

Confronting Christianity

Week #3

Small Group Notes

Introduction:

Ice breaker: What do you imagine heaven and hell will be like?

This week we are going to look at the criticism that asks “Is hell even a literal place? How Could God send someone to hell?” Skeptics and critics will often say that a loving God would never send someone to hell. The truth is, no one should really like the thought of hell. It is difficult even for Christians to come to grips with. But the difficulty of hell should not cause us to ignore all that scripture has to say about it. Today we will focus on a parable that Jesus used to illustrate the horror of hell.

Discuss:

1. Luke 16:19-31

Explain: In (v.19-31) Jesus tells a parable that covers many topics such as wealth, poverty, economic disparity, and the nature of heaven and hell. At its core, the parable makes two points regarding hell: There will be a judgment for *how* we respond to God through our life circumstances (easily shown by how we handle earthly wealth), and the sufficiency of Scripture to tell us all we need to know.

Ask: 2-3 Discussion questions related to the content.

- ❖ **How is hell portrayed in television and movies? Do the depictions of hell ever make it feel like a real place?**
 - *Most of the time, hell is portrayed comically if at all.*
- ❖ **Why do you think that the majority of people either do not believe in hell?**
 - *To them it does not feel like the punishment fits the crime.*
- ❖ **How do you feel about hell? How do you feel about a God who could send people there?**
 - *It’s even harder to grasp the reality of hell when we know of loved ones who have died and were not believers.*
- ❖ **Do you think the parable of the rich man and Lazarus is a historical account of a literal event? Why or why not?**

- *Look at Luke 16:26 (See also Matthew. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; 2 Peter 2:17; Jude 13, 2 Thess1:9.) We know from other clear statements of Scripture that people in hell cannot see into heaven and observe or recognize people there, much less have conversations with them.*
- *But the parable clearly is using a figurative point to illustrate a literal place.*
- ❖ **Why do you think Jesus is telling this parable to the Pharisees? What is it about the Pharisees and about Jesus that motivated Him to tell this parable?**
 - *Refer back to Luke 16:14 for guidance.*
- ❖ **What keeps us from maintaining an eternal mind set about ourselves? About the people around us?**
 - *(See v.25) Material possessions, wealth, and the cares of this world keep us distracted.*
- ❖ **Do you think you are distracted by earthly matters and are less concerned with eternal ones?**
- ❖ **What is the basis of judgment for these two men? Why did Lazarus go to heaven and the rich man to hell?**
 - *Wealth itself is not the problem, it is loving wealth more than Jesus. How we respond to God is more important than anything in this life. How we respond to God is also clearly seen in how we respond to others. (v.20-21) The rich man was callous to the suffering of others and callous towards God.*
 - *Jesus gives the poor character in the story the name of Lazarus which in Hebrew means “God has helped.” Lazarus’ low state clearly allowed him to look forward, in faith, to the world to come and the God who helps.*
- ❖ **How does the rich man’s testimony from Hades affect your understanding of hell and what those there would desire for those still living?**
 - *If they could, they would warn us.*

2. Luke 16:29-31

Explain: The main point in these verses is that the gospel calls us to hear the word of the Lord and respond to it with repentance and faith. When this is done, the issues of wealth, compassion, and heaven and hell are

profoundly affected as well as the urgency of evangelism.

Ask: 2-3 Discussion questions related to the content.

- ❖ **Why do you think Jesus closes the with a call to hear the word of God?** (e.g., “The Prophets”) **What is the connection between hearing the word of God and moral behavior?**
 - The word of God is sufficient and we are called to respond in faith. We do not need further supernatural miracles.
- ❖ ***Critics would ask: “But how could a God of love and forgiveness send someone to hell over this?” How would you respond?***
 - “You’re worse than you think you are.”
 - “God is holier than you give him credit for.”
- ❖ ***How can the doctrine of hell actually reveal the love of God?***
 - *God cares about justice and His holiness and glory. Who wants to worship a god who does not punish wrongs?*
 - *Jesus suffered the wrath of the father (experienced hell) on our behalf!*
- ❖ **Why is hell a motivation for believers to evangelize?**
- ❖ **How can you present the beauty of God’s grace and the sobering reality of hell to someone?**

Close:

How can we be praying for one another? How can we encourage one another this week?