



**9Marks eJournal**  
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*Editor's note:*

Wisdom so often in life prescribes moderation. It's wise to eat with moderation, to speak with moderation, to feel with moderation, some would even say to believe with moderation.

But there's absolutely nothing moderate about the doctrine of hell. It's extreme in every way. It's an extreme idea for the mind. It's an extreme confrontation for the heart. And it blows against all the rules of social etiquette.

Embracing the reality of hell means setting aside moderation. It means admitting that our sin is dark and heinous to the point of eternal damnation; that the white light of God's character and glory justly destroys those who have fallen short of his glory; and that that our non-Christians friends have nothing greater to fear. That's tough to do when you have moderate views of your sin, your friend's sin, and of God's glory.

Embracing the reality of hell also means going against the fallen cultural structures and belief systems of this world, all of which conspire together with our own hearts to repeat the serpent's promise of a moderate outcome, "You will surely not die."

As hard as it is to stare at the doctrine of hell, surely it must be salubrious to our faith to do so from time to time. It forces us to once again reckon with who God is and who we are. We hope this issue of the 9Marks eJournal will help all of us to do just that.

—Jonathan Leeman

## PASTORAL PERSPECTIVES ON HELL



### **Pastoral Fearmongering, Manipulation, and Hell**

Our culture sneers at fear, as if there really is nothing to fear but fear itself. Yet Jesus told people to fear hell, and pastors today should do the same.

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### **There's Something Worse than Death**

The doctrine of hell is ballast for our ministries, which will help us sail straight toward our most urgent task: proclaiming the gospel.

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## HELL IN BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE



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Hell glorifies God by vindicating his holiness and faithfulness to his word, demonstrating his infinite worth, and magnifying his mercy and love toward the redeemed.

*By James M. Hamilton, Jr.*

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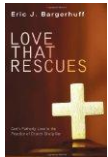
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This article contains brief reviews of seven key books on hell.

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## RECENT BOOK REVIEWS



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## AUDIO – LEADERSHIP INTERVIEWS

### [Training Pators with David Jackman](#)

Can you “make” a preacher or is preaching simply a gift? Find out in this interview with David Jackman, founder of the Cornhill Training Course.

*Posted on September 1, 2010*

### [Women, Christianity, and Feminism with Carolyn McCulley](#)

Carolyn McCulley discusses feminism, ministering to singles, Christian social action, and what it means to be a “crush catalyst.”

*Posted on August 1, 2010*

## NEW TRANSLATIONS

The Korean translation of *In My Place Condemned He Stood* by J.I. Packer and Mark Dever is now available here: <http://www.yes24.com/24/goods/3732515?scode=032&srnk=1>

## UPCOMING 9MARKS EVENTS



[9Marks@Southeastern: Biblical Theology](#)  
 Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary  
 Wake Forest, North Carolina  
 September 10 – 11, 2010  
*Daniel Akin, Thabiti Anyabwile, Mark Dever, Matt Chandler, and David Platt*



[26ª Conferência Fiel para Pastores e Líderes 2010](#)  
 São Paulo, Brazil  
 October 18th–22nd 2010  
**Preletores (Speakers):** Dr. Steven Lawson, Dr. Joel Beeke, Pr. Thabiti Anyabwile, Pr. Luiz Sayão and Dr. Don Kistler



[Trellis and Vine Conference](#)  
 Capitol Hill Baptist Church  
 Washington, DC  
 October 28 – 29, 2010  
 Tony Payne, Colin Marshall, and Marty Sweeny

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## Pastoral Fearmongering, Manipulation, and Hell

By Mark Dever

Preaching about hell is manipulative. It's a scare tactic. It's fearmongering. Isn't that what people say?

For most of its history, says journalist A. C. Grayling, Christianity

has been an often violent and always oppressive ideology—think Crusades, torture, burnings at the stake, the enslavement of women to constantly repeated childbirth and undivorcable husbands, the warping of human sexuality, the use of fear (of hell's torments) as an instrument of control, and the horrific results of its calumny against Judaism.

But today Christians are more consumer-savvy. They know how to market themselves by jettisoning the unpopular bits, like a new product or politician. Grayling continues,

Nowadays, by contrast, Christianity specializes in soft-focus mood-music; its threats of hell, its demand for poverty and chastity, its doctrine that only a few will be saved and the many damned, have been shed, replaced by strummed guitars and saccharine smiles. It has reinvented itself so often, and with such breath-taking hypocrisy, in the interests of retaining its hold on the guillible, that a medieval monk who woke today, like Woody Allen's *Sleeper*, would not be able to recognize the faith that bears the same name as his own.[1]

This, anyhow, is the transformation one non-Christian has observed among Christians. It reflects our modern discomfort, our squeamishness, in publicly affirming any number of Jesus' unpopular teachings, such as the fearful picture of the future that Jesus painted. Could it also reflect how Christians too readily capitulate to cultural standards?

### WHY WE SNEER AT FEAR

Our society dislikes being motivated by fear. We resent it. Fear, after all, is an unreliable guide. It seems beneath us. It seems primitive, even animal-like. It seems too instinctual to be reasonable.

"Phobias" are what we call unreasonable fears. So we refer to hydrophobia, an irrational fear of water, or arachnophobia, an irrational fear of spiders. Phobias are to be pitied and they're to be dismissed. If you call my understanding of homosexuality "homophobia" then you don't have to consider what I say. Phobias are beneath being taken seriously.

Fear is powerful, we admit. But it's also irrational, and leaves us open to being manipulated. It leaves us vulnerable. So we don't like it.

### FEAR WORKS

Ironically, everyone knows that fear is useful! So we employ it.

From the dawn of time we've done this. So Aesop's fables warned of the fates of those who were lazy. Sayings and maxims of Confucius and Ben Franklin contrast the prosperity of those who do right with the poverty of those who do wrong. Parents tell young children not to do *this* or *that* because it will hurt them, or not to have *those* friends because they will lead them into no good. Teachers tell Johnny that if he can't read he can't work; and if he can't work he can't have the stuff he wants, and the life he wants.

We feign cynicism toward scary claims, but the real truth is that fear sells!

You want your kids safe so you buy a certain car. You want your health protected so you get insurance and vitamins. You want your looks preserved so you buy an ab machine. You want financial security so

you invest. You want to sleep soundly, which means you need to sleep safely, so you buy a house alarm.

Fear works.

And it's not just Madison Avenue that knows this. The city I live in, Washington, DC, knows the utility of fear. Fear might be decried—"We have nothing to fear, but fear itself!"—yet it's constantly employed.

Just picture a dark television screen. Then an unflattering black and white photograph appears, and a deep voice speaks ominously, "If Bob Smith gets into office, murderous prisoners will be released, jobs will evaporate, our country will be undefended, old people will starve, the sun won't rise, and it will be winter always but never Christmas!" Then the screen switches to a color photo of a candidate smiling, being warmly greeted by happy people. The voice changes from ominous to warm and confident. It affirms the candidate. End.

### **WHAT IF THERE REALLY IS SOMETHING TO FEAR?**

Of course, it's good to teach our children not to be scared by shadows, and to be wary of those who use fear to sell us something. But what if there really is something to fear?

What if our actions do have consequences and not all of those consequences are good? And what if there is a relationship between what we do and what we get? Are we allowed to talk about that?

Our society tolerates warnings of objective dangers: "The bridge is out ahead. Detour right." We value educated medical warnings: "If you don't stop smoking, it will kill you. So stop." We speculate about how some action will affect our environment or economy. We're quick to warn about terrorist threats.

But what about spiritual matters? Matters of God, our souls, and the afterlife? Is fear an appropriate motivator in such matters?

We may resent the idea, but our resentments have never been an infallible guide to falsehoods, have they? Just because we resent something doesn't mean it's not true!

### **JESUS SHOWS US WHAT TO FEAR: HELL**

Jesus knew there was something to fear: spending eternity in hell. He told his disciples,

If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.' (Mark 9:43-48)

Elsewhere, Jesus said,

I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes I tell you, fear him (Luke 12:4-5).

Jesus exhorts us to fear hell. And he warns us to fear God, who has the power to cast us into hell.

### **PASTORS: DON'T BE AFRAID OF FEAR**

It's an illusion to think that we can live without fear in this cursed and fallen world. Everybody fears something; it's just a question of what.

Pastors, don't be lured into the culture's standards of what to fear and not to fear. Don't be fooled by the culture's sneering at fear. They're afraid, too. Instead, follow Jesus in warning others about the fearful future that awaits those who do not repent of their sins and trust in Christ.

*Mark Dever is the senior pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington DC and the author of Nine Marks of a Healthy Church.*

[1] A. C. Grayling, *Against All Gods* (Oberon, 2007), 24.

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## There's Something Worse than Death

By Kevin DeYoung

We will never make sense of the Bible, the church's mission, or the glory of the gospel unless we understand this seeming paradox: Death is the last enemy, but it is not the worst.

Clearly, death is an enemy, the last enemy to be destroyed, Paul tells us (1 Cor. 15:26). Death is the tragic result of sin (Rom. 5:12). It should be hated and despised. It should arouse our anger and mournful indignation (John 11:35, 38). Death must be defeated.

But, on the other hand, it must not be feared. Over and over, Scripture tells us not to be afraid of death. After all, what can flesh do to us (Ps. 56:3-4)? The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and they are saved (Prov. 18:10). So even if we are delivered up to our enemies, not a hair shall perish from our head apart from God's ordaining (Luke 21:18). As Christians we conquer by the word of our testimony, not by clinging to the breath of life (Rev. 12:11). In fact, there is nothing more fundamental to Christianity than the certain faith that death will be gain for us (Phil. 1:21).

Therefore we do not fear death. Instead, "we are of good courage," for "we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8).

The consistent witness of Scripture is that death is grievous, but far from the ultimate disaster that can befall a person. In fact, there's something worse than death. Much worse.

### FEAR THIS

For the most part, Jesus did not want the disciples to be afraid. He told them not to fear their persecutors (Matt. 10:26), not to fear those who kill the body (v. 28), not to fear for their precious little hairs on their precious little heads (v. 31). Jesus did not want them afraid of much, but he did want them to be afraid of hell. "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul," Jesus warned. "Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (28).

People often talk as if Jesus was above frightening people with scenes of judgment. But such sentiment exposes soft-minded prejudice more than careful exegesis. Often Jesus warned of the day of judgment (Matt. 11:24; 25:31-46), spoke of condemnation (Matt. 12:37; John 3:18), and described hell in graphic, shocking terms (Matt. 13:49-50; 18:9; Luke 16:24). You only have to read his parables about the tenants or the wedding feast or the virgins or the talents to realize that Jesus frequently motivated his hearers to heed his message by warning them of coming judgment. It was not beneath Jesus to scare the hell out of people.

Obviously, it would be inaccurate to characterize Jesus and the apostles as nothing but sandwich-board fanatics with vacant stares screaming at people to repent or perish. It flattens the New Testament beyond recognition to make it one large tract about saving souls from hell. And yet, it would be closer to the truth to picture Jesus and the apostles (not to mention John the Baptist) passionately pleading with people to flee the wrath to come than it would be to imagine them laying out plans for cosmic renewal and helping people on their spiritual journeys. Anyone reading through the gospels, the epistles, and the apocalypse with an open mind has to conclude that eternal life after death is the great reward for which we hope and eternal destruction after death is the dreadful judgment which we should want to avoid at all costs. From John 3 to Romans 1 to 1 Thessalonians 4 to Revelation...well, all of it, scarcely a chapter goes by where God does not appear as the great Savior of the righteous and the righteous judge of the wicked. There is a death for God's children which should not be feared (Heb. 2:14-15), and a second death for the ungodly which should be (Rev. 20:11-15).

### STEADY AS SHE GOES

However unpopular it may be and however much we may wish to soften its hard edges, the doctrine of hell is essential for faithful Christian witness. The belief that there is something worse than death is, to recall John Piper's imagery, ballast for our ministry boats.

Hell is not the North Star. That is, divine wrath is not our guiding light. It does not set the direction for everything in the Christian faith like, say, the glory of God in the face of Christ. Neither is hell the faith-wheel which steers the ship, nor the wind that powers us along, nor the sails that capture the Spirit's breeze. Yet hell is not incidental to this vessel we call the church. It's our ballast, and we throw it overboard at great peril to ourselves and to everyone drowning far out at sea.

For those not familiar with boating terms (and I for one find them arcane), ballast refers to weights, usually put underneath in the middle of the boat, which are used to keep the ship stable in the water. Without ballast, the boat will not sit properly. It will veer off course more easily or be tossed from side to side. Ballast keeps the boat balanced.

The doctrine of hell is like that for the church. Divine wrath may not be the decorative masthead or the flag we raise up every flagpole. The doctrine may be underneath other doctrines. It may not always be seen. But its absence will always be felt.

Since hell is real, we must prepare our people to die well far more than we strive to help them live comfortably. Since hell is real, we must never think alleviating earthly suffering is the most loving thing we can do. Since hell is real, evangelism and discipleship must not be marginalized as important tasks that are on par with painting a school or producing a movie.

If we lose the doctrine of hell, either becoming too embarrassed to mention it or too culturally-sensitive to affirm it, we can count on this: the boat will drift. The cross will be stripped of propitiation, our preaching will be devoid of urgency and power, and our work in the world will no longer center on calling people to faith and repentance and building them to maturity in Christ. Lose the ballast of divine judgment and our message, our ministry, and our mission will all eventually change.

## STAYING ON COURSE

All of life must be lived to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). And we ought to do good to all people (Gal. 6:10). No apologies necessary for caring about our cities, loving our neighbors, or working hard at our vocation. These too are "musts." But with the doctrine of hell as ballast in our boats, we will never sneer at the old hymns which call us to rescue the perishing, nor will we scoff at saving souls as it were nothing but glorified fire insurance.

There is something worse than death. And only the gospel of Jesus Christ, proclaimed by Christians and protected by the church, can set us free from what we truly must fear. The doctrine of hell reminds us that the greatest need of every person will not be met by the United Nations or Habitat for Humanity or the United Way. It is only through Christian witness, through proclamation of Christ crucified, that the worst thing in all the world will not fall on all those in the world.

So to all the wonderful, sacrificial, risk-taking pastors who love justice, care for the suffering, and long to renew their cities, Jesus says, "Well done. But don't forget the ballast, boys."

*Kevin DeYoung is the senior pastor of University Reformed Church in East Lansing, Michigan, and is the author (with Greg Gilbert) of the forthcoming What is the Mission of the Church? (Crossway, 2011).*

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## Why Hell is Integral to the Gospel

By Greg Gilbert

I'm sure you were overjoyed to learn that this issue of the 9Marks eJournal focuses on the topic of hell. In fact, it's a topic that, if anything, makes us want to avert our eyes and think about something else entirely.

For some, the horror of the Christian doctrine of hell—that it is a place of eternal, conscious torment where God's enemies are punished—has led them not just to avert their eyes and minds, but to deny it entirely. "Surely," they say, "hell is a fictional construct used to oppress people with fear; a God of love would never allow such a place to really exist." There's an emotional power to this argument, to be sure. No one, certainly no Christian, *likes* the idea of hell.

At the same time, this doctrine isn't just drapery on the side of the Christian worldview, something with no relevance to the structure of the faith itself. Nor is the doctrine of hell an embarrassing, unnecessary, primitive wart that we believe just because we're told we have to.

On the contrary, the doctrine and reality of hell actually throws the glory of the gospel into sharp relief for us. It helps us to understand just how great God really is, how sinfully wretched we really are, and how unutterably amazing it is that he would show us grace at all. Moreover, the reality of hell—if we don't push it out of our minds—will focus us, above all, on the task of proclaiming the gospel to those who are in danger of spending eternity there.

With that in mind, here are five biblical statements about hell which, taken as a whole, demonstrate why hell is integral to the gospel.

### WHY HELL IS INTEGRAL TO THE GOSPEL

#### **1. Scripture teaches that there is a real place called hell.**

I won't belabor this point. Others have made this case with crystal clarity. Suffice it to say that medieval bishops didn't invent the doctrine of hell as a way to scare the serfs; they got it from the apostles. And the apostles didn't invent it to scare the pagans; they got it from Jesus. And Jesus didn't borrow it from the Zoroastrians to scare the Pharisees; he was God, so he *knew* it to be real, and said so. And besides, hell's reality had already been revealed in the Old Testament.

At the most basic level, therefore, if we claim to be Christians and to believe that the Bible is the word of God, we have to recognize that the Bible teaches the reality of hell. But there's more.

#### **2. Hell shows us how heinous our sin really is.**

Have you ever heard someone make the argument that no human sin could *possibly* deserve eternal torment in hell? It's an interesting argument, one that reveals a lot about the human heart. Why is it that when people think about hell, they always conclude that God must be at fault and not themselves? You can see how the doctrine reveals our hearts: when we consider our own sin, our first inclination is always to minimize it, to protest that it's not that bad and that God is wrong to say it deserves punishment.

The reality of hell stands as a massive refutation of that self-justification. Non-Christians will always see the horrors of hell as an indictment of *God*, but as Christians who know God to be perfectly just and righteous, we must understand that the horrors of hell are actually an indictment of *us*. We may want to minimize our sin, or excuse it, or try to argue our consciences down. But the fact that God has declared that we deserve eternal torment for those sins should remind us that they are not small at all. They are enormously evil.

#### **3. Hell shows us how immovably and unimpeachably just God really is.**

People have been tempted throughout history to think of God as a corrupt judge, one who sets aside the demands of justice simply because he *likes* the defendant. “We are all God’s children,” the argument goes. “How could God hand down such a horrible sentence on *some* of his children?” The answer to that question is simple: God is not a corrupt judge. He is an absolutely just and righteous one.

Over and over the Bible makes this point. When God reveals himself to Moses, he declares himself to be compassionate and loving, but he also says, “Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished.” The Psalms declare that “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.” What an amazing statement! If God is to continue being God, he cannot simply set justice aside and sweep sin under the rug. He must deal with it—decisively and with exacting justice. When God finally judges, not one sin will receive more punishment than it deserves. And not one will receive *less* than it deserves, either.

The Bible tells us that on that day, when God sentences his enemies to hell, the whole universe will recognize and acknowledge that what he has decided is unimpeachably just and right. Isaiah 5 makes this point with bracing clarity: “Therefore Sheol has enlarged its appetite and opens its mouth without measure.” It’s a grotesque image, the grave widening its mouth to swallow the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And yet by this means, Isaiah declares, “The Lord of Hosts is exalted in justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness.” Similarly, Romans 9:22 tells us that by the torments of hell, God will “show his wrath and make his power known,” so that he might “make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy.”

We may not understand it fully now, but one day hell itself will declare God’s glory. It will—even in its horror—testify together with the psalmist, “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.”

#### **4. Hell shows us how horrific the cross really was, and how great God’s grace really is.**

Romans 3 tells us that God put forth Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement “to demonstrate his justice.” He did this “because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished.”

Why did Jesus have to die on the cross? It was because that was the only way God could righteously *not* send every one of us to hell. Jesus had to take what was due to us, and that means he had to endure the equivalent of hell as he hung on the cross. That doesn’t mean that Jesus actually went to hell. But it does mean that the nails and the thorns were only the beginning of Jesus’ suffering. The true height of his suffering came when God poured out his wrath on Jesus. When the darkness fell, that wasn’t just God covering the suffering of his Son, as some have said. That was the darkness of the curse, of God’s wrath. It was the darkness of hell, and in that moment Jesus was enduring its full fury—the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.

When you understand the cross in that light, you begin to understand better just how magnificent God’s grace to you is, if you are a Christian. The mission of redemption that Jesus undertook involved a commitment to endure God’s wrath in your place, to take the hell that you deserve. What an amazing display of love and mercy that is! Yet you will only see and understand this display of love clearly when you understand, accept, and shudder at the horror of hell.

#### **5. Hell focuses our minds on the task of proclaiming the gospel.**

If hell is real, and if people are truly in danger of spending eternity there, then there is no more urgent and important task than doing precisely what Jesus told his apostles to do before he ascended to heaven—proclaim to the world the good news that forgiveness of sins is offered through Jesus Christ!

I think John Piper got it exactly right in a Gospel Coalition interview: “It’s very hard to give up on the gospel if you believe there is hell, that after this life, there is an endless suffering for those who did not believe in the gospel.” There are all kinds of good things that Christians can do—and in fact should do! But if hell is real, it is worth keeping in mind—no, it is *imperative* that we keep in mind—that the one thing that Christians can do that no one else in the world is ever going to do is to tell people how they can be forgiven of their sin, how they can avoid spending an eternity in hell.

## CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that the doctrine of hell is horrible. The doctrine is horrible because the reality is horrible. But that's not a reason to avert our eyes and ignore it, much less to reject it.

There are those who think that, by rejecting or at least ignoring the doctrine in their preaching, they are making God more glorious and more loving. Far from it! What they are really doing is unwittingly stealing glory from the Savior Jesus Christ, as if what he saved us from was...well, not so bad after all.

In fact, the horrific nature of what we have been saved *from* only intensifies the glory of what we have been saved *to*. Not only so, but as we see ever more clearly the horror of hell, we look with ever more love, ever more gratitude, and ever greater worship to the One who endured that hell for us and saved us.

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## Hellfire and Brimstone: Interpreting the New Testament's Descriptions of Hell

By Andrew David Naselli

The New Testament graphically and horrifically describes hell. And that raises a thorny question: How should we interpret those dreadful images? May we simply label them “metaphors” to soften their bite?[1]

### HOW DOES THE NEW TESTAMENT DESCRIBE HELL?

In their recent little book *What Is Hell?*, Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson succinctly summarize what the Bible teaches about hell in the following five truths.[2]

1. “Hell is punishment” (2 Thess. 1:5–10; Rev. 20:10–15). God justly punishes people as retribution for their moral crimes against him. Hell is not even close to a big party. Jesus teaches that it would be better to cut off your hand or foot or to tear out your eye than to use them to sin and consequently suffer the just penalty in hell (Matt. 5:27–30; Mark 9:42–48).
2. “Hell is destruction” and death (Matt. 7:13–14; John 3:1; 2 Thess. 1:9). It’s the ultimate way to waste your life.
3. “Hell is banishment” (Matt. 7:23; 25:41; Rev. 22:15). Hell is the place where God banishes rebels from his kingdom once and for all.
4. “Hell is a place of suffering.” The Bible depicts hell with images that produce shock and fear: darkness, fire, and suffering.

*Darkness.* Those in hell are bound “hand and foot” and then thrown into “the outer darkness” (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30). “The gloom of utter darkness” awaits them (Jude 13).

*Fire.* Those in hell are thrown “into the fiery furnace” (Matt. 13:42, 50), and they burn with “unquenchable fire” (Mark 3:12; 9:43). “Their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:48). God’s judgment is “a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries” (Heb. 10:27). Those in hell “drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger” and are “tormented with fire and sulfur” (Rev. 14:10). They are “thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:15; cf. 19:20; 20:10, 14; 21:8).

*Suffering.* Nothing on earth hurts like hell. The severe conscious punishment in hell hurts physically, emotionally, and mentally. That’s why “there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28). God warns the wicked who are rich, “Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire” (James 5:3).

5. “Hell is eternal” (Matt. 25:41, 46; Jude 7, 13; Rev. 14:10–11; 20:10). It lasts forever and ever. It never ever ends. There’s no relief in sight, ever.

The New Testament—especially Jesus himself—vividly and repeatedly depicts each of these five truths, but the way it depicts the fourth raises the particular issue that this article addresses.

### HOW DO PEOPLE INTERPRET THE NEW TESTAMENT’S HORRIFIC DESCRIPTIONS OF HELL?

People interpret the ghastly descriptions of darkness, fire, and suffering in at least three ways.

1. Mythically. Some argue that traditional Christian conceptions of hell are a product of Roman and pagan myths.

2. Literally. Some think that the descriptions are literal, meaning that the darkness, fire, and suffering are actual darkness, fire, and suffering.
3. Metaphorically. Others say that some or all of the descriptions are metaphorical in the sense that the darkness, fire, and suffering may not be actual darkness, fire, and suffering.

The terms “literal” and “metaphorical” are notoriously slippery and prone to misunderstanding. In this case, I’m using literal in the sense of actual, non-metaphorical, in contrast to those who use literal in the sense of normal or natural and thus include figures of speech like metaphor. One of the finest definitions of metaphor is by Janet Soskice: “Metaphor is that figure of speech whereby we speak about one thing in terms which are seen to be suggestive of another.”[3]

## HOW SHOULD WE INTERPRET THE NEW TESTAMENT’S HORRIFIC DESCRIPTIONS OF HELL?

How then should we interpret the New Testament’s descriptions of hell as fire, darkness, and suffering?

1. We can rule out interpreting the descriptions mythically because the imagery of hell is rooted in the Old Testament (see esp. Isa. 66:24; Dan. 12:1–2), not Roman or pagan myths.

2. But we can’t quickly rule out interpreting the descriptions literally. Charles Spurgeon preached,

Now, do not begin telling me that that is metaphorical fire: who cares for that? If a man were to threaten to give me a metaphorical blow on the head, I should care very little about it; he would be welcome to give me as many as he pleased. And what say the wicked? “We do not care about metaphorical fires.” But they are *real*, sir—yes, as real as yourself. There is a real fire in hell, as truly as you have now a real body—a fire exactly like that which we have on earth in everything except this—that it will not consume, though it will torture you. You have seen the asbestos lying in the fire red hot, but when you take it out it is unconsumed. So your body will be prepared by God in such a way that it will burn for ever without being consumed; it will lie, not as you consider, in metaphorical fire, but in actual flame.[4]

The literal view argues that it takes the text at face value without domesticating or blunting it. And the view is feasible because God is certainly able to sustain material objects in flames. Scripture records two such examples: the burning bush (Ex. 3:3) and Daniel’s three friends (Dan. 3:24–27).

But it’s difficult to dogmatically insist that all the descriptions of hell must be interpreted literally because some of the images (for example, fire and darkness) seem contradictory when taken literally. Such apparent contradictions may be clues that we should interpret the text metaphorically.

3. Evaluating metaphorical interpretations requires some nuance. While we should reject the way that some people interpret the descriptions of hell metaphorically, interpreting the images metaphorically is plausible.

On the one hand, we can’t know for sure whether the horrible descriptions of hell are literal or metaphorical because they depict another realm that is foreign to our experience. Scripture’s language for heaven is similar. Will heaven have actual roads paved with gold? I don’t know. It’s challenging to describe another realm like heaven or hell to earthlings because our only experiential reference-point is earth. How would you describe something like an iPhone to a young child who lives in a remote jungle as part of a secluded tribe that doesn’t even have a written language?

On the other hand, we can know with certainty whether the horrible descriptions of hell are really bad news or just semi-bad news. Some people say that “darkness,” “fire,” and “suffering” are metaphors in order to *minimize* the shock and fear that the images produce. “It’s really not as bad as it sounds because the images are just metaphors.” Or worse: “Hell isn’t a literal place because the images are just metaphors.” This is exactly what we must *not* say if we interpret the images metaphorically. “Even if we assume that the language is metaphorical,” argues D. A. Carson, “it is metaphorical language that has a

referent; and if the metaphors are doing their job, they are evoking images of a horrible existence.”[5]  
John Piper explains,

Consider some of the word pictures of God’s wrath in the New Testament. And as you consider them remember the folly of saying, “But aren’t those just symbols? Isn’t fire and brimstone just a symbol?” I say beware of that, because it does not serve your purpose. Suppose fire is a symbol. Do people use symbols of horror because the reality is less horrible or more horrible than the symbols? I don’t know of anyone who uses symbolic language for horrible realities when literal language would make it sound more horrible.

People grasp for symbols of horror (or beauty) because the reality they are trying to describe is worse (or better) than they can put into words. If I say, “My wife is the diamond of my life,” I don’t want you to say, “Oh, he used a symbol of something valuable; it’s only a symbol. So his wife must not be as valuable as a diamond.” No. I used the symbol of the most valuable jewel I could think of because my wife is far more precious than jewels. Honest symbols are not used because they go beyond reality, but because reality goes beyond words.

So when the Bible speaks of hell-fire, woe to us if we say, “It’s only a symbol.” If it is a symbol at all, it means the reality is worse than fire, not better. The word “fire” is used not to make the easy sound terrible, but to make the exceedingly terrible sound something like what it really is.[6]

John Calvin likewise argues that interpreting graphic images of hell metaphorically should result in dread, not relief:

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 (Matt. 8:12; 22:13), unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:12; Mark 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.[7]

We may disagree about some finer nuances of our literal and metaphorical interpretations of hell’s darkness, fire, and suffering, but we should agree that, at the very least, the New Testament teaches that hell is eternally miserable, terrifying, and painful. It’s certainly no *better* than being cast into literal “outer darkness” or being tormented with literal “fire and sulfur.”

The New Testament’s message couldn’t be clearer: “Our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29), and “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31); so we should “fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt 10:28).[8]

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[1] This article does not comprehensively explain what the New Testament teaches about hell, nor does it refute annihilationism or conditional immortality. Many others have ably done that. See, for example, William V. Crockett, ed., [Four Views on Hell](#) (Counterpoint; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); Robert A. Peterson, [Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment](#) (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1995); D. A. Carson, “On Banishing the Lake of Fire,” in [The Gaggling of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism](#) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 515–36; Edward Fudge and Robert A. Peterson, [Two Views of Hell: A Biblical and Theological Dialogue](#) (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000); Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds., [Hell under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment](#) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004); Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, [What Is Hell?](#) (Basics of the Faith Series; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2010).

- [2] Morgan and Peterson, *What Is Hell?*, 10–20. For a fuller treatment of these themes, see Christopher W. Morgan, “Biblical Theology: Three Pictures of Hell” and “Annihilationism: Will the Unsaved Be Punished Forever?” in *Hell under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment* (ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 135–51, 195–218.
- [3] Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 15.
- [4] C. H. Spurgeon, “The Resurrection of the Dead,” in *The New Park Street Pulpit* (1857; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963), 104. Cf. John F. Walvoord, “The Literal View,” in *Four Views on Hell* (ed. William V. Crockett; Counterpoint; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 28.
- [5] D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 90.
- [6] John Piper, “[God’s Wrath: ‘Vengeance Is Mine, I Will Repay,’ Says the Lord \(Romans 12:19–21\)](#),” sermon preached at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, February 27, 2005. Cf. Sinclair B. Ferguson, “Pastoral Theology: The Preacher and Hell,” in *Hell under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment* (ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 226–27.
- [7] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; Library of Christian Classics 20–21; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 20:1007 (3.25.12).
- [8] Special thanks to Chris Morgan and Justin Taylor for examining a draft of this article and sharing insightful feedback.

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## How Does Hell Glorify God?

By James M. Hamilton, Jr.

To get at the way that hell glorifies God, we need to see hell in light of the Bible's big story, its point of view, and its characterization of God and man.

### THE BIBLE'S BIG STORY

The Bible's plot, like all plots, has a beginning, middle, and end.

#### *Beginning*

God creates a perfect place and puts an innocent man and woman in it. God sets the terms and clearly states the consequence of transgressing his terms. An enemy lies to the innocent woman. She believes the lie, breaks God's terms, and the man sins with her. God curses the enemy and initiates the consequences of transgression, cursing the land also. In the curse on the enemy, God states that the seed of the woman would strike the enemy's head, while the enemy would strike the seed's heel. The man and woman are then banished from the perfect place.

#### *Middle*

Humanity has been divided into two groups: the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, the righteous and the wicked. The seed of the woman are initially a subset of the nation of Israel, a line of descent that God has chosen to bless. They experience a re-do of the plot's beginning. God puts them in a land of promise and sets the terms. They transgress the terms and are banished from that land, but God continues to promise that the enemy will be defeated even though it will be through a painful purging of the seed of the woman.

Then Jesus comes as the promised seed of the woman. He crushes the enemy's head, with the enemy striking his heel—he dies on the cross. Because he is innocent and has resisted all temptation, death cannot hold him. He triumphantly overcomes death, satisfying God's wrath against sin and opening the way of salvation for all who will trust him.

#### *End*

Creation will be like a woman in childbirth suffering labor pains, with the wicked viciously attacking the righteous, who trust God and testify to God's truth until they are killed. This will continue until Jesus comes again. When Jesus comes again, he will judge the wicked and consign them to everlasting punishment, and he will take those who believed the word of God and the testimony of Jesus into a new, better, perfect place.

### THE BIBLE GIVES US GOD'S POINT OF VIEW...

This plot is not merely a story: it presents God's point of view on the world. Think with me about the Bible's point of view, the biblical authors' perspective.

Their point of view is that God set the terms and God is in the right. Those who reject God's terms are in the wrong and face the consequences God stated when he set the terms. Moreover, the Bible not only represents the point of view of the biblical authors, it claims to speak for God. That is, the Bible claims to present God's point of view on the matter.

### ...ABOUT GOD, MAN, AND OUR STATE BEFORE GOD

How are the characters in the Bible presented? They are mainly presented by means of their words and actions, but the Bible also evaluates its characters. Let's think briefly of how the Bible characterizes God, humans, and Jesus.

The Bible teaches that God always does and says what is right. He always keeps his word. Nothing can thwart his purpose. He is free and good. The Bible always justifies God. That is, the Bible always shows that God is just. Paradoxically, the Bible also shows that God is merciful.

Conversely, all humans do and say what is wrong, what betrays a lack of faith in God. By word and deed humans transgress God's commands. Humans have defiled God's good creation, perverted his good gifts, and in every way attacked God, who gave them life and every good thing. For this, all humans deserve condemnation.

As stated above, there are two groups of humans. One group is characterized by trusting God, agreeing to his terms, confessing that they have broken the terms, turning away from their transgressions, and seeking to believe God's promises so that they can live by his terms. The other group rejects God and his terms, refuses to admit their guilt, refuses to turn away from evil, and joins the side of the enemy.

Jesus shows by his words and deeds that he is fully human and fully God. Jesus never transgressed God's commands. He is the hero. He saves the day. He gave himself for others. Anyone who opposes or rejects him is opposing and rejecting goodness and love. Anyone who opposes and rejects him deserves condemnation. Those who receive and join him, however, do so on his terms, which are God's terms, and which entail confession of sin, repentance, and trust in Jesus.

### **HOW THEN DOES HELL GLORIFY GOD?**

How does all this help us see how hell glorifies God?

This world is God's story. He spoke it into being, and it keeps going because he keeps speaking.[2] The universe is sustained by the word of his power. It's his plot. He is the Author whose point of view is communicated in the Bible and whose characterizations define the participants in the drama.

Hell is about God keeping his word. That God sends the wicked to hell shows God to be faithful and just. If God does not enforce the terms he has set, he does not keep his word and he is unfaithful. If he does not send the wicked to hell, he has not upheld his own righteous standard and he has not been just. If he does not punish rebels in hell, the righteous are not vindicated. In fact, if there is no hell, we might conclude that the righteous were wrong for having trusted God.

But there is hell, and the righteous are wise to trust God. Hell shows the glory of God's justice. Hell vindicates those who obey God's terms, even if they suffered terribly for doing so. Hell vindicates the righteous who were persecuted by the wicked. Hell glorifies God.

Do you object to this? You might as well join with Shere Khan against Rudyard Kipling. Or again, you have about as much chance of altering the plot, point of view, or characterization as Sauron does of changing Tolkien's mind. It isn't going to happen. You are a creature in the Creator's work of art. Accept it. He is the Creator, not you. How seriously should we take those who object to hell or try to rewrite the story so that hell isn't part of it? As seriously as we would we take Hamlet critiquing Shakespeare's work. Hamlet has no independent existence. He can only critique Shakespeare if the author decides to write that scene.

God has created a universe in which his mercy has meaning precisely because it does not nullify his justice. In order for God to be just *and* extend mercy, he must keep his promise to punish transgression. In the Bible's presentation of the true story of the world, God upholds justice at the cross and in hell. Jesus died on the cross to establish God's justice and ensure that those who repent of sin and trust in Christ receive mercy that is also just. God punishes the wicked in hell to uphold justice against all who refuse to repent of sin, glorify him as God, and give thanks to him.

In sum, hell glorifies God because

- it shows that he keeps his word;

- it shows his infinite worth, lasting forever;
- it demonstrates his power to subdue all who rebel against him;
- it shows how unspeakably merciful he is to those who trust him;
- it upholds the reality of love by visiting justice against those who reject God, who is love;
- it vindicates all who suffered to hear or proclaim the truth of God's word;
- and it shows the enormity of what Jesus accomplished when he died to save all who would trust him from the hell they deserved. If there were no hell, there would be no need for the cross.

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[1] My thoughts on plot, point of view, and characterization have been stimulated by A. Philip Brown II, *Hope Amidst Ruin: A Literary and Theological Analysis of Ezra* (Greenville: Bob Jones University Press, 2009). For the notes I took on Brown's description of the way literature works, see my post, "Literary Notes from Brown's Hope Amidst Ruin," on my blog:

<http://jimhamilton.wordpress.com/2010/07/06/literary-notes-from-browns-hope-amidst-ruin/>.

[2] See esp. N. D. Wilson, *Notes from the Tilt-A-Whirl: Wide-Eyed Wonder in God's Spoken World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009).

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## An Annotated Bibliography on Hell

By Gavin Ortlund

***The Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell*, by Paul Helm.** Banner of Truth, 1989. 152 pages. \$8

Paul Helm is a teaching fellow at Regent College near Vancouver, and is widely known for his publications on the theology of John Calvin. His *The Last Things* is the final installment to a series of brief theological treatises, all published by Banner of Truth, which began with *The Beginnings: Word and Spirit in Conversion* (1986) and continued in *The Callings: The Gospel in the World* (1987). *The Last Things* is a brief, accessible, and practical treatment of the four subjects listed in its subtitle (in chapters 2-5, respectively), set in the broader theological context of our responsibility before God as his creatures (chapter 1), and concluding with a more practical discussion concerning how the believer's life on earth is a foretaste of the glories of heaven (chapter 6).

*The Last Things* is marked by both sound exposition of Scripture and thoughtful application of Scripture to contemporary doubts and questions. Throughout the book Helm demonstrates how biblical teaching interfaces with current trends of thought about the afterlife in Western society, such as the denial of personal responsibility, the sentimentalization of death, and discomfort with any notion of divine retributive justice. In addition, Helm shows great pastoral sensitivity to commonly asked questions in the church, regarding, for example, whether heaven may be boring (95), whether Christians should ever desire death (54-55), whether it is permissible to hope for the salvation of the severely mentally handicapped and those who die in infancy (121), how to preach about hell both soberly and earnestly (125), and how the doctrine of hell squares with divine justice (110-117). In short, this book will prove helpful to a wide variety of different readers. The chapters on heaven and hell are particularly insightful and may be profitably read apart from the rest of the book by readers who desire a brief treatment of those topics.

***The Nature of Hell: A Report by the Evangelical Alliance Commission on Unity and Truth Among Evangelicals*.** ACUTE, 2000. 148 pages. \$14.99

This book is a report written by a working group of the Alliance Commission on Unity and Truth among Evangelicals (ACUTE), an organization established by an Anglican group called Evangelical Alliance (EA) in 1995 to work for evangelical unity on controversial issues and to provide an evangelical voice on matters of public debate. The group consists of David Hilborn, Faith Forster, Tony Gray, Philip Johnston, and Tony Lane. The primary purpose of the report is to address the issue of conditionalism, or conditional immortality, along with its frequently consequent view, annihilationism (chapter 5 distinguishes between conditionalism and annihilationism and discusses their relationship). The book appears to be occasioned by tensions over the rising interest in conditionalism and annihilationism among evangelicals, particularly tensions in the history of the EA (see pp. ix-xi, 5-7, 63-67). Among the authors' recommendations in chapter 10 is that the EA Basis of Faith be revised to include a clause discussing the general resurrection, the final judgment, and heaven and hell. (The Basis of Faith had dropped a reference to "everlasting punishment" in 1970 under the influence of John Stott. In 2005 the Basis of Faith was again revised to include an affirmation of "eternal condemnation to the lost.")

This book will help readers who are interested in understanding the biblical and theological issues involved in the conditionalism debate. Chapters 6 and 7 provide particularly helpful overviews of the theological and exegetical arguments on both sides, while the survey of views on conditionalism in church history in chapter 4 and the discussion of "background issues" in chapter 2 provide good context to the debate. Readers should be aware that the authors, despite recommending greater clarity in the Basis of Faith (136) and despite rejecting universalism and post-mortem salvation (131), do refrain throughout from taking a definitive stand for or against conditionalism and/or annihilationism. The authors' summaries of the arguments on both sides can introduce readers to the issues, but readers should turn elsewhere for a definitive biblical treatment of the subject. In addition, readers should be aware that the book focuses narrowly on the conditionalism debate, especially as it has played out in the United Kingdom, and thus is not the place to turn to for a general theological discussion of the nature of hell, as the title might imply.

***The Message of Heaven and Hell*, by Bruce Milne.** InterVarsity Press, 2002. 351 pages. \$19.00

In this installment of the *Bible Speaks Today Bible Themes* series, Bruce Milne, who served for many years as the pastor of First Baptist Church in Vancouver, traces the themes of heaven and hell through their canonical development. The book is divided into three sections—the Old Testament, the Gospels, and the rest of the New Testament. This book is an excellent resource for those who want to learn more about what the whole Bible teaches concerning human destiny. Because it is canonically ordered, Milne's book is especially helpful for seeing how the theme of human destiny develops across the Bible, and how particular texts (such as Psalm 16) and terms (such as "Sheol") fit into a larger redemptive-historical context. Chapter 8 contains a brief critique of annihilationism, and chapter 11 has a very good discussion of the nature of the intermediate state, drawing from Jesus' assurance to the crucified thief in Luke 23:43. The insights and applications from New Testament texts on heaven in the last section of the book (e.g., the comments on Romans 8 in chapter 14) are very edifying. The book concludes with study guide questions which may serve those who want to use this book in a small group or book study context.

Two minor criticisms: first, the book lacks any kind of index, which would have been helpful given its breadth. Second, after its initial grounding in Genesis 1-3, the Old Testament section focuses on only four texts: Psalm 16 (chapter 3), Psalm 72 (chapter 4), and Daniel 7 and 12 (chapter 5). One wishes for more discussion of other data in the Old Testament, such as the destinies of Enoch and Elijah, the summoning of Samuel from the dead in 1 Samuel 28, Isaiah 66:24, or other key "sheol" texts such as Psalm 49:14-15.

***Death and the Afterlife*, by Robert A. Morey.** Bethany House Publishers, 1984. 315 pages.

Robert A. Morey is the leader of an apologetics ministry called *Faith Defenders* ([faithdefenders.com](http://faithdefenders.com)) and has authored several dozens of books on cults, new age thought, Eastern religions, and Islam. This book is his case for a Christian view of death and divine judgment over and against the competing views of other religions and non-Christian systems of thought. In the first half of the book, he outlines principles of sound biblical hermeneutics, discusses the biblical view of humanity, defines biblical terms for the afterlife, and then analyzes the rabbinic, biblical, and patristic texts dealing with divine judgment. In the second half of the book, he critiques the views of the afterlife advocated in materialism, annihilationism, universalism, and occultism.

While readers may be helped by Morey's word studies and his survey of ancient literature Near Eastern literature on divine judgment, his analysis is not as compelling as the other books reviewed in this list.

***Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment*, by Robert A. Peterson.** P&R, 1995. 258 pages. \$16.99

Robert Peterson is professor of Systematic Theology at Covenant Seminary in St. Louis. This book is his defense of the church's traditional understanding of hell as eternal punishment. After surveying recent challenges to this view (chapter 1), Peterson examines Scripture and historical views on the topic (chapters 2-7), critiques universalism and annihilationism (chapters 8-9), and then summarizes the biblical presentation of hell (chapter 10). Peterson then examines hell in relation to other doctrines such as God, sin, punishment, Christ's saving work, and heaven (chapter 11). Finally, Peterson addresses purgatory, the fate of those who have never heard the gospel, the fate of those who die in infancy, and then draws applications from the doctrine of hell for both believers and unbelievers (chapter 12).

*Hell on Trial* is clear, thorough, and consistently faithful to Scripture. Rather than tearing down straw men, Peterson interacts with the best arguments of well-known representatives of opposing views, such as John Hick (universalism), Clark Pinnock (post-mortem salvation), and John Stott (annihilationism). While the book engages deeply in the issues, it remains accessible to those without theological training. A particular strength of the book is Peterson's tone, which is consistently courteous, honest, and firm. Throughout the book (and especially in the final two chapters) there is an evident concern for godly application of the truth. Finally, Peterson does not present his readers with hell for hell's sake, but hell as the backdrop of the glorious news of the gospel. For example, on page 201 he writes, "When tempted to

be overcome by thoughts of hell, I turn my thoughts to the cross, and my distress turns to gratitude. Think of it—the Son of God bore the terrors of hell to save us sinners! His love is incomprehensible.”

***Hell Under Fire*, ed. Robert A. Peterson and Christopher W. Morgan.** Zondervan, 2004. 256 pages. \$19.99

This book is a series of outstanding essays by well-known evangelical scholars on various biblical, theological, and pastoral issues related to the doctrine of hell. After a helpful historical overview of “the disappearance of hell” in the church by Albert Mohler, four essays covering the Bible’s teaching on hell follow: Daniel Block on the Old Testament, Robert Yarbrough on the Gospels, Doug Moo on Paul, and Greg Beale on Revelation. Block’s survey contains a helpful discussion of key Old Testament terms, Isaiah 66:24, and Daniel 12:2, though as with Milne’s book one wishes for more analysis of other texts and the complexities of the meaning of “sheol” as it develops throughout the Old Testament. Yarbrough’s piece is noteworthy not only for its solid exegesis of passages on hell in the Gospels but also for his thoughtful reflections on Stott, 9/11, and divine justice in his conclusion. He makes the point that while hell is difficult to grasp, so is the injustice and suffering of this world, and there must be a proportionate response to it in divine justice (88-90). The essays by Moo and Beale are both superb expositions of Scripture and contain the most incisive critiques of annihilationism in the book.

Christopher Morgan surveys the whole Bible’s teaching on hell, highlighting the three recurring motifs of punishment, destruction, and banishment as descriptions of hell. Robert Peterson’s essay looks at hell from the vantage point of other topics in systematic theology, namely the Trinity, divine sovereignty and human freedom, and “already/not yet” eschatology. Looking at the topic of hell through the lens of these other topics in systematic theology both illuminates what hell is and deconstructs various false conceptions about it (for example, that God the Father alone is Judge, not the Son as well). In his chapter, J.I. Packer presents a sober but devastating critique of universalism. Among the many helpful aspects of his essay is his insight that all aberrant teachings on the afterlife are related to a deficiency in one’s doctrine of God (171-2, 189ff.). Morgan presents a critique of annihilationism, and then Sinclair Ferguson closes the book with a pastoral reflection on how the preacher should think and speak about hell. Ferguson’s chapter alone is worth the price of the book (although interested readers can find a condensed version of the chapter for free in this present eJournal), and readers who struggle with the concept of hell might consider starting their reading with Ferguson.

For the quality of its essays and the diversity of topics addressed, this book may be the most helpful place to begin in studying this topic.

***What is Hell?* by Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson.** P&R Publishing, 2010. 36 pages. \$3.99

Peterson and Morgan team up again for this brief booklet, part of the *Basics of the Faith Series* put out by P&R, which covers basic issues in Reformed theology and practice. This booklet opens by addressing whether a loving God could send people to hell, then surveys the biblical teaching on hell as punishment, destruction, banishment, suffering, and eternal. Finally, the booklet examines how the reality of hell should affect our doctrine and practice.

This last section is particularly edifying in its call for both courage and humility in proclaiming the reality of hell in our cultural setting. While it is not designed for in-depth study, this booklet is a very helpful introduction to the topic. Christians may find this a helpful resource to give to unbelievers or new Christians who have questions about hell.

Since Morgan and Peterson clearly present the saving work of Jesus as the Bible’s answer to the problem of hell, this booklet could even be used as an evangelistic tool.

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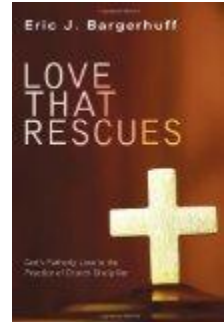
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**Book Review: *Love that Rescues: God's Fatherly Love in the Practice of Church Discipline*, by Eric J. Bargerhuff**

Reviewed by Jonathan Leeman

Eric J. Bargerhuff, *Love that Rescues: God's Fatherly Love in the Practice of Church Discipline*. Wipf and Stock, 2010. 210 pages. \$25.00



Eric Bargerhuff's book *Love that Rescues* is nothing if not well titled. The PhD dissertation-turned-book moves through church history, theology, exegesis, and finally local church practice in order to make one basic point: church discipline, in spite of our expectations to the contrary, is all about God's loving work of rescuing sinners from their sin.

Don't be intimidated by all the footnotes. For an academic-ish work, *Love that Rescues* is a surprisingly quick and clear read, in part because Bargerhuff admirably disciplines himself to stay on track with this one basic point. Church discipline is not about retribution; it's about the gospel work of making disciples and calling sinners to follow Christ.

So what do Augustine, Calvin, and the Anabaptists say about church discipline? Well, several things, and they don't agree entirely, but you'll find this common theme in their works: church discipline is a love that rescues.

How does God use discipline among his covenant community in the Old Testament? To instruct them and to chastise them toward righteousness. Again, discipline is a love that rescues. And you can guess what Bargerhuff argues in the New Testament: discipline is a love that rescues. Specifically, God is a father who disciplines the sons he loves, as Hebrews 12 puts it. In fact, the entire book seems to be written through the prism of Hebrews 12.

Or let me put it like this: if you were to trace the threads which surface in Hebrews 12 about the loving discipline of the divine father all the way back to the beginning of the Bible, what themes would you be tracing? In a sense, that's how the book reads, except you start at the beginning of the Bible, and your fingers follow the string, pinch by pinch, all the way to Hebrews 12. It's a wonderfully encouraging and edifying exercise.

Along the way, both expected and unexpected matters show up. Expectedly, he spends a chapter considering the metaphor of God as "father," and how it's relevant to God's covenant people in a way that it's not to those outside the covenant. Unexpectedly, for this reader at least, is an entire chapter on penal substitutionary atonement (PSA). Bargerhuff's basic point here: Christ's work of substitution on the cross removes any need to view the nature and purpose of church discipline as an act of retribution. Viewing discipline as retributive or punitive will communicate that Christ's work on the cross was *not* sufficient to pay for sins.

Or look at it the other way around: If you adopt some other theory of Christ's work than PSA, you leave sin unpunished, which further means that your practice of church discipline is more likely to be viewed as an act of retribution.

Bargerhuff concludes, "We can therefore confidently assert that insofar as church discipline is charged with dealing with sin and error in the church, *its nature and purpose is not punitive retribution, but is rather instructional, remedial, restorative, and reconciliatory*" (italics original, 134).

I think Bargerhuff's theology here is correct, but if I were to offer the book one critique, I would point to one thing that's missing from this last sentence. True, a church's activity of discipline, in and of itself, is not retributive. True, it is instructive, remedial, restorative, and reconciliatory. But there's one more all-important purpose of church discipline that is missing from Bargerhuff's theological description: church discipline is *proleptic* of retribution. That is, it's a small picture of judgment in the present that warns of an even greater judgment to come (e.g. 1 Cor. 5:5).

I'm confident that Bargerhuff would affirm this, based on comments he makes along the way. The trouble is, he labors so hard at affirming the positive, reconciling, or inclusive side of church discipline (and he's right to do so), that his theological definition and framework of discipline tends to overlook the genuinely warning and exclusivistic side of discipline. Yes, discipline involves a love that aims at rescue. Rescue is the *goal*. But *the thing itself* is an act of judgment and exclusion—"Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? (1 Cor. 5:12).

Churches don't ultimately know, this side of heaven, whether a person belongs to Christ or not. They cannot see into the heart. When discipline occurs, they hope for rescue, but they don't know what will happen. Therefore, our theological formulation of the whole exercise needs to strike a balance between inclusion and exclusion, rescue and judgment. It needs to hold both sides together.

Again, I know Bargerhuff agrees with all of this because he says so deep in the book (see pages 150-53). I would simply ask him to make these things more explicit at the *definitional* level—in the book's definition of discipline as it's stated in the introduction and in chapter after chapter. Discipline is about rescue *and* judgment.

Please understand, then, that my critique is not substantive, but occurs at the level of "theological formulation"—how to say something, or how to define it.

That fine tuning aside, this book is excellent. So buy it and read it. The market already enjoys a number of practical guides to discipline, such as Jay Adams', Mark Lutherbach's, Wyman Richardson's, or Steven McQuoid's. But this is the first full-length exegetical and theological treatment on discipline I've encountered from a contemporary writer, and I would go so far as to say *every seminarian and pastor should read it*.

If you've never read anything on discipline, it's a worthy introduction, particularly if coupled with something more practical like Lutherbach or Richardson. If you are familiar with discipline, I'd predict that it will strengthen and further equip you to lead your church toward practicing a love that rescues.

*Jonathan Leeman is the director of communications for 9Marks and the author of The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline (Crossway, 2010).*

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## Book Review: *The Masculine Mandate: God's Calling to Men*, by Richard Phillips

Reviewed by Jonathan Leeman

Richard Phillips, *The Masculine Mandate: God's Calling to Men*. Reformation Trust Publishing, 2010. 175 pages. \$15.00

A friend of mine in his late twenties recently made an interesting observation about adultery. Situations of adultery among couples *older* than him have typically involved the man's unfaithfulness, while situations of adultery among couples *younger* than him have typically involved the woman's unfaithfulness.

When I inquired further, he told me what I somehow expected to hear: the men in these marriages where the woman committed unfaithfulness were not exactly—I'm not sure how else to put it—manly.

Now, perhaps this last connection is beside the point. Adultery is sin and hated by God, whether committed by a man or a woman. The victims of adultery deserve our support, whether men or women. Besides, what does "manly" mean? And doesn't it change from culture to culture? And is "manly" really a good thing? A godly thing? Surely no man deserves to have his wife cheat on him, no matter how "unmanly" he is, even if there is some substance to that word.

Yes, yes, all that's absolutely true. Still, there are often reasons for why sin takes the particular course it does, and those are worth considering. My friend's observations about the difference between an older generation and a younger generation is just one anecdote, but it lines up with something many of us have also observed—a flailing and fraying sense of masculinity among more and more younger men.

Hanna Rosin's much-discussed article in *The Atlantic* called "[The End of Men](#)" (well summarized by Albert Mohler [here](#)) describes how men are losing their place in the contemporary economy, an economy increasingly suited to and ruled by women. Rosin observes, "Dozens of college women I interviewed assumed that they very well might be the ones working while their husbands stayed at home...Guys, one senior remarked to me, 'are the new ball and chain.'"

An accompanying article in the same issue by Pamela Paul called "Are Fathers Necessary" reported that children being raised by two lesbians "have fewer behavioral problems, and show more interest in and try harder at school." The article concludes, "The bad news for Dad is that despite common perception, there's nothing objectively essential about his contribution. The good news is, we've gotten used to him." Let's keep ole' dad around because we like the idea of a dad, but, truth be told, there's nothing essential about dad-ness, or father-ness.

Frankly, it's hard to use the word "manly" without being self-conscious. Are we talking about puffed-out chests on Muscle Beach? Or walking on the street-side of the sidewalk when you're with a "lady"? Or "wearing the pants"?

The question isn't an easy one: what is the man-ness of men? Rosin never attempts an answer, and Paul assumes there isn't one. But what really troubles me is that too many young Christian men have no idea either. I'm not surprised when secular journalists don't get it. But why is it that so many young Christian men don't get it? And why haven't the older men in their lives—such as their pastors—taught them?

There have been a number of books, conferences, and leaders in the last decade which have attempted to recapture a vision of masculinity. Some are chest-thumping. Some are gentle. Some are adventurous. But none of the answers that I've seen are as well-rounded and solidly biblical as the picture of masculinity presented by Richard Phillip's in his new *The Masculine Mandate*.



Pastor Phillips, himself a former tank commander, begins in Genesis 2, where God calls Adam to work and keep the Garden, to name the animals, and to love Eve. The first five chapters then provide a theological foundation of what it means to be a man. In one sentence, the masculine mandate is “to be spiritual men placed in real-world, God-defined relationships, as lords and servants under God, to bear God’s fruit by serving and leading.”

The second half of the book moves to the practical. Phillips considers what it means to be a biblical man in marriage, in parenting, in work, in friendship, and in the church. Throughout, Phillips grounds his biblical vision in the gospel. He doesn’t say, “Men, be what Adam should have been.” He tells us, “You’ve been saved by Christ and given his Spirit to be what Adam should have been.”

At the risk of undermining the reader’s confidence in my objectivity, I have to admit that I have nothing negative to say about the book. I believe that it provides a compelling, balanced, and pastorally-wise picture of biblical manhood.

- He captures why a biblical theology of work—a hot topic these days—should make distinctions between men and women.
- He explains how a father should conceive of his parental role differently than a mother, and what it means to give your heart to your children before asking them to give theirs to you.
- He discusses how a husband should labor to understand his wife before he can lead her well.
- He tells men to befriend one another, not just over beer and football, but like Jonathan did when giving his royal robe to David.

Here are some pastoral plans I have for Phillips’ book:

- Read it with a couple of men I’m discipling.
- Request that it be placed on our church’s bookstall.
- Recommend that it be added to the four or five books we ask couples to read in our newly-married small groups, which couples join for the first two years of marriage.
- Apply some of his lessons in my own life, particularly his advice to be more deliberate about what kind of time I’m spending with my children (he advises four things: read, pray, work, and play).

I say all this because I genuinely hope other pastors and elders will do the same with the men in their churches. My heart grieves to see so many young men in their twenties stuck in porn, putting off marriage, shuffling with boredom from one job to another, spending all their disposable income on evening and weekend pleasures, exhausting so much mental energy on looking cool, and pursuing forms of spirituality that are light on studying truth and heavy on evaluating their internal emotional states. Then these men get married and have children, which helps a little, but they still lack an overall vision of masculinity and leadership.

If the women are saying “there’s nothing objectively essential about dad’s contribution,” who do we have to blame?

I want men to be inspired by what the Bible intends for them. I want them to see that God has given them authority to use as his servants—the authority to author life in everyone around them, like Adam harvesting a fruitful garden in church, work, and home. Take a look at Phillips’ book. It provides just that vision.

*Jonathan Leeman is the director of communications for 9Marks and the author of *the Church* and *the Surprising Offense of God’s Love*.*

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