

QUESTIONS YOU ASKED: Heaven and Hell?

April 6, 2025

Michael Swartzentruber, Senior Minister



Ephesians 1:3-14

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. 5 He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace 8 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight 9 he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and

things on earth. 11 In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, 12 so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; 14 this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

REFLECT & DISCUSS

1. Read the passage slowly. Then take a deep breath and read it again. What word, phrase, or image stands out to you?
2. According to the Pew Research Center, 73% of US Adults believe in a heaven, and 62% believe in a hell. There is a (wide) diversity of thought and opinion within the Christian tradition on the afterlife. What are your thoughts about the afterlife?
3. Did you take the [afterlife survey](#)? Had you ever heard of all those different versions of the afterlife before? Did anything pique your curiosity?
4. What scriptures, ideas, religious traditions, or people have influenced your thoughts on the



South Elkhorn Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

4343 Harrodsburg Road, Lexington KY 40513

859-223-1433 southelkhorncc.org

afterlife? Has anything caused you to pause or even change your mind?

5. According to Ephesians, Christ reveals the will of God to “gather up all things” in the “fullness of time.” This is one scripture (among others, like the parables of the lost sheep and coin) that can be read as promoting “universal reconciliation”, which is the idea that, in the very end, God will restore everyone and everything to God’s presence, no matter how long

it takes and how far God must go. Have you heard of this idea of “universal reconciliation” before? What do you make of it?

6. Ultimately, our ideas of the afterlife reveal our deepest convictions about God. What do you think your sense of the afterlife means about God?
7. What do you make of the phrase “don’t be so heavenly-minded you’re of no earthly good”?

Some versions of the Afterlife:

Eternal Conscious Torment - hell is a kind of afterlife where condemned souls are forever punished with pain

Eternal Separation - hell is an afterlife for condemned souls forever separated from God, but there is no additional pain beyond the pain of separation

Annihilationism - there is no eternal hell, condemned souls just cease to exist (either immediately upon death, or after a "Final Judgment")

Sheol: all spirits reside in the same underworld that is neither heaven nor hell

Purgatory - a place or state in which souls that are not condemned undergo a (possibly painful) purification that makes them eligible for heaven after the Final Judgment

Universal Reconciliation - there is no hell, there is an afterlife where all souls are immediately or eventually purified and finally reconciled back to God

Universal Salvation - there is no hell, only heaven in which all souls are immediately unified with God

This Worldly - hell is a state of suffering in this life

Resurrection - the dead are resurrected for a final, everlasting kingdom in which heaven and earth are one in God's presence

Reincarnation - souls are returned to earth for a new life (& **Karma** - souls are returned to earth for a new life that reflects what they did with the last one)

Listen Online

Sermon audio available at southelkhorncc.org/sermons