

Reflections on the Biblical Doctrine of Hell

By Doug Brown, Lead Pastor, Greenwood Community Church

“Beloved, these are such weighty things that while I dwell on them, I feel far more inclined to sit down and weep than to stand up and speak to you.” – Charles Spurgeon

I can certainly relate to Spurgeon’s comment. An honest reading of Jesus and the New Testament should evoke a unique soberness among us even as we wrestle with our questions or objections. When I have taken the time to reflect on the reality of hell, I’ve been tremendously impacted by two thoughts. First, I’ve felt in my gut immense relief and gratitude that the Lord has rescued me from hell in His mercy. Second, I’ve not known whether to cry or throw up at the implications of such a truth. That said, it has raised questions for me like everyone else.

Many have written on the subject throughout Church history. I do not offer this as an exhaustive historical overview or treatment of every issue. Neither do I claim to have attempted to read everything written on the subject. I offer it as a brief summary of my reflections based on Scripture and the writings of other Christians.

Lastly before I launch in, it will be clear that I’m working on the conviction that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and ultimately interpreted through the person of Jesus. I take as my most basic conviction that Jesus teaches me, as his disciple, to love and live the Bible as he does. Because I know Jesus to be the Son of God, I believe he knows reality better than anyone. Therefore, what he says about any subject, including a controversial topic like hell, is my ultimate authority. I agree with Dale Bruner, who writes:

Christian teaching and life are to be drawn from what Jesus told his Apostles, only from what he whispered to them, only what the New Testament apostolic Word teaches – it is not to be drawn from secular, spiritual, or even scholarly persuasions about mission, success, or relevance.ⁱ

Jesus warned people repeatedly and un-apologetically about hell.

Jesus spoke more about hell than anyone else in all the Bible. There are thirty-one different passages in the Gospels where Jesus speaks of hell. Amazingly 13% of his sayings are about hell and judgment, and more than half his parables relate to the eternal judgment of sinners.ⁱⁱ

While we might be shocked to learn this fact, we must keep in mind the larger context of these sayings. Jesus’ warnings about hell are intended to call sinners to repentance so they can receive eternal life through him. As the early Church Father, Chrysostom, said – “God has threatened hell, not in order to cast us therein, but that He might persuade us to flee from it.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The larger story of the Bible reveals God as the Savior and Redeemer of sinners.^{iv} He says through Ezekiel – “Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? ...Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their evil ways and live? (Ezek. 18:23; 33:11). Peter expressed this same truth saying – “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). Paul said something similar when exhorting Christians to pray for others’ salvation – “This is good, and pleases God our

Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:3-4).

However shocked and sobered we may be by the doctrine of hell; we must not see it as the primary thrust of God’s purposes for those created in His image. There simply is no Biblical basis for a picture of a laughing God torturing people in hell. Jesus is clear – It is God’s love that is behind everything He has done in seeking to rescue us from perishing (John 3:16).

The Nature of hell.

Descriptions of hell

Jesus spoke of hell as “Gehenna.”^v The name refers to a valley outside Jerusalem where idolatry and child sacrifice were practiced by the ancient Israelites.^{vi} There is some evidence that this valley later became the city’s dump where its refuse was burned creating a constant smoldering fire. Jewish apocalyptic writers began to call the Valley of Hinnom the entrance to hell and later hell itself (4 Ezra 7:36).^{vii} By the time of Jesus, this valley was used as a symbol of the final state of judgment and punishment (Matthew 18:9).

The Bible does not give us a detailed and exhaustive description of hell. Jesus uses horrific language to describe the reality and nature of hell. Descriptions of hell include fire,^{viii} darkness,^{ix} punishment,^x exclusion from God’s presence,^{xi} restlessness,^{xii} second death,^{xiii} torment and anguish,^{xiv} weeping and gnashing of teeth,^{xv} and destruction.^{xvi} Hell is described as a place to be avoided no matter the costs.^{xvii}

Christians have disagreed over whether to interpret these descriptions literally or as metaphors trying to describe the indescribable. The mystery of the language used is revealed in Jesus’ story of the rich man and Lazarus in which the rich man’s agony is described in physical terms although he does not yet have a body (Luke 16:19-31). Jesus is giving us a physical description of a spiritual torment. Ultimately whether the language of hell is literal or metaphorical, it describes a horrific place of punishment. As Klaus Schilder has said, “Let no one say: it is merely symbolic and therefore not so terrible. By mere inversion one should rather say: if the symbol, the mere picture, is already awe-inspiring, how terrible the original must be!”^{xviii}

Dale Bruner writes:

We do not know the topography, temperature, or very much else of hell. One is wise to be skeptical of those who claim to know that hell ‘is not a place but a condition.’ How do they know? One thing we do know is that behind Jesus’ picture words there is some kind of awful judgment for people, who, without repentance, hurt other people. A review of Jesus’ teaching shows that he spent a great deal of time warning people, particularly disciples, of the seriousness of judgment. We do not honor love by omitting references to judgment.”^{xix}

We learn from these descriptions that hell is anything other than the “eternal Las Vegas” where anything goes with Satan as the permissive host. Contrary to the jokes of some, hell’s inhabitants will not be left to pursue their sinful inclinations without inhibition. Satan will not reign in hell, because hell is a place of punishment that God has prepared for

Satan, his angels, and all who have followed him in their rebellion against God and His Son Jesus. Jesus rules hell^{xx}

God's judgments and hell's inhabitants

There is no doubt that Jesus often warns us of a Day of final judgment when hell will be the destination for those who did not repent of their sin and entrust themselves to King Jesus as Savior and Lord. But there are hints that Jesus also warns us of the possibility of experiencing a kind of foretaste of hell in this life now by our sinful choices.

In his famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns that anger nursed into resentment and contempt puts one in danger of the "fire of hell" (Matthew 5:22). Likewise, a lifestyle given over to unrestrained lust may lead to hell (Matthew 5:30). It can be argued that one can make a series of choices leading to a lifestyle of bondage to certain sin patterns. Jesus warned us that "everyone who sins is a slave to sin" (John 8:34). According to Jesus, sin is not simply "breaking the rules." Sin is slavery!

C.S. Lewis speaks of the enslaving power of sin:

Hell ... begins with a grumbling mood, and yourself still distinct from it: perhaps even criticizing it You can repent and come out of it again. But there may come a day when you can do that no longer. Then there will be no you left to criticize the mood or even enjoy it, but just the grumble itself going on forever like a machine.

Paul speaks of this process of continually choosing sin over truth as the beginning of God's wrath. God simply gives us over to the sin we want (Romans 1:18-32). In this sense, God's judgment is simply to give us what we continually desire and choose. If one does not repent and embrace Jesus as Savior and Lord, one simply stays on the pathway they have freely chosen. In this light, "sin is slavery, and hell is the freely chosen eternal skid row of the universe."^{xxi}

C.S. Lewis depicts this reality in *The Great Divorce*. He describes a busload of people from hell who come to the outskirts of heaven. They are urged to leave behind the sins that have trapped them in hell, but they refuse to do so complaining about their experience of heaven. The great paradox of the novel is that the people on the bus would rather have their perceived freedom rather than God's salvation.^{xxii}

We learn from Jesus and Paul that we are always becoming a certain kind of person through our choices. Hell, as a destination after death, is not some arbitrary decision made by a vengeful God. Rather, it's God honoring our choices made during our life. It's naïve to think that anyone, who refused the grace of God in Jesus during their life, would want to be in heaven ruled by Jesus.

Nevertheless, Jesus does speak of hell as a destination after death or at least at the day of Judgment. All human beings must face death. Our mortality is a consequence of sin, which in turn derives from humanity's original rebellion against God.^{xxiii} The Bible speaks of death as an enemy. At death the body goes to the grave and the spirit/soul goes into the afterlife to face God's preliminary judgment.^{xxiv} The believer goes to be with God in heaven while the unbeliever remains separated from God.^{xxv} This is the "intermediate state" between the person's death and the final bodily resurrection.^{xxvi}

God has appointed a final Day of judgment in which every person will be judged through His Son King Jesus. Each person will either be separated from God forever or be with God forever in new resurrection bodies in the new heaven and earth.^{xxvii} Christians will be judged in a way different from non-Christians.

All Christians are saved by grace through faith.^{xxviii} Nevertheless, Christians must also appear before the Lord for His assessment of their faithfulness to Him.^{xxix} The theme of accountability and reward runs throughout the Bible to encourage us to faithfulness and good stewardship.^{xxx}

Those who have refused God's summons to repentance and eternal life through His Son Jesus remain under God's wrath.^{xxxi} They have rejected the only means of salvation, which is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.^{xxxii} Rather than receive Jesus' payment for their sins, they decided to make payment for themselves. Therefore, he says to them – "*Depart from me, you who are cursed into eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels*" (Matt. 25:41). Just as there are rewards for the faithful, there are degrees of punishment for the wicked.^{xxxiii}

There have been a few in the Church who have believed in universalism meaning that all people will eventually be saved.^{xxxiv} Those Christians believing this have held different opinions about how all people are ultimately saved.^{xxxv} Universalism has been continually denounced by the Councils of the Church as heretical.^{xxxvi}

Hell's duration

Although Scripture frequently presents God's ultimate punishment for sin as "death," the meaning of "death" in Scripture is not confined merely to the cessation of earthly life and is often used to convey long-term spiritual estrangement from God.^{xxxvii} Jesus describes hell as a realm of destruction (Matthew 10:28). There has been a debate among Bible-believing Christians over the meaning of the "destruction" that happens to people in hell. Does the destruction apply to the actual existence of the person (eventual annihilation) or to the quality of their relationship with God (eternal separation and conscious punishment)?^{xxxviii}

Historically, a minority of Christians have held to a view known as "annihilation" or "conditional immortality." In this view a person suffers in hell for an appropriate time before their soul is destroyed by God so that they cease to exist. In this view human beings are not naturally immortal creatures. Rather, immortality is a gift granted by God only to believers when they are justified.^{xxxix} The unrepentant are punished with conscious torment for an unspecified period before they are destroyed and cease to exist.^{xl}

Historically, a majority of Christians have understood the Bible to teach that unrepentant sinners experience eternal, conscious torment in hell.^{xli} Proponents of this perspective disagree over whether the eternal, conscious torment includes physical torment in addition to spiritual and psychological torment.^{xlii}

Proponents of both views agree that God's judgment is based on sins committed in this life, and that when judgment is to hell, it cannot be repealed.^{xliii} As well as separation from God, hell involves severe punishment related to the severity of the sins committed on earth.^{xliv}

Objections to hell

There is no doctrine of Christianity which modern, Western people find more offensive than the doctrines of judgment and hell. These two doctrines consistently evoke the strongest emotional and intellectual objections to Christianity. C. S. Lewis recognized this reality saying - *“The doctrine of hell is one of the chief grounds on which Christianity is attacked as barbarous and the goodness of God impugned.”*

Speaking for many modern Westerners, the atheist Bertrand Russell commented - *“There is one very serious defect to my mind in Christ’s moral character, and that is that he believed in hell. I do not myself feel that any person who is really profoundly humane can believe in everlasting punishment.”* While the doctrine of hell has raised many questions and objections, we may summarize most as follows.

A God of judgment cannot be a God of love.

In *The Reason for God* Tim Keller notes that the prevailing fundamental belief in American culture is that moral truth is relative to individual consciousness.^{xiv} Following the Enlightenment, Westerners have largely rejected the concept of a personal God, who created a transcendent moral order. Previously, the path of wisdom was to learn to live in conformity with this unyielding reality. Now Westerners live with the prevailing belief that we are the ones to determine right or wrong.^{xvi}

Keller points out that Westerners get upset by the Christian doctrines of judgment and hell, but they find Biblical teaching about turning the other cheek and forgiving our enemies appealing. Of course, we do not often consider that others from very different cultures find just the opposite in the Bible offensive. Keller wisely asks why should Western cultural sensitivities be the final court in which to judge whether Christianity is valid? If in fact Christianity is not the product of any culture, but the trans-cultural truth of God, wouldn’t we expect its truth to be offending and correcting our thinking at some place?^{xlvii}

Interestingly, Westerners have no problem believing in a God of love. However, we struggle to reconcile a God of love and of justice. How could a loving God be filled with wrath and anger? Doesn’t a loving God always forgive? But this belief is based on a wrong understanding of love and wrath.^{xlviii} Again, Keller points out that all loving persons are sometimes filled with wrath, not despite of but because of their love. He quotes Becky Pippert:

Think how we feel when we see someone we love ravaged by unwise actions or relationships. Do we respond with benign tolerance as we might toward a stranger? Far from it.... Anger isn’t the opposite of love. Hate is, and the final form of hate is indifference.... God’s wrath is not a cranky explosion, but his settled opposition to the cancer...which is eating out the insides of the human race he loves with his whole being.^{xlix}

God’s wrath is largely denied and/or misunderstood in the modern West. When many hear the word “wrath,” they imagine the drunken husband abusing his wife or the enraged father punishing his children. The Bible, however, teaches us that God’s wrath is part of His holy perfections.¹ J.I. Packer writes:

God's wrath in the Bible is never the capricious, self-indulgent, irritable, morally ignoble thing that human anger so often is. It is, instead, a right and necessary reaction to objective moral evil. God is angry only where anger is called for.... The wrath of God denotes His action in punishing sin. It is as much an expression of a personal, emotional attitude of the Triune God as is His love to sinners: it is the active manifesting of His hatred of irreligion and moral evil.ⁱ

Expressing a similar thought, A.W. Tozer writes:

God is holy and He has made holiness the moral condition necessary to the health of His universe.... Whatever is holy is healthy; evil is a moral sickness that must ultimately end in death.... Since God's concern for the universe is its moral health, that is, its holiness, whatever is contrary to this is necessarily under His eternal displeasure. To preserve His creation God must destroy whatever would destroy it.... Every wrathful judgment in the history of the world has been a holy act of preservation. The holiness of God, the wrath of God, and the health of the creation are inseparably united. God's wrath is His utter intolerance of whatever degrades and destroys. He hates iniquity as a mother hates the polio that takes the life of her child.ⁱⁱ

We observe that people do have a deep need for justice and wrongs avenged. After the events of 9/11, news paper headlines across the country cried out for justice even using the word "wrath." The Boston marathon bombings left a city unwilling to allow one of the dead terrorists be buried in their community. I remember a news story where three young women were rescued from ten years of captivity and rape after they were each kidnapped. The utter evil of their captors shocked the nation, and it is unthinkable that these men would not be brought to justice. Today we are appalled at the worldwide evil of sex trafficking even of very young children. Even the most progressively minded person would not make the claim that God should just overlook these heinous crimes.

God's wrath is the administration of His justice.ⁱⁱⁱ God's final judgment should have several effects on a people. First, it satisfies our inward sense of justice in the world. We are assured that God's universe is fair, because the Lord keeps accurate accounts and will render to men according to their deeds.^{iv} Second, it enables us to forgive others freely knowing their sins against us will be dealt with justly by God.^v Third, it provides us with a motive for righteous living. For unbelievers, the promise of judgment may provide some moral restraint on their lives. For believers we will not face God's wrath, because Jesus has received it in our place.^{vi} But we will be assessed for our faithfulness in order to receive greater rewards. Finally, it should provide believers with a motive for evangelism.^{vii}

A loving God would not allow hell.

Perhaps we might recognize that Jesus Christ, the most loving person to ever live, spoke often of hell's reality as a warning. So ultimately what one does with hell comes down to what they do with the credibility and authority of Jesus Christ. Jesus clearly did not see any inconsistency with a loving God allowing people to go to hell.

Keller addresses this objection as well. He writes:

Modern people inevitably think that hell works like this: God gives us time, but if we haven't made the right choices by the end of our lives, he casts our souls into hell for

eternity. As the poor souls fall through space, they cry out for mercy, but God says "Too late! You had your chance! Now you will suffer!" This caricature misunderstands the nature of evil. The Biblical picture is that sin separates us from the presence of God, which is the source of all joy and indeed all love, wisdom, or good things of any sort. Since we were originally created for God's immediate presence, only before his face will we thrive, flourish, and achieve our highest potential. If we were to lose his presence totally, that would be hell – the loss of our capacity for giving or receiving love or joy.^{lviii}

It's very important to see that God does not send anyone to hell. Hell only comes to those who have rejected His revelation, choosing to suppress the truth He made plain to them.^{lix} To get to hell a person has to reject the grace of God who "gives to all mankind life and breath and everything."^{lx} Moreover, they must reject the convicting work of the Holy Spirit and the call of the crucified and resurrected Savior.^{lxi}

C.S. Lewis wrote:

There are only two kinds of people – those who say 'Thy will be done' to God or those to whom God in the end says, 'Thy will be done.' All that are in Hell choose it. Without that self-choice it wouldn't be hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it.^{lxii}

G.K. Chesterton said something similar- "Hell is God's great compliment to the reality of human freedom and the dignity of human choice."

If God is truly to restore all things in a new heaven and new earth, then He must separate from his new creation everything that would oppose it or corrupt it. No doctor would knowingly leave cancer cells in their patient's body, nor would a computer tech allow a computer virus to corrupt an entire computer. It should not shock us that the Lord would not permit any sinful rebels to be a part of His good and pure Kingdom nor should we assume they would want to be a part of it.^{lxiii}

What should shock us is that Jesus, God's Son, would come as a man to live in the world ruined by rebellious humanity to rescue us! Isn't it right that we would be more awed by the fact that Jesus took the wrath of God we deserve than that God would not permit rebels inside His Kingdom?

It's not fair to for people to go to hell who have never heard of Jesus.

This objection might have the most power to cause even Christians to question the doctrine of hell. What are we to do with this objection? We must start by recognizing that we simply do not have the ability to see and know everything as God does. There are certain "secret things" that He has chosen not to reveal to us – *"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of the law"* (Deut. 29:29).

The Lord has not chosen to reveal everything we would like to know about the eternal destiny of people. But He has revealed enough for us to point people to Jesus inviting them to escape God's coming wrath and receive eternal life through him. In the end, we're left saying with Abraham – *"Will not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?"*(Gen. 18:25).^{lxiv}

Here's what God has chosen to reveal. There is only one way to God the Father, and that is through Jesus Christ.^{lxv} All other religions, spiritual guides, prophets and/or saviors are false and involve some degree of demonic deception.^{lxvi}

While it is true that Jesus is the only way to the Father, there are many ways to Jesus. The normal God-ordained way of salvation is responding to the message of the Gospel.^{lxvii} But there are Biblical examples as well as life experiences where God gives special revelation of Jesus to unsaved people in other forms such as dreams and visions.^{lxviii} Anyone who is genuinely searching and willing to respond to the goodness of God as Cornelius did will receive special revelation even if it requires God to bypass the "normal" channels to accomplish His purposes.^{lxix}

So ultimately, we are left with some unknown questions and yet we are given God's clear revelation in Jesus Christ. We know that God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son so that people might not perish. As Paul says – *"The Scripture says, 'Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"* (Rom. 10:11-13)

Conclusion

So, what are we to do with this doctrine as Christians? First, we should rightfully thank the Lord from a deep heart for His mercy in saving us from His coming wrath and hell. Jesus said that the "one forgiven much loves much" so let us allow this revelation to renew our love of the Lord in deeper ways. The purpose of hell is not ultimately to scare us into a relationship with God through Jesus. It is to compel us to love the One, who "descended into hell and rose on the third day" as expressed in the Apostles Creed. Moreover, as a people having received God's mercy, let us be a merciful people.

Second, let us recover in our time the truth of this Biblical doctrine as an essential part of the Gospel. It would do us well to recover the truth that among other things, we are rescued from "God's coming wrath."^{lxx} Jesus certainly had no problem warning people about the horrific reality of hell. While there is certainly an artful way to speak the truth in love, let us not offer the Gospel of a "personal relationship with Jesus" that does not include everything from which the cross rescued us.

Third, let us renew our commitment to live on mission with Jesus. Let us make the effort to develop relationships with lost people to have a natural opportunity to speak the Gospel to them. Let us pray that the Father will draw them to Jesus, and that Jesus will reveal Himself to them. Let us commit ourselves to learning how to communicate the Gospel in relevant ways to our culture. This will involve hearing people's stories, discerning their core convictions and passions, and connecting their stories to the story of Jesus.

Fourth, let us learn to live by the Biblical truths expressed in The Lausanne Covenant (1974), an evangelical manifesto for the worldwide Church:

All men and women are perishing because of sin, but God loves everyone, not wishing that any should perish but that all should repent. Yet those who reject Christ repudiate the joy of salvation and condemn themselves to eternal

separation from God. To proclaim Jesus as “the Savior of the world” is not to affirm that all people are either automatically or ultimately saved, still less to affirm that all religions offer salvation in Christ. Rather it is to proclaim God’s love for a world of sinners and to invite everyone to respond to him as Savior and Lord in the whole-hearted personal commitment of repentance and faith. Jesus Christ has been exalted above every other name; we long for the day when every knee shall bow to him and every tongue shall confess him Lord.^{lxxi}

Finally, let us humble ourselves before the Lord of all creation. Let us choose to trust Him, as He has revealed Himself in Jesus. Let us remember that, on the great Day of judgment, none of us will be able to accuse Him of acting unjustly.

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?

Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?

For from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be the glory forever!

Amen.

Romans 11:33-36

ⁱ Dale Bruner, *The Christbook*, Matthew 1-12, p.482.

ⁱⁱ Mark Driscoll, *Doctrine (Crossway 2010)*, p.424.

ⁱⁱⁱ Dale Bruner, *The Christbook*, Matthew 1-12, p. 213.

^{iv} John 3:16-17.

^v Matt. 5:22; 10:28; 18:9. Since Gehenna is described as a fiery abyss (Mark 9:43), it is also the “lake of fire” to which the wicked go together with Satan and his demons (Matt. 13:42, 50; Matt. 23:15, 33, 41; Rev. 19:20; 20:10-15).

^{vi} 2 Kings 16:3; 21:6; 23:10; 2 Chron. 28:3; 33:6; Jer. 19:56; 32:35.

^{vii} Michael Wilkins, *Matthew NIV Commentary*, p. 243.

^{viii} Matt. 13:42, 50; 18:8; Rev. 19:20; 20:14-15. Hell is also described as the “lake of fire” where Satan is destined to be tormented (Rev. 20:10).

^{ix} Matt. 25:30; Jude 13.

^x Rev. 14:10-11.

^{xi} Matt. 7:23; 25:41; Luke 16:19f; 2 Thess. 1:9.

^{xii} Rev. 14:11.

^{xiii} Rev. 2:11; 20:6,14; 21:8.

^{xiv} Luke 16:19-31.

^{xv} Matt. 13:42, 50; 22:12-13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28.

^{xvi} Matt. 10:28; Heb. 10:39.

^{xvii} Hell is utterly fearful and dreadful (Heb. 10:27-31); it is a fate worse than drowning at sea (Mark 9:42); it's worse than earthly suffering including being maimed (Matt. 5:29-30; Mark 9:43); the suffering never ends (Matt. 25:41; Mark 9:48); the wicked will be burned with "unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:12); there is weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 8:12); the punishment is depicted as "coming misery" (James 5:1-5); the suffering is constant (Rev. 14:11).

^{xviii} Quoted by Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke, Vol. 2 (P&R Pub. 2009), p.200.*

^{xix} Bruner, p. 213.

^{xx} Matt. 25:41; 2 Thess. 1:6-9; Rev. 11: 15-19; 14:10-11; 15:1-4; 19 ; 20:10.

^{xxi} Tim Keller, "Preaching Hell in a Tolerant Age," Preaching Today, October, 2006.

^{xxii} Tim Keller, "Preaching Hell in a Tolerant Age."

^{xxiii} Gen. 2:15-17; Eccl. 7:2; Rom. 5:12f. This statement comes from the "Conclusions and Recommendations" of The Evangelical Alliance's report: *The Nature of Hell: A Report by the Evangelical Alliance Commission of Unity and Truth Among Evangelicals, David Hilborn, ed. (Paternoster Press 2000).*

^{xxiv} Ps. 104:29; 146:4; Eccl. 3:20-21; 2 Cor. 5:7-9; Heb. 9:27; James 2:26.

^{xxv} Luke 16:19-31; 23:43; Acts 7:59; 2 Cor. 5:7-9; Php. 1:23; Rev. 6:9-11..

^{xxvi} 1 Cor. 15; 2 Cor. 5:8. This is only an intermediate state in heaven. Heaven is not the place where believers spend eternity. Our eternal home will be on the new earth.

^{xxvii} Daniel 12:2; Matt. 10:15; 25:46; Mark 14:62; John 5:22-27; Acts 10:42; 17:30-31; Rom. 2:5-11; 1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Thess. 1:6-9; 2Tim. 4:1; Heb. 6:2; 9:27-28; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Rev. 20:11-15; 22:12-21.

^{xxviii} Rom. 5:1; Gal. 3:24.

^{xxix} Matt. 19:28f; 25:31-46; Rom. 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:11-15.

^{xxx} Matt. 24:45-47; 25:14-30; Luke 12:42-48; 16:1-13; 17:7-10; 19:12-27; Rom. 2:16; 14:10; 1 Cor. 3:8-15; 4:5; 9:17-27; Col. 3:23-25; 1 Tim. 2:3-6; 2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Pet. 1:7; 5:4; Rev. 4:4,10; 22:12.

^{xxxi} John 3:18, 34-36; 5:21-27.

^{xxxii} John 14:6; Acts 4:17; Rom. 3:25; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; Heb. 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10; 5:11-12.

^{xxxiii} Matt. 11:21-24; Luke 10:12; 12:47-48; 20:47.

^{xxxiv} Origin (185-254) is perhaps the most famous. He believed that all the Scriptural texts speaking of eternal punishment were benevolent deceptions by God meant to shock us to repentance. See *The History of Hell, p. 6.*

^{xxxv} Don Carson asserts that universalism is built out of several different assertions: a) everyone is savingly loved by God and is reconciled to God already; b) because of the wildness of God's mercy, people of other religions will somehow find their way to heaven; c) initially, the only lost people are those who reject God's love; d) despite their rejection of his love, these people are still loved by God. Carson also addresses some of the specific Scriptures commonly quoted by universalists (John 12:32; Rom. 5:18; 2 Cor. 5:19; Rev. 21:25). See *God: Abounding in Love, Punishing the Guilty – Don Carson, Tim Keller, Crawford Loritts, Kevin DeYoung, and Stephen Um (The Gospel Coalition 2011 National Conference).* This response was given as a rebuttal to Rob Bell's *Love Wins* in which Bell argues that hell is a place of refinement until one repents and is reconciled with God.

^{xxxvi} The Second Council of Constantinople in 533 condemned Origin's teaching of universalism as heretical.

^{xxxvii} Matt. 7:13; 10:28; John 5:16; Eph. 2:1.

^{xxxviii} This paragraph is taken from *The Nature of Hell, Conclusions & Recommendations.* For a detailed discussion of these two views, see *The Nature of Hell.* A brief overview and summary of *The Nature of Hell* is provided by Robert A. Peterson in "Undying Worm Unquenchable Fire," *Christianity Today (Oct. 23, 2000).*

^{xxxix} Arguing against this view, Driscoll notes the key arguments for annihilationism are (1) the nature of fire, which consumes, (2) the use of the word "destroy," which means "the extinction of being," (3) the concept of justice whereby God punishes "according to what they have done" – Rev. 20:12, and (4) the passages that speak of God triumphing over evil so that God is all in all and reconciles all things to himself – 1 Cor. 15:28; Col. 1:20. See *Doctrine, p.430.*

^{xi} Although there are many exegetical issues in this debate, the most obvious question is on the meaning of the Biblical texts that speak of the unbeliever perishing or being destroyed (John 3:16; Matt. 10:28). Conditionalists contend these texts should be taken at face value to indicate the extinction of being.

Traditionalists respond that this language is metaphorical and speaks to the person's relationship with God rather than their being. They point to Rev. 17:8-11 where we are told of the "destruction" of the beast, and he is later cast into the fiery lake of burning sulfur (19:10) and is "tormented day and night for ever and ever" (20:10). Annihilationism was condemned by the Second Council of Constantinople (AD 533) and the Fifth Lateran Council (1513).

^{xli} They point to many texts, but two obvious texts are Daniel 12:2 and Matthew 25:46. These include such notable persons as Tertullian, Jerome, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, Whitefield, and Wesley.

^{xlii} The Roman Catholic view distinguishes between hell and purgatory, a place of temporary purification for those destined for heaven. See *The History of Hell – A brief survey and resource guide (Christian History 2011)*.

^{xliii} Matt. 25:41-46; Mark 9:43-48; Luke 16:26.

^{xliiv} *The Nature of Hell, Conclusions and Recommendations*.

^{xli v} *The Reason for God by Tim Keller (Dutton 2008)*, p.70. Keller cites Robert Bellah's influential work, *Habits of the Heart*, in which Bellah notes that 80% of Americans agree with the statement "an individual should arrive at his or her own religious beliefs independent of any church or synagogue."

^{xli vi} Keller, p.71.

^{xli vii} Keller, p. 72.

^{xli viii} Psalm 145:17-20.

^{xli x} Keller, p. 73, quoting Becky Pippert, *Hope Has Its Reasons*.

^l Psalm 96; Nahum 1:2-8; Rom. 1:18 – 2:16; 11:22, 33-36; Heb. 12:28-29; Rev. 6:9-17; 15:3-4; 19:1-2.

Wayne Grudem writes:

"As with the other attributes of God, this is an attribute for which we should thank and praise God. It may not immediately appear to us how this can be done, since wrath seems to be such a negative concept. Viewed alone, it would arouse only fear and dread. Yet it is helpful for us to ask what God would be like if He were a God that did not hate sin. He would then be a God who either delighted in sin or at least was not troubled by it. Such a God would not be worthy of our worship, for sin is hateful and it is worthy of being hated. Sin ought not to be. It is in fact a virtue to hate evil and sin (Hebrews 1:9; Zech. 8:17), and we rightly imitate this attribute of God when we feel hatred against evil, injustice, and sin." *Systematic Theology (Zondervan 1994)*, p.206.

^{li} Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 136, 139.

^{lii} Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, p.106.

^{liii} Rom. 2:5-6.

^{li v} Rom. 2; Col. 3:25; Rev. 20:12.

^{li v i} Rom. 12:19; 1 Peter 2:22-23.

^{li v ii} Rom. 5:9; 1 Thess. 1:9-10; 5:9.

^{li v iii} Ezekiel 33:11; Acts 17:29f; 1 Thess. 1:10; 2:16; 5:9; 2 Peter 3:9; Jude 23.

^{li v iii i} Keller, p.76.

^{li x} Rom. 1:21-25.

^{li x i} Acts 14:17; 17:25.

^{li x ii} John 12:32; 16:8.

^{li x iii} Quoted by Keller, p.79.

^{li x iii i} Rev. 22:14-15.

^{li x iii i v} Rev. 19:1-2. After speaking of the mysterious sovereignty of God, Paul erupts in worship over God's "unsearchable judgments" (Rom. 11:33-36).

^{li x v} John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5-6.

^{li x vi} Isaiah 44:6-20; Acts 17:16f; 1 Cor. 8:4-6; 10:18-22

^{li x vi i} Rom. 10:13-15.

^{li x vi i i i} Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3); Pharaoh (Gen. 40-41); Balaam (Num. 24:4, 16-19); Cornelius (Acts 10:3-6).

Today there are many credible reports of Jesus appearing in dreams and visions to Muslims. See *Dreams and Visions – Is Jesus Awakening the Muslim World? By Tom Doyle (Thomas Nelson 2012)*.

^{lxi} Driscoll, p. 434.

^{lxx} 1 Thess. 1:9-10; 2 Thess. 1:5-10.

^{lxxi} The Lausanne Movement, “The Uniqueness and Universality of Christ” (par. 3) in *The Lausanne Covenant* (see www.lausanne.org/covenant).