

Is Hell Meant for People, or for Evil?

Reflections on the Restoration of All Things

Reflections Covenant and Doctrine 3 October 2026

Matthew 25:31-46

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Revelation 20:10-15

Revelation 21:22-22:5

Revelation 22:17

1 Timothy 2:4

2 Peter 3:9

Introduction: The Question That Follows

In my sermon “Paradise Lost and Paradise Restored”, I traced the biblical story from the garden of Eden to the garden-city of Revelation. I shared my conviction that the Paradise lost through humanity’s disobedience is destined to be restored through Jesus Christ, and that a benevolent Creator, who made humanity out of love and for fellowship with Himself, does not want His creation lost for ever.

That conviction leads to a question that I cannot honestly avoid, and one that deserves more room than a sermon allows.

If God intends to restore all things, will every human being find their way into the New Creation? Or will some be lost in hell for all eternity?

I offer these reflections to those who are willing to think deeply with me. I do not write to settle a question that the Church has wrestled with for two thousand years, but to share where the Scriptures have led me.

1. How the Church Has Answered

Let me say at the outset that sincere and faithful Christians have answered this question differently throughout the history of the Church.

Many have held that those who finally reject God will suffer eternal punishment. They point to the solemn words of Jesus: “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal” (Matthew 25:46). This has been the majority view in both the Western and the Eastern Church, and it is reflected in the Athanasian Creed.

Others have held that those who finally reject God will not suffer for ever, but will cease to exist. They point out that Scripture often speaks of the fate of the wicked as destruction (Matthew 10:28; 2 Thessalonians 1:9), and that immortality is God’s gift, not something we possess by nature (1 Timothy 6:16).

And from the earliest centuries, some Christian teachers, among them Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, dared to hope that in the end God’s love would win every heart. They took seriously Peter’s words about “the times of restitution of all things” (Acts 3:21).

Each of these positions is held by people who love Christ and honour Scripture. We should hold our own conclusions with humility, and speak of those who differ with respect.

2. What God Desires

First, I believe that God desires the salvation of every person.

This is not my opinion; it is the plain teaching of Scripture. God “will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). He is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Through Ezekiel He says, “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezekiel 33:11).

The work of Christ, too, is described in the widest possible terms. “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22). “By the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life” (Romans 5:18). Through Christ, it pleased the Father “by him to reconcile all things unto himself” (Colossians 1:19–20).

A benevolent Creator does not want His creation lost for ever. Of that I am certain.

3. What Hell Is For

Second, let us look carefully at what Scripture says hell is for.

When Jesus speaks of the final judgement in His parable of the sheep and the goats, He describes the fire as “everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41).

Prepared for the devil and his angels. Not prepared for humanity.

And in the book of Revelation, what is finally cast into the lake of fire? The devil, who deceived the nations (Revelation 20:10). And then, remarkably, “death and hell were cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:14). The word translated “hell” in that verse is Hades, the realm of the dead.

Death is not a person. Hades is not a person. They are powers, the enemies of God and of His creation.

Paul says the same: “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15:26).

This leads me to a conviction that I want to share carefully.

I believe that hell is, first and foremost, the place where God finally deals with evil itself: sin, death, decay, the devil and every power that has spoiled His good creation. Everything that has ever corrupted

Paradise will be consigned there, and it will never return.

When the New Creation comes, evil will not simply be locked away in a corner of it. It will have no place in it at all.

4. What Then of People?

Third, what then of people?

I must be honest. Scripture does not allow us to treat this question lightly. Jesus spoke often and solemnly about judgement. Revelation speaks of those who remain outside the city (Revelation 22:15). And love, by its very nature, cannot be forced. God will not drag anyone into His presence against their will.

And yet, in the very same vision, the gates of the city “shall not be shut at all” (Revelation 21:25). “The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Revelation 22:2). And the very last invitation in the Bible is this: “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17).

Is it not striking that, after the lake of fire has done its work, the gates of the city stand open and the invitation is still being given?

Paul looks to the day when “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10-11), and when God will be “all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28).

So I hold this not as a certainty that cancels the warnings of Scripture, but as a hope grounded in the character of God. I hope, and I pray, that the love which sought Adam and Eve in the garden, and which reached a dying thief on a cross, will in the end leave no one outside who could be brought in.

The final judgement belongs to God, not to me. But I take comfort in Abraham’s question: “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Genesis 18:25).

He will. And the Judge of all the earth is the same Lord who died for all.

Conclusion: Hope, Not Complacency

One thing must not be misunderstood. This hope is never a reason for complacency. It is a reason for urgency.

If God’s heart longs for every person to come home, then ours must too. The warnings of Scripture are real, the invitation must be heard, and it must be accepted.

Evil has no future. Death has no future. The devil has no future. But

every human being, made in the image of God, is invited into the future that God has prepared.

The gates are open. The Spirit and the bride still say, “Come.”

Amen.