

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 2 August 2026. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Character of Hell's Citizens

In a tract entitled “The Last Warning,” the author of the tract tells the story of a man whom he had led to the Lord years earlier. (Since the author chose to remain unnamed, I will call him “Stanley.”) It was a Sunday afternoon; and Stanley was handing out tracts on the street. Two men approached him; and he offered both of them a tract entitled “**Just in Time.**” Both men took the tract; and one of them, as he was looking over the tract, read the title out loud: “Just in Time.” Now, this man was young, strong, handsome, in the prime of his life: yet, for some reason, Stanley felt a strange sense of foreboding as he looked into his eyes. He replied back, “Yes, my friend, and God grant you may be just in time for Heaven.” As the young man walked away, Stanley prayed for him, that he would be saved.

Well, on Tuesday night of that week, after Stanley had gone to bed, he heard a knock at his door. He quickly answered; and the man standing at the door asked whether he had given out a tract called “Just in Time” to a young man just two days ago. After Stanley affirmed that he had, indeed, given him that tract, the man urged him to come with him at once. Apparently, the young man who had taken that tract from Stanley just two days earlier was this man’s coworker, at a local coal mine; and that day, he had had a horrible accident. As he was going down into the mine shaft, he jumped out of the bucket before it reached the bottom; and somehow, he lost his footing, fell under the bucket, and was crushed. The young man was in terrible pain, and couldn’t even speak. All he could do was gasp for breath.

When Stanley reached the young man’s bedside, he didn’t waste any time. The man was looking at him with a pleading look, as though he were saying, “Please show me how to be saved!” Stanley opened his Bible, and read the words of **John 3:16**: “***For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.***” He told him about how sin entered into the world through our father Adam, and brought condemnation upon all of us. He then explained how Jesus, God’s Son, came into this world to seek and to save that which was lost; and he assured him that Jesus had been seeking after *him*. He showed him how Jesus shed His precious blood for us, so that our sin might be removed from God’s sight, and that we might be accepted into His family. He showed him the parable of the prodigal son who repented and returned to his father, and of the sinful publican who prayed the simple prayer, “***God, be merciful to me a sinner,***” and was saved at that very moment. He then read Jesus’ promise in **John 6:37**: “***All that the Father giveth me shall come to me: and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.***”

At this point, the young man’s face began to light up; and, to the astonishment of everyone in the room, he looked up, as though he were looking into the face of the Lord Himself. For hours, he had been unable to speak a single word; but now, he spoke clearly. He said, “Just in time! God be merciful to me a sinner, for Jesus Christ’s sake. Amen!” No sooner had he said these words than he fell back on his bed, and died. He had been saved just in time!

Yet, what was he saved *from*? Was he saved merely from the *penalty* of sin (the Lake of Fire)? No! He was also saved from *sin itself*. That's why Stanley spent so much time explaining to this dying man that he had a sin problem. You see, in order to be saved from *Hell*, you must desire to be saved from *sin*. You must turn to *Christ*, and ask Him to take your sin away. Christ forgives and saves sinners not just so that they might miss Hell, but so that they might become new creatures, created in righteousness and true holiness. Those who do not wish to become new creatures in Christ, and who die rejecting Him, will never again have the opportunity to become a new and holy creation. They will retain their sinful thoughts and lusts forever and ever, in the place that burns with fire and brimstone. The title of this seventh (and last) sermon in our series on Hell is ***The Character of Hell's Citizens***.

Read Revelation 22:11-15.

I. The verdict of Scripture

In the last six messages, we've examined the reality of Hell, and of the Lake of Fire. We've seen that the Lake of Fire is an everlasting, fiery prison, which God *originally* created for the devil and his angels. However, the Lake of Fire also become the eternal abode for mankind, after man fell into sin in the Garden of Eden. Because we have all rebelled against a holy God, Hell is the *default* destination of every man and woman on the face of this earth—*unless* one repent, and receive God's gift of salvation. That is why God solemnly warns us to ***"flee from the wrath to come."*** In Psalm 11:6, David wrote, ***"Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup."*** David also described Hell as a place of ***"fire"*** and ***"deep pits,"*** where the wicked will never rise up again.

Read Psalm 140:8-10.

All over the world today, scoffers and sceptics of the Bible say that "The Bible is ambiguous and vague. It can be interpreted in hundreds of conflicting ways. Therefore, the Bible isn't God's Word." However, this thinking is completely illogical. To illustrate, imagine this scenario. Suppose that an aging millionaire is approaching his death; and as his death draws near, he goes to great pains to make sure that the wording of his last will and testament is very precise, so that no one could possibly misunderstand how he wishes his estate to be divided up after he dies. Now, would these careful arrangements stop greedy family members from trying to get a piece of the pie that isn't rightly theirs? Probably not! We've all heard stories of ugly family feuds over inheritances. Lawsuits are waged, the words in people's wills are twisted, and "loopholes" are forced into the text. Though the wording may be ever-so-clear and unmistakable, avaricious people will always try to twist the text, to make it say what they want it to say. A perfect example of this is the ***Thellusson v. Woodford*** case, back in the 19th century. A man named Lord Thelluson left behind an estate of £14,000,000 (an incredible amount of money in those days), to be distributed equally to his "children, grandchildren and

great-grandchildren, living at the time of his death.” Of course, his descendants fought it out in the courts; and the dispute lasted from 1797 to 1859, when it finally had to be settled in the House of Lords! After it was all over, there was little left of the estate, because the costs for the legal proceedings had been taken out of the estate itself. (This case was so infamous, that it became the inspiration for the fictional case of *Jarndyce V. Jarndyce*, in Charles Dickens’ novel *Bleak House*.)

Should it have taken that long for the ***Thellusson v. Woodford*** case to be resolved? No, it shouldn’t! Undoubtedly, the wording was clear enough; but people didn’t want to *accept* the directives of the will, because it didn’t suit their fancy. Well, that’s the way it is with God’s revelation in His Word concerning sin, judgment, and eternity. The fact that people *twist the meaning* of God’s Word to suit their sinful fancies doesn’t change the fact that the Bible is God’s perfect, infallible Word. Its declarations have only one true meaning—the meaning that God, the Author, gave to them. As for Hell, God’s Word couldn’t be clearer: there *is* a real place of eternal punishment for sinners. Hell cannot be spiritualised or allegorised away, or reduced to a parable or metaphor, simply because people find it unbelievable, or “unjust.” Yet, people choose to spiritualise, allegorise, or simply ignore God’s Word every day. Most people choose to ignore the plain words of Scripture; and they “**wrest**” the Scriptures “**unto their own destruction.**” The problem isn’t that the text is unclear: the problem is that sinners choose to harden their hearts against God’s revelation. Most people refuse to acknowledge the criminal nature of their sin against God. Rather than acknowledge the truth that their sin has condemned them to the Lake of Fire, and that they therefore need to run to Christ for salvation, they simply choose to disbelieve what the Bible says. They would rather convince themselves that there is no Hell than to depart from sin, and run to the *true* Jesus of the Bible.

Read 2 Peter 3:14-16.

Before we get into the meat of **verse 16**, there is an important truth about the *Scriptures* that I would like to point out. Did you notice what Peter said about Paul’s letters? He referred to them as “Scripture”! He said that those who were unlearned and unstable had “**wrested**” (in other words, “twisted,” or “perverted”) Paul’s letters—just as they did to “**other**” Scriptures. Now, that’s a very important statement! What it shows us is that Christians *already* recognised Paul’s letters as being Scripture, during Paul’s own lifetime. It didn’t take hundreds of years of fierce debate before powerful bishops finally decided which books *they* wanted to deem as “Scripture” (as the Dan Browns of the world would have us believe). The New Testament canon of Scripture had already been decided by *all Christians everywhere*, while the Apostles were still living, without any general council! How did they all agree? Because they were all led by the voice of one Shepherd—the Lord Jesus Christ!

Now, with this in mind, let's look at what Peter says about the ***“unlearned”*** and ***“unstable.”*** (Read 2 Peter 3:16 again.) Folks, that the word ***“unlearned”*** does not mean “unintelligent.” Peter isn't talking about people's IQ, education, or mental capacity. Peter is *not* saying that “If you are not highly educated, you can't possibly understand Scripture: so just leave it to the scholars.” No, God has given born-again Christians the ability to understand *everything* that God has revealed in His Word. In 1 John 2:20 John says to Christians, ***“But ye have an unction (an anointing) from the Holy One, and ye know all things.”*** In other words, the Holy Spirit of God, who dwells in believers, gives us the ability to understand everything that God has revealed in His Word.

So, then, who *are* these ***“unlearned”*** people of whom Peter is speaking? They are people who are *wilfully* unlearned. He's talking about people who are *wilfully* ignorant. He's talking about people who either ignore, or twist, the truth of Scripture. He's talking about religious, but lost people, who don't *want* to see what God's Word really says about sin, salvation, righteousness, judgment, death, Hell, and things to come. These people wrest Scripture to make it say what they want to believe. They twist God's Word to make it appear that salvation is through good works, and that outward rituals can redeem us. They twist Scripture to make it look as though man is basically good; that sin isn't that big a deal; that there are “gods,” saints, angels, or other beings through whom we can get to God; that God isn't really going to judge us; or, that there isn't such a thing as Hell. They don't *really* want to know God's Word: instead, they want to soothe their consciences with comfortable lies. They may have a certain “knowledge” of Scripture; but they don't know its true meaning, nor its power. They may be *intellectually* “learned”; but spiritually, they are ignorant and ***“unlearned.”*** Not only that, but Peter says that they are ***“unstable.”*** In other words, their lives are teetering back and forth, and ready to collapse. Why? Because they have not built their lives upon the Rock of Jesus Christ! They are building their lives on the sinking sand of their own efforts, their own knowledge, and their own wisdom. They *choose not to hear God's Word*, and choose instead to “redeem” themselves in their own way. Tragically, they are heading toward destruction—not only in *this* life, but in *eternity*.

II. The vileness of Hell's citizens

Some of you may, at this very moment, be cringing inside. Perhaps you're thinking, “Pastor, don't you think you should tone it down a little? Do you really mean to use the word ‘vile’ to describe *everyone* in Hell? After all, aren't there lots of well-meaning people in Hell? We know that Hell is filled with *really* vile people, such as murderers, rapists, pimps, and drug lords; but what about the little old ladies who sincerely were trying to get to Heaven by being good people? Are you really saying that they are ‘vile’?” No, *I'm* not saying that they are vile: *God* does! The LORD said in Isaiah 64:6, ***“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.”*** Without getting graphic, I'll just speak in code, and

say that the Hebrew word for *“filthy”* refers to the most polluted kind of blood stain. *That* is how God sees our “good works”! Even our best deeds are polluted with sin, which is abhorrent to God. Sinners don’t see their sin as a big deal; but God sees our sin as vile and repulsive. In **Proverbs 21:2** Solomon wrote, *“Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts.”* Solomon also wrote, *“There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”*

Now, this brings us to the last aspect of Hell—the character of Hell’s citizens. What *is* the character of Hell’s citizens? It is **vileness** and **filthiness**! Let’s read our main passage again. (Read Revelation 22:11-15.)

In this passage, as the Lord Jesus was wrapping up the vision that He had given to John, He solemnly pronounced, *“He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.”* Christ then went on to say that those who *“do”* His commandments will have right to the tree of life in the heavenly New Jerusalem; but those *outside* the city of New Jerusalem (in the Lake of Fire) will be *“dogs”* (spiritually unclean people); *“sorcerers”* (practicers of the occult, and drug abusers); *“whoremongers”* (fornicators, adulterers, and all sexually impure people); *“murderers”* (including those who hate people in their hearts); *“idolaters”* (including those who worship anything other than God in their hearts); and *“whosoever loveth and maketh a lie”* (in other words, “liars”).

Christ’s meaning is clear: those who have been saved by His grace will obey His commandments, because He has given them a new heart and nature. They weren’t saved by doing good works: rather, they do good works because they have been saved. We can expect to see a change of heart and life, and an increasing pattern of holiness, in the lives of those who have been born again. On the other hand, those who have never repented and believed on Christ are still in the bondage to sin, and condemned; and if they continue to reject Christ, there is nothing more that Christ can do for them. Christ died for their sins, and has offered them His gift of salvation; but if they refuse Him, and pass out of this life without Him, their sinful character will be irrevocably fixed. Because they chose to love and cling to their sin, and not to repent of it, they will be *“unjust”* and *“filthy”* in mind, heart, and body, for all eternity; and they will be *“without”* (outside of) the city of New Jerusalem.

Folks, there is no getting around it: John says, *“He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still.”* That word *“still”* indicates *permanence*. “So what does this mean, Pastor?” It means that no amount of suffering in the flames of Hell will ever purge sinners of their sinful nature! Nor is there any similar place called “Purgatory” that can purge people of their sins, or our sinful nature. The Bible says in **Hebrews 1:3** that Christ

“purged our sins” all by Himself, on the cross. He has already done everything needed in order for our sins (and the sinful nature itself) to be removed. However, those who don’t *want* their sins to be removed will have their wish granted. If they die without repenting and believing on Christ, they will remain *“unjust”* and *“filthy”* still. They have rejected the One who could have washed their sin away, and have given them a new nature, and a new, sinless, glorified body: therefore, they will be consumed with the same impurity, lust, anger, hatred, bitterness, jealousy, vindictiveness, covetousness, selfishness, blasphemy, rebellion, pride, malice, dishonesty, and mercilessness that enchained them when they were on earth. Not only that, but the Bible indicates that people’s characters will be eternally fixed *at the level of wickedness* to which they had sunk when they were on earth.

Read Luke 16:22-28.

Read Ezekiel 32:18-32.

The rich man who went to Hell was at least concerned enough for his five brothers to beg for someone to go back to earth and warn them to repent, so that they wouldn’t join him in Hell. Evidently, he still had a functioning, but guilty, conscience. However, the Pharaoh of Ezekiel’s day didn’t have any such concern for anyone’s souls. In **Ezekiel 32**, God foretold that this Pharaoh would, in Hell, find a certain sadistic “comfort” in knowing that his own Egyptian soldiers were dying and going to Hell, and joining him in his torment!

Folks, the Bible says that there will be *degrees of punishment* in Hell, according to the depths of wickedness to which people sank upon earth—and according to the amount of truth that they knew, yet rejected. In **Matthew 11:20-24**, Jesus said that the religious, but lost people in the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum will suffer greater judgment than the wicked people of Sodom will suffer, because Christ preached in their very midst, yet they rejected Him. There *will*, unquestionably, be greater and lesser degrees of punishment in Hell. However, there will also be *varying degrees of wickedness* in the inhabitants of Hell, according to the degree of wickedness that they chose to embrace in this life. Sin was what they wanted; thus, sin is what they will get for all eternity: and they will get it in the measure to which they filled their cup in this lifetime.

The character of the inhabitants of Hell will forever be “sinfulness.” Hell is not some sort of “purgatory” designed to purge away sins with fire. The only thing that can purge sins is the one-time sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Many inhabitants of Hell undoubtedly cry out to God for mercy, while others curse His name; but *all* inhabitants of Hell will be sinners for all eternity, and will thus be eternally barred from Heaven.

III. The vocation of Heaven's citizens

Read Ephesians 4:1-3.

In these verses, Paul urged the Christians in the church of Ephesus to “**walk worthy of the vocation** [or “calling”] to which they were called. What does Paul mean, exactly? Well, first of all, that word “**worthy**” means “as becomes,” or “in a way that is befitting.” Paul is saying that a Christian’s lifestyle should match his “vocation.” And what *is* the believer’s “vocation”? Jesus answered that question when He said, “***They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.***”

When Jesus said that He came to call sinners to *repentance*, He was talking about the calling to *salvation*. This means that **the Christian’s “vocation” (or calling) is to salvation**. Time and time again, the Bible says that God *calls* sinners to repent and be saved. But here’s the deal: God’s call is more than just a call to have your sins forgiven so that you can go to Heaven when you die. It is a call to *turn to God from sin*! That is why Christ saves people in the first place—so that He can free them from the tyranny of the sin nature, and give them the power to live righteously. A person who has truly repented of his sin, and received God’s gift of salvation, is one who has *changed his mind* about his sin. He doesn’t want to live in sin anymore. Yes, he wants God to forgive him so that he can go to Heaven (because he knows that he can’t save himself); but he also wants God to *break the power of sin* in his life, so that he can live righteously. In **1 Thessalonians 4:7**, Paul says to believers, “***For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.***”

Now, we often use the word “**vocation**” to refer to a person’s line of work. We would all expect, for example, that a person with the vocation of “mechanic” would love cars, and that he should be learning more and more about how to fix them. What would you do, then, if you went into a garage and asked the mechanic to fix your cracked radiator; and he sluggishly turned down the volume on the telly, and said that fixing cars isn’t “really his thing”? You’d say, “Excuse me? I thought you were supposed to be a mechanic!” You’d exit that garage quickly, would you not? Now, what if the man got angry at you and said, “How dare you say I’m not a mechanic? I *said* I’m a mechanic, didn’t I? I have a nice garage, don’t I?” But it wouldn’t matter, would it? He may *claim* that he’s a mechanic; but his claim is meaningless. Why? Because his *actions and desires* don’t match his profession. His total lack of knowledge and experience with cars, or even love for cars, tells you that he is a fraud, and that his garage is a deceptive outward front.

Likewise, we can expect that a person who is truly saved will love the Lord, love His Word, and strive to become more and more like Christ. If a person *say* he’s saved, yet has never shown any evidence of love for God, or of a desire to allow God to change his way of living, then I can only assume that this person has never truly been born again. Now, unfortunately, there are many people who *are* truly saved; but somewhere along the way, they’ve stopped

submitting to God; and they have begun to walk “*unworthily*” of their vocation as saints. A saved person who has stopped submitting to God, and allowing God to change him, is like a doctor who has genuine credentials as a doctor, but who is losing his zeal for medicine, and isn’t learning any new innovations or medical treatments. Even though he’s a genuine doctor, he is becoming less and less a help to anyone. Likewise, a Christian who is walking unworthily of his vocation is in no position to lead others to Christ. He is saved, but ineffective. A lost person, on the other hand, has *never* answered the call to salvation, and does *not* have Christ’s righteousness at all.

And so, as we wrap up this series, I would ask: “Do you know that you’ve been saved?” Many people claim to be “saved” or “born again,” yet they have never come to God on His terms of true repentance and faith in Christ. They sin constantly, and think little to nothing of it: yet they come to God with lips full of feigned praises on Sunday, and think that this somehow makes them O.K. with God. Many people go to the bars and drink alcohol on the weekends, or commit fornication with a partner outside the bond of marriage, or lie, or cheat, or use foul language all week long; yet they go to church on Sunday, and think that they are saved because they do “Christian” things. To those who think this way, the Apostle Paul says this:

Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

If you think these words are harsh, please realise that the real Author of these words was not Paul, but the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the eternal, living Word of God, and our Creator and Judge. We will *all* stand before Him to be judged one day; and all who did not repent and believe on Christ in this lifetime will be barred from the Kingdom of God; will be eternally condemned to the Lake of Fire; and will remain in their sin for all eternity. Please don’t let that be your fate! If you’re not saved, Christ is calling you today; and you don’t know when His last call will be. Humble your heart today, and ask Christ to come into your heart, and be your Lord and Saviour!

Conclusion: As we close this series on Heaven and Hell, I would like to relate a true story. Back in the 1920’s, as the United States Senate was in session one day, there was a heated debate between two senators; and one senator told the other senator to go “straight to hell.” The senator who had been insulted turned to Vice President Calvin Coolidge (who was the presiding officer of the Senate), and complained about this outrage. Coolidge, who was a man of few words, calmly looked up from a book that he had been reading; and he simply said, “I’ve been looking through the rule book. You don’t have to go.”¹ (In other words, “You don’t *have* to go to Hell.”)

Whether Coolidge himself was a genuine, born-again believer, I don’t know. However, I wholeheartedly agree with the statement that he made. As we close this morning, I, too, would say: “I’ve been reading

through *this* Book; and I'm here to tell you that *you don't have to go*." You don't *have* to wake up in Hell. You don't *have* to lift up your eyes in torment one day, as the rich man did! God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Christ desires to "**wash**" you with His precious, saving blood; to "**sanctify**" you (set you apart to serve Him); and to "**justify**" you (declare you to be righteous). If you've not received His gift of salvation, He is knocking at your heart's door. He desires to come into your heart, and have sweet fellowship with you, and sit on the throne of your life, as Lord and Master. Jesus said, "***Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.***" If you're not saved (or if you're not absolutely sure that you are saved), don't put off the matter of salvation. Repent and believe on Christ this morning, and ask Him to come into your heart, and be your Lord and Saviour. And if you are saved, **walk worthy of the vocation** with which you were called! When Christ called you to salvation, He called you so that He might give you the freedom and power to live a holy life for God. One day, in Heaven, you will be free from the sin nature entirely; but until then, "***let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.***"

¹ Robert Morgan, *Preacher's Sourcebook of Creative Sermon Illustrations* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2007), p. 434.