

I do not believe in Hell, but in the deep recesses of my mind a tiny part of me ponders if perhaps, just maybe, Hell is a real place. Growing up agnostic, I have never attended church or prayed. This has led me to wonder how my life would be different if I had faith in Christianity. I question if I could truly feel comforted by having total faith in God and the afterlife? Would these beliefs feel too limiting? I can imagine feeling comfort in knowing everything is going according to God's plan; that there is a reason for every low and every high I've experienced. But would I also feel tormented that living an unholy lifestyle would lead to God's punishment of a miserable afterlife?

My piece revolves around this idea of eternal damnation and uncertainty in faith. In my painting, you can see the devil tormenting two damned souls in the biblical version of Hell. Through this violent imagery, I hope to make the viewer question their final destination, and the idea of Hell itself. The dark colors and mood help to emphasize the horror that comes with the fear of Hell.

By creating this painting, I have allowed myself to explore my relationship with religion and the afterlife. I have come closer to accepting the fact that the possibility of life after death is unknown, and that this uncertainty is something we must endure as humans.

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Hell

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I am extremely fearful of discussing the possible existence of Hell with anyone. Although I do not believe in Hell, but in the deep recesses of my mind a tiny part of me ponders if perhaps, just maybe, Hell is a real place. I had never given much thought about the afterlife until 2018, when my family and I took a trip to Italy. By the time we visited the Sistine Chapel, we had already been to many tourist attractions, so I wasn't feeling very excited about visiting another one. It was swelteringly hot; I was tired, and my feet hurt. I begrudgingly walked into the chapel. To my surprise, I was immediately struck by the wall depicting "The Last Judgement." I remember feeling sickened by the depiction of Hell on the wall. On the left, those whose souls were saved were ascending into Heaven. On the right, those whose souls were damned were descending into the fiery pits of Hell. You can see the mass of people confined in a small area,



being tortured by demons and snakes. The entire painting made me uncomfortable but also provoked me to consider many new ideas I'd never explored before. These thoughts were so disturbing, I couldn't keep them to myself, so I asked my parents, "Why would God send his creations to Hell for not worshipping him when there is no proof of his existence? Isn't that selfish and narcissistic?" My parents didn't have an answer, and neither do I.

Growing up agnostic, I have always been curious about religion. For me, agnosticism means uncertainty. There have been moments in my life, when I've hit extreme lows, that I have found myself praying to God even though I am unsure of His existence. At other times I have wished I was raised Catholic and worshipped God. I wonder if I could truly feel comforted by having total faith in God and the afterlife. Would these beliefs feel too limiting? I can imagine feeling comfort in knowing everything is going according to God's plan; that there is a reason for every low and every high I've experienced. But would I also feel tormented that living an unholy lifestyle would lead to God's punishment of a miserable afterlife? I cannot help but wonder why God would send one of his creations to Hell to be tortured for eternity, or what anyone could possibly do in their lifetime to warrant this fate.

Through my research and life experience I have heard of many different variations of Hell. Although they differ, they all depict a terrible fiery underground world whose inhabitants are forever suffering.

In the Bible, Hell is described as a place where the souls of those who have not accepted God are forced to roam for eternity. It is a dark space within the Earth's core, filled with flames and a "lake of fire." Demons live within Hell in order to torture and frighten the damned souls.

According to biblebelievers.com "Not only is there physical suffering, but there is also a great deal of MENTAL suffering. You'll always remember your earthly life. You'll remember your family and your friends. You'll remember your spouse and your children. Just as the rich man in Luke 16, you'll remember it all! You'll also remember the chances that you had to be saved. You'll remember reading this paper, and you'll remember your thoughts and comments about this paper. In Hell, you will always remember the moment that you REJECTED Jesus Christ as your Savior. All sinners go to Hell, and they go there to suffer."

Even in pop culture, Hell has been depicted in different ways, from the most traditional version in the bible to a psychological personal Hell. In "Disenchantment" by Matt Groening, characters are tied up and forced to watch the worst part of their life over and over again. In "No Exit" by Jean-Paul Sartre, three damned souls are confined in a small room together for eternity.

Although every depiction of Hell has a slight variation to the next, the concept is always the same: a place where damned souls are forced to reside for eternity. This led me to wonder, "Why do so many people believe in this horrific version of the afterlife known as Hell?"

Believers often sight the Bible as proof that Hell is real. Many passages warn humans of a torturous afterlife if they do not accept Jesus Christ and Christianity as their religion.

*"...the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame."*

*Luke 16:22-24.*

*"But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

*Matthew 8:12.*

After reading passages from many biblical sites, I have concluded that many people have faith in Hell because it gives them structure and purpose. An individual will live by higher morals in hopes their good deeds will allow them to enter Heaven. Their desire to be "good" is also motivated by their fear of descending to Hell. Many moralistic humans gain peace of mind by choosing to live their life in accordance with the Bible

with comfort that the result will be salvation in the afterlife.

I am intrigued by the fear associated with religion. On many Christian websites, the writers describe Hell in great detail in order to frighten the reader into believing in Hell. On [www.biblebelievers.com](http://www.biblebelievers.com), a passage reads, “There are no smiling faces in Hell, only the faces of pain, agony and sorrow. You'll remember all of the pretty, smiling faces that you once knew, but you'll never see them again. You'll never see your children again. You'll never see your family again. In Hell, friend, you'll see nothing except weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth forever!” This fear is often depicted in movies when a character is on their deathbed, and they manage to utter the words, “I accept Jesus Christ as my lord and saviour.” The idea of a last minute death bed repentance is vastly different from those who live their whole lives answering to a higher calling in accordance with the Bible. The repenters have no time to prove their devotion to God but somehow they are to be welcomed into the pearly gates just the same. In both scenarios, the fear of Hell drives humans to find faith in the end.

Pascal’s Wager is an argument in favor of faith. According to Britannica, “Pascal posed the following argument to show that belief in the Christian religion is rational: If the Christian God does not exist, the agnostic loses little by believing in him and gains correspondingly little by not believing. If the Christian God does exist, the agnostic gains eternal life by believing in him and loses an infinite good by not believing.” This argument deduces that one should take the “safer route” and believe in God, as there is no downside. As the famous idiom says, “better safe than sorry.”

Throughout this project, I have explored many new topics and gained new insights, yet I am still unsure if I can truly believe in Heaven and Hell. I relate to Michelangelo, who painted his own image into the “The Last Judgment.” In the mural, Michelangelo is depicted as a shell of a man hovering between Heaven and Hell. This represents the uncertainty he felt about the fate of his own soul. His feelings of uncertainty resonate with me as well - If Heaven and Hell are real places, I am unsure of my final destination.



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