

# Erasing Hell

by Francis Chan

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*Francis Chan's sermon 'Erasing Hell' emphasizes the importance of understanding biblical teachings on hell and confronting false narratives in contemporary Christianity.*

**Duration:** 1:00:54

**Scripture:** Matthew 25:31

**Topics:** "Eternal Judgment", "Salvation Hope"

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## Description

This sermon delves into the topic of hell, emphasizing the importance of understanding the consequences of sin and the need for salvation. It highlights the overwhelming love of God displayed through Christ's sacrifice, the reality of judgment day, and the hope of eternal life in God's presence.

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## Transcript

How's everybody doing? Good? Happy Father's Day to all of you guys out there that are dads. We're going to be talking about hell today. They'll hopefully connect the dots on that one.

But we are really excited that you're here today. Today's kind of a special day. A few months ago, I was having breakfast with Francis and he had just read a book, and I'll let him explain the book that he was reading.

But he just started to kind of unload on me just some of his heart on this issue of hell and what this particular guy had written about. And after listening to him for just a little bit, I said, man, you've got to talk to Preston. I think Preston would be one of the best guys to talk to about this issue.

I had no clue it was going to turn into a book, but it was just, I think, a really good thing for what God did through that. And we're really excited for them now to take what God has taught them about this book and specifically about this issue of hell. And I just wanted them to bring this to the body, just to share with you the things they learned, because I do think it's a super important issue.

And so the guys that are up here right now, this is Mark Buring. He's on the faculty at EBC. That was a good little, how you doing? He's on the faculty at EBC.

He actually also was a part of writing the book, It Reads Well, because he was a part of this book. He's just a really good writer. And so he jumped into it and also a really good thinker through different things.

And obviously Preston Sprinkle. You've seen him up here preaching a few times. And then what's his name at the very end? Francis Chan.

Anyways, what we're going to do today is we're going to just turn them loose to talk about what I think is a very important issue to the church today. You're going to see a little phone number up on the screen. If you have any questions, go ahead and text them in.

Or if you even want to write a question on a piece of paper and hand it to one of the ushers, I'm sure they'll be able to get it back to us. But let me just pray for our time together. I want to pray that God would truly be honored through our discussion through this very important issue.

Father, thank you for these guys. Would you please empower them through your spirit, Father, not to just kick out a few canned answers about this sobering topic. But, Father, would your spirit just empower them and enliven them to truly be able to help all of us in this room gain a greater passion for you and your holiness and what you're doing on this planet because of it.

Thank you for them. Look forward to what you're going to do today, God. In your precious name we pray.

Amen. Great. Well, we're going to talk about the book.

So the book is called Erasing Hell. The subtitle is What God Said About Eternity and the Things We Made Up. So that's kind of what we're going to discuss.

But it goes beyond that. So we're not just going to talk about a book. We're going to talk about actually the idea behind it, the concept, the need to write something on this issue and how this issue affects our lives.

So first we'll just start. Why this book? Why now? Preston, you've written several things. Your work has been all scholarly and difficult to understand.

You've written a very lengthy treatment on law and grace and how the two interact. He edited a book called The Faith of Christ. It's on the Epistus Christi debate.

It's literally a book on a Greek phrase and whether that Greek phrase is an objective genitive or a subjective genitive. So it just makes the rest of us feel uneducated even talking about his book. And then now he's working on another scholarly work on Paul and Judaism.

So for you, to come from where you've been and what you've studied, what you did your PhD in, to jump into this area of talking about hell and doing it in a much broader audience, it's a bit of a shift. And then Francis, for you, you've written Crazy Love, which is about following Jesus with a wholehearted devotion. You've written Forgotten God, which is about pursuing the Holy Spirit, reversing our neglect of the Spirit.

You've written some outstanding kids' books too. A different approach than Preston usually. And so for you to come from these things and now address this topic of hell, it still is a bit of a shift.

So I think it's fascinating that the two of you, that God's taken you at a point in both your book careers, your book writing careers or whatever, taken you to a place in your walk with God that now he's led you to the same point now to write this book. So maybe just to address for us, and even Francis too, just give us a little update on how you are. Yeah, first I just want to say hi to everyone.

And it's always just, yeah, so cool to come back. I mean, I really love coming back every few weeks and just reconnecting, catching up with everyone. Because while we've settled in, Lisa and I settled in in San Francisco, bought a house.

We're kind of in a neighborhood now. Kids are all in school. Everything's going well.

But it just doesn't feel like home, you know, in a lot of ways, which is kind of what we wanted. Because we're not supposed to totally feel at home on this earth. And let's just go wherever we think would be most effective.

But it is nice to come back here where we do feel like there's a sense of home and there's a sense of family. And it's like, okay, these people know us. They've known us for years.

And reconnecting, it's just been really, really good. We had a baby two weeks ago. Yes.

Yes. It's our fourth girl. And, yeah.

And then, you know, we go to paint our house because things have fallen apart. And the girls choose, like, this purple color. So I'm like in a dollhouse.

It's just weird. But ministry is going great. It's just really exciting right now.

Getting involved with some homeless ministries, some recovery addicts, and then just some new church plans. Just really coming alongside of other guys, trying to just help them with their ministry and just kind of go wherever God's calling me to go or do whatever I'm supposed to do. And it's just been very, very, very good.

But as Todd shared earlier, man, I read this book a couple months ago that just, I don't know, probably three months ago. It's called Love Wins by Rob Bell. And as I'm reading it, I'm getting very excited at certain parts because it's kind of saying that basically everyone's going to go to heaven eventually.

And I'm reading going, man, I hope he's right because I have friends that have died that don't believe in Jesus, that totally rebelled against God. And it's saying, you know what, there's going to be more and more chances after death. There's part of me that's going, wow, that's cool.

But then the more I read, the more I go, wait a second, that's not what the Bible teaches. That's not what I've ever known. And maybe I'm off.

And it just made me study again. I mean, I couldn't sleep. You start thinking, wait, I hope maybe he's right and I've been teaching the wrong thing.

And just going back to the way I study Scripture, I mean, I've always just, I try to just think to myself, okay, if I'm on an island and I read this book over and over and over again, what would I leave there thinking and believing about Christ? What would I believe about the church? What would I believe about the Holy Spirit? And so with this topic of hell, what would I believe about it? Would I believe that, you know, basically, what would I believe? And I thought, no, if I walked away, I'd go, no, all through this book, it's about those who follow God. There's this amazing blessing. And then those who choose to rebel against him, there's this, it's just a very tough, it's bad consequences.

And then the ending, I mean, you get to Revelation and it's about this amazing life in eternity with God. And then on the flip side for those who reject him or take the mark of the beast is this suffering, you know, it's this day and night forever and ever. And I'm like, how would I ever get that, well, that doesn't really mean that.

I mean, you guys know me, I'm quick to change. I could be doing something my whole life and then look at it biblically and go, I think I got it off on this one. I think it's wrong, you know, and I'll change my way of living.

So when it comes to hell, man, I'll ditch that in a moment if I could. You know, biblically and I could and that's when I talk to Todd about it. He goes, you talk to Preston because we approach things a little differently.

You know, I write Halfway Herbert and the Big Red Tractor and he writes, you know, something in Greek. And it's good, I think it was a good balance, you know, and plus we looked a lot alike. I've got a weird thing.

I shaved my mustache off this morning and grew this out just so I wouldn't look so much like him. Because when we would Skype, I'd be like, wait, which one's me? Seriously, and I'm weird that way. Like if my wife and I are wearing like the same type of shirt, I'll go up and change because I don't want to go out with the same shirt and I didn't want us to come up here with the same face.

So I changed mine. But, you know, this is a topic that is so, so important. I don't think there's a deeper topic.

I didn't want to write about this. I just believe God specifically asked me to and wanted me to this to where I couldn't even sleep. And yet I didn't want to be wrong because that's what I was concerned about with this book was like, man, you throw out some nice ideas, but if you're wrong, if I'm wrong about this, there's some serious consequences.

Look, I don't want you believing in hell if it doesn't exist because that kind of ruins your life, doesn't it? I mean, isn't there like this awful burden in you? Like, I don't want you to live that way if it's not there. And at the same time, I don't want to say it's not there if it is because that's even worse because then you come to the end of your life and you realize, oh, I don't get another chance and this really is forever. So you understand how we can't... I can be wrong with a lot of things and make mistakes in life, but this one I didn't want to mess up on.

And so, yes, I wanted to go through the scriptures the way I normally do, simply, and reading it over and over. What does it say? Praying, fasting, saying, God, I've got to know the truth. And yet at the same time, I understand there's some limitations like my mind only goes to a certain point, you know, and I go, you know, let me get some thoughts from guys that think at maybe a deeper level, more intellectual level.

And then even after we wrote it, it was like, let's send it off to other guys and get their thoughts and make sure we get this right because this is just too big of an issue. I spoke too long. Go for it.

Yeah, ditto. Yeah, I think with a topic like hell, I mean, there's actually been a lot of scholarly books on hell. In fact, I was shocked.

If you punch into Amazon or something, you get like 20 written every year, but most of these are written in a way that just aren't very understandable. They're not very simple, you know. So I feel like another scholarly book on hell just wouldn't really do much.

There's lots of good stuff out there, but you can't understand it, you know. So I think our heart behind it was really to blend, you know, both of our sort of gifts and produce something that is hopefully very careful, you know, that we've gone through and really done our homework, but also very, very simple and communicates in a very clear way. And so I just think it was great teaming up with Francis to do that.

Okay, so you have the need, right, to write the book. God's laying this on your conscience. He's saying that this is what you need to step in and approach.

One of the things is throughout church history, this isn't anything new, right, that godly people throughout, from the time of Christ, have seen false teaching in the church. They've seen the people that they love, that they shepherd, the pastor, confronted with this false teaching, and they've stepped up to speak out and to correct it and to defend the biblical truth on something. I really believe that's what you guys are doing.

That's obviously your heart is you want to approach this issue and make sure that God's voice is being heard, that it's not just false teaching that's coming in. Give us some insight. What do we do when people are teaching, when we are encountered by false teaching? How do we respond? What do we say? What do we do, and what's the attitude that we should approach it with? Yeah, I think our attitude is huge.

I think that, as Mark said, there does need to be voices in the church that keep the church sound, if you will. But even that position can be kind of dangerous, right? I mean, it can be a very dangerous position to believe that you're sort of the watchdog on orthodoxy, and you have everything right, and you're going to correct everybody who has it wrong. There's people who do that, and neither of us have that heart.

So I think even going into this, because we are sort of addressing an issue that's been raised, it's been really sobering. We've really wanted to say, look, we don't want to tear down anybody. We want to be humble.

We want to check ourselves and make sure we're not thinking that we're one-up on anybody else. And yet, at the same time, there does need to be a need for, you know, if there's things being taught that are false, it does need to be addressed in a tone of humility. We don't want to attack a person or bring somebody down just to win an argument.

But there are times throughout church history when an issue does need to be addressed. And so that's kind of our heart behind us. We're not combative people.

We don't just love attacking everybody. But sometimes there does need to be a debate, and I think this is one of them. Yeah, I mean, you even see Paul confront Peter.

Your theology's off on this issue. And you see that right in Scripture. You see the Scriptures themselves, the canonization of Scripture, was actually as a response to a heretic named Marcion, you know, around the second century.

I always get it wrong. Second century. Second century A.D., you know, comes out with his own version of the Bible, and so the church leaders get together and go, no, no, we are in agreement that this is what it

says.

And so it's one of those situations where it does have to take place. Man, and I'm usually, I usually stay away from those things because I can see some of the animosity and the anger and the arrogance, and I struggle with those things myself. And so I've kind of stayed out of a lot of those battles.

But then when it came to this one, I just couldn't. It was like, no, this is too heavy. I mean, this will affect your life.

It'll affect the way our children think. And not that this is new, because these types of teachings have been around for a while, but they've never been made popular, and that was a concern. But then at the same time, there's never been a popular book about health.

I mean, who really wants to go, oh, I want to, you know, it's, and yet I knew that thinking about it and as we studied, the more I thought about it, the more it got me serious about what I believed and about my life. And as far as the way to approach it, too, I want you to understand that after I read that book and I was concerned and I started to study and find things that I just felt were very dangerous in it, I started praying for the guy. I mean, seriously, praying for him.

I wrote him a letter. We talked on the phone for a couple hours, hour and a half, couple hours, just talking through, let me understand this. Are you really saying this? And very good discussion and let him know, man, I love you.

I pray for you. I pray for your wife. I pray for your family, but I'm really concerned about some of the things you wrote because, you know, and you'll see it in the book, some things I just didn't think were fair and some things that I even thought were dangerous to the Christian community.

So we're talking, you know, the need for the book and everything else, but obviously this book is a lot more than just a response to one other book out there. Do you guys want to speak to that? How did it become more than just a response? I realized that there's certain things I don't like to think about. I don't know about you, I don't like watching sad movies.

You know, I remember my daughter took me to go see the boy in the striped pajamas and I thought, oh, okay, some kid in striped pajamas. I had no idea. You know, you get there and you realize, oh, that's about the Holocaust and you just, you get sick.

You don't want to think about it. I don't like to, a lot of things in this world that I see that I don't like to think about that are real and are good for my soul. And I know this has been, you know, like over the years when I come back from these trips and I tell you about people that are hungry, starving to death, people that are trying to find clean water.

Lana's here, you know, who works with kids that are trafficked. She's visiting from Thailand today, and works with the kids that are sex trafficked. I don't want to think about it, but it's so right for my soul to think about those things because then it gets my mind off of some of the frivolous things of what kind of car do I want to buy? Should I fix this part of my house or that part? And you're like, no, these are the things that matter and I need to devote my life to it.

And that's what this study did for me. It wasn't even about combating another book anymore. It was about, gosh, as believers, we don't like to think about this concept of hell and yet it's the very thing that caused

Paul to have this unceasing anguish in his heart, which we feel when we think about it.

And so even as you get a copy of this book, there's going to be part of you that's like, I don't want to think about that. And yet it's so good for your soul. It gets your perspective right.

It gets you to stop complaining and whining about stupid things that aren't eternal, that don't matter. The recession's like, whatever. Seriously.

There's some serious things on the line. And so that's where we, for me, it's like, okay, now I'm getting it, Lord. I see why you wanted me to write it.

For my own soul it's been good and I think it's going to be great for the body of Christ at large to focus on this topic and to force ourselves to think about it because Jesus does talk about it a lot. Yeah, and I had a few, I think it was about a month ago, I had a student from UDC come to me and say, thank you for doing this for our generation. I didn't really understand what he meant until I thought about it.

I'm like, yeah, there's a huge generational shift going on. We're moving into a more post-modern generation where to think seriously about something that is definitely true, I think, is actually not in vogue anymore. People don't want to think about something as serious as hell and that's very threatening and not palatable and so people don't talk about it.

As Francis said, if the Bible doesn't really talk about it that much then let's drop it. I would love to drop it. But if the Bible does, then God knows something that we don't.

I'm excited and excited may not be the best term, but I'm glad to have been a part of this, I think specifically for that younger generation where I think less and less people are really talking about things like eternal destinies. As I grew up, I hear lots of jokes about hell, people joking about hell and stuff. Or people would talk about hell a lot but you don't see it really affecting the way they live and so I really hope that the younger generation can grab a hold of something like hell and not just rant and rave about it or cram it down people's throats, but first and foremost I hope that they would let this very terrifying doctrine just totally transform the way they live and think.

Let's get into just talking about what does the Bible say about hell. I think there's a perception, at least in some circles, that it's kind of a leftover doctrine from the Middle Ages that we've played up and that we just kind of have this baggage that sticks with us. So does the Bible actually talk a lot about hell? Does it make a big deal about it? What does it say about it? Yeah, that's true.

Throughout church history, there's been books written like Dante's Inferno or early on in the church there was different books written in it went into long, elaborate descriptions about people hanging by their tongues and over boiling pitch and I do think that the church through history has maybe, if I can say, over-emphasized or over-grotesquized hell. Some people have reacted against that and said, oh no, Jesus didn't do that. Yes and no.

The Bible doesn't go into a lot of these elaborate descriptions, but having gone back through and looking at the words of Jesus and Paul and other letters, Jude, 2 Peter, Revelation, and see, no, the Bible does actually talk a lot about hell. One of the things I've seen that has come up in recent debates is people say, well, the word hell isn't used that much, therefore, the Bible doesn't talk that much about hell. And that's one thing that we really saw in the study is like, well, okay, Jesus uses the word hell 12 times, you know, it's a decent amount, but he also uses other descriptions of outer darkness, eternal fire, eternal

punishment, weeping and gnashing of teeth.

I mean, he clearly does talk about hell quite often, more than just using the actual word hell, so just doing a word study on hell isn't going to be sufficient. And then there's Paul who, he actually never uses the word hell. And I've seen people say, well, you know, Paul, the main sort of writer of the New Testament, never talked about hell.

I'm like, well, he didn't use the word hell, but he spoke of wrath, he spoke of destruction, he even speaks in one passage in 2 Thessalonians, in fact, I don't know if you have your Bible, 2 Thessalonians 1 that is incredibly graphic. He speaks of the second coming of Christ and he says God, this is 2 Thessalonians 1.6, he says, God will repay with affliction those who afflict you and to give relief to those who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels and flaming fire, and then look at verse 8, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God, to those who don't obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord from the glory of his power. Never mentions the word hell.

It's not there. But he talks about affliction, vengeance, destruction, and he doesn't really shrink back. I mean, he goes into it and just lays into it, you know? So, to say that Paul never mentions the word hell, therefore, he doesn't really believe in hell, no.

He does speak about wrath, destruction, and the eternal destinies of people all over the place. And then other books, 2 Peter and Jude and Revelation speak about hell a lot. And so, I think we kind of came full circle.

A lot of us were like, man, it'd be kind of cool if the Bible didn't talk that much about hell. But then after studying it out, we're like, no, it does seem to be a pretty fundamental doctrine in Scripture. Yeah, and it just was very sobering.

I mean, for those six weeks or so where we're pretty intensely studying it, there's almost a side of you that gets, I don't know if depressed is the right word, but it's just like, how can I just do my everyday thing knowing that this place exists? I mean, I was kind of hoping to find something different because now that you know that it's there, it's like, how do I just go out and play tennis? There's just that constant in your mind, and I think that's something we struggle with as believers, is, okay, what am I doing in light of this? But I was really surprised. I was surprised at some of the words that Jesus chose to use. They are not words I would have used.

They're much stronger, much harsher. In our culture, in our church culture, we'll take a few of the passages that we really like and we'll preach them over and over and over again. It almost gets you thinking, oh yeah, Jesus only said these kind words.

No, that's just all you hear people preach. No, just read through the Gospels for yourself. As we did that again, it's like, oh, why did you say it like that? Why did you say it like that? You realize, wow, Jesus had some very, very difficult things to say.

I don't like to hear them. You won't enjoy hearing them, but they're truth, and you just have to go, okay. That is what he said, and he is God, and so I'm going to go with it.

Another good thing to address here is not just that it talks about hell a lot, but let's ask the question, why? Why does the Bible bring it up? Who is it warning about hell? Who is being threatened with hell, so to

speak? Basically, how do we relate that to us today? It's one thing to look at the Pharisees and the Old Testament, but if we were to look around the contemporary scene, who's being warned about hell and why? Go for it, Francis. It's weird because when we talk about hell, usually we think, okay, let's go and tell everyone who's an unbeliever, hey, you know, there's a hell down there. But, and I'm not saying not to do that.

I'm just saying that when I see it in Scripture, it seems like Jesus' strongest words about hell were to religious people, people who would attend, you know, nowadays, it would be to the people who attend church services. It's almost like the seriousness of it, and so that was kind of surprising to me. It seemed to address, he seemed to really address the saints, making sure that they got it and understood it, and it was a warning to those who saw themselves as safe because they were a part of a religious organization somehow, and they had some sort of religious background, and it seemed like those were the ones he warned the most.

Yeah, that was probably the most sobering thing in the study. I'm thinking of, like, Jude and 2 Peter. They're probably the most elaborate descriptions of hell in those passages.

I mean, it's over and over and over, talking about the wrath of God, wrath of God, and hell, and... But they're warning false teachers. They're warning people who are standing up with the Bible and teaching people the Word of God and saying, you better watch yourself. You may end up in hell.

And so I'm sitting there saying, well, I teach the Bible. I don't think I'm false, but did the false teachers say they're false? They, you know, have a sign saying, hey, I'm a false teacher. Come listen to me.

The false teachers, they think they're true. I think I'm true. So I'm reading these passages saying, well, gosh, I need to watch what I'm doing.

James. James mentions hell one time, and he warns people who are misusing their tongue, backbiting other believers or speaking things falsely. You know that passage in James 3.1, you know, beware of being a teacher, because you'll incur a stricter judgment.

It's a few verses later when James talks about the tongue being able to set the fire, the whole forest fire on... the whole fire on fire. Forest on fire. Thank you.

And then, um, I honestly think the scariest passage in the entire Bible is Matthew 7, where Jesus says, many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord. I mean, can you imagine? Most of you probably confess Christ. Some people here are just checking things out or whatever, but can you imagine being a Christ confessor getting to on judgment day? You know, which cloud is mine? And Jesus says many, there's many who will say, Lord, Lord, Jesus, you're Lord, you're Lord, you know, where do I go? You know, and he's like, I don't... Who are you? You know, I got my book of life here, and I've gotten through the S's, you know, and I don't see sprinkle here, you know, I mean.

Can you imagine how terrifying that would be? But that's kind of the tone of hell in the New Testament, is he's constantly warning religious people, and that's frightening. It wasn't, I don't think the doctrine of hell, while it is unbelievers who will be in hell, I think reflecting on that doctrine was really designed to shake people up who think that their religiosity is gonna help them escape from that place. You know, I just thought about this when you were saying that.

Who do you think feared God more? Like, people in America this day and age, or the people 2,000 years ago, you know, who had a greater fear and respect and awe of God, maybe all of them was terrified. You know, I would guess the people back then, based upon what I read and study, go, wow, I mean, they had much higher fear of the Lord, and yet, those are the people to whom Jesus makes some of these statements about fearing Him more, like in Matthew 10, verse 28, don't fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul, rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. It's interesting to me that we live in a culture that doesn't fear God, and yet we're telling people, oh, don't preach about the fear of the Lord.

And I'm saying, man, that's crazy because back then, they feared the Lord more, and Jesus chose to preach fear even more to them. You would think it would have been the opposite. And so, it's just this whole... I don't know.

I don't even remember what the question was. I just thought of that. It's preaching hell to people who don't fear God.

That's what the warnings are for, is people to fear God more. It was a good answer, even if you didn't know the question. I knew it was an answer at some point.

That was good. Okay, well, I want to make sure we take some time for the... Presumably, you haven't just been texting your friends. You've been texting in questions, so... Oh, man.

Someone's got a kid out of control. I don't think that's a real question that we need to... Okay, here we go. Alright, this seems like a... Are these individual? Let's see.

If you don't produce fruit, do you go to hell? Should we take this one at a time? Yeah. Okay, so let's talk about that. If you don't produce fruit, do you go to hell? Oh, it's kind of the same thing.

Is it just enough to accept Jesus as your Lord? What about someone living in constant sin? It is the same thing. Okay, this is good. Thank you.

This is good. This is a good question because, okay, for example, when I called Rob on the phone to talk about his book and go, man, it seems like this is what you're saying, and he was kind of like, well, he goes, all I'm saying is, could it be possible? Is there any room for the possibility that, you know, God's going to surprise us with his grace as he has in other times in history, and suddenly everyone goes. And I thought, yeah, I guess that could be a possibility.

And he goes, that's all I'm saying. But then when I read the book, I'm going, no, that's not what you're saying. You're ridiculing anyone that would believe that God would have someone suffer for all of eternity.

And so it's not just leaving a little bit of room. Yeah, there's a slight possibility. And the reason why I bring that up is when I look at this, I mean, you guys know what I taught here for years, is basically what I see in this book, where the answer to that is, gosh, everything I see in this book is that if you really are a believer, your life will change.

Now, is there a slight possibility that maybe you can live exactly the way you always have, and is there any room in this book that possibly, based on this one verse, that belief is just some sort of intellectual... It's like, wow, is there a sliver of hope, possibility? Maybe. But, man, when I read this book, the clear overwhelming message is, gosh, if many will say, Lord, Lord, many will confess with their mouth, but

they're not going to live it out. And they don't really believe it in their hearts, and their life shows that.

And I mean, what I see in scripture is, in James, we quoted earlier, that the demons in hell believe in God. They shudder. They even fear God.

So, if you say, well, I'm a believer in God, great, you're like a demon. You know, I mean, that puts you on par with them. The question is, Satan believed in God.

Satan knows the story. Will he come under the lordship of Jesus Christ? No. And in the same way, neither will the demons, and neither will some of you.

You'll say, okay, yeah, I believe he's there. I believe he's a good guy. I believe he's a loving guy.

I believe he sent his son. But will you actually believe to the point where you come under his leadership? No. And so, I would never bank on that.

I really disbelieve that you can just pray a prayer and accept Jesus in your heart, have nothing change, and you're going to heaven. Everything I read in scripture is, when that Holy Spirit comes into you, he changes you, and you're given a whole new set of desires. You're a new creation, and you're a slave to what is right now.

You're a slave to righteousness. And the fruit tree is going to bear fruit. Yeah.

It's a really important question, and I think it deals with a lot of really important theological issues. You know, the relationship between faith and works. I mean, my thirty-second answer is, I believe that scriptures teach pretty clearly that genuine faith will produce obedience.

Whereas Jesus says, if you love me, you will, what? Obey me. I mean, that just kind of follows from loving God. And so, yeah, I don't think that you can have genuine faith, be genuinely converted and transformed by the Spirit of God, and not show some evidence of that.

An apple tree will produce apples. If there's no apples, it's hard to be convinced that it's an apple tree, right? With regard to hell, I don't want to, this is a long passage, but I would just say, Matthew 25, verses 31 to 46, Jesus makes not only obedience, but specifically reaching out to people in physical need, the hungry, the sick, the thirsty, the people who don't have clothing. And Jesus says, if you didn't do this to these people, then you didn't do this to me.

And on two occasions, he says in verse 41, depart from me into the eternal fire. In verse 46, these will go away into eternal punishment. The criteria of who goes where is how did you reach out to the least of these of my brothers.

Already, there's going to be people like, yeah, yeah, but justification is by faith, you're saved by grace, and you can't make up, I know, I know. But the passage says, if you didn't do this to the least of these of my brothers, you go to hell. That's what the text says, and I know we want to fix Jesus' theology and add all sorts of qualifications, and yes, justification is by faith, yes, you're saved by grace, but Jesus, for some reason, emphasizes obedience as the marker of distinguishing the believer from the unbeliever.

So, grace and faith is the basis of salvation, but that grace and faith will, I believe, issue in genuine obedience. Yeah, that, this whole question is really what got me to become a pastor, honestly, and to start speaking to the church was, I remember being in, you know, high school, college, and seeing Matthew 7,

21, again, the verse you mentioned earlier, of not everyone who says Lord, Lord, is going to enter the kingdom of heaven. It's only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven, and I started to just get concerned for people who attend, you know, these church services, going, man, there's a lot of people in these places that say Lord, Lord, and they'll pray Lord a million times, even when they're praying, it's like, Lord this, Lord this, Lord do this, Lord do that.

You know, when it's like, well, that doesn't even make sense, you know, Master do this, Master do that. It's the idea of coming under his Lord and doing what he wants us to do. I mean, I was concerned for some of you, that's why I got into ministry.

It's like, there are people that attend church every week and feel so secure because they're there, because they pray a prayer, because maybe they even got baptized, but the truth of their life is they've never decided to follow Jesus. Their life doesn't show it, and that concerns me, because I don't want you at the end to stand before God and go, but I was at Cornerstone, you know Francis Chan, crazy love that, you know. Like, I mean, I joke about it, but I don't want you to have this false security that, hey, because I was a part of this thing.

No, it's because you genuinely believed in what Christ did on the cross, and you so trusted in his love and go, man, that's an amazing God that would send his son to die on a cross for me. I want to follow him. Here's my life.

That's true belief. There's an action tied to it. Does a loving God torture those in hell? That's a great question.

Go ahead. You know, and this is where God is love. Everything he does is love.

The thing we have to understand is he gets to define what love is and not us. Everyone in this room, maybe not everyone, but if I said, okay, what's the most loving thing God could do? We'd all have different opinions, right? Because we're all opinionated. We all have a view of what we think the most loving thing to do is.

You know, even when we have a person struggling in sin or whatever, you know, we're up in arms going, no, you should do this, you should do this, you should do this. Everyone has a different opinion with what to do with these situations, and ultimately God is the one who chooses what is right. I mean, we question things like does a loving God torture those in hell? But I have another question.

Does a fair God just forgive you for all the stuff that you did? Does a fair God let you escape hell? I mean, why does a fair God have his own son come down and die for your sake? It's weird how we'll question, God, how could you punish anyone? And we never ask the question, God, how could you forgive anyone? Because why? Because we like that side. And I'm just saying, be careful that I just go, look, Lord, there are things that I say about God that I don't understand. I don't get certain things.

Would I have chosen to torture people eternally? No, Francis Chan would not. But would Francis Chan have chosen to send his one and only son to die for his creation? No, Francis Chan would not. And at the end of the day, who really cares what Francis Chan would or would not do? I'm not God.

I didn't create the world. I don't understand. The Bible says his ways are just way beyond mine.

His thoughts are way beyond mine. Not he's a little bit brighter than me. You see how the heavens are way up there and you're down here? Because that's the way my thoughts are compared to yours.

That's the way my ways are. We're just too different. You can't think like me.

And so for me to say, well, God, you shouldn't do this or you should do that, there's just a sense of arrogance when I tell God, look, this is right or this is wrong because that's not the way I would do it and it's not the way that I think. And so I just say, okay, Lord, here's what I see here and whatever I see here is what I'm going to assume you are like. And whatever I see in this book, best I can understand it.

I go, you know what? That's the right way to think and somehow I'm flawed in my thinking. And I would also, with something as sensitive as hell, with so much mystery and difficult questions about what is it like, what's the suffering like, how's it going to happen, all that stuff, I think it's very careful with something like hell to stick to the actual biblical language used to describe hell and not go beyond that. For instance, even the words there does a loving God, I want to stop there and say, what do you mean by love? Because we often, as Francis said, have our own warped idea of what love is and we project that upon God, so already the question is kind of off a little bit because we're trying to fit God into our idea of love.

Does he torture, I'm a big 24 fan, and we're in season three, just finished season two, and it seems like every episode was just torture, torture, torture, so I'm picturing Jack Bauer with the, you know, I don't know. And so I think we have to be very careful. The Bible doesn't use the term torture.

It uses the term people are tormented in hell, but it doesn't picture God as sort of some torturer. And torture has images of injustice, right? You think of stuff that, you know, in warfare and stuff that happens, and that's always like, ew, that's not good. So I wouldn't want to read hell through the lens of even the language there.

I would say does a loving God, according to what the Bible says love is, you know, send people out of their own rejection of the gospel or of God, according to Romans 1, send them to a place of punishment that they themselves have sort of chosen for themselves, and I would say yeah, but that's sticking closer to what the Bible actually says, so that's, you know. I was going to say that, too. Preston obviously got that from Francis.

Yes. Yeah, that's just so good, because even just like we were reading in John 3, the language, the distinction, the biblical authors didn't have that distinction that we have of, oh, a loving God wouldn't do this, because Jesus is just saying well, God loves the world so much that He sent His Son, and He can go on in the same conversation with the same person to talk about God punishing those who don't follow Him, and yeah, it's good. We need to be careful about sticking with what the Bible says and how it frames it.

You want to take another one here? This is the last one, apparently. In light of Father's Day, why is this an important issue? That's got an interesting twist to it. I can take this one first.

Okay. This one's very dear to me. As you guys know, I'm a family guy.

Man, I love my kids. All five of them. Crazy about them, and I've said this before, like I see some of you kids in the room, and man, I've stood on this stage for the last 17, 18 years, not this one, but for this church, and I've seen some of you grow up.

Some of you that were little kids, you know, sitting there in the front row or wherever, sitting by your parents, sitting like your Sunday school teacher or whatever, but you came to the service, and you know what I'd see? It's like, oh, so cute, so cute, you know, so good, and see them grow up, and then at some point, you get to this age where you've got to make a decision for yourself, and it is so heartbreaking for me as a pastor, and I know it was for you when you watched your own kids walk away from God, because man, as a dad, I would do anything to make my kids fall in love with Jesus. I mean, that's all I care about from the day they're born. I mean, right now with little Claire, two weeks old, what's my prayer for her? It's like, God, make her fall in love with you.

Make her into this woman that when she leaves this house, that she's in love with you, and yet, I have no control over that. You know, as a dad, you would do anything for your kids, but this is what drives me nuts. I can't make a person fall in love with Jesus.

I can't make my own kids fall in love with Jesus. I mean, you know, you try so hard, and I see the heartbreak, and I've gone through some of that with, you know, in my family at times, and right now, it's like, wow, we're all in love with Jesus right now.

My kids are stronger and closer to Jesus than I've ever seen them, and that's the greatest joy as a dad, but the pain of seeing the opposite, and so I guess I would say to some of you, some of the kids in this room right now, man, this is real stuff, and I know it, and if I could just be another voice to look you in the eyes and say, look, if your parents are followers of Jesus, and they're begging you, and you may see hypocrisy in the home, my kids see, you know, bits of hypocrisy in my life, and none of us are perfect, but I just want to be another voice in your life to say, I am so sure that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and He died for me, man, I talk to Him, and He answers, and He does things that no one on this earth can convince me that it was coincidental, or that there is no

God, and the reason why your parents may even get frustrated at times, and it's like a sadness, because when you know this is true, when you can't get someone else to believe this, and then you weigh the consequences of what we're talking about today, you just think you're going to go crazy, and so I would say, you know, give your parents some slack, parents, man, I came to a point where I just came before God one day and said, Lord, this is nuts, I travel around the world leading people to Jesus, and I can't make my own children fall in love with you, wake up in the middle of the night just bawling on my face, God, you have to do it, either your Holy Spirit comes into my daughter, and she becomes a new creation, or I can make all the rules for the rest of her life, and it doesn't matter

the moment she turns 18, she'll just rebel anyways, it is all up to your spirit, and then when the Holy Spirit came into her, and everything changed, not that she's perfect by any stretch, but it is just a clear you were dead, and now you're alive, you just go, God, thank you, thank you, thank you, but it's, that was nothing on me, I did, that's not me, you can't make it happen, it's all up to the spirit, and so those of you parents, and some of your kids are far from the Lord right now, I would just say, the only thing I can speak from is my own experience, which is, it's really not, don't be so hard on yourself, because Lisa looked at me at one point and said, do you feel like we failed, and I said, no, this is not, if my theology is right, I go, we weren't hypocrites, we lived it out,

they see it, and now there's something God has to do, and sure enough, that's exactly what happened, and that's all you can do, so don't, you know, some of you probably go through that same thing that Lisa went through, where she's like, is it my fault that my kids aren't walking with the Lord, it's like, no, each

person has to make their choice, but you do look at life, and you do confess your sin to your kids, and say, you know, I wasn't a good example of this, I wasn't a good example of this, but, you saw God in my life, you saw the supernatural, you saw how God answered mom and dad's prayers, and if you choose that, you choose that, but don't be so hard on yourself.

You know, just as you hit me while you're talking, have you guys heard like, you know, when you grow up, your image of God the Father is often reflected by your image of your earthly father, have you guys heard that? And I think about that, and man, I, my Heavenly Father loves me, He loves to be with me, He saw me as His enemy, and He died for me, and entered into a relationship with me. He loves to spend time with me, He loves to talk with me, does God the Father care about the little things in my life? Does He love to be with me? And so, I ask myself those questions, like, wow, so my kids will understand that about their Heavenly Father if their earthly Father sort of models that. And so, when I sat down yesterday and like, played trains with my two-year-old, you know, he wakes up at like, feels like three in the morning, you know, choo-choo, choo-choo, and wants to build, I'm like, well, that actually is an issue of Heaven and Hell in the sense that if I convey the idea that I'm His Father and I love to spend time with Him, I'm interested in Him, you know, or my four-year-old is talking to me, you know, I'm like, yeah, yeah, yeah, I'm texting my friends or on the phone or whatever, then she's gonna think that God the Father is like, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, I've got other things to worry about.

So it's just, for me, with young kids at home, it just instills in me this desire to cherish and redeem those seemingly insignificant moments, because all along, I'm just, I want to communicate to them, model to them that their Heavenly Father loves them, cares about them, cares about their artwork, and wants to spend time with them, but if I'm always you know, gone or doing my other thing or whatever, even if it's ministry, you know, I'm not conveying a good picture of God to them, so I didn't really put that together until you were talking.

Yeah, and then when he was talking, okay, I got one. This is really important, I'll set up after this one, but, no, it's true, like, your view of God is gonna be tainted by your dad, it just will, and I try to think that through, too, you know, like sometimes, my sin, sin in my life is I'm not patient, I can get angry or frustrated, and sometimes, like, if I'm annoyed by one of the kids, I don't, I kind of like just back away, just like, I just need some space from you, but that's not what God does, and so every time I do that, I think, wait, I'm not representing God well, because God doesn't do that, and the thing that I would say as it relates to this issue, the reason why I believe we in America, at this day and age, have a difficult time with this particular issue of hell, it has a lot to do with the way that we were raised, and with parenting nowadays, we don't understand the concept of authority, that dad says this, so be it, that has been absolutely lost in our culture, this idea of authority, of my dad is an actual authority figure, and he said to do this, he said to clean my room, so I'm gonna go clean my room, and that's where, as dads, we gotta be careful from the time they're kids, you know, I have to show them, you know, when your kid's throwing a tantrum on the ground, you don't go, oh, isn't that cute, no, that's not cute, you're teaching them, no, you don't grow up and just throw tantrums to get your way, and you need to understand that I am an authority, and one day you're gonna have a boss at work, you need to come under his authority, you're gonna have to understand the police, they are your authority, you understand the government you're under, that's the authority, you understand the elders of the church are your authority, and I am your dad, and I am your authority right now, and there's been so much emphasis on this buddy-buddy, I don't wanna hurt her feelings, I don't, and that's not loving, and that's not the way God is, I mean, read this book sometime, you know, God says, look, this is the way it is, I am God, and whatever I say goes, and there's some reflection

of that that I need to show my kids, that they don't just disobey what I say, that there's consequences to that, and I need to teach them that, because then when they grow up, they gotta understand, no, when you disobey your governing authorities, there's consequences to that, and then when you disobey God himself, there are consequences to that, but the way that we teach love has been, oh, you never punish, you never discipline, you never say no, just let him act out, it's like, no, that's not what God does, that's not love, and so I think this whole concept of how could God do this, it's woven into the fabric of our culture that says, how dare my dad tell me what I can and cannot do, and we've lost the idea of authority altogether, and it's killing our families, it's killing our churches, it's killing our culture.

So I think the best way for us to end this, in a lot of Christian circles, hell is basically a way to scare people into heaven, the gospel gets presented as fire insurance, a get out of hell free card, that kind of a thing, but obviously we want to avoid doing that, but obviously when we talk about hell, it raises these questions, how do we avoid it? The Bible warns us about hell so that we see it somewhere we don't want to go, so what's the alternative? So I think it'd be great, maybe Preston, if you could just give us really briefly, what is God's plan of salvation and how do we become a part of that? Yeah, yeah, we don't want to scare people into heaven, it just doesn't it may work temporarily, right? I feel like that's how I got in, I was scared of hell, but what's gonna cause people to persevere, I think, is understanding the good news, the good news that God has for us. You know, when I think of hell, I think of what's made me kind of think of the enormity of our sin. If God is at all just and he says that the punishment for sin is hell, then that means my sin is way worse than I could ever even imagine.

It's just so fascinating to think that God, you know, the death of Christ, in a sense you can almost say like Christ bore my hell on the cross because of this overwhelming love for me, and if my sin was so great, then that means I didn't deserve any of that. And to think that God, when I didn't deserve it, reached down, and when I fought him and said no, no, and wanted to do my own thing, wanted to do my own thing, that the grace of God conquered my heart because of his overwhelming love for me, that's just you know, that's very humbling, and very compelling, I think. That's what's gonna make me, I think, persevere as a Christian, reflecting that this God loves me that much that he's willing to give that much for me to redeem me.

And then I think, you know, I just think the Bible talks a lot about you know, when Christ comes back, and to me that, that's just been a growing, you know, aspect of Scripture that just I think overwhelms my thinking. That one day the king of all creation is gonna return, and there's gonna be this huge victory celebration, and the creator of the universe is gonna come, and he's gonna see face-to-face all of his children that he redeemed, and we're gonna rejoice, and he's gonna, you know, bring in, he's gonna recreate the worlds and create this paradise, and heaven's gonna come to earth, and the presence of God's gonna fill all the way it was intended to be, and we're gonna live out our humanity under the authority and love of God forever and ever and ever. That is compelling, and I just, I can't wait for that day, when that day comes, when the king returns, and all of his children bow the knee, and just look up and say, God, this is yours.

Thank you for redeeming me. And he's gonna gather all his children. I just, to me, the mundane things in life and the, you know, the suffering and the hardship and everything, a lot of that kind of, kind of fades away a little bit when I think about that day.

So I just, I encourage you, I mean, some of you here have never been here, maybe this is all new to you, I would encourage you, this isn't, we're not just a bunch of hellfire preachers, we don't just love talking about

hell, this is kind of a unique thing, but this idea of hell, it is real, and the king is real, he will come back, and he will look to see who has followed his son faithfully till the end, and those he will usher into this never-ending paradise, and I just long for that day. Hi, my name is Joshua Walker, and I'm the president of Eternity Bible College and an elder here at Cornerstone. Back in 2003, Francis Chan and a group of guys, including myself, started a Bible college in order to train the next generation of church leaders.

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