

On Death and the Life to Come: Death, Heaven, Hell and the End of the World

By: Kyle Worley and elders of Mosaic Church

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At Mosaic Church, we believe that it is crucial for the Word of God to shape the way we view and engage the issues of our day. From time to time, the pastors of Mosaic engage in writing works of “practical theology.” We intend for these documents to be a pastorally sensitive, biblically rich, and theologically engaged treatment of issues that are on the hearts and minds of the people God has entrusted to our care.

As a note: These papers are not intended to be some kind of address to the church in America or all Christians everywhere. The pastors of Mosaic intend for them to be for the people whom God has entrusted to their care. We take seriously Peter’s admonition in 1 Peter 5 to “...shepherd the flock of God that is *among* you...” and ***we believe that serious matters require significant and proximate relationships.***

These papers are typically the result of a long season of study and reflection among our leaders. We spend months studying for them, crafting them, editing them, and getting feedback from elders, staff, and members of Mosaic. We test them with outside voices and subject matter experts as well, to measure their biblical fidelity, theological strength, and practical benefit.

Here is our hope: *In a world in which it can feel as if there are so many people giving their opinions about matters of consequence, we hope that these papers, written by pastors who love you and pray for you, will be words of weight in an age of flimsiness. We hope you will consider them with sobriety and treat them with serious consideration as your views on the issues at hand come into focus. If nothing else, we hope that the paper demonstrates that the Christian exploration of issues of consequence will require more than memes, tweets, anecdotes and posts.*

In the summer of 2021, we published [a paper “On Wisdom and School Options.”](#) The hope for that paper was that it would shape the way we talk about the sensitive subject of school options as a diverse church family united in the gospel. In the fall of 2021, [we published a paper “On Race and the Gospel.”](#) Now, we turn our attention to another subject for which we receive many questions: death, heaven, hell, and the life to come.

Why would Mosaic Church take time to address this topic? Well there are five main reasons.

- The last two years have been full of conversations regarding health, sickness, death, and fear.
- There is widespread confusion (in both the church and the culture at large) about death, heaven, hell, and what happens when we die.
- We believe that the church bears a responsibility to address the issues that are present in the minds of its people and in the culture they live in.
- The Bible speaks to the core issues at play, and so should we.

- As a church with many children, we have found that this is a question that regularly comes to parents from our curious children.

We want to acknowledge that these questions and issues hit at the most vital intersections of hurt, hope, desire, fear, and uncertainty.

The reign of death is all around us, yet we don't often feel the need to wrestle with the realities of death until it corrupts our personal experience. That could look like the death or terminal diagnosis of a parent, loss of a child, a sudden death in the family, or it could be that someone you care about is dealing with death. In these moments, it can be challenging to think critically about a theological topic because you are processing deep emotions of grief, loss, anger, and/or denial.

Digging into a topic like death and the life to come is building a theological framework that will serve you when you (or the people you care about) are hit with an unexpected loss. If Christians don't engage in this type of work, then the framework they will use in moments of deep emotional trauma will be from alternative sources like social media, popular culture, or self sufficiency.

The most important thing you will need in moments of deep emotional trauma and grief is a theological framework informed by the Bible to help you process some of the deepest theological questions:

- Is God really good?
- Does God love me?
- Why did He allow this to happen?

A theological framework will serve you by anchoring your grief, pain, and doubt in truth. A good framework can ultimately produce a deeper, richer faith because you will experience the depth of God's love and a greater awareness of God's grief and pain over sin in the process.

God knows what it is like to experience loss, pain, and sadness. The Father knows what it is like to lose a child. Christians who endure the grief and pain of loss discover a deeper understanding of who God is, what He has done in Christ, and how broken the world is. And yet, in all of this, we look at our lives and the world with an honest hope: Honest enough to admit that death is an enemy intruding in God's good world, hopeful enough to believe that God will defeat it in Christ Jesus for good, forever.

The hope of this paper is not unlike that of previous work.

- We aim to provide a biblical perspective on the relevant issues.
- We aim to provide the guardrails for how we as a church will discuss this topic as a church family.
- We aim to provide a document that can be used by members of Mosaic Church to shape the way they discuss this topic with people outside of the church.

To accomplish this, we must begin with the witness of scripture and the theological engagement of the historic church on four relevant questions.

- What does the Bible say about death?
- What does the Bible say about what happens when we die?
- What does the Bible say about heaven and hell?
- What does the Bible say about the end of the world?

We will explore each of these questions and then provide an appendix on the question “How do I talk about death, heaven, and hell with my kids?” and some recommended resources for further exploration of the topic.

What does the Bible say about death?

Death is not good. Death is not a friend. Human death was not supposed to be. In 1 Corinthians 15:26 Paul says, “The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” We don’t want to call a friend what God has called an enemy.

But where did death come from? In Genesis 1-2 we hear that God created a good world that was in order/at peace (*shalom*). In Genesis 3, we hear the tragic story of how humanity, the jewel of God’s creation, rejected God’s rule and reign in an attempt to establish their own kingdom and autonomy from God. Prior to Genesis 3, the event of the fall of humanity, we hear in Genesis 2:15-16: “The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’”

When Adam and Eve eat of the fruit of this specific tree in Genesis 3, what happens? Death enters the picture. In Genesis 3:14-19 God details the consequences of Adam and Eve’s sin and we hear that, “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, *till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*” God is gracious in not striking Adam and Eve dead at the moment of sin, but death still occurs in their sin and rebellion. And it is important to remember that humanity’s sin doesn’t merely impact humanity, it impacts the whole of creation. In the list of curses and consequences for sin in Genesis 3 we find out that sin and death have impacted and infected the “grounds” of creation itself. (Gen. 3:17-19)

Death is a result of sin. Death is the work of Satan. Death is judgment. It is not a friend.

In short, death is not a golden door we enter through to a better life. No, death is what has alienated us from God (Ps. 51:5); it is banishment from the blessed presence of God (II Thess. 1:9); real and characteristic to all (Gen. 1-2); bringing disruption to life yet overcome by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (I Cor. 15:54-55). Death is the “last enemy to be destroyed” (I Cor. 15:26). While physical death is a result of sin, not *all* physical death leads to spiritual separation

from God. We are born into this world spiritually dead, meaning we are spiritually separated from God, and yet through the grace of salvation in Christ many are made alive in Christ Jesus.

We hear this affirmed in Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” It is true that the norm for all humans is that they will die. We hear in Hebrews 9:27, “And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment...” There appear to be two exceptions to the universal consequence of death for humanity:

- Enoch and Elijah are both said to have been brought to heaven alive, having not experienced death. (Gen. 5:23-24; 2 Kings 2:11)[1]
- It appears that those who are alive at the second coming of Christ will not experience pre-final judgment death, though they will be brought immediately into the final judgment where those “in Christ” will be separated from the wicked forever. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

As the story of scripture progresses, we see death developed and deepened as a concept across the Old Testament. Because Adam and Eve, along with all of humanity including you and me, are creatures of body and soul, the question begins to emerge: What happens in death? What happens to our body? What happens to our soul?

Scripture is clear that death is an enemy and that it is a universal (normative) consequence of sin. But death is not the final word. Far from it.

What does the Bible say about what happens when we die?

Candidly, of all the questions we explore in this paper, this is the most mysterious. Scripture lays down some guardrails and principles to guide our faith and belief, but in between those guardrails there is considerable mystery.

In the Old Testament we hear that Abraham died and “was gathered to his people” (Gen. 25:8-10). This phrase is used also in Numbers 20:24-29 in reference to Aaron, and in 1 Kings 2:10 where David’s death is described as going to sleep “with his fathers.” Across the Old Testament we get a picture that there is a “realm of the dead” with the most frequent term for this being the Hebrew word “*Sheol*.” What makes the use of this word challenging is that while it is sometimes used in a way that appears to be the general destination of all who die, both the righteous and the unrighteous, it is also used with what appears to be specifically a reference to the post-death destination of the unrighteous who are under divine judgment. (Gen. 3:14; Prov. 30:15; Habakkuk 2:5; Psalm 139:7-8)

In short, we can say that the Old Testament conceives of a place where a person goes when they die, but that it is fairly broad in its picture of this place. Gratefully, the Bible progressively provides increasing clarity as we move forward in the story of scripture.

In the New Testament we hear Jesus tell the thief on the cross, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:43) The paradise mentioned here could be, and is occasionally referred to as heaven, but is best understood as being a reference to what is sometimes referred to as “the bosom of Abraham.” This place is a place where all the dead prior to Jesus’ death and resurrection go, a temporary place that has two “compartments,” one for the righteous dead and one for the unrighteous dead. In 2 Corinthians 5:8, we hear Paul enter into a discussion of the body and being with God that seems to indicate that it is possible to be with God and to be absent from the body at the same time. In Matthew 10:28 Jesus says, “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

In Luke 16 Jesus tells the story of the “rich man and Lazarus.” In this story we hear that when Lazarus died he was “carried by the angels to Abraham’s side...the rich man died, was buried, and experienced torment in Hades.” The rich man is experiencing pain, he recognizes Abraham and Lazarus, he seems to be experiencing conscious need (thirst), and he begs to go back and warn his brothers (so he has memory of his life before death).

All of these passages, when viewed in light of the Old Testament passages, seem to suggest at least five things that we think we can faithfully say are the testimony of scripture.

- **Humans are psychosomatic creatures:** We are composed of both body (*pyschos*) and soul (*soma*).
- **When humans die, our souls immediately go somewhere:** It appears that there is a place where the dead go. This place is not where we receive our resurrection bodies, but we have some immaterial form in this place.
- **Not everyone who dies goes to the same place:** The righteous go to a specific place that Jesus calls “paradise” or “heaven” and the unrighteous go to a place of judgment and death that the Old Testament seems to refer to intermittently as “sheol” and the New Testament calls “hell.”
- **The righteous are present with the Lord:** For the “righteous in Christ,” it is clear that they are immediately brought (in some form) into the presence of the Lord.
- **It appears that the souls of the departed are conscious:** They possess memory of their life prior to death, experience need/desire/pleasure/pain, they are able to communicate, they have some physicality, and they are aware of where they are.

While there is a spectrum of faithful views on the question of “what happens when we die before the final resurrection,” (we explore final resurrection/judgment later in this paper) we think a faithful answer to the question: “What does the Bible say about what happens when we die?” would include the following.

Death is an enemy, not a friend. It is the normative universal consequence of sin, but it is not final. When a human experiences death, their souls are immediately brought to a place of either blessing or judgment. The souls of the righteous are brought to a place of blessing where they consciously wait for the final resurrection/judgment that will occur at the second coming of the Lord. The souls of the unrighteous are brought to a place of judgment where they consciously

wait for the final resurrection/judgment that will occur at the second coming of the Lord. The place where righteous souls go is called “heaven/paradise.” The place where unrighteous souls go is called “hell” or the “king of terrors.” (Job 18:14)

The intermediate state (the time between a person’s death and the final resurrection of the dead) that scripture speaks of is not what has been called by Roman Catholic theologians “purgatory.” The Roman Catholic view of purgatory envisions an intermediate state for those who die in the grace of God but remain imperfectly holy where the intermediate state is the context for finishing out one’s journey of sanctification. In Roman Catholic theology, purgatory is an intermediate state of continual refinement/preparation for the future heaven.

We do not believe that the “intermediate state” described in scripture is one wherein believers are progressively brought up to the standard of heaven, but rather, that it is the place where the souls of believers are held in a state of blessing until the day of bodily resurrection and the souls of those who reject God are held in a state of judgment until the day of bodily resurrection.

But this intermediate state is not where the departed remain forever. There is a future destination for all beyond the intermediate state. And while scripture has less to say about the intermediate state, it has far more to say about our forever state.[2]

What does the Bible say about heaven and hell?

Throughout the Bible we hear the word *heaven* used in a variety of ways. We hear about the “heavens,” “the heavenly places,” and “heaven.” While the word appears frequently in scripture, it is not always referring to what we might think of when we think of *heaven*, and we have to rely on the context of its usage to determine the meaning.

For example, in Genesis 1 when we hear that God created the “heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1), and that he separated the waters from the waters to create an expanse and He “called the expanse Heaven,” it seems clear that what is in view is not the heaven as God’s paradise for the righteous, but rather the sky.

Later in Genesis 1 we hear that God creates the stars and “sets them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth.” (Gen. 1:17) This is what appears to be a reference to the sky or what we might refer to as “space.”

In the New Testament, the word “heaven” is used 286 times. The word “hell” is used 14 times. Additionally, there are many times when heaven and hell are referenced without use of the specific word.

For example, Jesus’ promise to the thief on the cross that “today you will be with me in paradise,” (Luke 23:39-43) has traditionally (and rightly) been understood to be a reference to heaven. On the other side, when Jesus speaks of “fire” throughout the gospels (Matt. 3:10; Matt. 3:12; Matt. 13:40) he is referring to judgment, the end of the world, and/or some version of what we often call “hell.”

Images of “present” heaven in scripture include: a place of rest (Jn. 14:1), paradise (Lk 23:43), banquet (Ps. 23), and a home (Jn. 14:2). Images of “future” heaven include: a city (Heb. 11:10), wedding feast (Mt 22:2), a better country (Heb. 11:16), a place of peace (Isa. 11:6), a reconstructed world (II Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1), and a marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9).

Throughout Ephesians we hear Paul use the phrase “heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:3; 1:20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12). It’s clear from Paul’s use of this phrase that he means something beyond the skies above. He says that God has blessed us “in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,” that he “raised him [Christ] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,” that he has “raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,” that he has made his wisdom “known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places,” and that in Ephesians 6 we are told that we wrestle against the “rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

In light of the usage of this phrase we can say that “heavenly places” seems to include the place of God’s blessed presence, but also includes the entire “spiritual realm.”

So, what is heaven? And, what is hell?

It seems that we can distinguish between a **present heaven and hell** and a **future heaven and hell**. While there is overlap between the present and future heaven/hell, there are also some significant differences.

By present, we mean the present status of heaven and hell in the time between Christ’s resurrection and the future final resurrection and final judgment. We mean all the time that elapses between the ascension of Christ and his second coming. This time between, for those who die, is called the “intermediate state.” When people die in that time between, they enter into what we could faithfully refer to as the present heaven or hell. This present heaven or hell is what we have referred to earlier in the paper as the intermediate state.

The present heaven is characterized by presence with the Lord, some kind of immaterial form (but not our final resurrection bodies), and blessing. It is reserved for the righteous in Christ and is a place of blessedness.

The present hell is characterized by separation from the Lord, some kind of immaterial form (but not our final resurrection bodies), and judgment. It is reserved for the unrighteous who have rejected Christ and is a cursed place.

But there is a day coming when the present heaven and hell will come to an end. A time is coming in the future of the world where there will be a final resurrection and final judgment. At this final resurrection and final judgment there will be a great sorting out of the righteous and the wicked. The righteous will be welcomed into what we could call the **future** heaven, that will be a heaven on earth in resurrected bodies for the righteous in Christ. The wicked will be condemned into what we could call the **future** hell, that will be a place of forever judgment for those who have rejected Christ and His kingdom.

What does the Bible say about the end of the world?

The present heaven and hell will one day pass away. In their present state, they are not permanent. They are not our forever homes. They are a shadow of the things to come. Additionally, what we see in Luke 16 is that there is “a great chasm that is fixed” between the present heaven and present hell that keeps them and those therein separated. They are not various rooms in the same home that one may pass in and out of at will. They are two different temporary homes.

It's important to remember that the idea of resurrection was not totally foreign to Jews of Jesus' day. In the ancient world, there were different views on the question of death, resurrection, and everlasting life. The Greeks and Romans didn't believe in the resurrection, but some Jews, including the Pharisees, which represented a very large sect of Judaism that we see Jesus regularly interacting with during his ministry, affirmed a future resurrection, although it appears that they didn't believe this resurrection would be bodily. In contrast, the Sadducees, the other dominant Jewish religious sect, did not believe in a future resurrection of the dead.

It's safe to say that while there were some, like the Pharisees, who believed in life after death, Christianity was unique in providing a view of death's reversal. This is not to say that the hope and truth of resurrection appeared out of nowhere in the New Testament, but that what was implicit in the Old Testament becomes explicit in the New Testament. The Old Testament affirms that God will reverse death and bodily resurrect the dead saints, but we don't get to see this promise truly fulfilled until we encounter the person and work of Christ Jesus. This is what NT Wright has called, “life after life after death.” Wright has written elsewhere: “Resurrection was, by definition, not the existence into which someone might (or might not) go immediately upon death; it was not a disembodied heavenly life; it was a further stage, out beyond all that. It was not a redescription or redefinition of death. It was death's reversal.”[3]

Throughout the gospels we hear Jesus beginning to signal to his followers that his view of death and resurrection was different from their own. He speaks candidly and explicitly about his own death and resurrection. He grieves death and he demonstrates to his followers and to the world that He has come to overturn the power of death.

In Jesus' ministry we see at least two events of “resurrection,” although it's important to understand that the resurrections we see Jesus perform are different from His own resurrection and our future resurrection.

When Jesus brings Lazarus back from the dead (John 11) or when he does the same with the little girl (Mark 5), these resurrections are restorations to the life they knew before death. It is a resurrection to what was, not a resurrection into what will be. When Lazarus was raised from the dead, he wasn't given a resurrected body, he wasn't placed into a new heavens and a new earth, he wasn't transported into God's beatific (blessed) presence, and eventually he would die again. The same is true of all resurrections performed in the New Testament with the exception of the resurrection of Christ Jesus and the final resurrection of the dead at the end of all things.

With the resurrection of Christ, we get the paradigm of resurrection triumph over death. In that way Christ is the forerunner, the firstfruits, the first glimpse of what life after life after death will look like. We hear in Colossians 1:18 that Christ is “the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.” Christ Jesus is the firstfruits of the bodily resurrection that all will experience at his second coming.

This is developed at length in 1 Corinthians 15. In this chapter of Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth he tells us, “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:20-26)

This passage is crucial because it points out to us the flow of resurrection in the history of redemption:

- The resurrection of Christ inaugurates a new age where the power of death is removed.
- Because Christ has triumphed in a resurrected body over death, so too will those who “belong to Christ.”
- And this will happen with the end of the world as we know it and the establishment of a new world where there will no longer be any presence of sin, death, shame or Satan.

Paul expands on the topic of the final resurrection and final judgment in 1 Thessalonians 4-5. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 we hear, “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.” Going on in verses 16-18 we hear, “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.”

Here we see greater detail surrounding the second coming of the Lord and what will occur at that time. Now, there are many schools of thought on how this will play out in real time, many faithful views on what precedes the second coming of the Lord and the timing of that appearing, but all faithful views on the second coming of the Lord include:

- Bodily resurrection of the dead.
- The final judgment of all humanity.
- The welcome of all in Christ into forever fellowship with God in a new heavens and a new earth.
- The sentencing of all who have rejected Christ into forever separation from God.

We discover as we follow the story of scripture that at the second coming of the Son of God there is a final resurrection which is followed by a final judgment.

In Revelation 19-22 we get a picture of the final judgment, what is sometimes called the “Great White Throne Judgment” and a picture of the final judgment/defeat of Satan and satanic forces. There are a variety of views as to when this judgment occurs, but the church agrees that at the end of the world, before the new heavens and new earth are fully realized, there is a judgment and final victory over Satan who, along with all satanic forces, are “thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night and forever and ever.” (Rev. 20:10)

After this, we hear of the final judgment of the righteous and the wicked, wherein, “the dead, great and small, [stand] before the throne...and the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done...Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:12-15).

This second death is the forever death of separation from the blessed presence of God. This second death is where the unrighteous experience his holy and just presence in judgment, without the intervening mercy available in and given through faith in Christ. This second death is the sentence and condemnation to what scripture refers to as “hell.”

After this judgment, in Revelation 21, we hear the Apostle John say, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I hear a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (Rev. 21:1-4)

This is a description of the future heaven. The heaven that descends to earth. The place that the righteous in Christ will spend forever with God, His people, and a fully restored creation. The righteous in Christ will live forever in resurrected, incorruptible and immortal, bodies that will never know death, suffering, or pain. We will live in the midst of a restored creation that will be full of the glory of God.

So, when we end the story of scripture we end with a “new heavens and new earth” populated by the righteous in Christ and with a place of forever judgment, referred to as “hell” or more accurately “the lake of fire” populated by Satan, demonic forces, and those unrighteous who voluntarily separated themselves from fellowship with God. This is a place of “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Luke 13:28).

The story of scripture begins with a paradise on earth subject to corruption and sin through the rejection of Adam and Eve; it ends with a paradise on earth that is no longer subject to corruption and sin through the restoration of Adam and Eve's lineage in Christ.

Conclusion: Affirmations and Denials

In an effort to summarize the paper, we offer these concluding affirmations and denials:

We **affirm** that God created the world good and free from death.

We *deny* that death is a friend. It is an intrusion and disruption to God's good world and will one day be destroyed forever.

We **affirm** that when the righteous in Christ, those who are recipients of salvation by God's grace, die, they enter into a conscious life of forever fellowship with God.

We *deny* that when the righteous in Christ die, between the ascension of Christ and the final resurrection, they enter into the state in which they will live forever. Rather, they enter into what we can faithfully refer to as the "present heaven," which is temporary.

We **affirm** that when the unrighteous, those who reject God's grace in salvation, die, they enter into a conscious life of forever separation from God.

We *deny* that when the unrighteous die, between the ascension of Christ and the final resurrection, they enter into the state in which they will live forever. Rather, they enter into what we can faithfully refer to as the "present hell," which is temporary.

We **affirm** that future heaven will be inaugurated at the second coming of Christ in the final judgment and final resurrection wherein all of the righteous in Christ will be raised to receive their resurrection bodies and take up residence in the "new heavens and new earth" that will be forever free from sin, shame, death, corruption, and Satan.

We **affirm** that the future hell will be inaugurated at the second coming of Christ in the final judgment and final resurrection wherein all of the unrighteous will be raised to receive their resurrection bodies and take up residence in the place of judgment that is referred to as either "hell" or the "lake of fire" that will be forever marked by divine judgment, sin, shame, separation, exile, Satan, and demonic forces.

Appendix: How do I talk about death, heaven, and hell with my kids?

Certainly one of the most pressing reasons behind the paper and the sermon series that accompanies it were questions from parents in the life of our church: How do I talk about death, heaven, and hell with my kids?

While the paper is meant for adults, providing deeper substance and biblical reasoning behind the core questions, we wanted to provide a simple and faithful guide to help navigate these questions with your children. The church has historically done this in and through *catechism*. Catechism is God's truth in the form of question and answer. It's one of the main ways that the church has passed on the faith from one generation to the next. It's helpful because you can either use the questions as prompts, proactively, but also, because we have phrased them in the way they are often asked by children.

If you'd like more explorations of this topic for you and your family, please consider the resources for kids we have at the bottom of this paper. Please keep in mind the developmental stage, sensitivity, and unique wiring of your child as you explore how to introduce the following questions and resources.

Question 1: What is death?

Death is God's enemy, the penalty for sin, and will one day be gone forever.

1 Corinthians 15:26 – "The last enemy to be destroyed is death."

Question 2: What happens when we die?

For those who love and trust Jesus, they go to be with God and His people forever.

For those who do not love and trust Jesus, they are separated from God and His people forever.

Question 3: Who will be in heaven?

All those who love and trust Jesus, from every tribe, tongue and nation will be with God and His people forever.

Question 4: What is heaven and what is it like?

Heaven is where those who love and trust Jesus go to be with God forever. It is a place of peace, rest, and joy.

Question 5: What is hell and what is it like?

Hell is where those who do not love and trust Jesus go to be separated from God forever. It is a place of pain, sadness, and hurt.

Question 6: What will we do in heaven?

In heaven, we will praise God, partner with God and play in God's creation.

Question 7: What will be happening in hell?

In hell, people will experience sadness, suffering, and sorrow.

Question 8: Will there be animals, dinosaurs, and food in heaven?

We know that heaven will be full of God's good creation.

1 Corinthians 2:9 – “But, as it is written, What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him...”

Question 9: What is our only hope in life and death?

That we are not our own, but belong to God.

FAQs regarding Heaven

While we have laid out much of the theological structure to the core questions of heaven, it is not uncommon for us to experience specific questions that require the use of “biblical imagination.” Places where scripture provides principles without specificity. We have provided short answers to frequently asked questions here, but would also direct your attention to some of our recommended resources for further exploration.

- *What will life be like in the future heaven?*

Our life in the future heaven will be lived with God in a restored world. It will be filled with wonder, thanksgiving, praise, and vibrant living in God's redeemed and restored world. It will be free from sin, sickness, sorrow, suffering, shame, death, and Satan.

- *Will we recognize each other in heaven?*

We will see each other and know each other in ways we couldn't ever have imagined here. We will not be strangers to each other. One of the things that the story of Lazarus and the rich man seems to indicate is that we will retain some portion of our earthly memories as we transition into the life to come.

- *Where will the future hell be located?*

While the future heaven will be on earth, the future hell appears to be somewhere else. There are two images we get of those outside of heaven to come: those who are outside the gates and don't want to enter and the sentencing of the unrighteous to the lake of fire.

We can faithfully say that the future hell will be located outside of heaven.

- *Will we be married in heaven?*

Jesus says, “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage...” (Matt. 22:30) We will not be married in heaven, subsequently, we will not enjoy sexual intimacy in heaven. That being said: We can expect that in heaven we will enjoy a deep and intimate relationship

with our spouses. It is clear from scripture that we will retain some knowledge of our pre-resurrection memories and relationships.

- *What happens to babies/children when they die?*

One of the most common questions pastors receive when exploring the topic of death is concerning the tragic death of children. We are hesitant to answer this question abstractly as it sits at the center of some of the deepest grief one can know, but we think that the Bible gives sufficient grounds for us to conclude that infants and those who live beyond infancy but because of disability are incapable of making an informed choice go to be with God in heaven forever.

We believe the principle foundation of this hope is the grace of God to the most vulnerable. This is uniform throughout the story of scripture and the ministry of Jesus and serves as the foundation for this hope. (Matthew 19:13-15; Luke 18:15-17)

Beyond that, we discover in 2 Samuel 12:15-23 that when David's firstborn child with Bathsheba dies that David firmly believes, "Since he has died, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me." (2 Samuel 12:23)

- *What about those who don't hear the gospel?*

Another common question concerns those who have not heard the explicit details of the good news of the gospel and have been invited to trust in Christ. For those who are able to make an informed decision, but yet never hear the gospel: What happens to them?

In Romans 1:19-20, Paul says, "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."

According to scripture, we believe that for those who can make an informed decision, the created world presents them with enough of a witness to God that they are held accountable to their rejection or embrace of this creator and redeemer.

This is why it is crucial for the Christian to be a fervent evangelist, preaching the good news of Christ to every person, people, tribe, tongue, and nation.

- *What about those who died before the resurrection of Christ?*

Those who died before the resurrection of Christ entered into either the present heaven (for the righteous dead) or the present hell (for the unrighteous dead), where they will remain until the second coming of Christ where present heaven and present hell will be emptied out in the final resurrection/judgment to be welcomed forever into future heaven or future hell.

- *Where did Jesus go when he died and what was he doing?*

Jesus went to the depths of death, entering into what the Israelites would have understood to be the “underworld” or “place of the dead.” This place would have had compartments for both the righteous dead and the unrighteous dead. He was proclaiming His victory over sin, Satan, and death, a victory that was publically ratified, unveiled, and vindicated in His resurrection on the third day and ascension into heaven.

- *Who will be in heaven?*

Throughout the paper we have referred to the inhabitants of heaven as those who are “righteous in Christ.” Heaven will be inhabited by all those people who God receives into salvation by grace through faith in Jesus.

- *Who will be in hell?*

Hell will be inhabited by Satan, demonic forces, and all those who persist in rejection of God’s kingdom and grace in Christ Jesus.

- *Why is hell an appropriate consequence for sin?*

For some, the notion of forever judgment on sinners seems incongruent with the character of God or what is “fair.” Why is hell just?

Hell is just because God created humans as forever creatures. We are not eternal because we have a time when our life begins, but we are forever in that we have been created from the beginning to live forever with God.

When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, the stated consequence was death. But in the Bible, death is not merely the ending of earthly life, it is life under the judgment of God, separated from his blessed presence. While God has provided a path to salvation in Christ Jesus, for those who reject God it is their just reward to spend forever separated from the God they have rejected.

In many ways, hell is what those who reject God want: They reject God’s kingdom rule and reign and hell is God giving over those who reject His presence and kingdom to that desire.

- *Will our pets be in heaven?*

Heaven will be full of animals and creatures! And it’s quite possible that we will have pets in heaven.

- *Will we eat and drink in heaven?*

Absolutely! While Christians may agree or disagree on the specifics of what we will eat and drink (meat, vegetables, alcohol, coffee), we get a picture in Revelation of eating and drinking in heaven.

- *Is resurrection different from reincarnation? If so, how?*

Yes. Reincarnation is the view that one is reborn after death into a life that matches the just reward of their previous life. Our just reward by nature is forever death. Resurrection is different from reincarnation in that it holds forth resurrected and incorruptible forms of our current bodies and persons, a fully renewed and restored world free from brokenness, the surprising grace of heaven and the startling reality of hell.

Recommended Resources

As you have seen in this paper, the fundamental resource for the Christian exploration of any issue is Scripture, which is God's holy word. So any Christian exploration will begin with a serious consideration of what God's word says. At the same time, we are blessed to have Christians who have done strong work on the topics that matter and have written meaningful books on these crucial topics.

These are some of the resources the elders of Mosaic Church have found to be beneficial in exploring these topics from a biblical, theological, and historical perspective.

If you'd like to dig into this topic more, we encourage you to begin with reading the relevant scripture references throughout the paper, then moving toward the recommended resources in the order they are listed under each heading.

*(It should be noted that we do not endorse any of these resources as representative of the **whole** position or practice at Mosaic, but as helpful resources in exploring this topic further.)*

Biblical

- *Death and the Afterlife*, Paul Williamson

Theological

- *Grounded in Heaven*, Michael Allen

Practical

- *Heaven*, Randy Alcorn

For pre-K kids

- *God made me for Heaven*, Marty Machowski

For elementary age kids

- *Goodbye to Goodbyes*, Lauren Chandler

For older kids

- *Heaven: For Kids*, Randy Alcorn

[1] It is important to note that not all Bible scholars agree that Enoch and Elijah did not experience death. It is clear that Enoch and Elijah are moved into the life to come in a way that seems exceptional (outside of the norm), but we want to acknowledge there are a variety of faithful Christian perspectives on the circumstances surrounding their entrance into “life after death.”

[2] “The history of the doctrine of the intermediate state shows that it is hard for theologians and people in general to stay within the limits of Scripture and not attempt to be wiser than they can be. This preoccupation with the intermediate state is neither scriptural nor healthy.” (Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, pg. 706)

[3] NT Wright, *Resurrection and the Son of God*.