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PREACHING ON A FORGOTTEN DOCTRINE: HELL



PREACHING • TEACHING • TRAINING



STEADFAST HOPE

with STEVEN J. LAWSON

ONEPASSION MINISTRIES

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A WORD ABOUT HELL

DR. STEVEN J. LAWSON, PRESIDENT, ONEPASSION MINISTRIES



“Hell” is often a word heard more from unconverted men on a golf course than from biblical preachers standing in a pulpit. It is a word used more to spice up an ungodly conversation than to address a congregation.

This naturally raises the question: Why do we hear so little about hell in church?

The first among many reasons is the fact that the subject is so distasteful. No one really enjoys speaking about this truth. Who actually *wants* to talk about the awful realities of the lake of fire and brimstone? Our natural inclination is to avoid the matter like the plague.

A second reason is surely the preacher’s desire to maintain his support from the congregation. Preaching on hell is sure to cost him popularity with at least some percentage of his flock.

Third, the subject is so jolting that just one sermon on eternal punishment feels like sitting through an untold number of them. Because of its solemn weightiness, a single sermon on hell must feel like a lengthy series on this truth.

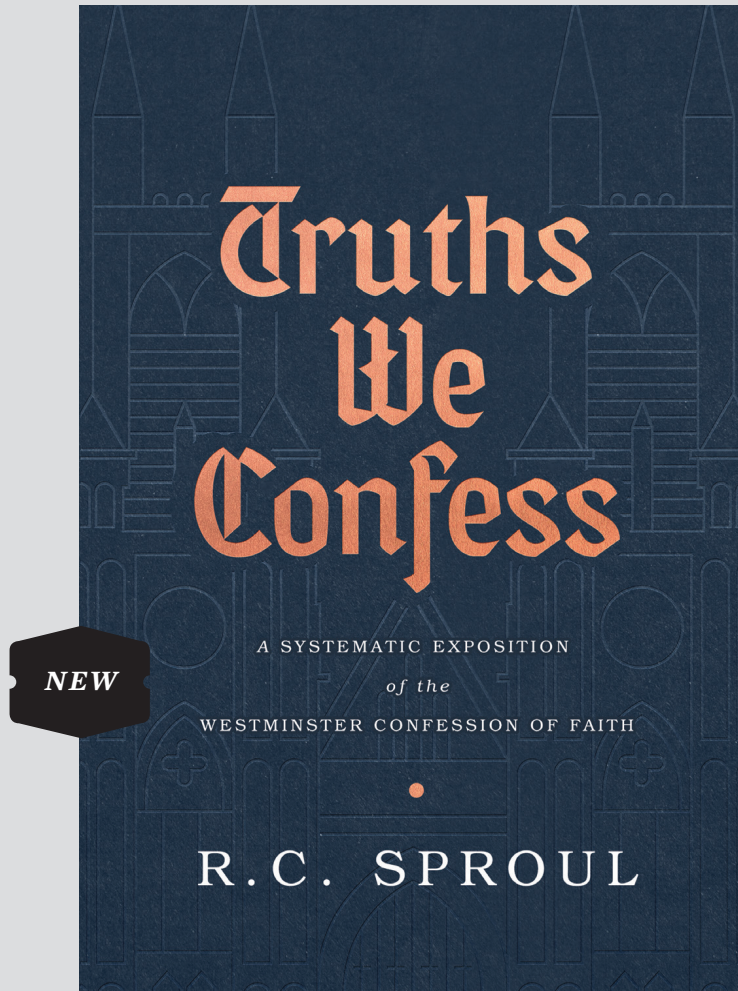
Fourth, preaching on hell would probably be more likely to empty the church before it would fill it. Who wants to shrink a church when you could preach on some other subject that will fill it?

Finally, preaching on hell will surely ruffle some feathers, and most pastors have enough troubles without adding to the list of their ministry difficulties.

For all of these reasons and more, the subject of hell is regularly avoided and rarely addressed in the modern-day pulpit. This needs to change.

In an attempt to correct this imbalance, I have written this entire issue of *Expositor* as a special edition entirely devoted to the subject of hell. Though this topic may seem daunting as outlined above, there is no need to fear or avoid it. Rather, preaching on hell can be wholesome, helpful, and clarifying for both your congregation and yourself.

My prayer is that this issue will awaken you to the need to preach on this provocative and potent truth found in the pages of Scripture. May God be magnified in the faithful exposition of this important doctrine. ♦



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STEVEN J. LAWSON

EXPOSITOR
ONEPASSION



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**THE
FORGOTTEN
DOCTRINE**

**WHATEVER HAPPENED
TO PREACHING ON HELL?**

STEVEN J. LAWSON

What one doctrine is most neglected in pulpits today? A strong case can be made that it is the biblical teaching on the subject of hell. Much of contemporary preaching is so focused upon life in the here and now that it has virtually lost all sight of eternity and the final destinies of men and women. What comes from the mouths of most pastors is a fixed preoccupation with how to live on Monday morning, while they often tragically lose sight of preparation for the world to come.

In this respect, many preachers have become sadly short-sighted. They suffer from spiritual myopia—they can only see what is immediately before them, to the neglect of everything else. They have lost sight of what is in the far distance, but is quickly approaching. This is tragic, because the brief span of our present lives is so short. It is like a vapor that appears and is soon gone. This short lifespan can be compared to one grain of sand on all the beaches of an endless eternity. There are ages upon ages to come. We must prepare now for what awaits us beyond the grave.

ONLY TWO DESTINIES

There are only two destinies after death—heaven and hell. No other places exist. We occasionally hear something about the afterlife at a funeral. We may sometimes hear about heaven in a song. But rarely, if ever, do we hear about hell. The truth about the eternal punishment of the wicked has truly become the forgotten doctrine in the church.

When was the last time you heard a sermon on hell? When was the last time you preached a message on this somber subject? When was the last time you warned your congregation about entering such a terrible place? When was the last time you read an entire book—or even a chapter—on hell?

It is incumbent upon us, as preachers, to open the Bible and proclaim the full counsel of God. A comprehensive exposition of Scripture would be impossible without teaching what the Bible says about hell—and admonishing our listeners of the horrors therein. We have become strangely quiet on this solemn subject. We hesitate to speak on the lake of fire and brimstone because it sounds uncouth. You would think the verses on hell had been removed from our Bibles. This condemning silence from the contemporary pulpit should be deafening to our ears.

In past generations, the eternal punishment of unbelievers was a truth often addressed without apology. A healthy sense of the fear of God once gripped the preacher as he taught on this terrifying subject. His pulpit was once ablaze with lightning flashes and shook with the crackling thunder of divine wrath as he spoke on hell. Warnings were regularly issued, lest anyone should enter such a place. Eternity was emblazoned upon the mindset of the one who stood in the pulpit as

he preached to those who sat in the pew. But such days seem to be past.

An expositor being called a “hellfire and brimstone” preacher was once synonymous with being a Bible preacher. Today, it is considered to be a demeaning stereotype. Preaching on hell is now regarded as socially unacceptable. Exhortations about the lake of fire and brimstone are deemed to be out of vogue—not in step with the times.

None of us are free to withhold any part of the Bible, no matter how uncomfortable it makes us. We must return to a full-orbed presentation of the whole truth of Scripture. We must herald this biblical subject of eternal perdition in our sermons.

As preachers, all that should matter to us is what God has said in His inspired Word. If we preach all that He has put into His Word, we will please God. And if we please God, it does not matter whom we displease. But if we displease God by holding back parts of His Word, it does not matter whom we please on earth. This makes our responsibility in preaching ultimately simple—we must strive to please God by preaching the *entire* counsel of His Word. Even the less popular truths of eternal condemnation.

In this issue of *Expositor*, I want to impress upon you why we must preach on hell. I then want to survey both the Old and New Testaments concerning this sobering doctrine. I also want to give you a brief introduction to those who deny the biblical truth of eternal punishment. May God use these pages to renew your commitment to preach the truth of the damnation of sinners in a real place called hell.

WHY MUST YOU PREACH ON HELL

As we begin our investigation on the subject, I want to address the reasons why every preacher must speak on the subject of hell. This is not an option for us to consider. Rather, if we are to be faithful and true to the Word of God, this is an absolute necessity—even a mandate—to preach the doctrine of hell. The following seven reasons should strongly motivate and compel each one of us to address this truth in our preaching.

1. Hell is taught in the Bible. Eternal punishment is a biblical doctrine that is rooted and grounded in the Word of God. As we shall see later in this issue, the truth of hell is taught in both the Old and New Testaments. The subject is especially emphasized by Jesus Christ in the Gospels and by the apostle John in the book of Revelation. It is also taught by the psalmists, the prophets, John the Baptist, the apostles, and other biblical writers. If you are committed to preaching the Bible, then you will address this weighty truth. But a failure to preach on the doctrine of hell is a failure to preach the full revealed Word of God.

2. Hell magnifies the cross. In preaching on hell, we see the glory of the cross greatly enhanced and enlarged. What

Jesus Christ suffered in His death for sinners is magnified as we consider what He endured upon the cross. Only damned souls now in hell can begin to grasp something of the awful agony that Jesus suffered as He bore the wrath of God in our place. He suffered our condemnation as He stood in our place, bearing our punishment that was unleashed upon Him. Jesus' physical suffering was minimal compared to the divine wrath He endured upon the cross.

3. Hell awakens the conscience. God often uses preaching on hell to awaken the slumbering conscience of one who is perishing in his sins. When he hears he is under divine wrath and that an eternity in hell awaits him, he is often alarmed by the helpless state of his lost soul. When confronted with the grim reality of eternal punishment, the unregenerate are stirred in their conscience and brought to faith in Christ. Though the love of God ultimately captures them in salvation, we must never negate the fact that God also uses the lake of fire to strike their hearts and provoke their consciences.

4. Hell sobers believers. There is such a gravitas created by preaching on hell that it produces a healthy sobriety in believers. Who can remain spiritually flippant when the reality of eternal punishment looms large before so many? Strong preaching on hell generates a holy fear of God within those who have been saved from it. It removes shallowness from believers marked by worldly trivialities, replacing it with reverential awe for God. Spiritual maturity, in this way, is marked by a profound gratitude for rescue from divine punishment through the gospel.

5. Hell promotes sanctification. As believers sit under preaching on hell, they are constrained to forsake the sins that damn unconverted souls and lead to the pit below. God uses hell to cause believers to have an utter disdain for the same sins that condemn others. Temptation is often more easily resisted by the saints when one considers the eternal punishment that many will suffer for that very sin. Acts of sin appear more hideous and repulsive when seen in light of hell. There are no small or inconsequential sins—without the atoning work of Christ, all sins lead to eternal, agonizing punishment.

6. Hell enhances heavenly glory. The darkness of hell causes the glories of heaven to shine all the brighter. It is the black velvet backdrop that causes the bright diamond to sparkle the most in its fullest luster. Likewise, it is the stark blackness of the pits of hell that causes the brightness of heaven to shine with an even greater glory. As with the gospel, it is the bad news that causes the good news to truly shine as the greatest news. In like manner, it is the torment of the damned in hell that causes the perfect happiness of saints in heaven to stand in even starker contrast.

7. Hell energizes evangelism. The reality of hell creates a compelling sense of urgency to preach the gospel and win the lost to Christ. The truth of an eternity in hell causes our preaching to be more persuasive in our gospel appeals from

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HELL WILL BE A PARTICULAR PLACE, WHERE THOSE WILL BE WHO ARE CONDEMNED TO HELL OR TO THE ETERNAL WRATH OF GOD.... NO DOUBT IT NOW IS, AND WILL BE, FAR WORSE THAN ANYONE IS ABLE TO DESCRIBE, PICTURE, OR THINK IT TO BE.

MARTIN LUTHER

GERMAN REFORMER

the pulpit. The thought of sinners being held in chains of darkness throughout the ages should motivate us in our preaching to be even more evangelistic. We must be pressed to be more persuasive in our free offer of the gospel through our invitations to come to faith in Christ.

We arrive now to our survey of the entire Bible on the subject of hell. The limitations of space do not allow for a thorough investigation of every biblical text that addresses this subject. Nor do we have space to address every aspect of the ancient heresies that have corrupted this truth. Our goal here is simply to provide an overview of the Scripture on this subject with a wide-angle lens so that you will have the basic tools to include it in your preaching.

OLD TESTAMENT: THE PSALMS AND PROPHETS

Admittedly, the Old Testament has little to say about the important subject of hell. For the most part, there are only limited generalities spoken in the Old Testament about what awaits unbelievers after death. We have only veiled references to their eternal punishment. The majority of the Old Testament's emphasis on death includes words like "the grave," "the pit," "the trap," "the earth," "Sheol," "death," and "Abaddon."

For the most part, we must look to the New Testament for the fullest revelation of the punishment of the wicked. But the same can be said for many major doctrines that are taught

in the Bible. For example, the doctrine of the Trinity is only hinted at in the Old Testament. It is not until the New Testament that its truth is more explicitly stated. Similarly, the doctrine of hell is introduced in the Old Testament and elucidated further in the New Testament.

This gradual unfolding of doctrinal truth is known as progressive revelation. That is, truths stated in the Old Testament are increasingly enlightened over the 1,600 years it took to write the Bible. What is dimly stated in the Old Testament receives a much clearer and more fully developed treatment in the New Testament. So, where can we look in the Old Testament for direct references to the subject of hell?

THE PSALMISTS

In the book of Psalms, a few psalmists make initial statements about the eternal destruction that awaits the wicked after their death. Each of these lays foundational stones for our understanding of the biblical truth about hell.

Anonymous Psalmist

Hell contains those who are perishing. The first psalm clearly states that the wicked will end in a state of perishing. There is no evidence given, nor any hope extended, that these sinners would ever be relieved of their perishing after death. Once the wicked are perishing after the final judgment, it is to

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THE WICKED IN HELL SHALL BE ALWAYS DYING
BUT NEVER DEAD. THE SMOKE OF THE FURNACE
ASCENDS FOREVER AND EVER.

THOMAS WATSON

PURITAN PREACHER

be reasonably assumed that they are forever perishing. This truth is so foundational that it is placed at the very beginning of the book of Psalms as a warning to hypocrites who come to the house of God in vain worship.

For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish (Ps 1:6).

The Lord will be intimately involved with the righteous, both now and, it is reasonable to assume, forevermore. At the same time, He will be causing the wicked to perish, it is implied, both now and forever. The rest of the Bible will reinforce this: the wicked will perish perpetually in hell.

David

The psalmist David was “a man after God’s own heart” (1 Sam 13:14). He is known as “the sweet singer of Israel,” a man with a passionate love for God. Nevertheless, David also spoke of the divine hatred of God toward the wicked (Ps 5:5-6; 7:12-13; 11:5-6). Further, he confessed that the unrighteous will be destroyed forever.

1. Hell is a place of divine wrath. David is the author of the second psalm (Acts 4:25), in which he urges the wicked to “do homage to the Son.” This is synonymous with exercising repentance and faith unto salvation. Otherwise, the righteous “anger” of the Son of God will soon become heated, and His “wrath” will be “kindled.” If sinners delay, it may prove to be too late to be reconciled to Him.

Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him! (Ps 2:12)

This divine “anger” (*anap*) means, literally, “to breathe hard” as an expression of the Son of God’s intense fury. “Wrath” (*ap*) means “nostril or nose” and expresses the heavy breathing of His anger that blows from His nostrils. Once kindled against the ungodly, the fury of the Lord’s Anointed will never be extinguished.

2. The wicked will be destroyed forever. As the Psalter progresses, David specifies that the destruction of the wicked will be “forever and ever.” In other words, their perishing is not temporary but will be eternal. Divine wrath against unrighteous sinners does not end at death. Instead, this destruction will continue through the ages to come. Though the memory of them perishes, the destruction of their soul and body never ceases.

You have rebuked the nations, You have destroyed the wicked; You have blotted out their name forever and

ever. The enemy has come to an end in perpetual ruins, and You have uprooted the cities; The very memory of them has perished (Ps 9:5-6).

When David says in verse 5 that the destruction of the wicked will be “forever” (*olam*), he uses a word that means “always, perpetual, everlasting.” He adds “ever” (*ad*), which means “perpetuity, continuous existence.” Joining the two words together—“forever and ever”—means an endless occurrence of the wicked being destroyed. In verse six, David further uses the word “perpetual” (*nesah*), which means “enduring continually unto the end.” Here, David reinforces the never-ending punishment of the wicked. The clarity of these words simply cannot be overstated.

Anonymous Psalmist

The wicked will be punished forevermore and forever. As the book of Psalms continues, there is no change in this teaching on eternal punishment. This next psalmist re-enforces the same instruction, specifically that the destruction of the wicked is “forevermore.”

...that when the wicked sprouted up like grass and all who did iniquity flourished, it was only that they might be destroyed forevermore. But You, O Lord, are on high forever (Ps 92:7-8).

This clearly says that “the wicked” will be destroyed “forevermore” (*ad*), meaning “perpetuity, forever, continuing future.” It is clear that the punishment of the wicked will be endless. At the same time, the next verse says God will exist “forever” (*olam*). This word means “always, continuous existence, unending future.” By comparing these two verses, we see that the unrighteous will be punished as long as God lives. No one in their right mind would argue against the endless duration of God. Therefore, no one should argue with the endless destruction of the wicked.

THE PROPHETS

The prophets of Israel were mouthpieces through whom God spoke His message. This included the warning of the eternal punishment of the wicked. The message of God through the prophets aligns with what was pronounced by the psalmists. These preachers of old proclaimed the truth that an eternity of intense destruction awaits those without saving faith in God.

Isaiah

Isaiah, the prince of prophets, and “the evangelical prophet,” wrote about the salvation that the Suffering Servant, the Lord Jesus Christ, would come to provide. But he also wrote about

the everlasting suffering of lost souls in fire after death.

Hell is a place where the fire never dies. In the very last verse of Isaiah, the prophet concludes the sixty-six chapters of his book with a warning about the eternal punishment of the wicked. He states that for those who refuse the Lord's salvation, there awaits nothing but the dread of everlasting fire.

Then they will go forth and look on the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm will not die and their fire will not be quenched; and they will be an abhorrence to all mankind (Isa 66:24).

The imagery of "their worm" not dying and "their fire" not being "quenched" is drawn from what took place at the valley outside of Jerusalem where the city trash dump was located. It was there that children had been sacrificed to the pagan god Molech. In addition, the discarded refuse of the people was brought to be burned with fire. Consequently, the garbage heap was continually burning. In this pile of smoldering litter, maggots—or worms—were hatched and grew there, devouring the carcasses of dead animals.

Isaiah adopts this gruesome picture to describe the reality of hell as a place where its fire burns forever. The figurative language that the worms never die represent the fact that the fires of hell will never stop consuming the wicked who are sentenced to be there.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah is known as "the weeping prophet," whose "eyes were a fountain of tears" (Jer 9:1). He lamented the destruction of his obstinate people. In part, his broken spirit must have been influenced by the fate of those who refuse to repent.

Hell is a place of unquenchable fire. God spoke through Jeremiah, revealing that the anger of His wrath was upon the wicked. This unleashing of divine fury included not only this life, but the world to come. The unrighteous will be consigned to a place to "burn" forever, never to be "quenched."

Therefore thus says the Lord God, "Behold, My anger and My wrath will be poured out on this place, on man and on beast and on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground; and it will burn and not be quenched" (Jer 7:20).

God is eternal, and all His attributes are never-ending. For example, "His lovingkindness is everlasting" (Ps 136:1ff.). There will be no end to His love. So also is His wrath upon the wicked eternal. The divine "anger and wrath . . . will burn and not be quenched," not in this world or in the world to come. In other words, there will be no end to His wrath. If God's wrath ceased to exist, God would cease to exist in all

the fullness of His attributes.

Daniel

The prophet Daniel was given prophecies of the rise and fall of empires and its rulers. He foretold the future of the world unto the end of the age. He also looked beyond this age to what lies ahead in the world to come for both the righteous and the wicked. This included the disgrace that awaits unbelievers.

Hell is a place of everlasting shame. The prophet Daniel also writes that death will send unbelievers to eternal torment. He emphasizes that the punishment they suffer will last for eternity. Jesus Christ will later define this place of "everlasting contempt" as hell.

Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt (Dan 12:2).

The prophet teaches that there will be the bodily resurrection of all people at the end of time. Of those who lay in the dust of the ground, the righteous will be raised to "everlasting life," while the unrighteous will be raised to "disgrace and everlasting contempt." This second group refers to the wicked, who will be sentenced to endless shame and disdain. "Everlasting" (olam) refers to time without end. Just as the righteous possess "everlasting life," unbelievers will share in "everlasting disgrace."

This concludes the brief walkthrough of the Old Testament on the eternal perishing of the wicked. Although these verses are relatively short, Scripture only needs to state a truth once for it to stand true for all time. Moses stated, "Man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Deut 8:3). Every single word that is spoken by God is infallibly true and able to guide us into an understanding of the eternity that lies before man.

NEW TESTAMENT

As we come to the New Testament, the teaching on hell becomes dramatically more direct and detailed. Far greater specifics are given on this foreboding subject than what was provided in the Old Testament. From Matthew to Revelation, the eternal abode of the unrighteous is brought into significantly sharper focus. Most of the New Testament writers will address the doctrine of eternal perdition with increased detail and description.

No one will have more to say about the final abode of the wicked than the master Teacher, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. This teaching by Him will be addressed primarily to unbelievers in His evangelistic preaching. It was intended to warn them of the horror that awaits them apart from



TO SAY THAT LIFE ETERNAL SHALL BE ENDLESS, [BUT THAT] PUNISHMENT ETERNAL SHALL COME TO AN END IS THE HEIGHT OF ABSURDITY.

AUGUSTINE

BISHOP OF HIPPO

His saving grace. Moreover, His forerunner, John the Baptist, warned sinners that they will be thrown into unquenchable fire if they do not repent.

The Apostle Paul does not speak about hell specifically, but he does address divine wrath, spiritual death, severe judgment, and the eternal punishment that follows the return of Christ. The author of Hebrews speaks in graphic terms about divine vengeance and eternal punishment upon sinners in the fury of fire. James teaches the destruction of the unsaved. Peter will be graphic in describing the judgment and destruction of the ungodly in pits of darkness. Jude likewise does not mince words about the eternal fire and black darkness that awaits unbelievers forever.

In the book of Revelation, the apostle John does not conceal the grim reality of eternal hell. Instead, he records this sobering truth with vivid images and shocking words that are matched only by the teaching of Jesus Christ Himself. This exiled apostle describes the torment of the damned, who will suffer forever and ever in the lake of fire and brimstone. Those whose names are not recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life will drink the wine of the wrath of God that is mixed in the fullest strength of His divine anger. After death, the wicked will have no rest, either day and night.

As we turn our attention to the beginning of the New Testament, we start with the preaching of the forerunner of the

Messiah, John the Baptist.

John the Baptist

After 400 years of silence from heaven, God sent a prophet to speak to His people and prepare the way for the coming of His Son, the long promised Christ. This prophet's name was John the Baptist, who was divinely commissioned to warn the apostate nation of Israel that unless they repented, they would be thrown into the eternal fire. He was a voice crying out in the wilderness, not only announcing the coming of the Messiah, but also warning about the unquenchable fire of hell.

1. Hell is a place of fire. John the Baptist was a powerful preacher who did not mince his words in proclaiming that the unrepentant are already under divine judgment. When they die, he announced, they will be “cut down” and “thrown into the fire.”

“The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matt 3:10).

Here, John the Baptist warns that “the axe is already laid at the root.” This means that unbelievers are presently under the wrath of God and are on a collision course to face His judg-

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NOW, BECAUSE NO DESCRIPTION CAN DEAL ADEQUATELY WITH THE GRAVITY OF GOD'S VENGEANCE AGAINST THE WICKED, THEIR TORMENTS AND TORTURES ARE FIGURATIVELY EXPRESSED TO US BY PHYSICAL THINGS, THAT IS, BY DARKNESS, WEEPING, AND GNASHING OF TEETH (MT. 8:12; 22:13), UNQUENCHABLE FIRE (MT. 3:12; MK. 9:43; ISA. 66:24), AN UNDYING WORM GNAWING AT THE HEART (ISA. 66:24). BY SUCH EXPRESSIONS THE HOLY SPIRIT CERTAINLY INTENDED TO CONFOUND ALL OUR SENSES WITH DREAD.

JOHN CALVIN

SWISS REFORMER

ment. Unless they “bear fruit in keeping with repentance” (verse 8), they will be “cut down” in the severity of the coming judgment. Then, they will be consigned to “the fire” of eternal punishment. In light of this sobering reality, they must “flee from the wrath to come” (verse 7) that will be unleashed in fiery hell.

2. Hell is a place of judgment. John the Baptist warned that the Promised One is coming, Jesus Christ. He has the authority to baptize believers with the Holy Spirit, but also to baptize unbelievers with the fire of His righteous wrath.

As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matt 3:11).

3. Hell is a place of unquenchable fire. This forerunner also announced that the coming Messiah possesses a “winnowing fork” that He will use to separate the “wheat” from the “chaff.” The “wheat” pictures believers who will be gathered into the barn for profitable use. But the “chaff” represents the unbelievers who serve no purpose but to be burned with “unquenchable fire.”

His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire (Matt 3:12).

This “fire” of divine righteousness is raging in hell and will inflict the severest suffering of eternal punishment upon all that enter it. These painful flames will be “unquenchable” (*asbestos*), never to be extinguished throughout all the ages to come. Those who are cast into this fire will be forever immersed in its flames.

Jesus Christ

When Jesus Christ emerged onto the scene, He had much to say about hell and the eternal punishment to be inflicted upon unbelievers. Jesus repeatedly preached on hell, more than any other person in the Bible. In His teaching, He actually had more to say about hell than He did about heaven. The words of Jesus, as recorded in the four Gospels, comprise a total of 1,870 verses. Thirteen percent of those are about judgment and hell. In fact, Jesus had more to say about these two subjects—the final judgment and eternal hell—than any other topic about which He spoke.

Jesus is the first person in the Bible to use the word “hell.” It is the Greek word “gehenna,” referring to a place located southwest of Jerusalem. Gehenna was the site of fire-worship in the time of Ahaz and became known as the Valley of

Lamentation (great weeping) because children were sacrificed there to the pagan god Molech. Jesus used this place to represent the future punishment of unbelievers in the constantly burning fires and endless sufferings of hell.

Of the twelve times that “gehenna” is used in the New Testament to describe hell, eleven come from the lips of Jesus (Matt 5:22,29,30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15,33; Mark 9:43,45,47; Luke 12:5). The only time hell (*gehenna*) is used by someone other than Jesus is found in James 3:6. In 2 Peter 2:4, the only other word for hell is used, which is “tartarus.” The following verses are what Jesus said about the frightening reality of hell:

1. Hell is to be avoided at all costs. Hell is so terrifying that Jesus said it must be avoided at all costs. Whatever a person does, he or she must not go to hell. Any suffering would be better than going to hell. It would be better to have a maimed body on the earth than have a whole body in hell—anything but the terrors of hell.

If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell (Matt 5:29–30; cf. 18:9).

The eternal consequences of a person going to hell are so severe that Jesus repeats the same warning in the second verse. The repetition underscores the seriousness of this admonition. Avoid hell no matter what it takes.

2. Hell is a real place. Jesus spoke about hell as a *real* “place” in which *real* people with a *real* body and a *real* soul go and experience *real* suffering. It is a real place on God’s map, as real as the place you live now. Jesus never gave the impression that hell is a state of mind or mere allegory. He claimed it is an actual place into which the unrepentant human body and soul are cast.

The sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 8:12).

Again, Jesus represents hell as “that place” of suffering in the intense pains of “fire”:

... and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 13:42; cf. 50).

In the parable of the talents, Jesus once more speaks of hell

as the “place” where “worthless slaves” of sin are cast:

Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 25:30).

3. Hell is a place of fire. Hell is not only a *real* place, but it is a place filled with *real fire*. The flames of hell inflict *real* pain to a *real* body and soul. This is not a metaphorical fire, nor can it be explained away as a mere figure of speech, any more than heaven would be similarly discounted. Jesus did not intend for the fire to be emblematic. To the contrary, this fire is more real than any fire in this world. But for the sake of argument, even if this fire is only a symbolic reference, the reality is always greater than any symbol. If this fire truly is metaphorical, the reality would be far worse than actual fire.

But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, “You good-for-nothing,” shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, “You fool,” shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell (Matt 5:22; 18:9).

Here, “fiery” is used as a descriptive modifier of “hell.” There is no part of hell that is without flames. Every corner is a towering inferno of fire.

4. Hell is the destination of false teachers. Later in the same Sermon on the Mount, Jesus admonished His listeners that all false teachers will be cast into the fire below. These are the ones who corrupt the purity of the gospel with their damning message of the broad gate. Hell awaits these messengers of doom and all who follow their message.

Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire (Matt 7:19).

5. Hell is a place for unbelievers. Jesus continued to speak on hell even up until the night before His crucifixion. In the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus reminded His eleven disciples of the terrifying reality of the fire into which apostates, like Judas, will be cast and burned.

If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned (John 15:6).

Jesus’s message was quite clear. Those who are religious, but unconverted, like the disciple who betrayed Him, will suffer the fire of eternal hell.

6. Hell is a place of destruction. The final destruction of

unbelievers does not take place in this world. The broad path “leads to” ultimate “destruction” in the world to come. “Destruction” (*apōleia*) does not refer to annihilation or extinction, but to the total ruin and unending decimation of the unbelieving sinner.

Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it (Matt 7:13).

7. Hell destroys the entire person. This eternal destruction of body and soul in hell is so terrifying that the unbelieving sinner should fear God with trembling and heed His warning. Please note that Jesus said the whole person would be cast into hell—both “body and soul.”

Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matt 10:28).

“Body” speaks of the physical aspect of the suffering of sinners in hell. “Soul” reveals the mental, emotional, and psychological suffering of unbelievers in the flames below. Every part of a damned person in hell will be entirely inflicted with pain.

8. Hell is a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. Jesus said that hell is a place where there is *the* weeping and *the* gnashing of teeth. The definite article “the” is not rendered in the English translation, but it is found in the original Greek. This means that this weeping is *the* greatest weeping that has ever occurred in the history of the world. In fact, all the combined weeping down through the centuries does not begin to compare with *the* weeping in hell. The same is true with *the* gnashing of teeth, which indicates intense rage and anger against God.

But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 8:12).

The weeping and gnashing of teeth in hell indicates that sinners are not repenting in hell. To the contrary, they are enraged with fierce anger at God for subjecting them to such a place of pain and torment.

Then the king said to the servants, “Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt 22:13).

9. Hell is a furnace of fire. Jesus described hell not merely

as a place of fire, but as a “furnace of fire.” Adding that it is a “furnace” reveals that the wicked are entrapped in what is pictured as a scorching fireplace. The enclosure of a “furnace” causes the heat of the fire to intensify exponentially. The trapped fire creates an inescapable oven of unbearable heat. There is no way of escape from this excruciatingly painful furnace. Jesus said:

...and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 13:42).

The reality of a furnace also reveals that there is no escape from the torturing pain of hell. A “furnace of fire” is a closed system of agonizing flames in hell:

And will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 13:50).

10. Hell is inescapable for unbelievers. Jesus warned the Pharisees that unless they repented, they would not escape the sentence of hell. There is no escaping the reality of hell if people do not turn to Christ in humble faith. Likewise, there will certainly be no escaping hell after sinners enter it. Jesus threatened the religious leaders of His day with this haunting reality:

You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell? (Matt 23:33)

11. Hell is a place of eternal fire. Jesus said that this fire into which sinners are cast is “eternal” (*aiōnios*). This means that this fire is “age-long, without end.” He proclaimed that unbelievers will be cast into hell, but He never said that they would be brought out of it. If people could escape hell at some point after they have entered it, Jesus would have said so. But He did not, because such a release is impossible. Jesus never issues a second command for the wicked to be released from this eternal fire. No such declaration is ever mentioned in Scripture, because no such declaration was ever given.

If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire (Matt 18:8).

12. Hell is prepared for the devil and his angels. Jesus will command unbelievers to depart from Him into the eternal fire of hell prepared for “the devil and his angels.”

Then He will also say to those on His left, “Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt 25:41).



COULD EVERY
SINNER WEEP A
WHOLE OCEAN, YET
ALL THOSE OCEANS
TOGETHER WOULD
NEVER EXTINGUISH
ONE SPARK OF
ETERNAL FIRE.

THOMAS BROOKS

PURITAN PREACHER

13. Hell is a place where the worm never dies. Drawing upon the imagery used by the prophet Isaiah, Jesus pictured hell as a garbage dump, where the trash is discarded and burned with fire. The Greek word again refers to the Valley of Hinnon near Jerusalem, a garbage dump where fires constantly burned. Jesus echoes Isaiah's description of maggots that grow there and spawn their worms:

...where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched (Mark 9:48).

By this graphic imagery, the fire of hell is to be understood as eternally burning.

14. Hell is a place where unbelievers are preserved forever in suffering. Jesus said that all unbelievers will be salted with fire. This is, they will be preserved in hellfire.

...for everyone will be salted with fire (Mark 9:49).

Salt was used as a preservative that was added to meat to prevent it from spoiling. It was also used as a preservative for sacrifices when they were burned (Lev 2:13). "Salted with fire" pictured God's enduring wrath upon unbelievers in hell.

15. Hell is a place of eternal torment. Jesus told the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, in which both men died. He explained that after the rich man died, he awoke in hell. There, he was inflicted with much "torment" (*basanos*), a word meaning the extreme pain of torture.

In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom (Luke 16:23).

This "torment" indicates extreme pains to a breaking point. The word reveals that this pain causes the sufferer to scream in losing all self-restraint. Hell is then a place filled with the shrieks and groans of the tormented damned. What a truly formidable picture.

16. Hell is a place of excruciating agony. In this same parable, Jesus pictured hell as a place of "agony" for perishing souls.

In Hades he lifted up his eyes in torment. ...And he cried out and said, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame" (Luke 16:23-24).



THERE IS NOTHING IN THE SCRIPTURES WHICH, EVEN BY
THE MOST REMOTE IMPLICATION, SUGGESTS THAT THE
SUFFERINGS OF THE LOST SHALL EVER END.

A.A. HODGE

PROFESSOR, PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

“Agony” (*odunao*) means to be inflicted with intense pain. The idea it conveys is to be suffering in great anguish.

17. Hell necessitates our strongest warnings. In this same parable, Jesus said that the rich man in hell was beside himself, longing that someone would warn his five brothers not to come to such a place.

...for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment (Luke 16:28).

Hell is a “place of torment” so terrifying that it demands that we strongly warn unbelievers lest they go to such a horrific place. Admonitions must be issued to caution the unrepentant.

18. Hell is a place of haunting memories. Jesus taught that in hell the wicked will have the capacity to remember what good things were provided for them during their life upon the earth. This memory will surely include every gospel presentation they may have ever read or heard, but foolishly rejected. Such recollection of the offer of grace will haunt them forever.

But Abraham said, “Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus

bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony” (Luke 16:25).

In hell, the mind will not be erased, but intensified with an increased capacity. Unbelievers will be tortured by the painful remembrances of an entire wasted life that was lived in sin. Their ability to recall will cause damned souls to suffer mentally by replaying their whole life that was squandered without God. Only now, they will be without hope.

19. Hell is a place that is inescapable. Jesus made it clear that once a person is in hell, he or she will never be able to leave and cross over into heaven. Unbelieving sinners will enter hell, but they will never escape it. The chasm between heaven and hell is so great that none can come over from hell to heaven. Moreover, this chasm is fixed, never to be removed, never to be bridged.

And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us (Luke 16:26).

Unbelievers in hell will, of course, “wish to come over” from there to heaven. But Jesus was emphatic that they “will not be able.” Without exception, “none may cross over from there” to the redeemed in heaven.



20. Hell possesses all excluded from heaven. Jesus stated that no unbeliever will ever enter heaven. The door leading into heaven is forever shut to them. It is eternally locked. There is no biblical text that indicates the door into heaven will ever be opened to them. Once it is closed, it will be forever sealed shut. No verse in the Bible teaches that hell is only temporary, nor that any in hell will ever escape. The silence is deafening. The very opposite is taught—that hell is forever and none therefore escape.

And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. Later the other virgins also came, saying, “Lord, lord, open up for us.” But he answered, “Truly I say to you, I do not know you” (Matt 25:10-12).

Jesus was unmistakably clear that no unbeliever will ever go where Jesus was going, back to the Father in heaven. To those who were conspiring to take His life, Jesus said:

Then He said again to them, “I go away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come” (John 8:21).

21. Hell is a place of outer darkness. Jesus taught that hell

is a place of “outer darkness,” meaning it is pitch-black, utterly without light. Damned souls will live in a world of total darkness as though they are completely blind. They will never see the light of day again.

...but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 8:12).

The sheer terror of living in utter darkness—forever and ever—is inconceivable to our minds. Never to have sight again is yet another trauma of hell. The mental, emotional, and psychological anguish of living in “outer darkness” is incalculable:

Then the king said to the servants, “Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt 22:13).

In the parable of the talents, Jesus states that those who are unfaithful with what God has entrusted to them reveal their lost condition. These will be cast “into the outer darkness.” The definite article “the” suggests that hell is the blackest black and darkest dark there has ever been.



THE GOD THAT HOLDS YOU OVER THE PIT OF HELL,
MUCH AS ONE HOLDS A SPIDER... ABHORS YOU, AND
IS DREADFULLY PROVOKED: HIS WRATH TOWARDS YOU
BURNS LIKE FIRE; HE LOOKS UPON YOU AS WORTHY OF
NOTHING ELSE, BUT TO BE CAST INTO THE FIRE.

JONATHAN EDWARDS

PASTOR AND THEOLOGIAN

Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 25:30).

22. Hell is heavily populated. Jesus said that untold multitudes will be in hell. He stated that there will be more people in hell than there are in heaven. There are many roads that lead to hell, but only one road that leads to heaven—through salvation in Jesus Christ. This increases the accessibility of hell to sinners, for whom hell is their default destination.

Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it (Matt 7:13).

The road to hell is the broad path, which accommodates the “many” who are traveling it. Further, that the “gate is wide” makes this path easily accessible. Most are traveling it, compared to the few who are on the narrow path that leads to life.

The Apostle Paul

As we come to the ministry of the apostles, we begin with the Apostle Paul. At the outset, let us note that Paul never uses the word “hell.” However, his affirmation of the doctrine of hell is to be assumed through his use of words such as “wrath,” “death,” “condemn,” “perish,” “punish,” and “cursed.” Perhaps one reason that Paul does not use the word hell is because it was an assumed basic belief among early Christians, because Jesus had already addressed it so thoroughly.

In addition, Paul’s thirteen epistles were written to believers in churches or to regenerate men in ministry. Jesus, on the other hand, was most often confronting unbelievers as an itinerant evangelist with the gospel. Again, due to space limitations, we will not be able to comment on every verse that Paul wrote that touches on this subject in one way or another. Here are a number of helpful verses where this truth is expounded:

1. Hell is a place of divine wrath. Paul stated that all unbelievers are presently under divine wrath, which will be permanently pronounced on the last day. No verse that the apostle writes lends any hope that there will be an escape from this wrath for them after death. It is rightly assumed that this present revelation of wrath will continue forever unless one believes in Jesus Christ before death.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Rom 1:18).

The present tense of this verb, “is revealed,” states that divine “wrath” (*orgē*) is presently active against unbelievers in their sin. “Wrath” refers to a settled, determined indignation. It

comes into the English language as “orgy,” a place where heated passions are carnally exacerbated to a fever pitch. As it relates to God, the sin of man provokes His holy emotions. God is not a stoic Sovereign, nor a dispassionate Dictator toward the unrighteousness of man. Rather, He is intensely invested in the vindication of His name.

2. Hell will unleash all stored up divine wrath. Paul further states that the wrath of God is being stored up against sinners until its final release on the last day. There is no indication in any biblical passage that this wrath will ever subside in eternity future. Rather, it will continue throughout all eternity.

But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God... but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation... (Rom 2:5,8).

The truth conveyed here is that the continued sin of unbelievers is building an increased amount of wrath that one day will be unleashed against them. The more sin committed, the more wrath is being “stored up” for the last day or “the day of wrath.” Inflexible justice will be executed in this “revelation of the righteous judgment of God” against sinners.

3. Hell is reserved for children of wrath. All unbelievers are considered by God to be worthy of divine wrath. As “children of wrath,” this means that they deserve the fury of divine wrath.

Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest (Eph 2:3).

4. Hell awaits all who do not love Christ. Every unbeliever will be forever accursed, meaning they will be consigned to eternal punishment. They will be damned throughout all the ages to come. The word “accursed” (*anathema*) means “to be devoted to destruction.” It is synonymous with eternal damnation.

If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed. Maranatha (1 Cor 16:22).

5. Hell will punish false teachers. The hottest part of hell will be reserved for false teachers, who are tools of Satan used to hasten the damnation of sinners. Those who corrupt the gospel of grace are “to be accursed.” Their punishment will be so severe that this warning is mentioned twice



HELL IS FULL OF THE DIVINE HOLINESS; HOLINESS IN THE MANIFESTATION OF JUSTICE; HOLINESS IN ITS MOST GLORIOUS EXERCISE. HOW FEARFULLY ARE THE LOST NOW LEARNING THIS TRUTH! THINK IT NOT A TRIFLING MATTER, UNCONVERTED READER, TO LOOK INTO THE BOTTOMLESS PIT, AND TO KNOW THAT THERE IS BUT A STEP AND YOU ARE THERE! YOU WALK TO THE END OF THE TREACHEROUS PLANK, AND YOU ARE GONE! O SOLEMN THOUGHT! BUT ONE STEP BETWEEN YOU AND THE QUENCHLESS FLAME! BUT ONE STEP BETWEEN YOU AND ENDLESS TORMENT! THROUGHOUT

in two consecutive verses.

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! (Gal 1:8-9)

6. Hell unleashes wrath upon sons of disobedience. All “sons of disobedience” will suffer “the wrath of God.” There is no hope given that they will ever escape from the fury of this divine vengeance.

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience (Eph 5:6; cf. Col 3:6).

7. Hell executes the penalty of eternal destruction. All unbelievers will suffer “destruction” that is “eternal” (*aiōnios*), meaning “that which is without end.”

These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away

from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power (2 Thess 1:9).

Paul uses the very same word “eternal” (*aiōnios*) to describe the length of time believers will enjoy after death in communion with the Father and Jesus Christ (Rom 2:7). In other words, the duration of hell and the duration of heaven are both the same. Sinners will be in hell as long as saints will be in heaven.

But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 6:22-23).

8. Hell can only be avoided by Christ’s death. Paul strongly asserts that every unbeliever who puts personal faith in Jesus Christ is saved from the wrath to come. No unbeliever will ever be delivered from such a dreaded horror.

Much more then, having now been justified by His

ETERNITY THE LOST SOUL WILL BE TESTIFYING TO THIS TRUTH: “GOD IS HOLY; I WAS A SINNER; I REJECTED HIS SALVATION, I TURNED MY BACK UPON HIS GOSPEL, I DESPISED HIS SON, I HATED GOD HIMSELF, I LIVED IN MY SINS, I LOVED MY SINS, I DIED IN MY SINS, AND NOW I AM LOST! TO ALL ETERNITY LOST! AND GOD IS RIGHTEOUS IN MY CONDEMNATION!”

OCTAVIUS WINSLOW

AMERICAN AND BRITISH PREACHER

blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him (Rom 5:9).

...and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come (1 Thess 1:10).

The Author of Hebrews

The author of Hebrews addresses the eternal punishment of unbelievers and adds further insight to this critical subject.

1. Hell has different degrees of punishment. Some sinners will receive greater punishment than others, because not all sin is the same. The greater the sin, the greater the punishment. That is the fundamental principle of “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” (Exod 21:24). The truth it states is this: the punishment should fit the crime. Each sin will receive its own penalty. Because some sins are worse than others, they will receive a more severe punishment. The same divine justice that operates in this world will operate in the world to come. This truth was taught by

Jesus in Matthew 11:22-24, that hell will be “more tolerable” for some than others.

For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? (Heb 2:2-3)

Those who openly reject Christ after hearing the gospel will receive a stricter judgment than those who never heard His name. They will suffer a “more severe punishment” than others, because they have shown great disdain in utterly rejecting the blood of Jesus Christ.

How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? (Heb 10:29)

2. Hell is a place of eternal punishment. The same

word “eternal” (*aiōnios*) that is used to describe the endless duration of the believer’s “eternal salvation” (Heb 5:9), “eternal redemption” (Heb 6:2), and “eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15) is used to describe the equally endless length of the unbeliever’s “eternal judgment” (Heb 6:2). As stated in other passages, eternal judgment will be the same length of time as eternal salvation and redemption.

...of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment (Heb 6:2).

Likewise, the eternality of hell is as long as the “eternal” existence of the Holy Spirit (Heb 9:14). The Spirit is eternal God, who will endure forever throughout all the ages to come. So also is the duration of those who suffer in hell.

3. Hell is a place with the fury of fire. Following the final “judgment,” the “fury of fire will consume” all unbelievers. The word “fury” (*zēlos*) means that the fire of hell will be intense in its raging. It will “consume” (*esthiō*) sinners, as a starving person would devour food (Matt 6:25, 31). The food does not become extinct, but is continually being consumed. So it is with the unbelieving sinner in hell.

But a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries (Heb 10:27).

4. Hell is a place of divine vengeance. The author of Hebrews quotes from Deuteronomy 32:35, that God will repay sinners with His “vengeance” (*ekdikēsis*). This refers to divine retribution, vindication, and punishment. This will occur when sinners “fall into the hands” of God.

For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge His people.” It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb 10:30-31).

The Author James

James wrote the first epistle in the New Testament, bearing his name, and not surprisingly, it speaks to the destruction of unbelievers. There is a noticeable resemblance between the Sermon on the Mount by Jesus and the book of James. As the Sermon on the Mount repeatedly addresses the subject of hell, so does the epistle of James speak to the destruction of lawbreakers.

Hell is a place of destruction. The righteous judgment of

“

LET NOT ANYONE WHO THINKS THAT THE FEAR OF HELL SHOULD BE PUT OUT OF THE MIND OF THE UNREGENERATE MAN EVER SUPPOSE THAT HE HAS THE SLIGHTEST UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAY AND DO.

J. GRESHAM MACHEN

PROFESSOR, PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

God will come from Him who is “the Lawgiver and Judge.” The curse for violating the law of God is death in its every form—spiritual death, physical death, and eternal death. God alone is able to save from this curse through faith in Jesus Christ. He also is able to destroy lawbreakers who do not believe in the gospel. The eternal duration of destruction is concurrent with the eternal duration of salvation.

There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor? (James 4:12)

The Apostle Peter

The apostle Peter likewise addresses the subject of hell. As the leader of the twelve disciples, he possessed firsthand knowledge of the preaching ministry of Jesus Christ. He personally observed the strong emphasis that Jesus placed upon preaching the eternal punishment of the wicked. With such an example before Peter, he does not hesitate to address this provocative subject.

1. Hell contains pits of darkness. Peter teaches that fallen angels were cast into “hell” (*tartarus*). This is the only time in the New Testament this particular word is used for hell. The word itself was drawn from Greek mythology to describe the place reserved for the most wicked spirits, human beings, and gods. There, they receive the most severe punishment from God. Consequently, the Jews used this word to describe the final destination of fallen angels in the lowest part of hell.

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment... (2 Pet 2:4).

This description of hell is referred to as “pits of darkness.” Here is a description of the lowest part of hell as “pits,” described elsewhere as a “bottomless pit” (Rev 9:2). These deep shafts are fathomless in their depth, being without a bottom. The idea conveyed is that these pits are too deep to escape. All there are forever “reserved” in eternal confinement.

2. Hell is a place of endless destruction. Peter states that the devastation brought on Sodom and Gomorrah should serve as examples to unbelievers of what awaits them if they continue in their path of unbelief. The word “destruction” (*katastrophē*) enters the English language as “catastrophe.” It means the complete overthrow and total ruin of unbelieving sinners. This judgment is referred to elsewhere as “the punishment of eternal fire” (Jude 7).

And if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly

lives thereafter... (2 Pet 2:6).

Peter prophesied about the coming day of the last judgment and the “destruction” that will follow. This “destruction” (*apolēia*) will involve the complete ruin of “ungodly men.” This does not mean annihilation, but the unending devastation of damnation—the antithesis of salvation.

But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men (2 Pet 3:7).

The Author Jude

Jude, the half brother of Jesus, also addressed the subject of hell. He did so in connection to his scathing rebuke of false teachers who were threatening the life of the church. As he earnestly contended for the faith, this necessitated that he expose the deceptive characteristics of these vile men. In so doing, he spoke about the ultimate destruction of these perpetrators of damnable lies.

1. Hell inflicts the punishment of eternal fire. In no uncertain terms, Jude writes that the wicked will suffer “the punishment of eternal fire.” These flames of hell are “eternal” (*aiōnios*) and, therefore, false teachers will be punished in them without end. Those who follow their teaching will likewise be in this “eternal fire.”

Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire... (Jude 7).

2. Hell possesses black darkness forever. Jude states that hell will be a terrifying place of “black darkness.” This indicates darkness upon darkness or a double darkness. Not a ray of light will penetrate the caverns of hell. It will be as though those in hell will be a state of blindness that will last “forever” (*aiōn*).

Wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever (Jude 13).

In this polemic book of Jude, the same endless duration—“forever” (*aiōn*)—is used to describe two endless realities. The first is the length of the reign of God (v. 25), and the second is the length of time souls will be in hell (vv. 7, 13). Both time periods are the same. Sinners will be in hell as long as God is in heaven.

3. Hell must be avoided by rescuing efforts. Those with

the gospel must rescue the lost from the lies of false teachers. They are told, “save others, snatching them out of the fire.” This “fire” is an obvious reference to the flames of hell for which they are headed. It must be noted that they are not being delivered out of the flames of hell. No one in hell will ever escape. Instead, they are to be rescued from a path of destruction *before* they descend into the eternal fire.

Save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some half mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh (Jude 23).

The Apostle John

As we come to the end of the Bible, we discover not a declining emphasis upon the eternity of hell, but rather, we find the very opposite. We actually see an escalating importance placed upon these divine warnings. Nothing about eternal punishment is mentioned in the three epistles written by John. However, the book of Revelation gives much insight into the graphic details and eternal duration of hell. There is more recorded about hell in Revelation than anywhere else in the Bible except in the four Gospels as spoken by Jesus.

1. Hell is a place of unending suffering. In hell, unbelievers will suffer the torment of the damned “forever and ever.” This is the unending duration of time that God and Jesus Christ will live and reign. The book of Revelation records that Christ is “alive forevermore” (Rev 1:18). It states that God “lives forever and ever” (Rev 4:9-10; 7:12; 10:6), Christ “will reign forever and ever” (Rev 5:13; 11:15), and the saints “will reign forever and ever” (Rev 22:5). It will be for this same duration that those in hell will suffer torment “forever and ever.”

And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name (Rev 14:11).

The “torment” unleashed by God upon the wicked will be “forever and ever.” Here, “forever and ever” (*eis tous aiōnas aiōnen*) means “into the ages of ages,” or into an unending eternity. For the wicked, there will be no rest, meaning not a single moment of relief from this relentless torment in hell.

2. Hell will be full of constant torment. The devil, the leaders of the evil world system, and all who follow them will suffer in hell “day and night forever and ever.” There will be no rest or relief for their damned souls, as “they will be tormented” in “the lake of fire and brimstone.” The devil and these godless leaders’ suffering will be the same for all unbelievers.

And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the

lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever (Rev 20:10).

As previously stated, the words “forever and ever,” used to describe the eternal duration of God’s reign, are the same words used for how long unbelievers will be in “the lake of fire and brimstone.”

2. Hell is a place of drinking the wine of divine wrath. Those in hell will be made to drink the wrath of God in its fullest strength. This divine fury is pictured as “the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength.” In ancient times, wine would be diluted with water to make it less potent. Here, divine wrath is unmixed, without any mercy to weaken its potency. The word for “wrath” (*thumos*) means the hot passion and heated fury that God has for the wicked.

He also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger (Rev 14:10).

The potency of this wine of undiluted wrath is intensified by the fact that it is served in “the cup of His anger.” Here is the terrifying picture of God’s wrath being served by His anger. “Anger” (*orgē*) indicates the violent passion of God’s indignation against sinners in hell. It will be divine wrath delivered by divine anger.

3. Hell is where Jesus punishes sinners. We have often heard it said that hell is a place of eternal separation from God and Jesus Christ. Those in hell only wish that would be the case. The wrath inflicted upon sinners is not self-inflicted. Neither is it administered by Satan. Rather, this smoldering fury is unleashed upon the wicked by Jesus Christ Himself.

...and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb (Rev 14:10).

This verse says that sinners will be tormented in the very presence of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. By the Holy Spirit, Jesus is omnipresent, not only in heaven and upon the earth, but also in hell. There is no place where He does not exist with the fullness of His entire being. Jesus is as much in hell as He is in heaven. Therefore, He is the One executing His own scalding wrath.

3. Hell is a place with the rising smoke of torment. There is an endless fire burning in hell, inflicting “torment” upon all damned souls. This fire causes the smoke of their “torment” to ascend upward forever and ever. There will be no end to this fire and smoke, and the subsequent agonizing pain of the damned.



OH, WHAT WOULD THE DAMNED IN HELL GIVE FOR
A SERMON, COULD THEY BUT LISTEN ONCE MORE!
THEY WOULD CONSENT, IF IT WERE POSSIBLE, TO
BEAR TEN THOUSAND YEARS OF HELL'S TORMENTS,
IF THEY MIGHT BUT ONCE MORE HAVE THE WORD
PRESENTED TO THEM! IF I HAD A CONGREGATION
SUCH AS THAT WOULD BE, OF MEN WHO HAVE
TASTED THE WRATH OF GOD, OF MEN WHO KNOW
WHAT AN AWFUL THING IT IS TO FALL INTO THE
HANDS OF AN ANGRY GOD, HOW WOULD THEY LEAN
FORWARD TO CATCH EVERY WORD.

CHARLES H. SPURGEON

BRITISH PASTOR

“

IT IS CLEARLY REVEALED
IN SCRIPTURE: THE
ETERNITY OF GOD, AND
HEAVEN AND HELL,
ALL STAND ON THE
SAME FOUNDATION.
AS SURELY AS GOD IS
ETERNAL, SO SURELY IS
HEAVEN AN ENDLESS
DAY WITHOUT NIGHT
AND HELL AN ENDLESS
NIGHT WITHOUT DAY.

J.C. RYLE

BISHOP OF LIVERPOOL

And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name (Rev 14:11).

4. Hell is a boiling lake of fire and brimstone. The world leaders of the global rebellion against God will be “thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone.” There, they will suffer the unmitigated pain that is inflicted by divine wrath. The eternal torment that awaits them is a taste of what awaits all sinners who die without personal faith in Jesus Christ.

And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone (Rev 19:20).

The inflicted suffering of these leaders will be “day and night forever and ever.” The word “tormented” (*basanizō*) means “to be tortured under great distress.” There will be no end to the affliction of these damned souls at the omnipotent hands of an angry God.

5. Hell is filled with those deceived by Satan. John records that hell was prepared by God for the devil and his fallen angels. Satan is a deceiver who dupes international leaders into following his sinister agenda. Likewise, he blinds the eyes of the unbelieving, who will be consigned to suffer in the same “lake of fire and brimstone.” This is where they will be “tormented” constantly without a respite.

And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. (Rev 20:10).

6. Hell is the just punishment for sinners. Hell is a necessary punishment for the satisfaction and execution of the righteous justice of God. On the last day, the “books” will be opened, containing the complete record of every unbeliever’s life. Every sin they have ever committed has been meticulously recorded by God and permanently written in His book. The entire record will be made known, and they will be “judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.”

And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead

were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.... Then death and Hades were thrown in the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire" (Rev 20:12,14).

The result of this final judgment is that every unbeliever will be thrown into "the lake of fire." There will be no exceptions to this verdict. There will be no escaping this sentence. "The second death" awaits all who stand before God without Jesus Christ as their Advocate to represent them.

7. Hell is the final destination for unbelievers. John records that "the book of life" contains the names of all believers who are redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ. Everyone whose name is not written in "the book of life" will be "thrown in the lake of fire." Hell is the final destination of every unbeliever.

And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:15).

8. Hell is inhabited by the vilest sinners. Every "unbelieving" person, John writes, will find themselves "in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone." This is the "second death," and it will never lead to a second chance for a second life. Once in hell, always in hell.

But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death (Rev 21:8).

Excluded from heaven are all sorts of rank unbelievers who have lived immoral lives. A celebrity once flippantly said they would take heaven for its climate and hell for its company. Here is the company of those in eternal perdition. This truly is a sobering and frightening scene. Sin has so corrupted us that hell is the default destination for every human.

BOTH OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT

It is clear that the entire Bible speaks with one voice to the reality of this place of eternal perdition. Moreover, it is apparent that hell is the final destination of unbelievers, where they will suffer eternal punishment. It is plain that hell is a place of unspeakable agony and insufferable torment. None who enter will ever leave it. Both the Old and New Testament make this abundantly clear.

All who take the Bible seriously should come to the conclusion that what it teaches about hell must be taken seriously. One's emotions may try to explain it away. One's logic may attempt to look for loopholes. But what the Scripture itself teaches on the eternal punishment of the wicked must be the

ground for our beliefs. Any attempt to explain away hell is an attempt to negate the teaching of God Himself. The Bible speaks with crystal clarity on this issue.

Those who stand in pulpits must preach this truth with deepening conviction. It is a necessary part of proclaiming the full counsel of God. We must not censor God. Neither may we edit what He says. "Let God be found true and every man a liar" (Rom 3:4).

HOW WE MUST PREACH ON HELL

Following this review, I trust that you are sufficiently convinced of the necessity to preach on the subject of hell. A question naturally arises, though: how shall we preach on this important subject? How must we stand in our pulpit and proclaim this truth? I want to lay before you seven specific principles that should guide our preaching on hell. Although more could be added, these provide a general overview and appropriate starting place.

1. Preach it unapologetically. As you preach the doctrine of hell, never apologize for this truth or for proclaiming it. Whatever God has put into His Word, we are to proclaim from the rooftops. To apologize and make excuses for the doctrine of hell is, whether knowingly or unknowingly, to slander the character of God. Why would we apologize for what God has ordained? Why would we apologize for what He has put into His Word? Such a posture would elevate ourselves above the perfect holiness and infinite wisdom of God.

2. Preach it graphically. God has described the truth about hell in the most vivid images and graphic terms. We must never water down what He has chosen to express in dramatic language. Who are we to dilute what God has revealed in its uncensored potency? As we can observe from the biblical language collected above, God intentionally wants this doctrine to be preached in a way that comes across with shock and awe. It is not meant to be a gentle and soft-spoken subject, but one that leaves an unsettled feeling in the pit of the stomach because of its gravity.

3. Preach it passionately. If we saw a house on fire and knew that a man was asleep inside, would we not raise our voice in order to awaken him from his danger? It would be an expression of our care to risk being misunderstood in order to arouse his attention for his greater good. Similarly, preaching on hell requires that we preach with full passion. If we deliver our message with a dispassionate monotone, it undermines the subject that we are proclaiming. If we want to recount this truth faithfully, we must come across as those who earnestly believe in the eternal torment that awaits those who are lost.

4. Preach it urgently. The severity of this subject requires that we preach with a compelling sense of urgency. Those who are perishing must believe now, while there is still time. Hell

is filled with procrastinators who thought about believing in Christ, “maybe one day,” but prolonged putting off making such a commitment. When we preach on hell, we must press to the hearts of our listeners the immediacy that is required in receiving Christ. They must not boast of tomorrow, but act today upon the offer of the gospel. Tomorrow is the devil’s day—today is God’s day.

5. Preach it persuasively. It is not enough that we simply teach accurately on the subject of hell. It is not enough that our listeners merely understand this truth. We must go further. We must persuade them to respond to the truth they have heard. We must persuade unbelievers to act *now* concerning Christ. We must reason with their minds. We must motivate their hearts. We must compel their wills. We must not allow them to go to hell unwarned. As Jacob wrestled with the angel of the Lord and said, “I will not let you go until you have blessed me,” we must wrestle for the souls of our listeners so they may be won to Christ.

6. Preach it soberly. The subject of hell is never a matter that should lead to jokes. We never want to make light of something that is so dramatically serious as the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. When the preacher takes this truth seriously, the people will take it seriously. Conversely,

if the preacher is lighthearted about this place of eternal torment, even momentarily, then his listeners will be tempted to lessen their caution about this sober reality. Tragically, a person may laugh their way into hell, but they will never laugh their way out of hell.

7. Preach it pastorally. With such an explosive topic, great sensitivity is required of the preacher. He must remain pastoral in his presentation of this truth. He must know when it is right to come down hard. But he must also have an awareness of when he needs to speak gently. He must have divinely given discernment in order to read the congregation and know when to be forceful in what he says and when to be more soft-spoken with his words. He must know when words of assurance are needed for those who are genuine followers of Christ. The expositor’s goal is not to leave people in fear or despair, but to build them up in their faith, even while we urge the lost to be saved.

HOW HELL MUST BE AVOIDED

The only way for anyone to avoid eternal punishment in hell is through personal faith in Jesus Christ alone. The truth of the gospel is that God sent His Son into this world to be the only Savior of sinners. Jesus came on a mission of salvation.



CHRISTIAN EVANGELISTS OUGHT TO GIVE TEACHING ON HELL: IT IS PART OF THEIR JOB.... MANY TODAY SHOW THE SAME KNEE-JERK REACTION IF HELL IS MENTIONED TO THEM; CONTEMPT FOR HELL-TALK HAS, IT SEEMS, BECOME PART OF OUR CULTURE. BUT EVANGELISTS ARE ON A RESCUE MISSION TO THEIR UNBELIEVING NEIGHBORS, AND IT IS RIGHT AND NECESSARY THAT, AS HONEST MEN, THEY SHOULD UNDERTAKE FRANKLY TO EXPLAIN WHAT

What we could not do to deliver ourselves from the wrath of God, He has done for us in Christ.

God demonstrated His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom 5:8).

God commissioned His Son to be born of a virgin and enter the human race, yet be without sin. He came in order to live a perfect life and achieve perfect righteousness on behalf of those who are unrighteous. He then went to the cross to die as a substitute for all who would believe in Him.

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, so He might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons (Gal 4:4-5).

Upon the cross, Jesus gave His life as the only sacrifice for sins in the place of guilty, hell-bound sinners. As He was lifted up to die, God the Father transferred all the sins of all the people who would ever believe upon Jesus. In turn, those who trust Him will receive the free gift of His perfect righteousness and forgiveness.

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor 5:21).

In this great exchange, all our sins were laid upon Him, and His perfect righteousness was placed upon us who believe in Him. Upon the cross, Jesus became our sin-bearer (1 Pet 2:24), who took our sins far away. John the Baptist declared:

Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29; cf. 36).

In this substitutionary death, Jesus satisfied the righteous anger of God toward all who would turn to Him in personal trust. By His shed blood, Jesus purchased the redemption of unworthy sinners. The result is peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible says:

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 5:1).

Previous to faith in Jesus, we were at war with God (Col 1:21), and He was at war with us (Rom 1:18). But now, we

**JEOPARDY PEOPLE ARE IN APART FROM CHRIST. ACADEMICS
SOMETIMES LOOK DOWN ON EVANGELISTS FOR AFFIRMING
THAT HELL IS REAL AND ETERNAL, BUT THEY WOULD BE
WISER TO LOOK UP TO THEM.**

J.I. PACKER

PROFESSOR, REGENT COLLEGE

have entered into peace with God through the reconciliation of the blood of His cross:

Having now been justified by his blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life (Rom 5:9-10).

Those who believe in Christ will never face the wrath of God. Jesus has absorbed the full fury of the divine punishment we deserve as He bore our sins upon the cross. No condemnation remains for us who believe. The Apostle Paul writes:

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1).

Through Christ, all who place their trust in Him are given a perfect standing of full acceptance before holy God. No sin will ever be held against them. Their sin debt is cancelled out

in full (Col 2:14). Paul explains:

Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us (Rom 8:33-34).

These rhetorical questions raised by Paul demand an unequivocally negative answer. No one can successfully bring any condemning prosecution against any who believe in Jesus Christ. No indictment before the supreme court of heaven can ever prevail against any believer. This is the perfect salvation that Jesus accomplished for all who will receive Him.

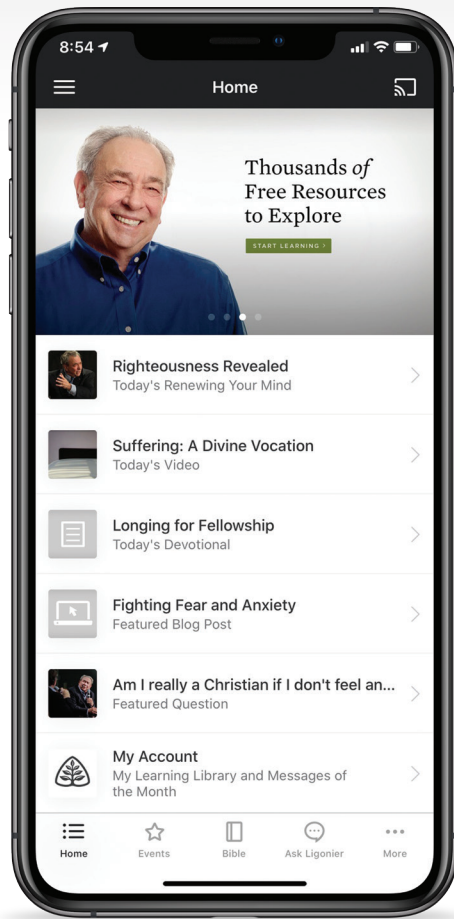
It is our mandate as preachers to herald this truth on hell—and the only possible escape from its eternal flames. As the reality of eternal punishment is prevalent throughout the Bible, so is the free offer of salvation through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let us preach these vital truths with an increased sense of our accountability to God, for His glory alone. 🔥



HELL WILL NOT BE A PLACE, AS SOME JOKINGLY ENVISION, WHERE THE UNGODLY WILL CONTINUE TO DO THEIR THING WHILE THE GODLY DO THEIRS IN HEAVEN. HELL WILL HAVE NO FRIENDSHIPS, NO FELLOWSHIP, NO CAMARADERIE, NO COMFORT. IT WILL NOT EVEN HAVE THE DEBAUCHED PLEASURES IN WHICH THE UNGODLY LOVE TO REVEL ON EARTH. THERE WILL BE NO PLEASURE IN HELL OF ANY KIND OR DEGREE – ONLY TORMENT, “DAY AND NIGHT FOREVER AND EVER” (REV. 20:10).

JOHN MACARTHUR

PASTOR-TEACHER, GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH



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NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

by STEVEN J. LAWSON

What actually happens when you trust Christ for salvation?

The single most important event in a person's life is the new birth. Yet many Christians would be hard-pressed to describe exactly what it is, let alone what it means to the rest of their walk with God. What happens when we are born again? Does everything in our lives change immediately? Is it just a kind of spiritual do-over, a chance to get it right this time? What happens when we fail? Does it mean we weren't really born again to begin with?

With a pastor's heart and a professor's insight, Steven Lawson carefully examines the encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus found in John 3 to uncover the nature of this spiritual rebirth. He shows you the necessity of the new birth, how God changes our hearts through it, and what follows after, from baptism and involvement in a local church to handling doubts and setbacks.

“Steve Lawson is a force of nature. His preaching and writing have touched tens of thousands of lives. Saturated with Scripture, contoured by sound biblical doctrine, and passionately written, this book is a gem. It will change the lives of those who read it.”

DEREK W. H. THOMAS, senior minister, First Presbyterian Church, Columbia,
South Carolina; chancellor's professor, Reformed Theological Seminary;
teaching fellow, Ligonier Ministries

FOREWORD BY
SINCLAIR FERGUSON

NEW LIFE

in

CHRIST

WHAT REALLY HAPPENS
WHEN YOU'RE BORN AGAIN AND
WHY IT MATTERS

STEVEN J. LAWSON



WAR ON HELL

UNMASKING THE DEVIL'S LIES

STEVEN J. LAWSON

A critical part of Satan's lethal assault on humanity is his diabolical plot to cause men to explain away the terrors of hell. The devil knows that if he can remove the fear of eternal punishment from the minds of men and women, he can more easily seduce them to go there. As long as people believe that hell exists, no one will be foolish enough to deny its terror. But if they can be duped into believing there is no such thing as the lake of fire, then it will be a simpler matter for them to fall into it.

The ruler of this world—the prince of the power of the air—has many strategies that he uses to con men into thinking that hell does not exist—or that even if it does exist, no one will ever go there. Or, perhaps, that if they do plunge into hell, they will surely not be held there forever, or that it really will not be so bad, after all. These devices are stunningly devilish in their fiendish brilliance. Though no one with an open Bible would seemingly be so gullible as to fall prey to these lies, they nevertheless have tricked untold multitudes.

The Bible says, “The god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the

gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor 4:4). The devil has greatly impaired their ability to see the truth, especially on this subject of hell. Even among those who admit there *is* a hell, he has deceived vast multitudes into believing that unbelievers will not remain there forever.

What are these wiles of the devil by which he has beguiled countless numbers into thinking there is no eternal hell for those without Christ? Several effective battle plans should be intercepted and made known for what they are:

ANNIHILATIONISM

The most popular attack today on hell is the satanic deception of annihilationism. The term is drawn from the Latin word *nihil*, meaning “nothing.” This is the belief that all unsaved people who die without Christ will at some point pass out of existence, or into a state of unconscious nothingness. According to this false position, God confers the gift of immortality only upon His redeemed people, enabling them to live forever. But He allows the rest of humanity to be annihilated and pass into non-existence. Those unbelievers without Christ are simply uncreated. They cease to exist after death by

“A SINGLE DAY IN HELL WILL BE WORSE THAN A WHOLE LIFE SPENT IN CARRYING THE CROSS.” – J.C. RYLE

a direct act of God.

This view is the result of mishandling verses that describe the final destiny of unsaved men to be “death” (Rom 6:23; James 5:20; Rev 20:14), “destruction” (Matt 7:13; 10:28; 2 Thess 1:9), and “perishing” (John 3:16). The assumption is that these words refer to annihilation. However, these words do not mean annihilation, but strictly speaking, a deprivation of people’s wellbeing. That is to say, they are ever-dying, yet never permanently dying. They suffer destruction, yet are never completely destroyed. They are always perishing, yet never perish.

The most popular advocate of this annihilationist position was John Stott (1921–2011), the well-known expositor at All Souls Church in London. Stott writes, “Emotionally, I find the concept of hell intolerable and do not understand how people can live with it without either cauterizing their emotions or cracking under the strain.” He supports the idea that the smoke that rises from hell is after the lake of fire has finished burning. The smoke is a reminder of what the fire once was, but no longer exists.

Stott also writes, “I question whether eternal conscious torment is compatible with the biblical revelation of divine justice.” In other words, he argues that the punishment does not fit the crime. He maintains that the infliction of eternal suffering far outweighs the offense of rejecting Jesus Christ. However, this view is more sentimental imagination than sound interpretation. Further, it thinks far too little of the

majestic honor of Christ. Because the sin of unbelief has been leveled against the High King of heaven, the retribution to be inflicted must be enduring. Anything less necessarily diminishes the glory of Christ.

Another recent proponent of this position is theologian Clark Pinnock (1937–2010), who writes, “The fire will be quenched...when the job is finished.” Yet Jesus said the fire does “not quench.” Whom are we to believe? Do we side with Pinnock? Or do we trust Jesus Christ? To ask the question is to answer it. Of course, the One who is “the truth” is correct, and all opposing arguments are wrong. The fires of hell in which torments are inflicted will never be extinguished. Neither will those who are in its fires be annihilated.

UNIVERSALISM

Another attack on the doctrine of hell is the popular belief known as universalism. This is the heresy that every human being will ultimately be saved. Some hold to the position that at death, all creatures are perfectly restored to God. Others hold that after some period of punishment following death, all mankind is reconciled to God. What is more, some Universalists believe that even the devil and his demons will be restored to their former position as angels in good standing before God. This kind of theological shell game—an exegetical slight of hand—is mesmerizing to those untaught by the Spirit and dangerous in its deception.

There are some advocates of universalism who are identi-

fied with the term *apokatastasis* (often translated as “restoration”). Based upon Acts 3:21, which speaks of “the period of the restoration of all things,” this position emerged from the Greek fathers in the fourth century. Chief among these were Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. This teaching first appeared as a doctrine of Zoroastrianism and was adapted by the Alexandrian school, where it became Christianized by many in the early Greek church. This unorthodox teaching held that at the end of history, evil will be destroyed, and the world will be restored to its original state. Such a restoration, it is claimed, will include all creatures—humanity and devils included.

A form of *apokatastasis* was condemned with an anathema by the local Synod of Constantinople in 543. This denunciation was formally submitted to the Second Council of Constantinople in 553. The charge of anathema against *apokatastasis* is mentioned in the fourteenth of fifteen anathemas against Origen, which reads: “If anyone shall say... that in this pretended *apokatastasis*, spirits only will continue to exist, as it was in the feigned pre-existence: let him be anathema.” This anathema was reiterated at the Second Council of Nicaea, explicitly affirming the sentence of the Second Council of Constantinople (553) that condemned Origen. Specifically, it condemned the teaching of “the restoration of all things” and affirmed the eternal damnation of lost souls.

In this present day, David Bentley Hart (1965–) has written a resurrected version of this ancient heresy, a book entitled *That All Shall Be Saved*. He argues for the restoration of all things in the end, including lost souls, through a faulty twisting of Scripture. Out of the seven chapters of the book,


only one chapter addresses the Bible, a glaring omission. In that one chapter, the majority of the verses are only translated, but not interpreted. In other words, he gives no real analysis of the text.

In the chapter “Who Is God?,” not a single passage of Scripture is referenced. Hart’s handling of Scripture is so thin that in the back of the book, there is provided a subject index, but no Scripture index. None is needed. Though he labels “the traditional majority Christian view of hell” as “a genuinely odious idea,” he offers zero biblical support for his outlandish statement. Instead, he is more interested in interpreting the Greek fathers to emphasize his position, rather than the Bible.

PURGATORY

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that those who die at peace and are not in a state of mortal sin can be purified after death and made fit for heaven in a fictitious place called purgatory. They teach that saints and martyrs go straight to heaven, but that the vast majority of those in the Catholic church must endure purgatorial fire. According to the Church, the fire of purgatory does not differ from the fire of hell. The only difference is in its duration. Some in purgatory endure the pains of their suffering for entire centuries. Release from purgatory is supposedly expedited by religious masses for the dead and indulgences purchased.

Nevertheless, let us be clear, there is no mention of purgatory anywhere in the Bible. It is strictly a man-made invention that has no basis in reality. The idea of purgatory demeans the perfection of Christ’s sacrifice upon the cross



**THE IDEA OF PURGATORY DEMEANS THE
PERFECTION OF CHRIST’S SACRIFICE
UPON THE CROSS AND HAS BEEN USED TO
CRASSLY RAISE MONEY FOR THE CHURCH
THROUGH THE SALE OF INDULGENCES.**

and has been used to crassly raise money for the church through the sale of indulgences. Pointedly, Lorraine Boettner has said, “No other doctrine of the church of Rome...has done so much to pervert the gospel or to enslave the people to the priesthood as has the doctrine of purgatory.” This is but another lie of the devil.

LIBERALISM


A further attack on hell is made by liberal theologians and ministers in the church who deny the authority of Scripture. They are consistent, in that many further deny the supernatural, such as the virgin birth and the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This spirit of unbelief continues in their denial of the unseen world of hell. In their minds, all they can believe is what they can see. Because human eyes cannot presently see beyond the grave, they deny the very existence of a place called hell. Such rank unbelief deadens their doctrinal thinking and prevents them from taking the Bible seriously.

Liberalism is a movement whose genesis is generally at-

tributed to the German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), though its roots go farther back. Schleiermacher denied the deity of Christ and the necessity of His virgin birth. He propounded that God has sovereignly decreed the universal salvation of all people. In so doing, he destroyed any biblical representation of the doctrine of hell. In the twentieth century, the Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968) taught much the same, as he doubted that God could finally condemn anyone. Though he denied being a universalist, his doubletalk led countless others to embrace this false doctrine. At the end of the day, they believed hell will not be the eternal abode for any person after death.

Another Swiss theologian, Emil Brunner (1889–1966), denied the inerrancy of Scripture. He wrote, “The Bible is full of errors, contradictions, erroneous opinions concerning all kinds of human, natural, historical situations.” Once the authority of Scripture was called into question, Brunner found it easy to say, “The doctrine of forgiving grace...finds its crown in a proclamation of universal redemption.” This is the same bottle of poison, merely with a different label.





**LET US FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT IN
OUR WAR AGAINST THESE HERESIES.
LET US EARNESTLY CONTEND FOR
THE FAITH ONCE FOR ALL DELIVERED
TO THE SAINTS. LET US SPEAK WHAT
THE BIBLE SAYS ON HELL WITH
AUTHORITY AND CLARITY, WITHOUT
ANY EQUIVOCATION. MAY THE LIGHT
OF THE TRUTH EXTINGUISH THIS
MESSAGE OF DARKNESS.**

More recently, others have adopted this “wider mercy” heresy, such as liberal British minister C. H. Dodd (1884–1973), who wrote: “In the end no member of the human race is left outside the scope of salvation.” Likewise, William Barclay reasoned that God is a Father more than He is King or Judge. He claimed, “No father could be happy while there were members of his family in agony. No father would count it a triumph to obliterate the disobedient members of his family. The only triumph a father can know is to have all his family back home.”


This kind of liberalism has fully embraced universalism. In its deluded thinking, it has emptied hell of any souls that would occupy it. It has populated heaven with the entire human race, regardless of religion or confession of truth. In other words, a person could claim to be a Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, or even an atheist, and would go to heaven just the same. In other words, Christ suffered and died needlessly. All efforts of evangelism are wasted time and money. All foreign missionary endeavors are the waste of the missionary’s life.

Liberals of this leaning join themselves with universalists, who believe that all people will be saved in the end. These two groups make for strange bedfellows, because the former de-

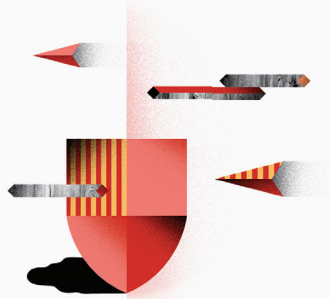
nies the authority of Scripture, while some of the latter affirm it. Nevertheless, they both end up at the same tragic place: both deny the reality of hell.

THE DEVIL’S LIES

These doctrinal corruptions are damnable lies. They are some of the deceptive weapons, ignited with the flames of hell itself, that have been aimed at destroying the truth of eternal hell for those who die without Christ. To be sure, each one of these positions speaks with the hiss of the serpent and injects its deadly venom into the lifeblood of those who are beguiled by them. Each devilish lie finds its common source in the one of whom Jesus said, he “does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

Let us be on the alert for these deceptions concerning hell. Let us fight the good fight in our war against these heresies. Let us earnestly contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Let us speak what the Bible says on hell with authority and clarity, without any equivocation. May the light of the truth extinguish this message of darkness. 

STAND FIRM



LIVING IN A POST-CHRISTIAN CULTURE

JOHN MACARTHUR

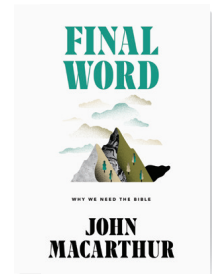
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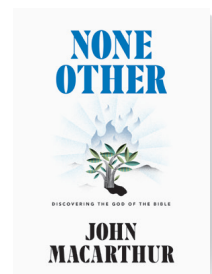
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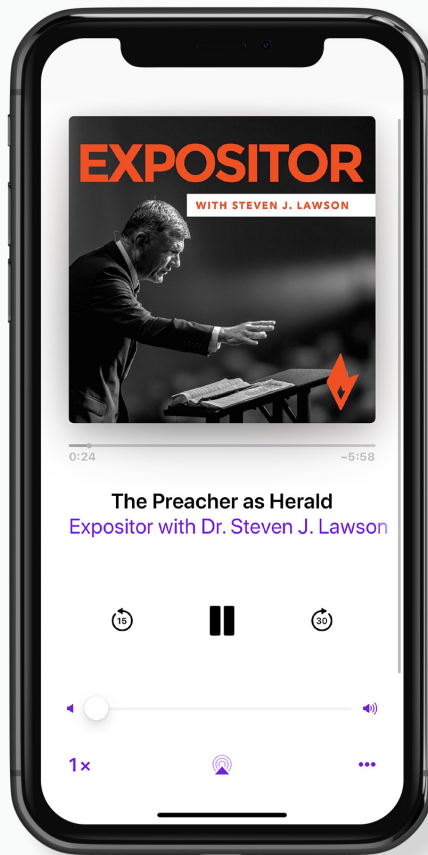
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