

The Christian belief in a final, eternal separation from God (hell) is never going to be a popular doctrine. It creates all kinds of questions in our minds, some on which the bible seems to be clear on, others about which we can be less certain.

But nevertheless, some things in this passage are clear.

Start by reading Matthew 13: 47-52

1. Do you believe God is unfair, vindictive given to finding pleasure in people's suffering?
2. Do you believe that Jesus speaks with final authority on all matters of life and death? If so why?
3. Why is deciding on what you believe about the authority of the speaker the most important starting point on this or any other question in life?

The separation will be on the basis of whether we are righteous or wicked.

Jesus says the righteous will be in his kingdom and the wicked will not.

5. What do **we** normally associate with the words righteous and wicked? What kind of images do they conjure up?

6. Read Matthew 13: 38, 13:43, 13:45 and look at the way Jesus defines the righteous in his kingdom?

What does this teach us about how Jesus defines the righteous?

The righteous are the ones who accept Jesus authority; that they need to receive his grace, his mercy, his rule, and be adopted as God's children in order to be blessed under his rule forever.

If this is the case, then those who are not righteous desire life under any other rule than Christ's. God gives them what they choose.

7. Do you think this will lead to frustration, dissatisfaction and regret? Why do you think that will feel like a fiery furnace?

8. Some answers this passage does not have for us. Do you trust God enough to believe that he is fair, even if we cannot always trace out how?

Jesus lays before us a clear message. Those who accept his righteousness under his rule spend eternity with him. Those who choose against that live with their choices and experience the fiery furnace.

This leaves questions unanswered. But God has told us. What have we done about it. And given that this is what he has told us clearly – how does this affect our attitude to those who know nothing yet about his rule?