DEAR REVEREND: I have a friend who claims that the Bible is true but spiritually false; that it actually is a set of rules to live by, but spiritually it goes to heaven, and that hell doesn't exist. This isn't what I was taught as a boy in Sunday school, but it is what the Bible teaches. DEAR A.T.: No, this is not what the Bible says. Just as the Bible teaches the joyous reality of heaven, so it also teaches the terrible reality of hell. Jesus warned that on that last judgment God will say to those who have rejected Him: “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” These are solemn words, and we ignore them at our peril. They tell us that someday all who lived evil lives will be judged, and will have to pay the price for their rebellion against God and for their rebellion against others. They know what they have failed to do, and they do not know what they have failed to do. They also knew what they were doing, and what they were doing was evil. The Bible promises that they will be without excuse and will have no defense when they stand before God. The Bible says, “You will be punished with everlasting destruction at the judgment reserved for the devil and his angels.” The Bible doesn’t mean “don’t worry about our answers. We are sure that our answers are correct.”

It’s important to remember that there is a difference between honestly admitting that we are weak and a self-focused feeling of inadequacy. For all of us, there are things in our lives that we want to change but have no real desire to do so. Therefore this may well lead us easy down the road of focusing on our own inadequacy—finding it much easier to focus on our weaknesses than through our lives to see what He surely can do. How do we deal with these feelings of inadequacy? Well, we can try to overcome them by doing things that seem big enough to make us feel important or significant. We can attempt to cover those feelings by pretending the feelings are not real. We can seek to escape from them by immersing ourselves in some life preoccupation or even selfish pleasure. We can give in to them and “act” real big and important. Or we can accept our feelings of inadequacy as a reality of our human weakness and lean on God’s strength instead. We can ask God to help us make choices of faith in spite of feelings of inadequacy. Instead of focusing on or fighting it, God can turn it into a way of showing our faith in a God who is more than adequate. Let’s try praying something like this: “Father, you know how I feel about myself right now. I’m tired of pretending I’m strong when deep down I know I’m not. So I ask you to use me in my weakness. I trust in your truth that in weak, you are strong.”