

# Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church

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## Pastor's Bible Study

# If God Is Good

A Bible Study Series  
Based on the book  
"If God Is Good" by Randy Alcorn

## Part XXIII

May 8, 2012

## The Two Eternal Solutions to the Problem of Evil: Heaven and Hell

### IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?

#### ☉ IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?

- **Many see Hell as the ultimate cruelty and injustice.**
  - Jesus said God prepared Hell "for the devil and his angels" ([Matthew 25:41](#)). Humans go there only as they align themselves with that cosmic minority of fallen angels who reject God.
  - Many atheists believe early Christians invented Hell as a doctrine to frighten people into conversion. But Christ's followers merely repeated their Lord's teaching. They didn't make it up.

#### ☉ IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?

- Doesn't our main objection to Hell center in the belief that we are far better than we really are? We may accept in theory that we're sinners; we may even be able to list some of our sins (though we can give quite good reasons for many of

them). But we do not even begin to see the extent of our evil in the sight of an all-holy God.

- If we regard Hell as a divine overreaction to sin, we deny that God has the moral right to inflict ongoing punishment on any humans he created to exist forever. By denying Hell, we deny the extent of God's holiness and the extent of our evil. We deny the extreme seriousness of sin.
- And, worst of all, we deny the extreme magnificence of God's grace in Christ's blood, shed for us on the cross. For if the evils he died for aren't big enough to warrant eternal punishment, then perhaps the grace he showed us on the cross isn't big enough to warrant eternal praise.

### ☉ IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?

- Suppose that
  - God is far more holy than we realize.
  - We are far more sinful than we realize.
- If these premises are true—and Scripture demonstrates they are—then why should it surprise us that God decisively and eternally punishes sin?
- If we better understood both God's nature and our own, we would not feel shocked that some people go to Hell. (Where else could sinners go?) Rather, we would feel shocked—as perhaps the angels do—that any fallen human would be permitted into Heaven.
- Unholy as we are in ourselves, we are disqualified to claim that infinite holiness cannot demand everlasting punishment.

### ☉ IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?

- **The more we believe in God's absolute holiness and justice, the more Hell will make sense to us.**
  - Are you tired of all the evil and corruption in this world? Do you long for a world in which such things don't exist? Then you long for a Heaven without evildoers. And that requires either that God forces everyone to repent, come to Christ, and embrace his righteousness, or that God provides an alternative residence for those who do not. Hell is that place.

- It saddens me to think of people suffering forever. But if there were no Hell, that would diminish the very attributes of God that make Hell necessary and Heaven available.

### ☉ IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?

- **Our opinion about Hell’s existence holds no sway; God doesn’t give us a vote.**
  - Simone Weil wrote, “One can only excuse men for evil by accusing God of it.”[11]
  - Some in ancient Israel claimed the way of the Lord was not just. God replied, “Is it not your ways that are unjust?” And then he reiterated that everyone will die for his own sin (see [Ezekiel 18:25–29](#)).

### ☉ IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?

- <sup>25</sup> (NLT) “Yet you say, ‘The Lord isn’t doing what’s right!’ Listen to me, O people of Israel. Am I the one not doing what’s right, or is it you? <sup>26</sup> When righteous people turn from their righteous behavior and start doing sinful things, they will die for it. Yes, they will die because of their sinful deeds. <sup>27</sup> And if wicked people turn from their wickedness, obey the law, and do what is just and right, they will save their lives. <sup>28</sup> They will live because they thought it over and decided to turn from their sins. Such people will not die. <sup>29</sup> And yet the people of Israel keep saying, ‘The Lord isn’t doing what’s right!’ O people of Israel, it is you who are not doing what’s right, not I. *Ezekiel 18:25-29 (NLT)*

### ☉ IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?

- Just because I don’t like the idea of Hell doesn’t make Hell unjust. Of course, sinners oppose the idea that they deserve eternal punishment, just as a little boy opposes the idea that he deserves punishment because he hit his little sister.
- Why do we have more difficulty accepting the doctrine of Hell than ancient people did? Perhaps because our tolerant, therapeutic, positive-thinking culture assumes our basic goodness.
- In a day of television and Internet news polls that determine what percent of a population approves of certain issues or candidates, it’s easy to think that our opinion about Hell carries weight. But God doesn’t take opinion polls. He refuses to adjust his revelation about Hell to fit our modern sensibilities.

### ☉ IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?

- **Hell will have degrees of punishment; each person’s punishment will exactly correspond to his sins.**
  - All whose names are not written in the Lamb’s Book of Life will be judged by God in relation to their works, which have been recorded in the books of Heaven (see [Revelation 20:12–15](#)). The severity of punishment will vary with the amount of truth known, and the nature and number of the sins committed (see [Luke 20:45–47](#); [Romans 2:3–6](#)).

◎ **IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?**

- <sup>12</sup> (HCSB) I also saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged according to their works by what was written in the books. <sup>13</sup> Then the sea gave up its dead, and Death and Hades gave up their dead; all were judged according to their works. <sup>14</sup> Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. <sup>15</sup> And anyone not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.  
*Revelation 20:12-15 (HCSB)*

◎ **IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?**

- <sup>45</sup> (HCSB) While all the people were listening, He said to His disciples, <sup>46</sup> “Beware of the scribes, who want to go around in long robes and who love greetings in the marketplaces, the front seats in the synagogues, and the places of honor at banquets. <sup>47</sup> They devour widows’ houses and say long prayers just for show. These will receive greater punishment.”  
*Luke 20:45-47 (HCSB)*

◎ **IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?**

- <sup>3</sup> (HCSB) Do you really think—anyone of you who judges those who do such things yet do the same—that you will escape God’s judgment? <sup>4</sup> Or do you despise the riches of His kindness, restraint, and patience, not recognizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance? <sup>5</sup> But because of your hardness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath, when God’s righteous judgment is revealed. <sup>6</sup> He will repay each one according to his works:  
*Romans 2:3-6 (HCSB)*

◎ **IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?**

- Jesus said the Day of Judgment would be more bearable for some than for others (see [Matthew 11:20–24](#)). Some will be “beaten with many blows” and others “beaten with few blows” ([Luke 12:47–48](#)).
- Hell is not one-size-fits-all. Revelation 20 explicitly says that God records all human works so that all punishment will be commensurate to the evil committed (verses 12–13, see also [Matthew 5:21–28](#); [12:36](#); [1 John 3:15](#)).

#### ☉ IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?

- **Since the absence of God is the absence of good, Hell is a place without the slightest trace of good.**
  - In Luke 16 Abraham and Lazarus dwell together in paradise, but the rich man stands alone in Hell. Expect no comforting company in a place from which God has withdrawn. “They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power” ([2 Thessalonians 1:9](#)).
  - Hell is horrible because it means being locked out from God’s presence.
  - Since God is the source of all good, there can be no good where God is not. No wonder Dante, in the *Inferno*, envisioned this sign chiseled above Hell’s gate: “Abandon all hope, you who enter here.”

#### ☉ IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?

- **The vast majority of those who believe in Hell do not believe they are going there.**
  - Many more Americans believe in Heaven than believe in Hell. For everyone who believes he’s going to Hell, a hundred and twenty believe they’re going to Heaven.
  - This optimism stands in stark contrast to Christ’s words in [Matthew 7:13–14](#): “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”

#### ☉ IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?

- Our culture considers Heaven the default destination (when did you last attend a funeral in which a speaker pictured the departed in Hell?).

- But since “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” ([Romans 3:23](#)) and “without holiness no one will see the Lord” ([Hebrews 12:14](#)), none of us will enter the presence of an infinitely holy God unless something in us radically changes.
- Until our sin problem gets resolved, Hell will remain our true destination.

#### ☉ IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?

- **Once this life ends, the unbeliever’s sin nature becomes permanent, likely assuring future evildoing that demands future punishment.**
  - At death, God will transform his children so that righteous men will be made perfect (see [Hebrews 12:23](#)).
    - ☉ to the assembly of the firstborn whose names have been written in heaven, to God who is the Judge of all, to the spirits of righteous people made perfect,  
*Hebrews 12:23 (HCSB)*
  - But he can do nothing more for those who have refused his grace. Hell isn’t simply a sentence that falls upon us; it is the inevitable destination we choose with every sin and every refusal to repent and turn to God for grace.

#### ☉ IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?

- When developing photographs, technicians immerse negatives in different solutions; so long as the photograph remains in the developing solution, it can change. But once it gets dropped into the “stop bath,” it’s permanently fixed.
- So will it be when we die and enter eternity; our lives on Earth will be fixed, never to be altered or revised. “Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment” ([Hebrews 9:27](#)).

#### ☉ IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?

- This position makes perfect sense if we recognize death as forever sealing or making permanent our natures. The believer has been granted an eternal identity with the nature of Christ, and this identity allows him to enter Heaven. But at death the unregenerate person, the unrepentant sinner, forever remains unregenerate. There is no longer a possibility of transformation.
- Yes, he will acknowledge God's existence, but so do the demons even now, shuddering (see [James 2:19](#)). He will regret being punished, but that doesn't mean he will repent, nor will he cease to sin against God in thought and word (and action, if action is possible in Hell). Because his nature is unrepentant, and that nature cannot change after death, he can continue for all eternity not to trust God, not to value Christ's work, and to otherwise commit sins against God.
- Hell's torment may be to unendingly experience lusts, greed, and other sinful desires with no hope of fulfillment, coupled with ongoing judgment for these ongoing sins.

#### ☉ IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?

- **Fairness doesn't demand that God give people a second chance after death, since he gives us thousands of chances before death.**
  - God grants every person a lifetime to reform, to turn to him for grace and empowerment. For those who die young or otherwise lack the mental capacity to respond to Christ, many Christians throughout the ages have believed God may extend the atonement of Christ to cover them, as an act of grace. I agree.
  - God gives people on this fallen Earth adequate opportunity to turn to him in their "first chance." He has revealed himself to us in the creation and in our conscience so that "men are without excuse" ([Romans 1:20](#)).

#### ☉ IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?

- God gives us second chances and third and tenth and hundredth chances every day of our lives. The chance to respond to the message of creation that cries out, "There is a God," is repeated multiple times daily, over a lifetime. Every breath is an opportunity to respond to a conscience that convicts people of their guilt.
- If God allowed everyone to die first and then decide whether to trust God, it would make faith irrelevant. In the end all people would submit to Christ by

sight, not faith; instead of trusting, they would merely be acquiescing to his infinite power. He has no desire for this.

☉ **IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?**

- If a woman were given a choice between being buried alive in a swamp and marrying a certain man, she would choose to marry the man. But what man would want such a wife?
- God doesn't need our love, but he does want it. He doesn't want people who merely desire to escape Hell. He wants people who value and treasure him above all else, who long to be with him.

☉ **IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?**

- **Because our choices in this life orient us for eternity, God-rejecters might be as miserable in Heaven as Hell.**
  - C. S. Lewis spoke to those who questioned the doctrine of Hell:

☉ In the long run the answer to all those who object to the doctrine of hell is itself a question: "What are you asking God to do?" To wipe out their past sins and, at all costs, to give them a fresh start, smoothing every difficulty and offering every miraculous help? But He has done so, on Calvary. To forgive them? They will not be forgiven. To leave them alone? Alas, I am afraid that is what He does.

☉ **IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?**

- Lewis said the doors of Hell are barred from the inside. If he means those in Hell refuse to give up their trust in themselves to turn to God, I think he's right. But if we imagine that people in Hell won't want to get out to avoid its sufferings, that's certainly false. The rich man in Luke 16 desperately desired to have his agony relieved; he even requested a drop of water from paradise.
- Wanting out of Hell, however, is not the same as wanting to be with God. And God desires us to be with him only if we want to be with him.
- Feeling sorry for the consequences of our sins is not the same as repenting of our sins.

☉ **IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?**



- The redeemed say, “In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” ([Psalm 16:11](#), esv).
- But what do the unredeemed say when exposed to God’s presence? “They called to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!’” ([Revelation 6:16](#)).
- Heaven and Hell are places defined, respectively, by God’s presence or absence, by God’s grace or wrath.
- They’re real places, but also conditions of relationship to God. Whose we are, not where we are, determines our misery or our joy.
- To bring a man from Hell to Heaven would bring him no joy unless he had a fundamentally transformed relationship with God.

#### ☉ IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?

- Three times in the final two chapters of Scripture we’re told that those still in their sins have no access to Heaven and never will ([Revelation 21:8](#), [27](#); [22:15](#)).
  - But the cowards, unbelievers, vile, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars—their share will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” *Revelation 21:8 (HCSB)*
  - Nothing profane will ever enter it: no one who does what is vile or false, but only those written in the Lamb’s book of life. *Revelation 21:27 (HCSB)*
  - Outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying. *Revelation 22:15 (HCSB)*

#### ☉ IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?

- The condition of the unbelieving heart remains unchangeable at death. God’s grace, even if offered, would remain forever repugnant to such a rebellious heart.
- To the person sealed forever in righteousness, God will remain forever wondrous; to the one sealed forever in sin, God will forever remain dreadful.

#### ☉ IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?

- **We live our present life between Heaven and Hell and so get foretastes of each, which prepare us for one or the other.**
  - Just as God and Satan are not equal opposites, neither is Hell the equal opposite of Heaven. God has no equal as a person, and Heaven has no equal as a place.
  - Hell is not a place where demons take delight in punishing people, since Hell was made to punish demons, not reward them, and there will be no delight in Hell. People will not take solace by commiserating, since there will be no solace. More likely, each person remains in solitary confinement (the rich man of Luke 16 appears to have no company in Hell).
  - Both Heaven and Hell touch Earth—an in-between world leading directly into one or the other. What tragedy that this present life is the closest nonbelievers will ever come to Heaven. What consolation that this present life is the closest believers will ever come to Hell.

#### ◎ **IS HELL A PROBLEM OR A SOLUTION?**

- **Our present suffering warns against the suffering of Hell; for unbelievers, the fear of Hell serves as a merciful call to repentance.**
  - Suffering can help the Heaven-bound fall out of love with this life and live in light of the coming one. The sufferings of the present give us a bittersweet reminder of the horrors from which God has delivered us.
  - For the Hell-bound, suffering can serve as a frightening foretaste of Hell. Suffering reminds us of our imminent death, the wages for our sin. In our suffering we should look at our own evils and failures and beg God for mercy.
  - If we reject the best gift that a holy and gracious God can offer us, purchased with his own blood, what remains, in the end, will be nothing but Hell.