

The Lake of Fire

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Well, brethren, as I think most of you are probably aware, one of the major things that separates the Church of God from popular Christianity is our view on the subject of life after death. The popular Christianity view is that when a person dies, if they have been a good person and tried to live a righteous life, well, then they automatically go to heaven, and they live forever in heaven, in paradise circumstances. Now, if they've been a bad person and they've been wicked and rebellious, their view is that person then goes to hell, and they're tormented for all eternity with no end to this torment. We in the Church of God take a very different view of that. In our view, when a person dies, they stay in the grave until they're resurrected. And if they've been a righteous person, they receive the resurrection to eternal life. And if they've been a wicked person, they're resurrected and they're thrown into the lake of fire.

Now, even in regards to the subject of the lake of fire, I've heard it debated within Church of God circles as to whether or not the lake of fire is literal. In other words, would God literally take the wicked and throw them in a fire to be killed spiritually and permanently? Would God actually do that? And that subject gets particularly questioned in regards to people that have already died. In other words, if someone has lived out their life and they were wicked and they died and they're in the grave, would God literally bring them back to life just solely for the purpose of then condemning them and throwing them in the lake of fire? That just kind of seems mean to our view of love. Well, what we're going to do today in the sermon is look at this particular subject from a full view of the lake of fire. So, if you'd like a title for this sermon, it's

The Lake of Fire

Now to start off with, as I mentioned, the popular view in popular Christianity is the idea that people wind up in either heaven or hell. In fact, you'll oftentimes hear Protestant preachers ask the question, "Where are you going to spend eternity?" Now the question itself assumes that eternal life is actually a given. In other words, it's not a gift that's given to the righteous. It's a given. It's something that everyone receives. And the question is only, are you going to spend that eternal life in good conditions in heaven, or are you going to spend that eternal life in horrible conditions in hell? Well, this contradicts how the Bible talks about eternal life because the Bible refers to it as a gift and not as a given. So, to start off with, let's just notice this basic concept. Turn over to Romans 6 and we'll start reading in verse 23.

Rom 6:23 *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (NKJV)

Notice this refers to eternal life as a gift and not as a given. It's a gift for those who accept the sacrifice of Christ and who diligently obey Him in their life. It's a gift that

they'll receive but it's not something that everyone has as a given. And it says the alternative conclusion to that is death. *That's the wages of sin.* It's not living forever in horrible circumstances. It's your existence ceasing. It's coming to an end. And this isn't a concept that's just mentioned in one scripture. This is a consistent theme throughout the Bible. So, just to notice another verse that refers to this, turn over to Matthew 25. Now, we're going to pick up at the very end of the chapter. But just to summarize the context here, starting in verse 31, you see a picture of Christ basically talking about how He's judging mankind. Now He's separating the righteous from the wicked, and He pictures this as sheep and goats. The sheep being the righteous. The goats being the wicked. And He kind of goes through explaining how this takes place, and we're going to pick up at the very end of this in verse 46. But just to understand the context, realize that in the verses just prior to this, He's addressing the wicked, those that are condemned because they didn't obey Him. But just notice here in verse 46,

Matt 25:46 *"And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."* (NKJV)

And notice there's only one group that receives eternal life, and that's the righteous. Now that's consistent with what we just read in Romans. *It's a gift, it's not a given.* The alternative to that, He describes, is everlasting punishment. Now people who believe in the "fires of hell" concept say, "Well, that's everlasting punishment. They're just punished for all eternity" and meaning torments, circumstances that never ever actually come to an end. Well, that's not really what this is getting at. Yes, their punishment is everlasting, it's permanent, but it's not "everlasting torment". Because what we're going to see is the Bible refers to this everlasting punishment as the "second death". In other words, their existence coming to an end. They cease to exist. So, just to notice this, turn over to Revelation 21. We'll see here that the lake of fire is repeatedly referred to in the Bible as the "second death". It's consistent with what we read there in Romans that the wages of sin is death. Those who don't repent of their sins and who live a life of sin, their ultimate end is death. It's not endless torment. And notice here in Revelation 21:7.

Rev 21:7 *"He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son."* (NKJV)

Again, referring to the righteous. And again, they're inheriting all things. In other words, they're inheriting eternal life. That's what it's referring to. And notice once again, the opposite end here is in verse 8.

"8) But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (NKJV)

And we'll see here, numerous times in the Bible, the lake of fire is referred to as the "second death". It's one's existence coming to a permanent end is what it's referring to. And just to notice another verse that refers to this, just turn back over the page here to chapter 20. Now we're going to pick up here in verse 14. Now, later in this sermon,

we're going to cover the whole context of verses 11 through 15 and unpack some of the common misunderstandings there. But for right now, we're going to start in verse 14.

Rev 20:14 *"Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death."* (NKJV)

Notice the lake of fire is referred to as the "second death". In verse 15,

"15) And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." (NKJV)

Notice again, the Book of Life, that's those who are going to receive eternal life. That's the opposite conclusion. You know, that's the other ending to the movie as opposed to going in the lake of fire. So, eternal life is a gift, it's not a given, and the alternate ending to the movie is the second death. It's going out of existence. That's the ultimate end of the wicked.

Now, sometimes some of the verses that are associated with the lake of fire can be misunderstood to kind of back up this idea of the "fires of hell". You know, this never-ending torment that just goes on for eternity with no end. And one of the verses that's sometimes interpreted like this is in chapter 20 and verse 10. So, just to look across the page here to verse 10.

Rev 20:10 *"The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."* (NKJV)

Now, for starters, just notice if you're reading a New King James Version like I am, at the end of that first sentence there in verse 10, you see the word "are", but it's in italics. In other words, that's a translator inserted word. In other words, there's not a Greek equivalent to that word. The translators just stuck in a word that they thought made sense and finished the thought. Now, as we're going to see here, it would be more accurate to say where they "were thrown". Because they misunderstood the rest of the statement here and assumed that the beast and false prophet, they're just being tormented for all eternity like the "fires of hell".

Now, to understand why you have the beast and the false prophet mentioned here. Because keep in mind, we have three individuals that have been mentioned in this verse here. And you'll understand in a minute why I'm pointing this out. Satan, the beast, and the false prophet are the three individuals mentioned. And that'll be important here in a second. But just look across the page to Revelation 19 and verse 20. Now, the context here is during the end of the Day of the LORD. There's a battle of armies that come together with the beast and they're fighting Christ upon His return. And it tells us here in verse 20, the ultimate end of the beast and the false prophet at this time.

Rev 19:20 *"Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone."* (NKJV)

You see, the beast and the false prophet are cast into the lake of fire at the end of the Day of the LORD. Now what we have here in Revelation 20:10 is more than a thousand years later, because we have the thousand years of the millennium and then we have the time period pictured by the Eighth Day. The Bible doesn't tell us exactly how long that is, but we know when Satan is thrown in the lake of fire it's after that time period as well. So, more than a thousand years have transpired in between these two events. But verse 10 is telling us that all three of these were thrown in the lake of fire. Now that's important to understand because realize that the last part of verse 10 says,

Rev 20:10 *"...And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."* (NKJV)

Now in context, if we just read the context, who would "they" be referring to? It would be referring to the three individuals mentioned. It would be Satan and the beast and the false prophet. The reason I point this out is it kind of trainwrecks the logic that I was taught as a child growing up in the Church of God. Because often as we would read this, and we would assume that "they" must mean Satan and the demons because we misunderstood this verse and then we made up a concept that the Bible never says. And that concept was the idea that spirit beings can't die. That's how we kind of justified this in our minds because we knew human beings, the Bible's obvious that we don't have an immortal soul, we are souls, and our ultimate end is the second death.

If we're rebellious and we refuse to follow God and endure to the end, we don't receive eternal life. We receive the second death. Well, then we would read this and think, "Okay, well, how do we understand this torment forever and ever?" And what we did is in our minds, we said, "Well, that just must be Satan and the demons". And then to rationalize that, we made up this logic of, well, maybe spirit beings just can't die. And once God created them, well now He can't kill them. Well, that's why they have to be tormented forever. Well, honestly, I believed that for several decades of my life.

I remember being a student at Ambassador College when one of my professors brought up a very obvious, easy example that totally debunks that chain of logic. Because he brought up that concept and he said,

"Just look at the example of Jesus Christ. He's not a created angelic being, He's an eternal God being. But what happened? Well, He became a physical human being and lived on earth and then He died. And then He was dead for three days and three nights and the Father had to resurrect him to bring Him back to life. Now, if a God being can die, how could we argue that an angel couldn't die?"

See that the logic just doesn't make sense. But because we never stopped to notice that the Bible never actually states that logic, we just kind of made that up because we misunderstood one verse.

And just to notice a couple of verses that speak about Satan's ultimate end. Turn over to Ezekiel 28. It's a section of scripture here we've attributed to Satan my entire life. We'll start reading here in verse 11. We're going to read the whole section here from verse 11 to verse 19, because I want you to understand the full context of what we're talking about. And then particularly pay attention to the last two verses here, because it describes to us Satan's end.

Ezek 28:11 *"Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 12) "Son of man, take up a lamentation for the king of Tyre, and say to him, "Thus says the Lord GOD: 'You were the seal of perfection, Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. 13) You were in Eden, the garden of God; Every precious stone was your covering: The sardius, topaz, and diamond, Beryl, onyx, and jasper, Sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold. The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes Was prepared for you on the day you were created. 14) "You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; You were on the holy mountain of God; You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. 15) You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, Till iniquity was found in you." (NKJV)*

As we've always taught, Satan was a righteous angel, and then he decided to rebel. He was perfect until he started sinning, and then he turned against God. In verse 16,

16) "By the abundance of your trading You became filled with violence within, And you sinned; Therefore I cast you as a profane thing Out of the mountain of God; And I destroyed you, O covering cherub, From the midst of the fiery stones. 17) "Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, That they might gaze at you." (NKJV)

Now notice in particular verse 18 and 19, because it tells us Satan's end.

18) "You defiled your sanctuaries By the multitude of your iniquities, By the iniquity of your trading; Therefore I brought fire from your midst; It devoured you, And I turned you to ashes upon the earth In the sight of all who saw you." (NKJV)

Notice he's in a fire and he's turned to ashes, he's destroyed.

19) "All who knew you among the peoples are astonished at you; You have become a horror, And shall be no more forever." (NKJV)

In other words, he dies. His existence comes to an end. He's not tormented forever as we would typically define torment. You know, someone being tortured for all eternity with no end. As we're going to see, that's not what in Revelation 20 verse 10 is getting

at. We have to kind of unpack that because if we assume it means never-ending torment, there's too many other verses that that's going to contradict. Also, just to support this, turn over to Isaiah 27. We'll see another verse here consistent with this. Now I'm just going to summarize some things here. One of the things you'll notice in the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament, Satan is oftentimes pictured as a sea creature referred to as "Leviathan". You'll see in the book of Job, he's talked about there, and he's referred to as the "king of all the proud". That's obviously not a literal sea creature who's the "king of all the proud". It's a symbolic picture describing Satan. And you'll see he's repeatedly referred to in the Old Testament as "Leviathan", but that's who is being referred to. But notice what's going to ultimately happen to Leviathan. This is Isaiah 27 in verse 1.

Is 27:1 *"In that day the LORD with His severe sword, great and strong, Will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan that twisted serpent; And He will slay the reptile that is in the sea."* (NKJV)

Now notice he's slain. He's going to die. He's going to be destroyed at some point. Notice also it refers to him as the "reptile in the sea". That's going to become important at the end of this sermon because the Bible often refers to how Leviathan's domain is the "sea". That's where he basically rules, and his domain is the "sea". That's going to become important later. But now let's turn back over to Revelation 20. Because again, we have this comment that if we take it literally, it would be consistent with the idea of the "fires of hell". This never ending torment that just goes on and on and there's never an end to it. That would seem like what verse 10 was saying. So, let's take a closer look at this. This is Revelation 20 and verse 10, what we just read.

Rev 20:10 *"The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are...."* (NKJV)

Now, as I mentioned, I'm reading from the New King James Version. The word "are" is in italics. That's a translator inserted word, because the translators thought that that finished the thought. It would be more appropriate to say where they "were cast". Because we know more than a thousand years earlier, they were thrown in the lake of fire but it's the second death. They're not currently alive in that fire at this point.

"...And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." (NKJV)

Now, if we take that literally, it would seem like it's consistent with the idea of just torment that never ends. But we also have to consider sometimes the Bible uses, you might say kind of poetic figurative language to express a concept that is not as always as literal as we might take it. Because we also have to consider the Bible wasn't written in English. Because each language and culture sometimes has expressions or ways of communicating a thought that don't always translate as well from one language to another. You know, there are expressions that we use that the literal words themselves sometimes is not exactly what was being said. But just on that note, turn over to

Revelation 14. Because we're going to see very similar language used here to describe the fate of unrepentant physical human beings, and it sounds very similar.

The reason I point this out is in the Church of God, we've kind of manufactured this logic that spirit beings can't die. Well, again, Christ himself kind of debunks that whole idea. If a God being could die, I mean, yes, He's capable of living forever, but if He could actually die, then how can we argue that an angel couldn't die? That God couldn't kill a created angel that He brought into existence in the first place? But what I want you to notice here, we're not going to cover the full context of this section of scripture here, but just notice a few verses here that are referring to unrepentant human beings who followed Satan's way of life and what their end is, because you're going to see it described in very similar type of language. Let's pick up here in Revelation 14:9.

Rev 14:9 *"Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, 'If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10) he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11) And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.'" (NKJV)*

Now, just as kind of some context here to understand these verses. Oftentimes, people assume that the mark of the beast is solely an end time concept. And that's because of some statements that are made in Revelation 13 about this mark being used to prevent people from buying and selling at the very end. Now, obviously that is an end time specific reference in terms of preventing people from buying and selling. But if you look at all the scriptures that refer to the mark of the beast, you realize it's not a concept that is unique simply to the end time.

Now I won't go into great detail on this because I've covered it in other sermons, and there's even a sermon on my website and my YouTube channel called "The Mark and Number of the Beast". There's even a study paper on my website that addresses the mark of the beast as well. So, I'll refer you to that for all the greater details here. But just to summarize it. The mark of the beast, what it's really getting at is it's a symbolic reference to accepting and following Satan's way of life. It refers to it as on the hand and the forehead. Now again, that's not some barcode or implanted chip or things of that nature. Because you'll see, particularly in the Old Testament, references to God telling the Israelites to basically imprint His commandments or His Holy Days on their hand and their forehead. He's not referring to tattooing it on them. He's referring to their thoughts and their actions. In other words, to internalize this.

You'll see numerous references in the New Testament of God marking His people as a seal on their forehead or putting His name on their foreheads. Again, it's a symbolic reference to marking His people. That their thoughts and their actions are following Him. So again, when it refers to the mark of the beast and who has it on their hand and their

forehead, it's not a tattoo. It's not a barcode or something of that nature. You're talking about people whose thoughts and actions are following Satan's way of life. So, what it's referring to here in these verses is unrepentant sinners who have followed Satan's way of life. And this is referring to their ultimate end.

But notice how it refers to there's smoke just ascending forever. Now, if you interpret that totally literally, you would think, "Well, that must be the fires of hell." You know, it just burns forever, and that smoke just never stops coming up and they're just tormented for all eternity. Well, that contradicts everything else the Bible says about this subject. Because that would assume that eternal life was a given and not a gift. And the Bible consistently says it's just the righteous who receive eternal life, who live forever. The wages of sin, that's death, that's going out of existence.

So, what I want you to see is another reference in the Bible in the Old Testament that uses very similar imagery. It uses very similar language of smoke ascending forever, but what it's actually referring to is just destruction. You know, it's not literally this "fires of hell" picture. And to see this, turn over to Isaiah 34. What we're going to see here is again, just notice the language as we read through this, because you'll see from the context, we're obviously not talking about the "fires of hell". But it's going to use very similar imagery and kind of poetic language, and what it's talking about is just destruction. Because you'll see as we read through a section of verses here in Isaiah 34, what it's talking about is the destruction of Edom, the descendants of Esau, during the Day of the LORD. Their nation being destroyed. And it's talking about basically how thoroughly they are destroyed. But again, this isn't an eternal torment, "fires of hell" picture that we're talking about. But notice how similar the language is to what we read in Revelation. Now pick up here in Isaiah 34:5.

Is 34:5 *"For My sword shall be bathed in heaven; Indeed it shall come down on Edom, And on the people of My curse, for judgment. 6) The sword of the LORD is filled with blood, It is made overflowing with fatness, With the blood of lambs and goats, With the fat of the kidneys of rams. For the LORD has a sacrifice in Bozrah, And a great slaughter in the land of Edom. 7) The wild oxen shall come down with them, And the young bulls with the mighty bulls; Their land shall be soaked with blood, And their dust saturated with fatness." 8) For it is the day of the LORD'S vengeance,..." (NKJV)*

In other words, the Day of the LORD is what we're talking about here.

"...The year of recompense for the cause of Zion. 9) Its streams shall be turned into pitch, And its dust into brimstone; Its land shall become burning pitch. 10) It shall not be quenched night or day; Its smoke shall ascend forever. From generation to generation it shall lie waste; No one shall pass through it forever and ever." (NKJV)

Notice that similar language to what we read in Revelation.

"11) But the pelican and the porcupine shall possess it, Also the owl and the raven shall dwell in it. And He shall stretch out over it The line of confusion and the stones of emptiness. 12) They shall call its nobles to the kingdom, But none shall be there, and all its princes shall be nothing." (NKJV)

So, notice that it's just referring to destruction here. The descendants of Edom being wiped out during the Day of the LORD is what it's talking about. But notice the language of the smoke rising forever and such. Again, this isn't the "fires of hell", of never ending torment. It's referring to destruction. But it's describing it in this more poetic language, that if we try to interpret it very literally, we come up with a very false picture. So, when we look at those references in Revelation, associated with the lake of fire that use similar language, we have to put it in the context of the entire Bible and see all the other verses that we would be contradicting if we were to interpret them to mean the fires of hell. You would contradict the very basic principle that eternal life is a gift, it's not a given. Because if you're going to live forever being tormented in the fires of hell, that's eternal life. It's eternal life in horrible conditions, but it would still be eternal life.

But the lake of fire is referred to as the "second death". In other words, going out of existence. It's not just physical death. It's spiritual death that you don't come back from. That is what's being referred to here. Because the Bible always presents this kind of binary between life and death, between eternal life and eternal death. And it's the righteous who receive eternal life, while the wicked, the unrepentant sinners receive eternal death. So again, it's not the "fires of hell" at all.

But there is another subject that's oftentimes debated in the Church of God. Because I've seen this a number of times in my lifetime. I even know of some Church of God groups that officially teach that the lake of fire is not literal. In other words, there's not a literal fire that God's going to throw people into, as their punishment for being rebellious. And they particularly will cite this in reference to people that have already died. In other words, if someone's lived out their life, they've rejected their opportunity for salvation, they're already dead and in the grave. They look at that and go, "Why would a loving God bring this person back up solely for the purpose of condemning them and throwing them in the lake of fire, just for them to die again?" That just seems mean from their view of love.

Well, we have to remember, God's ways are not our ways. His thoughts are higher than ours. It directly tells us that in Isaiah 55. We have to realize that His thoughts are higher than ours. His ways are higher than ours. And we have to focus on what does the Bible actually say? What does Scripture clearly tell us? Because if we can see a consistent picture, it's very clear what Scripture says. It's not just one verse that we misunderstood and created false concepts from, but if there's a clear trend, that the Bible lays out very clearly for us. You know, even if it doesn't match our view of how things should be, if it doesn't match our view of love, we have to realize that God is always right, and His thinking is above ours. His ways are higher than ours. And if there's a conflict there, we have to realize He's always right and we're the ones who misunderstand it.

So, let's look at this particular subject. Does the Bible really teach that those who are unrepentant, who rejected their opportunity for salvation and they're already in the grave, is God literally going to bring them back up to then just condemn them and put them in a fire? Well, let's notice that the Bible actually does say that. Turn over to John 5:28.

John 5:28 *“Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice 29) and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”* (NKJV)

And notice that Christ says it's everybody. It's everybody who's in the grave. Everybody who's died and gone to the grave, they're all coming back up, and there's one of two conclusions. It's either the resurrection to eternal life or the resurrection to condemnation. So, this is telling us that, yes, He will bring the dead up who have been rebellious to be cast into the lake of fire. And it's not just one verse that says that. We're going to see this is a consistent theme that's addressed multiple times throughout the Bible. So, turn over to Daniel 12. We'll start reading here in verse 1.

Dan 12:1 *“At that time Michael shall stand up, The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, Even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, Every one who is found written in the book.”* (NKJV)

Now notice in verse 1, we just read a very obvious reference to the Day of the LORD. A time of trouble that's worse than any time in human history. Okay, that's obviously the Day of the LORD. And we've also read an obvious reference to the Book of Life. Well, see that helps us understand verse 2, and verse 2 is as clear as it sounds.

“2) And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,...” (NKJV)

In other words, those who are in the grave and who are dead, they're going to awaken.

“...Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.” (NKJV)

We have the same two endings to the movie. Some receiving eternal life. Some to everlasting contempt. Now in my experience in the Church of God, as I've addressed in previous sermons, unfortunately throughout our history in the Church of God, we kind of created some false paradigms around the subject of the resurrections, because we based our whole view off of two terms that we misunderstood. The term “first resurrection”, and the term “rest of the dead”. Because we assumed that the term “first resurrection” was establishing a numerical sequence of first, second, and third. That's why you always hear in Church of God circles the terms “second resurrection” and “third resurrection” being commonly used. But try to find those terms in the Bible. You're going to be searching for the rest of your life. They're just not there. They're terms that we made up.

Well, because we took the English word “first” and we assumed it must be talking about a numerical order. And we didn’t consider maybe that’s not what was intended. Because if you look at the Greek there, there’s other ways that can be interpreted, which make a lot more sense in the context. It’s referring to the “first” more like rank or the chief, the honorable resurrection is what it’s referring to. Well, when you think about everyone’s life ends in either going into eternal life or into condemnation in the lake of fire -- that’s the contrast to understand what first means. It’s not about first, second, and third.

Well, the reason I mention this is we also misunderstood this term “rest of the dead”. We took that as kind of a blanket statement that eliminated the possibility that there were any other resurrections -- other than the Firstfruits receiving eternal life -- until after the millennium. Well, as a result, then we would read this, the second part of verse 2 here -- “some to shame and everlasting contempt” -- and we do mental gymnastics around that. Because our paradigm didn’t allow us to just accept what it says. Because it’s giving us a Day of the LORD timeframe, and it’s saying that there are people resurrected, and there’s two groups. There’s one to everlasting life, and there’s one to everlasting condemnation. When you understand what everlasting condemnation is, it’s the lake of fire is what it’s referring to. And it’s placing both of these in a Day of the LORD timeframe. Because this is basically the judgment of all the people who’ve received their judgment in terms of salvation prior to the return of Christ. That’s who’s being addressed here.

Now, just to kind of nail this down, let’s look at the Hebrew word here that’s translated here as “contempt”. Because what it actually means is “abhorrence”. Now, if you have a New King James translation like I do that has the center references, you’ll see a little number one next to “contempt”. And if you look in the center margin there, it’s got the word “abhorrence”. Well, that’s consistent with what the Hebrew word means. Now the Hebrew word that’s translated there as “contempt”, it’s transliterated into English as “deraon”. It’s Strong’s # 1860. And the definition I’m going to give you comes from The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the Old Testament by Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter. And here’s how they define this word.

“A masculine noun meaning abhorrence.....It is used only twice in the Old Testament and in both cases speaks about the abhorrence of wicked men in the eternal state (Isa 66:24). Daniel, likewise, spoke about the everlasting abhorrence of the wicked who were resurrected (Dan 12:2).”

And it’s referencing the verse that we just read here. Now, if you think about this, if you’re coming up to never ending abhorrence, there’s only one conclusion of what this can mean. Because if you’re talking about people who have the opportunity to repent, and they can possibly still make it into the Kingdom of God, that’s not everlasting abhorrence. The only way it could be everlasting abhorrence is they’re going in the lake of fire. You know, they’ve lost their chance, it’s done. The conclusion is set for them. And just to further back this up, as Baker & Carpenter mentioned here, this word is only used twice in the Old Testament. Now let’s look at the other reference because it’ll be very obvious here when we unpack this that we’re talking about the lake of fire. Turn

over to Isaiah 66. And we'll see here how this is used. And then we'll be able to verify later how when Christ actually quotes this verse multiple times, this is talking about the lake of fire. It's very clear. Now, this is Isaiah 66. We'll start reading in verse 22.

Is 66:22 *"For as the new heavens and the new earth Which I will make shall remain before Me," says the LORD, "So shall your descendants and your name remain. 23) And it shall come to pass That from one New Moon to another, And from one Sabbath to another, All flesh shall come to worship before Me," says the LORD. 24) "And they shall go forth and look Upon the corpses of the men Who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, And their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."* (NKJV)

And see here it's translated as "abhorrence". This is deraon. This is the exact same Hebrew word here. And again, it's translated clearly as "abhorrence" here. Now when you see "new heavens and new earth", as I've explained in previous sermons, that's the recreated earth, after the destruction of the Day of the LORD, when God heals the earth and makes it this utopian environment for the millennium. What's being described here is basically the lake of fire is existing throughout this timeframe and people are looking at it. Basically, it's a cautionary tale. God having people look at this and go, "Okay, if you choose to rebel, this is going to be your end. This is how the movie's going to end for you if you rebel." And it's basically a very visual reminder for them of this is what happens to those who choose to go their own way. This is the alternative to eternal life. *You go in that fire.*

Okay, so how do I know for sure that that's what this verse is referring to here? You know, because obviously it doesn't state "lake of fire", and it uses kind of some poetic imagery to express the concept. Well, the way we know for sure that this is referring to the lake of fire is in the New Testament, Christ quotes this exact verse here in verse 24 multiple times. And if we just look at the context and how He uses it, He's obviously referring to the lake of fire. So, turn over to Mark 9. And we'll see here where Christ Himself makes direct reference to this verse multiple times. And if we just look at how He uses it, it's obvious He's telling us this is talking about the lake of fire. Mark 9 and verse 42.

Mark 9:42 *"But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea. 43) If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched— 44) where "Their worm does not die And the fire is not quenched." 45) And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched— 46) where "Their worm does not die And the fire is not quenched." 47) And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire— 48) where "Their worm does not die And the fire is not quenched."* (NKJV)

And notice He's using this phrase about the worm not dying and the fire not quenched, but it's a fire that's basically the alternative conclusion to being in the Kingdom of God. Well, what has the Bible consistently taught us that is? That's the lake of fire. That's the alternative conclusion. That's the other way the movie can end in your life. You either wind up in the Kingdom of God or in the lake of fire. And He's quoting a phrase that comes directly from Isaiah 66. Obviously, that's what that verse is referring to. Christ Himself indicates that.

So, we can see then if we look back at Daniel 12, what did it tell us? At the same time that you have the resurrection to eternal life for those who have been faithful Firstfruits, there's also a resurrection to condemnation, to everlasting abhorrence. In other words, for people who had their opportunity but rejected it, who were resurrected back to physical life to receive their judgment and then to be cast in the lake of fire. The Bible repeatedly tells us that this is the case.

But just to understand the full picture. What we're going to see here is in the two judgments of mankind, and what I mean by that is -- we've taught all of my life, the Firstfruits, well, that's the spring harvest. The rest of mankind, that's the fall harvest. Well, in the Day of the LORD timeframe, that's when the Firstfruits, those who have been faithful, receive their resurrection to eternal life. What we saw there in Daniel 12 is there's also a group who receive the lake of fire in that timeframe.

Well, there's also a judgment at the end of the Eighth Day that's described in Matthew 25 where it's the same picture. You know, where the righteous receive eternal life and the wicked receive the lake of fire. But what we're going to see in both of these cases is when it comes to the lake of fire, there are people who are still at the end of their physical life. In other words, they didn't die and go into the grave and then have to be brought back up to be thrown in the lake of fire. At the end of their physical life, they are thrown into the lake of fire. There's individuals that fit into that category, then there's those who have died and are already in the grave and they're resurrected and thrown into the lake of fire. Now we just read in Daniel 12, where those who were already in the grave come up and are thrown into the lake of fire.

And we read this earlier, but turn back over to Revelation 19. And we'll see again the beast and the false prophet. Because what I want you to see here is the picture that there are people who are physically alive at the time of this judgment and that they never actually died and were buried, but they lost their chance at salvation. And they're thrown directly in the lake of fire. And there's those who were resurrected to condemnation and are then thrown in the lake of fire. Because in both cases, in both the judgment of the Firstfruits and the judgment of the rest of mankind, this is true in both cases, is what we're going to see here. Turn to Revelation 19, and this time we're going to start in verse 19.

Rev 19:19 *“And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army.” (NKJV)*

Now this is Christ coming down on the white horse, and these are the armies that are gathered there to fight them. Now notice again verse 20,

“20) Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.” (NKJV)

So, in other words, they didn't die and go into the grave and have to be brought back. They're just thrown directly into the lake of fire.

“21) And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.” (NKJV)

In other words, at this time during the Day of the LORD, there will also be other people that are fighting Christ who are just deceived. In other words, they haven't received their judgment in terms of salvation. They were being rebellious and fighting Christ, but they were deceived and they're going to get their chance through the fulfillment of the Feast and the Eighth Day. You know, through the millennium and Eighth Day period, they're going to have their chance. That's why they just physically die, whereas the beast and the false prophet are thrown directly into the lake of fire.

But what I want you to see in this picture is, when it comes to the lake of fire, you have you might say two groups. You have those who are still physically alive, who get thrown directly into the lake of fire, because they're still living at that timeframe. And you have those who are in the grave who have to be resurrected and then thrown into the lake of fire.

This is a very similar picture to 1 Thessalonians 4, when it comes to the righteous. We won't take the time to turn there, but just to reference that scripture, Paul is referring there to the blowing of the seventh trumpet and the resurrection of the Firstfruits to eternal life. And he talks about the dead in Christ, those who are in the grave, who have to be resurrected. And he also mentions, “We who are alive”. Obviously, he was assuming that would happen in his lifetime, which he was incorrect about. But he was obviously expressing the concept that there's going to be those who are physically still alive, who are the righteous, at the time that happens. And they obviously won't go in the grave, they'll just get changed to spirit, and then directly go up to meet Christ in the air. Well, again, same concept happens with the lake of fire with those who have been judged and condemned.

Now to see the fall harvest version of this, look over in Revelation 20 and verse 11. Now we're going to read verses 11 through 15 here and kind of unpack this because oftentimes there's a lot of incorrect assumptions and confusion around these verses.

Rev 20:11 *"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. 12) And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. 13) The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. 14) Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death."* (NKJV)

Again, the lake of fire is the second death.

"15) And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." (NKJV)

Now, first of all, let me address some incorrect assumptions that I've heard taught all of my life in regards to these scriptures. Because historically in the Church of God, I know what I was taught growing up is we tried to break up these verses and we inserted terms that we quite frankly just made up. The terms, "second resurrection" and "third resurrection". Again, terms you just simply will not find in scripture. We just made them up. But just notice when you read to verses 11 through 15, it reads like a consistent event. In other words, it's describing one particular event that's taking place. Now the reason I mention that is historically in the Church of God -- and what I was even taught at Ambassador College -- we would take verses 11 and 12 and we called that the "second resurrection". And then we took verses 13 through 15, and we called that the "third resurrection". But that's not how it reads. Again, those terms are made up. They're not in the Bible. But if you read through it, it reads as a single event because that's what it is.

And now let's unpack some other misunderstandings here. And let's just realize as we read through this, let's consider that we're in the Book of Revelation. Now the reason I mention that is the Book of Revelation uses a lot of symbolic language, figurative references, and things of that nature. So, we can't always just assume that everything is just literal and straightforward. We have to consider that maybe there's symbolic references here. There's figurative language being used. We have to consider that as a possibility. Particularly if we interpret things literally and they just don't really make sense. Read here through verse 13.

Rev 20:13 *"The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works."* (NKJV)

Now, typically in my lifetime, I've noticed that the word "sea" here is typically interpreted to be a body of water. And the word "dead" is assumed to mean the physically dead. You know, those who had died and are in the grave. But just notice some logical problems with that. We have two groups here that are referred to as the "dead", but only one is coming from death and the grave. Because it refers to one of them coming from death and Hades -- death and the grave. Only one of them is coming from that. Okay, that doesn't logically make sense if we take all this just as completely literal and don't consider some figurative meanings here. Because if they're both being resurrected from the grave, wouldn't both of them becoming from death and the grave? Why would that be unique to just one of them?

If we assume that the "sea" is a body of water, well then the most common interpretation I've heard all of my life is, "Okay, well some of these were buried at sea, they were buried in water and others were buried on land." Well, it doesn't refer to anybody buried on land. It just says the "sea", and the "sea" is contrasted with death and the grave. So, let's consider some figurative meanings here that make this make a little bit more sense. Now I won't go into all the scriptures that address this, but notice when we read Isaiah 27 in verse 1, and we talked about Leviathan. I mentioned how it talked about him being in the "sea". If you notice, throughout the Bible -- particularly in the Old Testament -- Satan is pictured as a sea monster named Leviathan. Now again, he's obviously not a literal sea creature. It's a symbolic, figurative reference here. But he is referred to as this sea monster. He's the "king of all the proud", but his domain is referred to as the "sea".

Then you have to consider how the beast powers are referred to. We know from the book of Daniel, these are oftentimes pictured as these creatures that are rising up out of the "sea". And we know they're not these literal animals as they're described. That's a figurative symbolic reference. They're not literally rising up out of an ocean because this is all symbolic language. But the "sea" being referred to here is Satan's domain because he's Leviathan. He's the "king of all the proud". His domain is the "sea" and he's the power as the Bible tells us behind the beast empires that have ruled throughout time. He's what gives them their power. They're part of the "sea", part of his domain. So, what we've got to consider here is that the "sea" here is not a reference to a body of water. It's a reference to Satan's domain.

Now let's also consider the word "dead" here. Because again, if we assume that the word "dead" is again just referring to those who died and are in the grave, it doesn't really make sense that only one of these groups is coming from death in the grave. They would have to both be coming from death and the grave. So, is there another way to look at "dead" here? Actually, yes, there is. So, if we look at the Greek word here, that's translated here as "dead" in these verses, it's "nekros". It's Strong's # 3498. And the definition I'm going to give you comes from The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament by Spiros Zodhiates. Now just to be thorough, nekros can certainly mean the physically dead. That is certainly one of the meanings that this word can have. It can also have figurative meanings. So, what I'm going to read to you is what he gives as the figurative meaning.

"Figuratively....those dead to Christ and His gospel, meaning spiritually dead."

So, we need to consider here that it's the spiritually dead we're referring to here. That's why only one of the groups is coming from death and the grave. But just to give you some scriptural references to show that the Bible, in a number of cases, uses nekros to refer to the spiritually dead. Those who are physically alive but spiritually dead. Let me show you a few references that speak to this. Turn over to Matthew 8. And we're going to see here a verse that uses nekros twice. Once to mean the physically dead and once to mean the spiritually dead. And it's very obvious when we read the context that that's what it's talking about. It's Matthew 8 in verse 19.

Matt 8:19 *"Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, 'Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.' 20) And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.' 21) Then another of His disciples said to Him, 'Lord, let me first go and bury my father.' 22) But Jesus said to him, 'Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead.'"* (NKJV)

Now, obviously Christ is not saying, "Let's have those physically dead people bury these physically dead people." That would be ridiculous! Obviously, He's not saying that. What He's saying is, "Let the spiritually dead bury their physically dead." That's the concept of what He's getting at here. But what I want you to see here is how this word "nekros" can be used to refer to the spiritually dead who are physically alive. Now turn also to Ephesians 5. See Ephesians 5 and we'll see another reference like this. And we'll start reading here in verse 8.

Eph 5:8 *"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9) (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), 10) finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. 11) And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. 12) For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. 13) But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. 14) Therefore He says: 'Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light.'"* (NKJV)

Now, obviously, he's not referring to a resurrection here of people who are physically dead and being brought back to life. When he's saying "awaken", it's "awaken" out of being spiritually dead and follow Christ and pursue righteousness. That is what he's referring to here. So, this is people who are physically alive, but he's referring to spiritual death. Now to see one other reference here, turn over to Revelation 3. I'm just going to read here the first verse of the letter to the Church in Sardis.

Rev 3:1 *"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: 'I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.'"* (NKJV)

See, he's saying that you're physically alive but you're spiritually dead. That's what he's actually saying here. So now with all that in mind, turn back over to Revelation 20. And let's go through these same verses and consider that "sea" could be a reference to Satan's domain, and "dead" there could be a reference to the spiritually dead. And that's why only one of the two groups being mentioned is coming from death and the grave. Only one of them is being resurrected because they were physically dead. Now, let's just read this again, starting in verse 11.

Rev 20:11 *"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. 12) And I saw the dead..."* (NKJV)

The spiritually dead.

"...small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead..." (NKJV)

Again, the spiritually dead.

"...were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. 13) The sea..." (NKJV)

Again, not a body of water. We're talking Satan's domain here.

"...gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades..." (NKJV)

The grave.

"...delivered up the dead..." (NKJV)

The spiritually dead.

"...who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works." (NKJV)

You see, if we unpack this, what we have here is the exact same picture we saw with the spring harvest. So, we noticed in Daniel 12, you had those who were in the grave who were resurrected back to life for condemnation -- to be thrown in the lake of fire. And we noticed in Revelation 19, we had the beast and the false prophet. They were physically alive, but they were rebellious, and they rejected salvation as well. So, they're thrown in the lake of fire without ever going to the grave. Then you have people who were brought back from the grave and thrown into the lake of fire.

You have the same picture here. Because see, those who are coming from death and the grave, well, they have physically died, and they're being resurrected back to be judged and thrown into the lake of fire. Then you have those from the "sea". Those who

are currently alive, but who have followed Satan's way of life. They're a part of Satan's domain. They're still physically alive, but they're going to be cast in the lake of fire. It's a very consistent picture with what we saw with the spring harvest that's playing out here with the fall harvest. Now continue on reading in verse 14.

"14) Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15) And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." (NKJV)

So, see, basically we have that same binary here where the righteous receive eternal life. They're in the book of life. They receive eternal life. But those who've been rebellious to God and who've basically lost their chance at salvation because they were rebellious, they lived a life of sin, they get thrown into the lake of fire. But we have two groups. And by that, I mean those who are still physically alive at that point. They're at the end of their physical life and they never went to the grave, but they're thrown directly into the lake of fire. And then you have those who've already died, and they're resurrected back to receive their judgment and be thrown into the lake of fire.

You see, what we have to consider is the Bible directly tells us that everyone has to stand before Christ and to be judged. Oftentimes we can look at that as maybe a figurative reference that everyone's held accountable for their actions, which is true. But once you understand the picture that's laid out here with both the spring and the fall harvest, you realize that these verses are referring to something literal as well. So, turn over to 2 Corinthians. What I want you to see here is Paul refers to this and directly tells us that everyone ultimately has to stand before Christ and to be held accountable. It's 2 Corinthians 5 in verse 9.

2 Cor 5:9 *"Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. 10) For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. 11) Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences." (NKJV)*

You see, what he's saying is there's a point we all have to literally stand before Christ and face accountability for our actions. There's literally that point of judgment where it's not just a figurative reference that we're all held accountable. There's literally a point -- the ultimate end for everyone -- where you literally hear, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant", and you're rewarded with eternal life, or "I never knew you", and you're thrown into the lake of fire. That's not just figurative. That literally happens for everyone.

We won't take the time to go through all the scriptures that refer to the weeping and gnashing of teeth. But you'll notice that there's a number of verses when they refer to the lake of fire. They refer to those who are rejected, who Christ says, "I never knew you," when they're cast in the lake of fire. They're weeping and gnashing their teeth. In other words, there's that realization of what they gave up.

Because just think this through. I'm sure all of us, if you've been in the Church of God for decades like I have, you've probably known a number of people who came into the Church, were baptized, and faithfully followed for a number of years. But since then, they've totally turned their back on the truth. I know individuals I went to Ambassador College with who were very sincere and very devout at the time. Today, they're atheists. They don't even believe that there is a God. So, if they live out their lives and they die, they're not thinking there's going to be a judgment. They don't believe that there is a God to judge them. I know others who have basically rejected the truth. They've gone into Protestantism or Catholicism. They're expecting when they die, they're just going to go to heaven. Because they're fully convinced that the path that they've gone down is correct.

Well, imagine being a person like that. If you die in that state and in your mind, you're thinking, "I've done the right thing." But in reality, you've basically earned the lake of fire in how you've lived your life. Now, if you just stay dead, and you're never resurrected to have that realization, where would the weeping and gnashing of teeth come into the equation? Well, it wouldn't, because you would never have that realization. You would never have to face that. We'll the reason that the Bible repeatedly refers to the weeping and gnashing of teeth is because we all have to stand before God and face that moment of accountability. God wants us all to know, "I gave you this opportunity." I think we have to stand before Christ because He's the one who sacrificed His life, who went through torment to give us the opportunity for eternal life. And I think He wants us to face Him so He can basically let us know, "I did all this for you. I gave you this opportunity and you blew it. And I want you to realize what you turned down." I think that's the whole reason why it describes the weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Now I know for us as physical human beings, sometimes we have the tendency to do what one of my professors at Ambassador College used to refer to it like this. He would say sometimes instead of being molded into God's image. In other words, yielding our thinking to His thinking and being molded to think like He does. In our human nature, we try to mold God into our image. In other words, we try to make Him think like we do and to want what we want. Well, sometimes we can do that with our definition of love.

I've experienced this a lot over the last decade plus. I've mentioned a lot in recent sermons that about a decade or more ago, I came to realize that there was no such thing as an easy slide into the Kingdom of God. That everyone has to face Satan. Everyone has to overcome those difficult trials and be persecuted. That's just what the Bible consistently says all throughout the New Testament. Well, as I've explained numerous times in recent sermons, what I typically always get as the resistance to that, is not a scriptural argument. I get an emotional argument. You know, "Well, that just wouldn't be love. God just wouldn't do that! He just wants everyone to have an easy, comfortable slide into the Kingdom." Well, that's just not what the Bible says. The Bible clearly says the opposite. You know, that through much tribulation we enter the Kingdom of God. That everyone has to be persecuted. That we have to endure to the end.

We have to realize that God's ways are higher than ours. His thoughts are higher than ours. And when we come into a conflict of what we think is right and what the Bible actually says, we have to admit it's us who doesn't understand it. We have to yield our thinking to be like His. Because what we have to remember is a concept we find in Isaiah 55 in verse 8.

Is 55:8 *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. 9) "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."* (NKJV)

See, He understands it better than we do. And if we get locked onto, "Well, that doesn't meet my definition of love", what we're doing is we kind of become blind to reading what's literally on the page. If we see something that's very clearly laid out in the Bible, just like the requirements for salvation, there's an absolute stack of scriptures that lay that out. They're clear, they're dogmatic and they all match each other. And even if that doesn't match our idea of love, that just means we don't understand love like God understands it. This subject is the same. The Bible clearly tells us there's a resurrection to condemnation, that God requires everyone to stand before Christ. To either hear, "Well done thy good and faithful servant," and to be rewarded with eternal life, or to hear, "I never knew you," and to have that experience of weeping and gnashing of teeth as we're tossed into the lake of fire. Again, that's just clearly what the Bible says. So, we have to remember when we look at this subject, don't try to mold God into our image. We have to be molded into His image and look to scripture.

So, brethren, as we look at this subject, let's be grateful for our understanding that there are no "fires of hell". God does not torment everyone for all eternity who rebel against Him. That's not how He handles things. The Bible clearly tells us the wages of sin is death and those who rebel have to die. But there is an accountability for everyone. We all have to stand before Christ and face his judgment. So, we need to take that very seriously because we don't want to be the ones doing the weeping and gnashing of teeth. We want to do whatever we have to do to endure whatever we have to go through in this life, so that we can stand before Him and hear those words "Well done thy good and faithful servant!"