was not that. It was unconditional election that God, based off of some divine wisdom, not based off of human choices or free will, but rather divine fiat, God unconditionally chose who would go to hell, who would go to heaven.

[24 : 43] And the large, large, large majority of people would go to hell. And so, they are eternally, consciously tormented by God's choice.

God is so infinitely high above and grand and majestic that any rebellion against him automatically means that they deserve hell, eternal conscious torment.

And so, God, this is language from the book of Romans, created objects of wrath, objects that would show forth God's glory by being infernalized and consciously tormented, put in hell, because that's what they deserved in comparison to God's glory.

So, there's that, that extreme. A little bit less extreme than that is the same thing, eternal conscious torment, infernalism, but it's by free will. God still elects people, but it is not unconditional.

It's a conditional election. God elects the saved based off of foreknowledge of whether or not they will choose to follow Jesus or not. Conditional election. And so, God elects those that he foreknows through his being above time, being timeless and eternal.

[25 : 54] God foreknows who will choose Jesus. They are elect. They will go to heaven. And those who, by their own free will, reject Jesus, reject God, they are going to choose hell.

Eternal conscious torment, to be specific. So, predestined hell, free will chosen hell. And then you get to kind of the middle path, conditionalism, also known as annihilationalism.

Now, it's conditionalism, and now we're using the word conditional in a new way, talking about the immortality of the soul. Is the human soul unconditionally immortal?

So, is it by its nature, upon creation by God, is it unconditionally immortal? That no matter what, it will forever exist. Or, is it conditionally immortal?

That the only condition that the human soul is immortal is that God wills it to be so. And so, all that God has to do is withdraw his will for us to exist, and we would cease to exist.

[27 : 04] We are not naturally immortal. We are naturally mortal. And so, if we so harden ourselves against God, God's will, God's way, God's character, if we so harden ourselves against it, calcify our hearts, calcify our souls against who God is, then we would come into the afterlife experiencing God's presence, and it would seem to us to be torment, evil, bad, something that we would not want to experience.

And what conditionalists argue is that they, the more and more that they would experience God, the more and more that they would be hardened against God. It's the difference between an egg and pasta.

Some people, they experience the boiling water of God's goodness, and they're like pasta. They become soft. And some are like an egg put in boiling water, and it becomes hard.

So God, out of his mercy, conditionalists argue, God recognizes the hard-boiled egg type of person, the kind of person that is so embittered against God's loving, self-sacrificing, merciful nature.

God recognizes that kind of person and recognizes that, oh, they are going to experience me, God says, for eternity as torment, as torture.

[28 : 25] So God, out of God's mercy, chooses to withdraw his life-giving force from that individual, and they cease to be. They are annihilated.

It's not so much that, and this is why annihilation, that word, is kind of not used a lot anymore, because they usually want to make the point, it's not that God has the action of annihilating someone, causing them to cease to exist as if they had never been, Obadiah, verse 16, I think.

Not that they are, God has an action of violence against the person, but rather an action of withdrawal, a passive annihilation, that because the human soul is conditionally immortal, not naturally immortal, that God will mercifully withdraw from this calcified soul, and they will cease to be.

That is conditionalism or annihilationalism. So, predestined, eternal conscious torment, free-willy chosen eternal conscious torment, annihilation, which says that they will enter the afterlife, experience God as a negative thing, and so God mercifully withdraws his life-giving force, and they cease to be.

And then you get into kind of a broad spectrum of different kinds of universalism. So you've got something called post-mortem opportunity, and there's a couple different things that could fit in post-mortem opportunity.

[29 : 45] There's the Catholic views of purgatory, that there are some souls that are so sanctified on their life on earth that they immediately go to the presence of God and experience it as bliss.

But there are some souls who, they're saved, they're baptized, they accepted Jesus into the heart, whatever language, but they are actually still kind of rotten people, and so they need to go through some form of purgation.

Their souls are purged from the nasty, negative, evil, sinful things within, so that then they can eventually experience God. And there are some who would argue that those who actually are not saved, who did not have the opportunity to hear about Jesus or the gospel, that those who maybe they were told lies about Jesus, that, you know, they go down to hell, but hell's doors are left unlocked, its gates are left open, and so that person at any point can say, this is terrible, I'm going to leave.

Now, some, in this post-mortem opportunity kind of view, hopeful universalism would be another name for it, some would say that there would be those calcified souls, the ones we talked about earlier with conditionalism, that they would go into hell and think, this is great, I don't want to be with that mamsy-pamsy wimpy God who dies for people, that's terrible, I want to be with all these other, like, power-hungry, egotistical folks like me.

C.S. Lewis has a great book called *The Great Divorce*, and it's not about marital divorce, it's about the great divide between heaven and hell, and there's a couple chapters about what hell is like, and how people keep moving further and further away from each other because they hate each other's guts.

[31 : 33] It's a beautifully written book, and then there's, like, a bus that takes people from hell on tours of heaven, and you see how people can be so blinded to their own stupidity that they experience the pleasures of heaven as not pleasure.

It's like, you know, handing, you know, if I handed my toddlers, like, a \$200 plate of sushi, and they would say, Eww, this is gross! I'm like, no, this is an immaculately put-together meal that you don't even know how great the ingredients are, and they're like, no, throw it away!

Actually, my daughter likes sushi, but anyway, that's the idea, that you put something so good and glorious and wonderful in front of this, like, ignorant or stupid or calcified soul, and they say, no, I want no part of it.

But the hopeful universalist says that maybe, maybe, we're open to the idea that given enough time, they will change their minds. Then you've got folks who are inevitable universalists.

They are a little bit more willing to say it is inevitable that everyone will be brought into the kingdom of God, brought into the new Jerusalem, the new heavens, and the new earth, that there is not a single human soul that will be excluded.

[32 : 52] Now, it may take some time, and this is pretty close to what some of the early church writers said for 2nd, 3rd century, that there may be eons of space between that invitation after death and their final acceptance of it.

But, given enough time, everyone will eventually choose to be with the all-loving, all-kind God, and that even the hardest of hearts will be softened.

So this is what's called inevitable universalism. And it still allows for a form of hell, but the same kind of hell that even Christians would experience upon death, the fire that cleanses and purifies and it allows for hearts to be softened wherever there are hard parts that they may experience God as bliss.

Well, this same thing exists. That same purifying, cleansing fire exists for the unrepentant, for the wicked, or the evil, or the non-Christian, or whatever you want to say. That exists as well, but they're resisting the curing fire, the fire that brings health and wholeness and gets rid of the junk. They resist it. But, inevitable universalists argue, everyone will eventually turn back towards God. And then the final, okay, so going around the horseshoe, the final piece that is awfully close to the God predestines people to hell, not based off of any decision that they made, but solely based off of divine fiat, is all roads lead to God, predestined universalism, that no matter what you do, no matter what you choose, no matter how hard or soft or how willing or unwilling your heart is, you will wake up after death and be in the presence of God, be in heaven, like it or not.

[34 : 42] And they would, you know, all roads lead to God would say, you will just like it automatically. So, in this view, there is no hell. There is no sense of either curative discipline or punishment for actions done on planet Earth in this life.

It is simply that no matter what path you choose, no matter what religion, no matter if you are a broadly moral person or a broadly monstrous person, no matter what, there is no hell and you simply wake up in the afterlife in some form of bliss, paradise, or otherwise.

Okay? So that's the current horseshoe of possibilities if you assume that there is some sort of afterlife at all. So, where does that leave me and us in our conversation?

There are two quotes that I have been sitting with these past three weeks as I have been studying these issues again and trying to come down, you know, with an open hand of what is it exactly that I believe about all these things.

The first is a quote from Bradley Juczak. He's an Orthodox priest. And he says, I am more hopeful of Jesus than I am sure of hell. And Bradley Juczak, when he wrote his book, characterized himself as a hopeful universalist.

[36 : 05] He was dependent on a Catholic writer named Balthazar who wrote a book called Dare We Hope. And it was a very tenuous, very, you know, walking where angels dare to tread kind of idea that maybe we can believe that God is so good and God's unrelenting love is so darn unrelenting that maybe everyone will be saved, that maybe heaven's gates will never be shut and everyone will eventually make their way in.

Second quote from an inevitable universalist, somebody who believes that everyone will be part of paradise in the new heavens and new earth, David Bentley Hart said this, if you bring divine actions down to a human scale, would they be considered monstrous?

The common argument that infernalist, eternal conscious torment folks, will use is that any rebellion, sin, slight against an infinite God necessitates infinite punishment.

That God is just to punish his creation for any slight, no matter how small, because he is so infinitely high above us.

But like, I'm not sure this logic works. And if you heard this in the sermon, sorry, I'm going to say it again, but imagine, you know, I have a dog, my dog Willow, and I am infinitely more intelligent than Willow.

[37 : 41] Like, there are some analogies to our intelligence, but in many, many ways, I hold a level of intelligence that Willow, no matter how much we trained her, no matter how many dog therapists we send her to, she will never reach.

I am capable of self-reflection, capable of language, of making I statements, of recognizing the difference between I and thou. I have the ability to reflect on the past and project into the future. Willow's got none of those things. My dog has none of those things. So, at least in terms of some levels of intelligence, I am infinitely more capable than my dog. Does it then logically follow that whatever slight my dog gives against me, I have either infinite or some, you know, algorithmically higher ability to punish my dog as I see fit?

That if my dog, you know, nips my finger when I hand her a treat, am I therefore allowed to endlessly torment and torture her for the rest of her life? I can't do what God can do, which is to willingly keep someone alive for eternity and torment and punish them, but I can at least, you know, torture my dog for as long as she lives.

Do I have that capability at moral authority to do so? And I'm pretty sure every single one of us would say like, dear God, no. My child, my child, my children, Audrey and Wesley, ages five and two, almost three.

[39 : 09] They're kids. They don't know a lot. Their brains are not fully formed. I have a lot more like logical, commonsensical capabilities than they do.

And so, does it therefore follow that if they slight me, I have the moral right to inflict pain and punishment on them as I see fit? No.

In fact, in both cases of the dog and the children, we usually argue the opposite because our dogs or because our young children are, you know, either, in the case of dogs, like just incapable, in the case of children, not mature enough yet to make moral, ethical decisions, to have self-reflection, et cetera.

Because of that, we argue that the grown-ups and the humans in the situation need to treat those pets and kids with more care, more concern, more mercy, more understanding.

We don't argue that, well, we are therefore able to punish as much as we see fit. We argue we treat them with even more care and concern and compassion and understanding than we would otherwise.

[40 : 18] It's why we have separate systems for adult and juvenile justice systems. It's why we have, you know, different laws about treating, animals humanely, et cetera.

So, does it follow that any slight against an infinite God gives God the ethical, moral authority to then inflict unending, eternal punishment, not for the sake of discipline, not for the sake of reform, not for the sake of making the person better, but simply punishment for the slight's sake for all

eternity?

I don't think it does. A couple other thoughts. 1 Corinthians 15 is the longest sustained chapter in the New Testament about the afterlife, specifically about resurrection and new bodies and what happens to those who die.

There is not a single verse about hell. And it could be argued that Paul is specifically referring to only Christians, only those who believe in Jesus, only those who have followed the light of revelation as best as they can.

But Paul keeps saying things like Christ will be all in all. Or he'll say something like as Adam died and therefore everyone died, so Christ has been made alive and therefore everyone will be made alive.

[41 : 48] And so Paul is using this very intentionally, dare I say, universalist language about resurrection. What do we say about that? I think about Revelation 20 through 22 and of course on both sides of the horseshoe people use Revelation 20 through 22 to further their own arguments.

There is a lake of fire that death and Hades and everyone who's not written in the book of life gets thrown into. I get that. I understand that. And yet we are left with these interesting images where yeah, okay, so everyone who's left, everyone who's not written in the book of life gets thrown into the lake of fire which maybe that's a reference to the Dead Sea and not like literal flames but okay, whatever.

And then we get like told that the kings of the nations who have been previously destroyed in a couple of chapters earlier, well they're going to bring their glory into the new city, the new Jerusalem.

I thought they were destroyed. No, they're bringing their glory in. Oh, okay, that's interesting. And then we get a verse that says that the leaves of the tree of life that line this river will be used for the healing of the nations.

Healing? I thought everyone was saved already. I thought we were all in the city. Oh, there's healing going on. Okay, that's interesting. Or then we get a reference to that all of these immoral people, idolaters and the sexually impure and like that kind of biblical language that they are all outside of the city.

[43 : 18] Well, I thought they were in the lake of fire. Well, okay, maybe the lake of fire is outside the city so that's what they're talking about. But then the writer of Revelation says that anyone who washes their robe will then be granted access to the tree of life.

But wait a second, who's left to wash their robe? I thought everyone was, I thought they were destroyed, but they can wash their robe and be let in? And of course, the famous reference, her gates will never be shut.

Well, what does that mean? And what does that mean about those who are outside but the gates aren't shut and people can wash their robes and they heal the nations and the nations will bring in their glory? We're left with so many possibilities.

So what is it that I believe? I've written kind of a credo statement about these questions and I believe statement, which I'll link in the show notes and it's got scripture references for all of the statements.

So I'm just going to read that and we'll see how it sits with y'all. I believe that the soul endures after death and I believe that every human has been justified and saved by God in the person of Jesus.

[44 : 37] I believe that there is nothing and no one that can separate us from the love of God. That God's character remains the same yesterday, today, and forever.

That God is love. That there will never be a day when the God of love as described in 1 Corinthians 13 and Galatians 5 the fruit of the Spirit there will never be a day when that will cease to be accurate.

When Jesus asks his followers to love their enemies so that they may be like their Father in heaven that this means that God too loves his enemies. God's character does not change upon our death. I believe that all creation will be reconciled to God. I believe that God will be all in all and that he will gather all things up in him. I believe that death and corruption are enemies of God and will be destroyed.

I believe that death and Hades will be destroyed. Everyone is morally responsible to respond to the revelation of God as best as they can given their circumstances and I believe that it's God's kindness and not his punishment that is what leads us to repentance.

[45 : 51] I believe that upon death everyone will enter into God's presence and each person will be offered the healing transformation of their soul. This healing transformation is both restorative and just offering healing for the evils done on earth.

For those who enter into this transformation willingly they will experience it as paradise even if there is a cleansing or purgative element and for those who resist they will experience this as hell and judgment.

I believe that for those who resist they may resist as long as they desire and may stop resisting whenever they want. their resistance may at first be experienced by them as freedom from God but ultimately this resistance will ultimately be exhausted against the unrelenting love of God.

Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. I believe that the gates of the new Jerusalem will never be shut and I believe that all who have willingly excluded themselves and then changed their minds need only ask.

I believe that every person will experience bodily resurrection and that there will be a renewed and restored creation where there is no tears or crying or pain.

[47 : 10] So I hope you have found that a helpful survey of some of the material at hand. Honestly, we're just scratching the surface and I hope that you know as you hear where I am kind of gently holding these ideas in my own heart and mind that you will find encouragement for them encouragement by them yourself.

The fact remains that God does call us to live lives of holiness and repentance to think of others more highly than ourselves to love our neighbors as ourselves and that it's never been the intention of God for us to fear hell so much that we might cling to God but rather to know the goodness of God's love so much that we would want to tell everyone about it.

That is the gospel that I hold on to and that I will proclaim. Thank you. Thank you.