A SIMPLE EXPLANATION OF HEAVEN AND HELL
DEATH SCARES US

And yet, our culture often views death as a good thing because it eliminates the weak, the inconvenient, the outsider, the unwanted. People often view death as an escape route, either for another person or for themselves. While it is true that, as Christians, we believe that our loved ones who die in Christ are consoled in His presence and will be raised again on the Last Day (more on that later!), it is still important to recognize that death is evil and out of place in our world.

Death is not a natural part of the world we live in; rather, it is a punishment that comes as a result of the first humans disobeying the Creator: “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’” (Genesis 2:16–17). After Adam and Eve eat of the fruit, the Lord speaks the following curse to Adam, and by extension over all of humanity:
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 (Genesis 3:19).

The Bible tells us again and again that death is an evil, alien force that invaded this world. And yet, death is not the end.

**WHAT HAPPENS AFTER WE DIE?**

Death is the separation of the soul from the body. Solomon says that in death “the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7). God designed us to be both spiritual soul and physical body, and His original design did not include the two ever being torn apart from each other.

We can’t say much about death or what happens afterward; the Bible just doesn’t tell us much (and we don’t really need to know, anyway), but Scripture does say a few things.
poverty, cancer, family dysfunction, child abuse, hostile workplaces, dementia, abortion, theft, deceit, murder, betrayal, sexual assault, natural disasters, war, suicide. All of these things exist in our world because of the fall into sin; Satan and his legions wreak havoc across the world. Not only that, but oftentimes, the evil in this world comes as a direct result of evil people.

Now, all people are corrupted by sin: St. Paul writes, “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked . . . and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind” (Ephesians 2:1, 3). Christ, perfect God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, took on human flesh and frailty in order to deal with our sinful nature. He died on the cross, bearing the weight of all our sins and all our sinful selves. In our Baptism, Christ takes our wretched sinfulness and exchanges it for His own holy, pure righteousness. Our sin is no longer ours; it is His, and His righteousness is now ours. Consider the following from the prophet Isaiah:
But He was pierced for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
upon Him was the chastisement that
brought us peace,
and with His wounds we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his
own way;
and the Lord has laid on Him
the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:5–6)

What a great exchange! Christ has done
what no man ever could—He has saved us from
the death and hell we deserved.

But what of those who reject this gift?
What of those who throw Christ’s righteousness back in His face and snatch back their
own sinfulness? What of those who declare, “I
have no need of You, God! I am going to do
this myself, without You!” Then Christ grants
them what they ask for: separation from God.
This is what hell ultimately is. Our loving God
gives these people what they want, and what
they want is a universe without God. Hell was
never intended for man; it was first and foremost the place into which God cast out the angels who rebelled against Him—the devil and his hordes. But to those who want to be separated from God, who reject their need for a Savior and say they will do it themselves, they ultimately choose hell.

This is an important distinction to make: Christians are predestined by God unto salvation. From before the foundations of the world, God inscribed Christ’s name onto your heart. What comfort this brings!

The Bible rejects the doctrines of both free will and double predestination. Free will says that we choose God; but Scripture says we are utterly dead in our sin and trespasses. Just as Christ called Lazarus from the dead and Lazarus did not “choose” to be resurrected, so also our faith is made in us as a pure gift by the Holy Spirit.
WHAT DOES SCRIPTURE TEACH US ABOUT HELL?

Jesus talks about hell more than anyone else in the Scriptures. Hell is not just an “Old Testament doctrine” or something from the “Old Testament God”! The God of the Old Testament and New Testament is the same, good, loving, just, eternal God. What does this mean in light of God’s judgment? God did not wipe out Adam and Eve as soon as they sinned, nor did He condemn them on the spot to hell—even though that is what we all deserve!

Think about it: we send murderers to prison, and we acknowledge that this is a just punishment for a heinous crime. We may not be murderers, but we constantly hurt our neighbor in thought, word, and deed. Even worse, we, along with our first parents, broke and continue to break the very relationship between God and man that made all of creation good! As we confess in worship, we are, by nature, sinful and unclean, hating God and neighbor. But our God is good, loving, just, and eternal.