

# **Is Hell a Reality?**

*What judgment shall I dread, doing no wrong?*

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## Is Hell a Reality?

*What judgment shall I dread, doing no wrong?*<sup>1</sup>

The Christian doctrine of the final judgment has, as we all know, an exceedingly solemn corollary. So solemn and unpleasant to contemplate that perhaps all of us have at some time or other wished that the doctrine were not true. Indeed, we may have tried one of those popular escape routes along which people, even people who profess to be Christians, try to escape the idea of the final judgment with eternal perdition for the impenitent.

Most Christian preachers and lecturers at some time or other in their careers wish that the doctrine were not true. Some of them, as I say, have invented escape routes. Notably two. They have said that the whole idea of eternal punishment is in its origin an idea that took place in the pre-scientific age. Primitive man, living near volcanoes and watching fire erupt from the jaws of the mountain, imagined that there must be a terrible, hot place in the middle of the earth. Their primitive imaginations coupled with their uneasy consciences got to work and they came to the conclusion that the gods must have put a big furnace down there for the purpose of coping with those who are finally impenitent. And the argument goes that, now that we have emerged into the scientific age and we know that the centre of the earth isn't fire anyway, we can no longer accept such a crude idea that had its basis in pre-scientific observation.

Others have said that this idea, that God would punish people eternally, originated in people whose moral sense was primitive and not merely that they lacked modern science. People who lived in days when a man could easily be butchered, or strung and quartered, or burned at the stake for holding different religious views from the views that were then orthodox. And because people were so primitive in their moral outlook they imagined that God held the same view of things as they did, and that God would punish his enemies just as they punished theirs. Now, of course, so this argument runs, our moral sense has been enlightened by great prophets such as Jesus Christ; we have learned that God is a God of love, and it is quite unthinkable that such a God of love would ever punish anybody. At any rate punish them eternally. And so it is held that the whole notion of a final judgment, and its corollary of eternal perdition for the impenitent, was a nightmare of the dark ages. We have happily escaped and emerged into the broad daylight of this modern era.

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<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, *Merchant of Venice*; spoken by Shylock in Act 4, Scene 1.

It is a fact that the Bible, when discussing this matter, does speak of a lake of fire (Rev 19:20; 20:10, 14, 15), and does say that those who are finally impenitent will be cast into a lake of fire. We do know, of course, that some of the mediaeval people, with their fevered imagination, debased this biblical figure into the most crude literalism. If you should go, for instance, into the Chapel of St John the Evangelist in the College of St John in Cambridge you would find in the doorway as you go in that tremendous window that has for its theme the final judgment. At one corner down at the bottom in the stained glass is a picture of a tremendous furnace, a sort of brazier, and around it are demons dressed in green livery, with forked tails and cloven hooves, and tremendous pitch-forks. They are in process of stirring away human beings into this furnace, rather in the manner in which the Gestapo put Jews into their gas chambers.

If we are going to be honest and fair with ourselves, we must observe that the crudity of the notion lies not in the Bible but in the medieval interpretation of what the Bible says. The Bible's phrase is a foreign figure indeed. Our Lord himself used it. Our Lord spoke of the Gehenna of fire (e.g. Matt 5:22). As we all know, Gehenna—meaning literally the Valley of Hinnon—was a gorge outside Jerusalem where the city's refuse was cast. The eternal fires were kept burning there, clearing up this stinking mess of stuff and saving the city from infection. Our Lord used that physical burning, those physical flames, as a figure of spiritual torment. He was expecting nobody to imagine a hell in the form of a literal gorge outside of Jerusalem. But he was warning us that just as there was a fire that can consume our bodies so there is a torment for the impenitent.

If the mediaeval people pleased, and indeed if we please to drag down that solemn yet noble figure into such literalism then we cannot fairly charge the Christian doctrine with being crude. Or at least if we do we have no honest logical grounds for doing so; and because the doctrine according to us is crude we have no grounds for rejecting it *in toto*. The Bible doctrine is not crude.

And then as to that other matter, that the doctrine is inconsistent with the love of God and must have been invented with a cruel, sadistic turn of mind – that escape route quickly closes to us too, when we consider the grounds for our belief in a final judgment. They are of course pre-eminently and primarily, and in the first place the solemn statements of our Lord himself—our Lord who was the one to teach us that God is love. You will search Old Testament history, for instance, to find the love of God, but it was our Lord who taught that God is love. It was our Lord who taught a salvation that stems, not from man's efforts but from the love of God. Therein he is unique. But it was that same Lord, who preached to us a God of love and so demonstrated in work and word that God indeed is love –it was he who preached more than any other man that eternal torment awaits the impenitent (see e.g. Matt 18:8, 9; 23:33; 25:41, 46; Mark 9:43–48; Luke 12:5; 16:19–31).

Was it not our Lord for instance, who took up and enforced in the spiritual realm the phrase that Isaiah had used in the physical realm, about the torment in which the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched? (Isa 66:24; Mark 9:48) Was it not our Lord who responded to the mocking Pharisee who jibed that Jesus of Nazareth was taking things far too seriously, with the story of the rich man who found that he was on the wrong side of a

fixed gulf and in torment? (Luke 16:19–31) In answer to the question, Lord, are there few that be saved? Was it not our Lord who said,

Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us,' then he will answer you, 'I do not know where you come from.' Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!' In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out. (Luke 13:23–28)

It was our Lord himself who said that, not one of his apostles. So that even those of us who may find it fashionable and attractive to argue that we prefer the teaching of Jesus Christ, and we are not so stricken with the teaching of some of his lesser apostles, cannot go along this escape route if we believe Jesus Christ at all. We must be honest with him and face the fact that he more than anybody else taught that for the unbelieving and impenitent there will be a shut door, a fixed gulf and torment.

I should like us to notice that not only did he teach this, but his teaching of this solemn fact was inextricably bound up with his teaching about the love of God. Some people argue that those passages which speak about the love of God were taught by Christ; but a lot of people were used in compiling the Bible and those parts that talk of this fearful fate for the impenitent were never originally given us by Christ at all. Somebody else put them into the general 'scrapbook' of the Bible! The nice pieces come from Christ but the nasty pieces come from somebody else. But that argument fails. I need do no more than quote that famous statement of the gospel that many of us have known from our infancy:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

Here is the most profound statement of the love of God. Here is God's love in its furthest extreme: He so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son. But then, if you enquire why he gave him and ask wherein is the love of God practical and significant, the answer comes: that whoever believes in him should not perish. The word is inextricably bound up in the very heart of the gospel.

Unless we are prepared to say that the cross of Christ—that extravagant expression of the love of God—was all to no purpose and an idle exercise, we must admit the Bible's statement: it was to rescue from perishing those who will believe.

Not only do we believe the doctrine of the final judgment on the authority of Christ's word. God has gone out of his way to give his confirmation. Paul said to the learned chamber of the Areopagus:

God has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. (Acts 17:31)

This is an exceedingly important statement, which I would like us to ponder. We are told in some modern versions of Christianity that the idea of a coming judgment, the resurrection and our Lord's return are all myths. Indeed, that the resurrection itself is a myth, which you have to accept solely on the grounds that you find yourself disposed to believe it. If you don't believe it that's all right, because it's only true for those who believe. But that is not the Bible's position, nor was it Paul's position.

Paul knew that there were philosophers of the Epicureans among his listeners in the Areopagus court. One of the leading tenets of the Epicureans was that there was no final judgment. They had many variations upon their central theme. Lucretius in his version gladly preached his doctrines of materialism. He welcomed them as a man welcomes the gospel. He welcomed the theories of evolution, not merely because he felt it was scientifically true but because in it he felt there was a gospel for men. That is why he wrote, and wrote in poetry. The powerful passages in Lucretius are those where he expounds what you might call the gospel of evolution, which is simply this: when man dies the atoms of his body go apart and join in that impersonal stream of indestructible matter, but the man himself ceases to exist. And because the man ceases to exist, all those stories of a coming final judgment and torments for the impenitent are grandmothers' yarns, and bogey tales with which nannies have been known to correct their children.

As we know, evolution nowadays is likewise accepted, not merely (I nearly said, not at all) because men are compelled by the evidence. It is accepted and held as a gospel because it seems to hold hope for man that when death intervenes there will be nothing left to face a judgment. When Paul stood before the Areopagus court he was facing learned philosophers who held the view that when man dies he is finished—there is no judgment. These men were not predisposed to believe Paul's Christian theory; he must produce some evidence. Very boldly, and without any hesitation at all, Paul offered them the historic fact (not merely Christian belief) that Jesus Christ rose the third day. Divine confirmation of what he himself had so consistently taught throughout his life: there is a resurrection of the dead and there will be a final judgment.

I would offer that same evidence to all non-Christians, and especially to any modern Epicureans. You don't first have to believe what Christianity says before you may have evidence that there is going to be a final judgment. You can read your Bible, as you read the daily newspaper. The Bible will claim that there is objective, historical evidence that Jesus Christ rose the third day; which evidence God offers as confirmation of Christ's teaching that there will come a final judgment.

We may know this matter too by the witness of our own moral sense. There is a very interesting story in the Bible about a thief who hung alongside Christ on Calvary. Interestingly enough, the word translated thief is a word that Josephus used of the political men who were trying to lead revolution, throw off the capitalist Roman system and set up some other kind of a state. One of these men was being executed alongside of Christ. He got converted, and the thought processes that led him to conversion are exceedingly interesting. He first observed that Jesus Christ was innocent, innocent in the sense that the revolutionary himself realised that he personally wasn't innocent. He had committed crimes; but he knew Jesus to be an innocent man, guiltless of any revolutionary or anti-social activity. Then he observed

that, though innocent, Christ was being hounded to death by unscrupulous politicians and religious leaders. Christ was suffering the same condemnation as men who were self-evidently and self-confessedly guilty. In his final moments he pondered that situation.

This is a world in which the innocent often suffer along with the guilty. Reflecting on that matter we tell ourselves how wrong it is, and feel our emotions rise against this wicked perversion of justice. But let us observe what is happening. We have within us a sense that can see the difference between right and wrong, and it calls aloud that right should be vindicated—the unfair governments of this world and all the suffering they have brought should be put right and reversed. But where does that moral sense come from? Did it just happen? If it is not backed by some absolute standard, by some absolute deity, then of course it is but a will-o'-the-wisp that bears no practical relation to the facts. It is an utter cheat. The world, as history has proved over many centuries, is a world of enormous unfairness. There is no god outside to give us that moral sense which makes us decry the situation, so we had better admit that our moral sense is no more than a chance collocation of atoms within the brain, and it is a deceit because it does not square with the facts of the world as we know it.

But this revolutionary who was dying beside Christ believed that his moral sense came from God. It seemed self-evident to him that if there is a God who has given us the moral ability to see the difference between right and wrong—then there must come a day when that God will redress the balance and vindicate right. Else he will deny himself and the whole of man's experience is a farce. Inasmuch as the thief was just a few minutes off death, and saw that justice was not going to be vindicated in this life, he expressed his firm belief that morally there must be another world and there will be a final judgment.

I would like now to turn to the principles of that final judgment as we are given them in the words of holy Scripture, because it is my feeling that the principles that will operate at the final judgment are not generally understood. Incidentally, that is why I put that quotation from Shakespeare (wresting it of course from its context) as the sub-title for this talk: What judgment shall I dread, doing no wrong?

A common plea by which we try to comfort ourselves is: there may be a final judgment but I stand as good a chance as anybody. I have not done anybody any wrong—what judgment shall I dread, doing no wrong? That sort of argument proceeds from the assumption that the final judgment is going to be a great weighing machine, or a sort of an examiner's meeting to mark people's scripts. A good and famous surgeon in this city recently said that when he stands there he expects his life will be weighed, and he sincerely hopes that the good will be at least fifty-one per cent. That is a very common idea; we try to tell ourselves that we have good hope of making at least fifty-one per cent on the good side.

But that is not how it is going to proceed. The Bible says that the standard by which man is going to be judged is God's law. Anything that comes short of the one hundred per cent mark will be judged as sin and worthy of the sentence of that law with separation from God. I know this must sound somewhat cruel, but unless we are prepared to invent a religion of our own, if we are going to lay any claim to being Christian at all, we must be honest to what Christ and his apostles said. They say that whoever keeps the whole law and offends in one point is guilty of all (Jas 2:10), because he has broken perfection and come short. It will not be a question of whether our good deeds outweigh our bad.

Nevertheless the Bible does say:

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. (Rev 20:12–13)

The dead shall be judged by the things that are written in the books, the books of God's record, according to their works. That is to say, there will not be indiscriminate judgment. It does make a difference whether a man has attempted to be honest or whether he has lived a life of careless selfishness and cruel sadism. In fact our Lord made a very pointed remark to the people of his own day in the city of Capernaum where he had lived a good deal of his life. They had heard the Christian gospel more than anybody else:

And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you. (Matt 11:23–24)

The judgment will not be indiscriminate. People shall be judged in that sense according to their works. The people of Sodom and Gomorrah had never heard the Christian gospel in the same way as the people of Capernaum. Therefore, though the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were terrible sexual perverts and the people of Capernaum were good and proper people who went to the synagogue every Sabbath, our Lord announced that eternal perdition for the people of Capernaum would be a far more solemn and painful thing. They had had more privilege, more chance of accepting God's Saviour, and they had more light in which to decide the matter. Therefore, when eventually they decided to reject the Saviour and go on with their own little religion, the guilt they incurred was inevitably far greater than even the sexual perverts of Sodom. And we who live in a city that has been so fully evangelised for so long should not let the point of that escape.

But perhaps the most important thing to get hold of is what the Bible says about whether a person, as a result of that judgment, is finally lost or saved. I call your attention to the actual explicit words of Scripture. It talks of those who are cast into this lake of fire. We look very keenly to see on what grounds. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:15). It does not say, if any one failed to get fifty-one per cent. It does not say, those who fell below thirty-five percent, or, those who were guilty of the enormous perversions—these were cast into the lake of fire. The determinant is not a person's works at all. For if we are to be judged by God's law the Bible tells us that all shall come short (Rom 3:23). Those who enter heaven are not those who come only ten per cent short. It is not on that basis whatsoever, but on another thing completely—if anyone's name is not found written in the book of life. The Lamb's book of life, that heavenly register that records every single soul that has had a personal transaction with Christ: everyone who has been received and has received the Saviour.



According to the Bible a person's salvation does not depend upon his or her effort to keep God's law, or success in keeping it. God's law merely proves a person to be a complete bankrupt. Even when he has done his best he is a bankrupt. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight (Rom 3:20). Man is not saved by his self-effort but by what Christ has done for him. When Christ died at Calvary, the Bible tells us, he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree (1 Pet 2:24); the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isa 53:6). And God, who is a realist and knows us and foresees that at the very end we shall have come short of his perfection, has given his Son to deal with this great cosmic problem of sin. For the man who will own his bankruptcy and receive Christ into his personality, God says of that man that he is forgiven. He is right with God. He is redeemed. His name is entered in the Lamb's book of life.

It is this that will determine whether a man is lost or saved. It is not whether his works were good or bad, but is his name in the book of life? That is, has he received the Saviour? Is he one of Christ's? With this, square the words of our Lord when the people come at last and the door is shut. They come knocking, pleading for admittance. You will notice that they come with the words of a popular version of Christianity: Lord, but what about our good works? Many times we have taken Holy Communion – we ate and drank in your presence. We were zealous in attending the public preaching of the Word—we heard you preach in our streets (see Luke 13:26).

This is a popular impression of Christianity, but they remain outside. And the reason why they are outside is not because of this and the other, but because I never knew you, says our Lord. Not I didn't know you existed; but I never had those personal intimate dealings with you, and you with me, when I accepted you and you accepted me and we became one. (In a far more deep and spiritual sense than that in which man and wife accept each other and become one.)

Here I want to point out what is a most delightful and yet in its way a most solemn thing. It is a common notion that if these things are true at least we have a breathing space in which we may wait. We must wait at any rate until the final day to know how our personal case will fall. Some people find a good deal of comfort in that, but the realities of the situation are otherwise. The Bible is emphatic that, though the judgment does not come until after death, the decision is knowable in this life. It is knowable on what I may call the good side—and therein is the wonderful glory of Christianity. Those who are cast into the lake of fire are those whose names are not written in the book of life; but the Bible asserts that those whose names are written in the book of life may know it during this life.

In fact, the impression the New Testament leaves is that this was common knowledge among the early Christians. For instance, Paul wrote to a church of Christians not long converted at a place called Philippi. In a reference to some of his fellow Christian workers he used this delightful phrase: whose names are in the book of life (Phil 4:3). That was written somewhere about AD 50–60, and they already knew. Again I must admit that this is not popular Christianity, but it is in the Bible. Says Paul of these ordinary people who had received Christ and were Christians: 'their names are already in the book of life'. With what comfort did they proceed to life's end, and how profound was their peace with God, however dissatisfied they were about their own personal attainments. Their peace with God, their

prospect of eternity was sound. They knew it. Their names were already in the book of life. Paul also says, 'There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' (Rom 8:1).

Our Lord himself, from whom these teachings derive, made the point explicitly. You remember that famous occasion recorded in John 5 when he was talking to the Jews, and made his astounding claim that he was the Son of God and equal with God. He told them that at the final judgment he (Jesus of Nazareth) was going to be the judge. That was an extraordinary claim for a thirty-year-old person to make, but he made it. He was making the point that God was committing judgment to him because he is human as well as divine, and understands how humans feel. The judge for that august tribunal will be human as well as divine. Having claimed that he is going to be judge in that last day, he said these tremendous words:

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)

This is not a theory put forward by some philosopher. If there is any truth in Christ at all, these are the words of the judge himself, giving a statement beforehand of what shall be the decisions of the court:

He that hears my word [here and now]  
and believes [here and now]  
on him that sent me has eternal life [here and now]  
and shall not<sup>2</sup> come into condemnation,  
but is passed over *already* from death to life.

Like a man who is a condemned criminal in the death cell just awaiting his sentence, and the pardon is given him. He holds it in his hand and with the pardon walks out of the cell to life. He has passed over. So, Christ said, in that most profound and spiritual sense, the man that hears Christ's word and receives him in this life already has eternal life, already has passed over from the condemned cell into life.

You say, how can the result be known before the great final day? It springs from what the great Christian gospel is and from how it works. There is to be one judgment, and it comes after death: it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment (Heb 9:27). There are not several judgments but one judgment after death. And God tells us that just as there is one judgment so Christ was once offered, not twice, or three times: 'Christ, having been offered once . . .' (v. 28). It is over now; the offering is complete. No more has to be done; the sacrifice has been made and it is finished. The sacrifice that secures a man's forgiveness with God has already been done.

God wants us to know it. He courageously tells us that it is done, it is finished, so that the person who receives Christ as Saviour and becomes one with Christ knows it already. The

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<sup>2</sup> The Greek is exceedingly emphatic: 'shall in no wise whatsoever'.

bill is paid; the sanctions of the law are suffered already. He has passed over already from death to life.

As a Christian preacher and lecturer I am exceedingly proud of that. I think God is supremely wonderful and far more courageous, as well as realistic, than the petty theologians who peddle popular Christianity. Popular Christianity has a man waiting in suspense all his days, digging him in the heels and telling him to be good, through fear of a coming judgment. But it is not so with real Christianity. Christianity will tell the person who has received Christ already that whatever happens he or she is accepted with God. They will never come into judgment, never be cast out. They are already saved; there is no condemnation. They shall be saved from the wrath of God. That is what Christianity means when it says that Christ gives us peace with God: 'Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ' (Rom 5:1).

That does not mean of course that when a person receives Christ he is free to do whatever he pleases. The New Testament is full of explanations that when a man receives Christ he is acquitted, he is right with God. His relationships with God are right; God receives him for Christ's sake and will never cast him out. But then of course begins the path of discipline in the school of God's family.

A person does not become a perfect behaviourist overnight. There will be many falls, many mistakes; the battle against sin will go on until his last day. If a man grows careless the Bible bluntly states that God will chasten, discipline him. And if needs be God will use the final discipline by removing a man's physical life (1 Cor 11:30). Discipline in God's family is a real thing but so is the acceptance. And the glory, indeed the heart of the Christian gospel, is that the person who comes confessing his bankruptcy in all realism to God, and stakes his faith wholly in Christ and receives Christ, that person is wholly accepted by God and shall never come into judgment.

But of course there is a solemn side. It can already be known in this life, and each man may know for himself if he shall be lost. Because again, it is not how he shall have done in the end; it is whether his name is in the book of life, whether he has received God's Son. And the man who refuses God's Son as Saviour, of him the Bible says: 'Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God' (John 3:18).

We must not therefore let ourselves run away with the idea that we are safe, so long as the results are not yet published. Each man and woman may know right now—the person who does not believe is already judged. Of course there is opportunity while life lasts to change one's outlook. There is opportunity to come in true repentance and confession of one's spiritual bankruptcy to receive Jesus Christ as Lord. But the thing that determines the result is a something that happens in this life, which we may already know.

You say, this doctrine, that the impenitent will be eternally separated from God, is cruel. It is altogether out of proportion with a person's sins. Suppose a man has been a sinner—the idea that in the coming world he will be eternally separated from God for his sins, surely that is a punishment altogether out of proportion with the crime?

One can understand the objection, but it leans on a popular notion of why man is judged anyway. Man has not been such a big sinner, has he? But the determinant that will decide if a

man is sent to eternal torment is not how big his sins have been, but has he received God's Son? The man who comes to his final decision and says No to God's Son is refusing eternal life. He is refusing eternal redemption; he is refusing God. There is no alternative to God but eternal perdition. This is not a cruel doctrine. It lies in the nature of the fact that a person who recognises that his religion is not going to improve him enough to gain him acceptance with God, the only thing that will save him is for him to come in confessed bankruptcy and receive Jesus as Saviour and Lord—and that person says, not just yet.

Some of my friends do not find this popular. You Christians come every night, and if you have done anything wrong you ask God to forgive you. Well, can't I just do that, and ask God to forgive my sins every night without receiving Christ (as you call it)?

That is the fundamental sin and human problem. We want God's forgiveness, but we are not quite sure if we want to receive Christ as Saviour and Lord and take him unreservedly into our personality. And that is all God is basically interested in, for everything hangs upon it. If a man rejects Christ he rejects God, and a nice examination paper full of good works is irrelevant.

You say, but surely, a man will get a chance to change his mind in eternity. That is supposing a lot of things that we just do not know. We don't know what eternity is. Our Lord himself does know, he loves our souls and he tells us that when eternity dawns it shall not be a place of change in that sense. Man will be fixed, his choice fixed. Moreover in that day a person shall not have the means to repent, for the only thing that can possibly cause a man's heart to change and repent is the love of God. God has demonstrated that love by giving his Son to a cross for us, raising him from the dead, and asking us to receive him into our personalities. And the man who says No to the love of God in Christ shall find in eternity that he has rejected the only thing that could lead him to a change of mind.

God shall not annihilate a person. That would not be loving on God's part, for he has given man a will and ranked him as a responsible creature. If man takes that will and says No to Christ, God will not degrade him to the level of a beast. God cannot, for his own sake, wipe out that decision so that nobody knows of it. God in all his courage will honour man's decision, honour his personality. It shall be known eternally that a person refused Christ through his or her own choice.

I want to end this lecture with a few quotations. I do so for this reason. When our Lord warned us of the man who found himself tormented in Hades he reminded us that in his life on earth he had had the Scriptures. So I now quote from the Bible:

*I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house for I have five brothers so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment. But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead. (Luke 16:27–31)*

They had the Bible, and if they did not believe the naked word of holy Scripture then they would not be convinced by any ghostly apparition from the other world. We must not expect that God is going to give us strange feelings and wonderful apparitions to convince us of this truth. We have the Word of God. God is no emotionalist with firework displays. He expects

us to believe what he said because he said it. Each one must make his or her personal decision.

And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. (Heb 9:27–28)

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. (John 3:16–18)

## About the Author

**DAVID W. GOODING** is Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University, Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. His international teaching ministry is marked by fresh and careful expositions of both testaments. He has published scholarly studies on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John 13–17, Acts, Hebrews and the New Testament's use of the Old Testament.