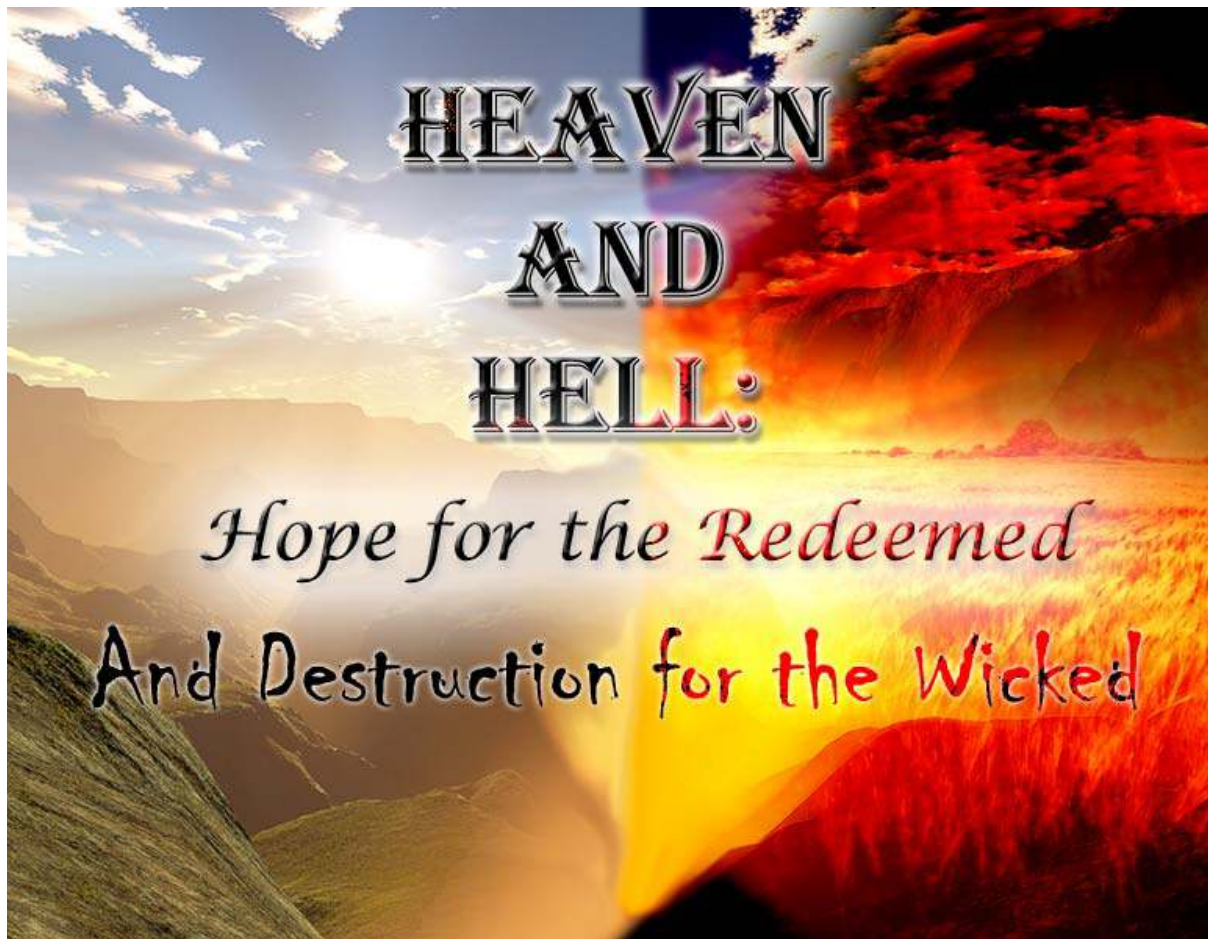


# Theology for Life

Volume 2 | Issue 3 | Fall 2015



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- ***Heaven (Theology in Community)* — An Author Interview**
- ***What is Heaven?***
- ***What is Hell?***
- ***Becoming Worldly Saints— A Book Review***

**THE MESSAGE  
OF THE KINGDOM  
ISN'T  
"YOU KIDS."  
GET OFF OUR LAWN.  
THE MESSAGE  
OF THE KINGDOM  
★ IS ★  
"MAKE WAY"  
FOR THE COMING OF  
THE LORD.**

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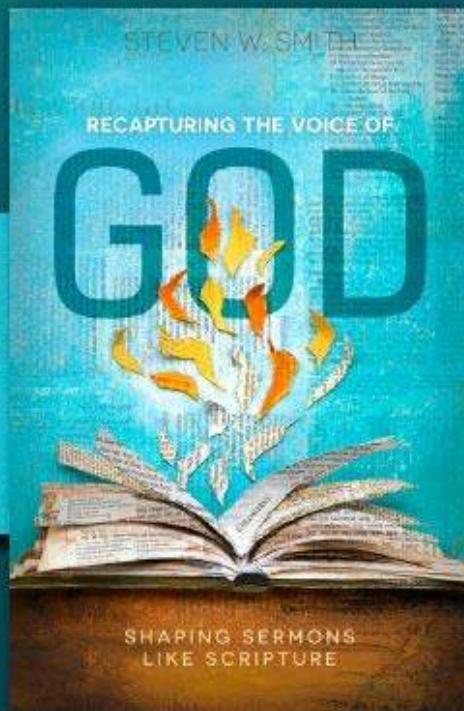
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## Editor's Corner

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Heaven is a place where the Redeemed of the Lord will go after they die. The true Christian lives in tension between the “already” and “not yet” of the Kingdom of God. On one hand, the Kingdom of God is here and now through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. At the moment of Christ’s death, He said, “It is finished”, which ushered in the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is also *not yet* in that Christ has not yet returned. Christians are to regularly fill their minds with Heaven through the means of Scripture, gathering in the context of the local church as members, under godly qualified leadership, to serve the Lord whole heartedly, and grow in His grace.

With that said, there are lots of people who refuse to worship Jesus. They refuse to believe in the Savior who bled, and died for them. Even so there are still people who have not yet heard the gospel. There is still a Savior and Lord who has bled, died, rose again, and serves as our exalted High Priest, Mediator, Intercessor, and Advocate before the Father in Jesus. King Jesus is returning to rule and reign over the throne of King David in Jerusalem. This King will judge the living and the dead—those who haven’t received him.

Hell is a place for those who have not yet received Jesus. There is only one chance in *this life* to either accept Jesus or reject Him. After one closes his/her eyes, has his/her last breath, and his/her last heart beat there is not another chance to be born again. Hell is a place where people will experience unending, unrelenting, conscious punishment.

People today say their lives are “hell”, and by that they mean that their lives are in disarray. If people truly understood that Hell is a place where the

worship of God cannot take place, then they wouldn't say "my life is hell". Instead they would acknowledge that Hell is a real place where people are really headed.

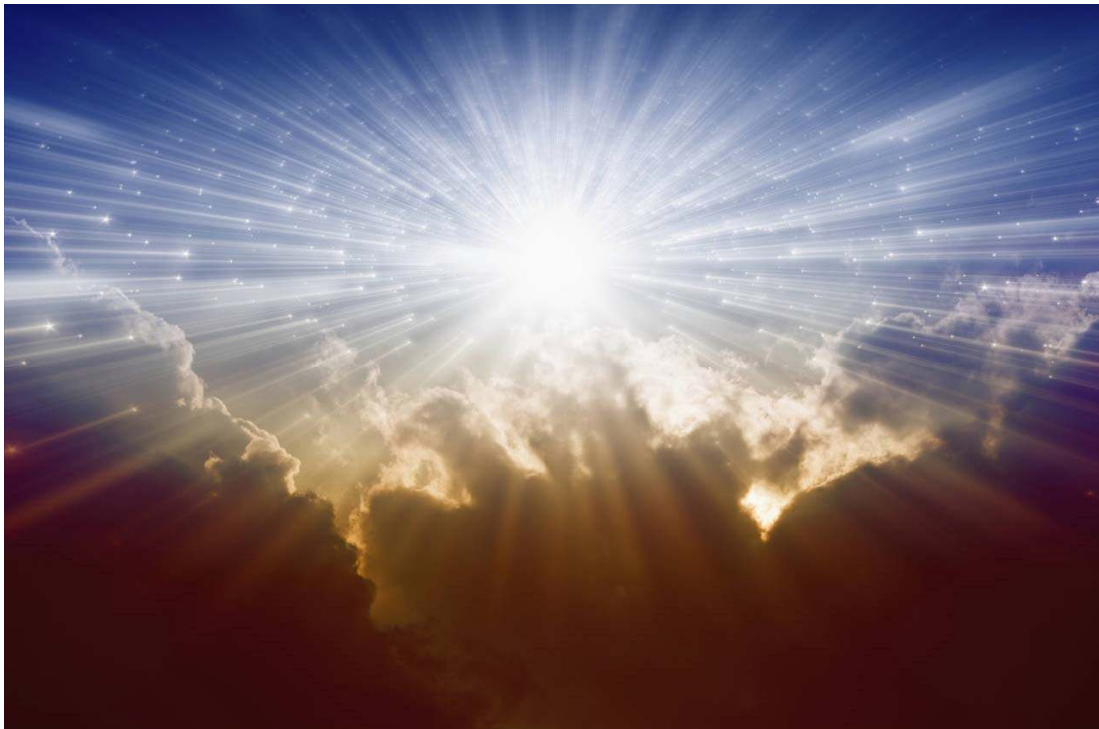
In this issue of *Theology for Life*, you will be challenged to see people as God sees them, created in His image, but lost if they don't know the Jesus the Son of God who saves. This issue will prayerfully help you to see the lost as God does so that you might have compassion on the lost, and truly care about them enough to share Christ with them. Heaven and Hell are real; it's not a joke. Heaven is a place where true Christians will go to worship their King and Lord Jesus Christ for all eternity. Hell is a place where the unsaved will experience unending, unrelenting conscious punishment for their entire lives.

As you read this issue I encourage you to share it with your friends. Heaven and Hell are weighty theological concepts, but often devalued in the Church today. There are many people who question whether Hell is a place of unrelenting, unending, conscious punishment. The Kingdom of Jesus is exclusive. In order to be part of His Kingdom, you must be born again. Jesus is only the way to God and only by believing in Him can one be saved and escape the fires of Hell. Through Jesus, He makes all things new. He redeems man by reconciling man to Himself. He gives man a new future, full of hope, a hope grounded in His death, burial, and resurrection. I encourage you as you read this issue to prayerfully reflect on what you're reading. My prayer is that your faith would be strengthened, and that the gospel might take deeper root in your life as a result of your reading of this issue on Heaven and Hell.

In Christ Alone,  
Dave Jenkins  
Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine*

## What is Heaven?

By Michael Wittmer



**Everyone uses the term “heaven”, but most haven’t given much thought to what it really means. Even Christians.** Scripture uses the term “heaven” in three different ways, so before we can answer the question “What is Heaven?” we need to know which *heaven* we’re talking about.

### **How the Bible Uses Heaven**

1. ***The space above the earth.*** This seems to be the meaning in

Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the *heavens* and the earth.” God created our planet and all the space above, from our troposphere through the stratosphere, mesosphere, outer space, intergalactic space, and all the way to the throne room of God, which is the second meaning of Heaven.

2. ***The abode of God.*** Psalm 115:3 says, “Our God is in heaven.” Jesus said that He left His Father’s side and came down from Heaven (John 3:13;



6:38), and Paul seems to suggest that he was the man who “was caught up to the third heaven,” where he “heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell” (2 Corinthians 12:2-4). Paul’s reluctance to talk about his experience should temper our enthusiasm for contemporaries who “visit Heaven” and return to write tell-all books. We know that Paul went to Heaven, and he said he was forbidden to speak about it. He wasn’t able to put it into words, even if he was allowed. Paul’s reticence reminds us to put our trust in Scripture, which tells us all God wants us to know about Heaven.

We must also remember that Heaven itself belongs to the realm of creation. Heaven is where God stoops to most fully reveal Himself, but make no mistake, He still stoops. God’s glory infinitely transcends what He can reveal to us, even in Heaven. As Solomon exclaimed, “The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you” (1 Kings 8:27).

**If Heaven belongs to creation, then our loved ones who go there do not leave creation behind.** They do not “step into eternity,” as God alone is eternal. They remain in time and space. Revelation 6:10 says the saints in Heaven “called out in a loud voice, ‘How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?’” Notice they are shouting, “How long?” which means they are still experiencing the succession of events. The future becomes the present and fades into the past, and they impatiently wonder how much longer they have to wait until Jesus defeats their enemies and restores all things. Their impatient longing brings us to the third notion of Heaven.

### 3. *The Intermediate State.*

Praise God that the children of God go to Heaven when they die. The throne room of God is glorious beyond words, and it sure beats going to the *other* place. Contrary to many Christians’ fixation on this meaning of Heaven, Scripture does not tell us much

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“We must also remember that Heaven itself belongs to the realm of creation.”

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about what we will experience there. Jesus told the thief on the cross, “Today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). Paul said he wanted to “depart and be with Christ” (Philippians 1:23). When he died he would be “at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). This would be true for all dead believers, for when Jesus returns He will bring with Him all “those who have fallen asleep in him” (1 Thessalonians 4:14).

What do these passages say about Heaven? Only that we are with the Lord. They do not tell us what Heaven is like or what we will do there, but they do assure us that we will be with Jesus. And this is enough, because the presence of Jesus is the point of Heaven. Jesus is what makes Heaven wonderful. If Heaven by itself was so much better than earth, then Jesus played a dirty trick on Lazarus when He raised him from the dead. Why didn’t Lazarus say, “Rats! Why did you bring me back here? Don’t you know I was in Heaven!” Lazarus was okay with coming back to Earth because Jesus was there, and Jesus’ presence made his corner of Bethany a foretaste of Heaven itself (John 11:38).

-44).

Theologians call this meaning of *heaven* the “intermediate state” because it is where dead saints go to await the return of Christ and their resurrection. We must never minimize this intermediate state, for after all, it is Heaven. What a comfort to know that our loved ones who died in Christ are right now in the presence of Jesus! We must not oversell it either, because it is merely our intermediate state. It is not the final goal that God tells us to long for. If we suggest that dying and going to Heaven is the goal of the Christian life, then we have eliminated the need for the return of Christ and the resurrection of our bodies. We must praise God for taking our loved ones to be with Him, and we must impatiently pray with them “How long, Sovereign Lord?” and “Come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 6:10; 22:20).

**As great as it is to be a disembodied soul with Jesus in Heaven, there is one thing better:** to be a whole person—body and soul—living with Jesus here, on planet Earth, where we were always meant to live. This is the exciting promise of Scripture, and one that many Christians miss. We too often mistake the intermediate state for our final state, thinking that when we die we will go to Heaven and stay there.

Consider just a few examples from popular books and songs. *The Purpose-Driven Life* explains, “You’re just passing through, just visiting earth.” The “earth is not our ultimate home,” so “At death you won’t leave home—you’ll go home.” Favorite hymns say we’ll shed our bodies and rise to our “home beyond the skies.” Bluegrass quartets announce “Some glad

morning when this life is o’er, I’ll fly away.” Even Carrie Underwood sings, “This is my temporary home, it’s not where I belong.”

This widespread sentiment is not biblical. The Christian hope is not merely that our departed souls go to Heaven. We yearn for the day when Jesus returns with our souls, resurrects our bodies, and puts us back together. We believe in the resurrection!

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“Scripture repeatedly promises that our final state is the “new heaven and the new earth.”

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To summarize: Scripture uses the term “heaven” to refer to the space above the earth, the abode of God, and the intermediate state. Note that Scripture nowhere uses “heaven” as many Christians do, to describe our final state. Since our final state is what many Christians (wrongly) mean when they say “heaven”, let’s examine the Bible’s thrilling promises about that.

### **How the Bible Describes Our Final State**

Scripture repeatedly promises that our final state is the “new heaven and the new earth” (Isaiah 65:17; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:3). Many Christians misread this phrase. They stop at the word “heaven” and, mistaking it for the intermediate state, think that we will live forever “up there” in the celestial clouds. “Heaven” in these passages is used in the first sense we noted above, as the space above the

earth. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and in the end He will restore them both. Creation, then new creation.

Notice the ambiguity in the phrase, “new earth.” The new earth is both continuous and discontinuous with our present creation. It is different, or new, but it is also the same, because it is still the earth. What is new and what stays the same?

### **We find a clue in 2 Peter**

**3:13. Peter says,** “We are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.” What is new about the new earth is that it is “the home of righteousness.” Peter does not see any new *things*, but he does see new *actions*. Unlike this fallen world, which is marked by sinners committing evil acts, the new world is the home of redeemed people committing righteous acts. This fits with God’s announcement in Revelation 21:5, “He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’” God does not say “I am making new things,” but rather “I am making everything new!” God is not replacing our current things with other things, but He is taking the things that are already here and restoring them.

Thus, it seems that the new earth is this earth that’s been fixed. We often say we feel like a new person once our health is restored or our mood brightens. We don’t mean that our essence has changed. We’re the same person we’ve always been, just restored. Likewise, the new earth doesn’t seem to have any new things—at least none that are suggested in Scripture, save the permanent presence of God (more on that below)—but it is fixed.

**Redemption requires that the new earth is *this* earth that has been fixed.** If the new earth is too different from our present earth, then our present earth will not be redeemed but replaced. This is true for individuals as well. If your resurrection body is too different from your current body, then you will not have been redeemed. You will have been replaced. Since the Christian hope is for our resurrection and the restoration of all things, it is essential that *this* body and *this* world rise to live forever. Satan wins nothing in the end. He ravaged our world when he led Adam into sin, and God wants it all back. He sent Jesus “to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in Heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Acts 3:21; Colossians 1:20). Everything that sin has broken, grace will restore.

Here is a rule of thumb for deciphering what aspects of our present existence will make it through to the new earth. Since redemption restores creation, whatever belongs to creation will remain and whatever belongs to the Fall will be removed. If redemption eliminates an aspect of creation it will be damaging the very patient it is trying to help. Likewise, if redemption leaves an aspect of the Fall untouched it will do a less than thorough job of healing the patient. This rule of thumb implies that scars, handicaps, and other effects of the fall will be removed while nature, culture, and other aspects of God’s good creation will remain.

The new earth will contain the glories of our present creation. I would not be surprised to find Lake Michigan or Mount Everest on the new earth. The new earth

will also contain the normal products of human culture. Isaiah says we will “build houses and dwell in them.” We will “plant vineyards and eat their fruit” (Isaiah 65:21). John sees nations, wealth, and commerce as “the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into” the New Jerusalem whose gates are never shut (Revelation 21:24-26; cf. Isaiah 60:3-11).

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“There are two effects of the Fall that will never be fixed.”

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**There are only three exceptions to our rule of thumb.** The one good of creation that will not appear on the new earth is marriage. Jesus said there won’t be marriage after the resurrection, probably because the fall has so scrambled marriage that God can’t restore one without violating another (Matthew 22:30). Yet it’s not exactly true that marriage is abolished. Paul says that marriage now is a shadow of the fuller marriage to come. On the new earth we all will be married to Jesus (Ephesians 5:32).

There are two effects of the Fall that will never be fixed. Isaiah 65:25 says that even on the new earth, when the wolf and the lamb are lying down together and the lion is eating straw like the ox, yet “dust will be the serpent’s food.” The snake was cursed to slither along the ground in the Garden of Eden, and this curse will never be reversed. John 20:27 reveals that the resurrected Jesus still bears the scars from His cross. These two leftovers from the Fall will keep us humble while living on the new earth. We will know better than to credit ourselves with

our good fortune. Every time we see a snake we’ll remember our sin and every time we look at Jesus we’ll see the beautiful scars that accomplished our salvation. And we’ll praise Him for His wonderful grace.

The best part of the new earth is that God Himself will descend to live here. John saw “the new Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God’” (Revelation 21:2-3). Heaven, the abode of God, seems to become the capital of a restored earth. How committed is God to us and to our planet? In the end He will live here permanently. This should not be a surprise, because after all, He is Immanuel, God-with-us.

### A Few Final Thoughts...

We have more questions than answers about what life will be like on the new earth, but what we do know is exciting. On the new earth we will do all (except marriage) that God originally intended for Adam and Eve. We will worship Jesus, love others, and try our hands at various forms of human culture. This means we don’t need a bucket list, because it’s not true that we only go around once. We will return with Jesus to live here, on the restored earth, so we will have forever to do whatever we didn’t get to this time around.



**Imagine living with Jesus on this restored earth, with all the effects of sin removed.** I love peaches, strawberries, and oranges, but I've only eaten these fruits from cursed soil. How luscious will fruit taste on the new earth? How bright and deep will be the color blue? How heightened will all of our earthly pleasures be when the curse is reversed? If you enjoy being human and if you enjoy living here, you're going to love the new earth.

Praise God that He has saved us from Hell, and praise Him even more that He has saved us for abundant, earthly life. Praise God that He takes our souls to be with Him in Heaven, and praise Him even more that He brings those souls with Him at the resurrection. This is a gospel to be excited about. This is a gospel worth sharing with others. And so we pray the closing prayer of Scripture, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20).

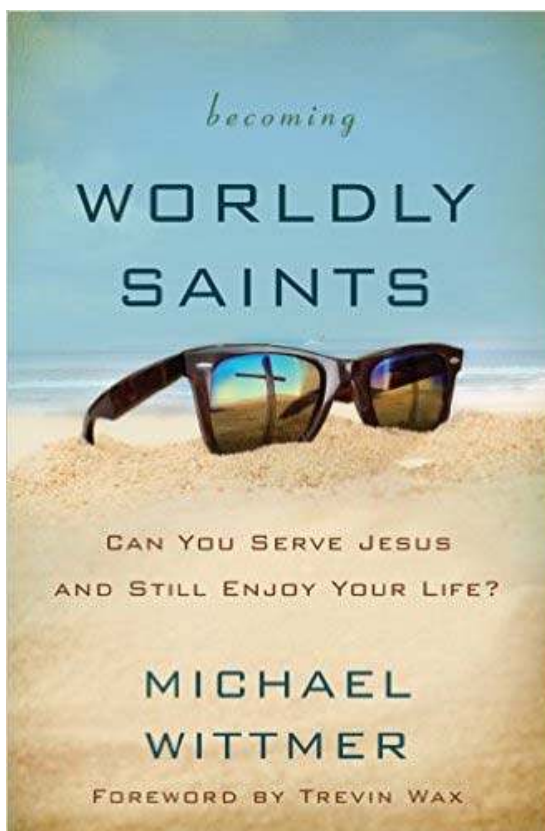
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- 3 "Temporary Home," by Luke Robert Laird, Zachary David Maloy, and Carrie Underwood, lyrics copyright Universal Music Publishing Group.

## A Book Review:

### ***Becoming Worldly Saints: Can You Serve Jesus and Still Enjoy Your Life***

By David Dunham



**I am a man of many loves. I love movies, music, food, fashion, and Jesus. The last of these must necessarily hold priority of affection in my heart, but often the other interests take up most of my time.** This imbalance has often weighed on me and caused no small amount of guilt. How can I love Jesus rightly and yet still enjoy living my life? It's a question that apparently many ask; in particular, it is a question that Michael Wittmer has asked. He asks it again in his newest book, [\*Becoming Worldly Saints: Can You Serve Jesus and Still Enjoy Your Life\*](#), and offers an encouraging answer. A sound theology of Heaven and Earth can help to ease the false guilt some have for enjoying life as a follower of Christ.

So, can you serve Jesus and still enjoy your life? In his book, Wittmer's answer is an encouraging "yes", but his explanation of that answer leads us into a thorough examination of the theology of Heaven and Earth. Our enjoyment of this life is often guilt-ridden because we have a poorly developed theology of Heaven. At the heart of our guilt is the belief that the enjoyment of this life is an *inferior joy*, that

there is a “heavenly purpose” we will miss if we do enjoy life. Yet these earthly pleasures and heavenly purposes are much more intertwined than we might think.

Wittmer explains:

*Our lives will shrivel if we allow our passion for redemption to smother the pleasures of creation. Being a Christian must not become an obstacle to being human. But the problem is even worse in reverse: when we eliminate our earthly pleasures, we inevitably limit the reach of our heavenly purpose. (13)*

Wittmer unpacks the nature of this relationship across 22 chapters, each filling in a little more detail about the theology of earthly joys.

**The book is broken down into four parts, following the storyline of Scripture: Creation, the meaning of life, the Fall, and redemption.** “We are people of stories,” Wittmer says, “and most Americans tend towards one of two potential stories: naturalism or spiritualism. We believe either that matter is all that matters, or we believe that the spiritual is all that matters (that “matter is the matter,” 18). In truth, however, there is only one story: God’s story.” His story not only forms the outline of this book, but it forms the outline of our existence. God creates a beautiful world to be enjoyed, man distorts that beautiful world with sin; but God sets in motion a plan to redeem His world and restore it. The redemption of creation then becomes the key to integrating “the purpose of heaven with the pleasure of earth” (22).

The greatest problem, as Wittmer sees it, is that many Christians have wrongly understood Heaven and Earth. We have been inclined to think that Heaven is our “home up there” and Earth is

our “temporary confine”. Such a view is not Pauline, however, but rather Platonic. We were always made to live on Earth, Wittmer says. In part-one, he establishes that the earth was made good. Platonic dualism has corrupted the church’s theology, but God made the earth to be good and to be enjoyed. Furthermore, this world is meant to be our home. Part-two walks us through the meaning of life, as

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“The greatest problem, as Wittmer sees it, is that many Christians have wrongly understood Heaven and Earth.”

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defined by God. It is a meaning rooted in our earthliness and creature-hood. It involves loving God, serving others, cultivating the earth, and resting in God. This idea of resting becomes an essential component of relating our human life to our Christian life. Part-three clarifies the ways in which the Fall has damaged our home, and distorted our love of the world, so that it can become idolatrous. That damage, however, does not completely destroy God’s original intent. Part-four points us to the redemption of creation, the coming Kingdom, and the New Earth. Each chapter, though short, provides increasing clarity to this important subject. The book is not comprehensive in its theological development, but readers will find much cogency and detail in its 188 pages. Discussion questions related to each chapter will further add to its value.

**Wittmer is an engaging writer; he is witty and even a bit snarky.** He brings a fresh voice to old doctrines, some of which the average

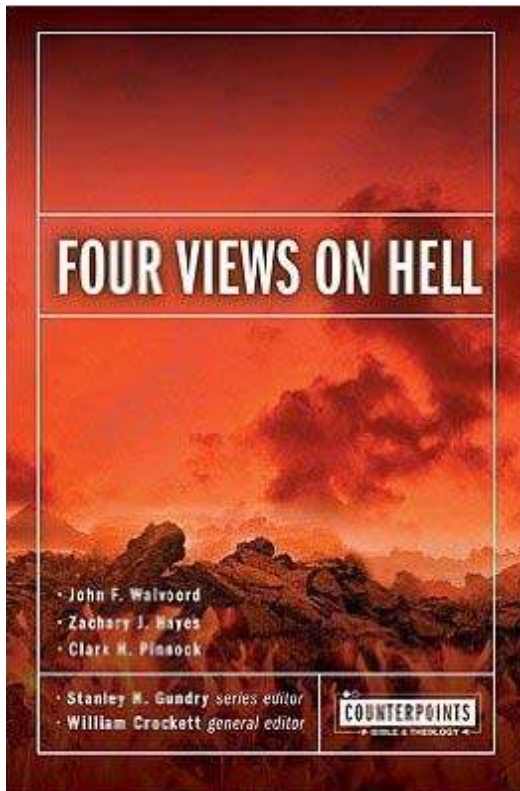
Christian has likely never known, but which have been long-held by the larger Church. Wittmer does “pop-theology” better than most, keeping to sound doctrine, but writing about it in thoroughly compelling ways. I loved this book; it helped to ease some of my own guilt and will likely do the same for many other “worldly saints”. I encourage you to pick up [\*Becoming Worldly Saints\*](#), and revisit your own theology of Heaven and Earth. You might be surprised at what the gospel says about your daily living, and find that you can, in fact, serve Jesus and enjoy your life.



## A Book Review:

### *Four Views on Hell*

By Michael Boling



***Four Views on Hell* is a concise, yet comprehensive, overview of four mainstream theological perspectives on Hell.** The format of the book allows each contributor to explicate their views, while allowing for an irenic response from each contributor to the position taken by their peers. The result is a valuable exposition of a topic that is, although often divisive, of great import to a holistic understanding of Scripture. Given the explicitly descriptive statements in Scripture regarding Hell, avoidance of this subject is disastrous to a fully formulated presentation of the gospel message. This review will show that, among the four views presented, the literal view of Hell averred by author and theologian John Walvoord, despite suffering from undue brevity, adheres most closely to sound biblical exposition.

#### **A Brief Summary**

The first position on Hell presented is that of author and theologian John Walvoord. In his review of *Four Views on Hell*, Robert Pyne accurately describes Walvoord's position as firmly based on the idea that the "biblical descrip-

tions of Hell as a place of everlasting fiery torment should be taken literally." New Testament professor William Crockett avers Hell as a place of everlasting torment; however, his stance argues "the biblical descriptions of this place should be understood metaphorically" in keeping with the penchant for New Testament authors to depict present and future concepts in a manner that would have been easily understood by their readers. Professor Zachary Hayes provides the purgatorial view espoused by the Roman Catholic Church, noting this interim state of existence is necessary to "get us ready for heaven through purification." *Four Views on Hell* concludes with the condi-

tional view of Hell postulated by Professor Clark Pinnock, a view also known as annihilationism or the idea “it is more practical to interpret the nature of Hell as destruction rather than the endless torture of the wicked.”

The four contributors to this tome offer lucid and insightful support for their respective positions on Hell. Subsequent to each authors’ contribution is a brief yet poignant counter argument interacting from the other authors’. This interactive style of writing provides the reader with valuable insight into the arguments on Hell that form the foundation, not only of the four authors of this book, but much of Christendom.

### **Critical Interaction with the Author’s Work**

John Walvoord argues for the orthodox position on Hell. In his review of *Four Views on Hell*, Robert Pyne notes, “Walvoord relies on the idea that prophecy is to be interpreted literally.” Most notably, Walvoord frames his discussion of Hell within proper hermeneutical principles by asking, “What does the Bible teach [on the subject of Hell]?”, rather than overly interacting with Church tradition or the position of noted theologians. His discussion of Hell begins with a brief overview of the terms *Sheol*, *Hades*, *Hell*, and *Gehenna*—the four main words utilized in Scripture to depict the place of the afterlife.

According to Walvoord, “The Old Testament clearly teaches that there is judgment for the unsaved after this life and that this judgment continues over an extended period of time.” He then centers his discussion of Hell’s eternality citing numerous Scriptures that portray the “sufferings of the wicked continue forever.” He notes Gehenna’s “usage in the New Testament is clearly a reference to the everlasting state of the wicked.” Further valuable support for eternal punishment of the wicked is seen by Walvoord in the concept subsumed in the term *Hades*, most notably, Revelation 20 with its clear notations regarding Hades “giving up the dead” in order for them to be thrown into the Lake of Fire for eternal punishment. Walvoord rightly declares the Lake of Fire “does not provide annihilation but continual suffering.”

Walvoord concludes his insightful discussion with a sound hermeneutical of the Greek word *aiōnios*. As with any term in Scripture, the proper definition is derived from both its context and the semantic range of the word. In this regard, Walvoord brilliantly observes, “In support of the idea that *aiōnios* means “endless” is its consistent placement alongside the duration of the life of the godly in eternity.” Walvoord is not alone in his assertions on the meaning and usage of *aiōnios*. Author and theologian Herbert Lockyer also states that *aiōnios*, specifically its root *aion*, is used most often in the New Testament to indicate time without end. This is evidenced by the fact that the term *aiōnios*, connoting everlasting and eternal, is used fourteen times to describe the eternal rewards of the righteous and an additional seven times to describe the final disposition of the wicked.

Walvoord concludes his section with a brief notation of the literal depiction of Hell in the New Testament. He supports his assertion with an overview of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16, in particular the rich man’s request for water to cool his tongue. Walvoord sees in this request a “natural reaction to fire”, with objections based on Scripture’s use of metaphorical language to depict unknown or fu-

ture events as based solely on theological differences, rather than sound exegetical practice. Despite the validity of Walvoord's position on a literal fire burning eternally in Hell, his remarks suffer from brevity and lack of apologetic development.

Professor William Crockett posits a position similar to that of Walvoord in regards to the eternality of Hell; however, Crockett asserts the depictions of Hell as "figurative expressions warning the wicked of impending doom." He claims the graphic views of Hell that form the basis of most evangelical teaching in this area, and are

largely based on medieval writings such as Dante's *Inferno*. Crockett rightly advises the reader to make special note of hyperbolic language, particularly when exegeting Scriptures on the nature of Hell. He accurately comments that "by paying attention to the contexts, we can avoid over literalizing on the one hand, or diluting the meaning of Scripture on the other." Crockett's assertions, however, suffer from his conviction that the literal view

"The metaphorical position ultimately fails to holistically determine what is to be taken metaphorically and what is to be accepted as literal. While Crockett's arguments disputably have merit and are theologically sound, the reader is left wondering why Hell could not be a literal place of fire and eternal darkness."

"makes the Bible say too much." The metaphorical position ultimately fails to holistically determine what is to be taken metaphorically and what is to be accepted as literal. While Crockett's arguments disputably have merit and are theologically sound, the reader is left wondering why Hell could not be a literal place of fire and eternal darkness.

Professor Zachary Hayes presents the Roman Catholic perspective of purgatory, a "state of purifying suffering for those who have died and are still in need of such purification." Hayes frames his argument by asking "if the concern of the religious journey is to move to ever greater closeness and intimacy with God in a relationship of love, one must ask how the distance between God and creature might be bridged." For Hayes, this bridge from man to God can be found in the purgatorial process of purification. As noted by Thomas Halstead in his review of *Four Views on Hell*, for Hayes, purgatory provides a way to "get us ready for heaven through purification." Unfortunately, Hayes provides little Scriptural basis for his assertions choosing rather to provide support for purgatory from Church tradition rather than clear biblical exegesis. Furthermore, Hayes provides no answer to Hebrews 9:27 which clearly states, "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment", a verse which provides no room for a purgatorial stance on the afterlife.

**The final perspective presented in *Four Views on Hell* is that of Clark Pinnock, who proposes what he labels as the conditional view.** Pinnock firmly states his belief that "the traditional belief that God makes the wicked suffer in an unending conscious torment in Hell is unbiblical." As such, he proposes that annihilationism more closely resembles biblical doctrine as it "retains the realism of some people finally saying no to God without turning the notion hell into a

monstrosity.” The words of D. A. Carson provide salient background into Pinnock’s aversion to a literal perspective on Hell. Carson notes that “despite the sincerity of their motives, one wonders more than a little to what extent the growing popularity of various forms of annihilationism and conditional immortality are a reflection of this age of pluralism.” Minimal biblical evidence support Pinnock’s sentiments, nor his penchant to misinterpret the “destruction of the wicked” described throughout Scripture. Despite the popularity such a message upheld by those seeking to assuage their fear of eternal damnation, Pinnock’s position is scripturally feeble at best.

### Conclusion

The importance of understanding the various theological arguments presented in *Four Views on Hell* cannot be overstated. One simply cannot ignore the biblical teaching on Hell due to difficulties in exegeting the totality of the doctrine of Hell. To this end, *Four Views on Hell* contributes magnificently to providing believers with a valuable tool by which to evaluate various views on Hell. While the debate certainly rages in evangelical circles as to nature of Hell, one thing is certain: rejection of the gift of salvation provided by Christ will have eternal consequences. The words of Dale Vree ring profoundly true as he saliently remarks, “Could it be that the only result of attempts, however well-meaning, to air-condition hell, is to ensure that more and more people wind up there?” As believers we must be mindful that “Jesus and his disciples taught again and again in terrible terms that there is an irreversible judgment and punishment of the unrepentant. Warnings and loving invitations intermingle to encourage us to flee the wrath to come.”



**Dr. Ray Ortlund Jr. in the beginning of his chapter on Heaven in the Old Testament notes,** “The whole Bible is the story of heaven above coming down to earth.” Not only do the bookends of the Bible (Genesis and Revelation) tell us of Heaven, but the reality and theology of Heaven runs through the other sixty-four books as well. If the reality of Heaven is to be

with God, then the Bible shows us time and time again that God wants man to be in Heaven with Him. Heaven is a real place but it is more than a place—it is the presence of God, and God wants us to be present with Him.

**What makes *Heaven* a necessary and compelling book to read?**

First, the contributors hold as their authority on Heaven the Word of God. As such, God Himself is given the first and last word on what Heaven is like. This means the “supposed experiences” of man are to be judged according to Scripture. Further, if the Apostle Paul could ascend to Heaven, not be able to say anything of what he heard, and be given a thorn in his flesh to keep him humble about his experience, then people need to be more measured, and reserved in their claims to have been Heaven and back.

Second, this book accomplishes the task of consistently presenting a biblical theology of Heaven. As a biblical theology of Heaven, each writer seeks to show how their area of focus on Heaven fits into the Bible’s unfolding presentation of Heaven. From the shalom in the Garden of Eden to the new Heaven and Earth where Jesus sits upon His throne, the unfolding of Heaven as a dominating theme in Scripture is given careful attention. For example, Robert A. Peterson’s chapter *Pictures of Heaven* does an excellent job of presenting the various stages of the biblical development of Heaven through themes like Heaven and earth, Sabbath rest, and the Kingdom of God.

**Third, because Scripture is given the primary voice regarding the nature of Heaven, we are allowed to see that it is about the presence of God.** God was pre-

sent in Eden and He will be present in eternity where the new Heaven will be joined with the New Earth. Between these times, we see Heaven reaching down to man as God condescends Himself to His fallen creatures.

Fourth, between the beginning and end of the Bible, this condescension of God’s presence with man speaks to the severe disruption that sin had upon God’s presence with man. Adam and Eve’s expulsion from Eden shows us how sin separated man from God’s presence. Adam and Eve’s hiding from the presence of God after they sinned shows us that even on man’s side of things, our sin makes us naturally recoil towards the presence of a perfect,

“Right now, because sin has disrupted reality, we are only tasting a glimpse of the glory of Heaven— God’s presence.”

righteous, and holy God. God wants to be with His image bearers but our sin keeps that from happening.

Finally, the book does a good job of showing the eschatological aspect of Heaven. Since creation, God has desired for His presence to spread to all the Earth. As man forms and fills the Earth, he is to take the glory of God with him and he will do so in the new city as “the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.” (Rev. 21:24) As Gerald Bray states, “We live in this world as strangers who belong elsewhere and who are on our way home.” Right now, because sin has disrupted reality, we are only tasting a glimpse of the

glory of Heaven—God's presence. Because so, states Bray, "Heaven is our ultimate goal, and heaven is the presence of the everlasting God, whom we shall know and worship in union with Christ, the Lamb who once was slain and who now sits on its throne." Christians will one day fully experience Heaven and the presence of God. As David Calhoun reminds us in his chapter on the hope of Heaven, because of Christ we have a hope that we will one day be in the unhindered presence of God.

**If you want a clear, sane, thorough, and most of all biblical look at Heaven from God's perspective, then *Heaven (Theology in Community)* is the best place to start.** This book continues the theological, biblical, and practical excellence the previous books in the *Theology in Community* series have established. Whether you are preaching or teaching about Heaven or have a personal interest in what Scripture says, this book will lead you in the right direction.

## The Nature of Hell and Eternal Punishment

By Michael Boling



**The nature of Hell and most notably the doctrine of eternal punishment has come under fire in recent years.** Authors such as Rob Bell have attempted to gloss-over and minimize eternal punishment and Hell as the product of a by-gone era, replacing it with a Universalist approach that promotes the idea that, in the end, all will find God's love. Others suggest the idea of annihilationism, the belief that the wicked will experience immediate cessation of existence upon judgment

with no eternal punishment experienced.

In juxtaposition to the ideas promoted by Bell, or within the annihilationist camp, the fundamental teaching in Scripture on the nature of Hell is unequivocally that the judgment of the wicked is eternal separation from God. This concept of eternity is a recurring element of eschatological exposition. Scripture is replete with examples supporting this assertion. Additionally, the eternity of Hell is accepted and promulgated by most evangelical circles, regardless of their end-times theological stance.



The terminology utilized in Scripture concerning Hell depicts a place of eternal torment and everlasting fire, with various additional descriptions provided to reinforce in the mind of the reader what Hell will be like for the wicked. The Greek word for everlasting, *aiōnios*, specifically its root *aion*, is used most often in the New Testament to indicate time without end. This is evidenced by the fact that the term *aiōnios*, connoting everlasting and eternal, is used fourteen times to describe the eternal rewards of the righteous, and an additional seven times to describe the final disposition of the wicked. It is the word *aionios* that presents the central point of debate among scholars, specifically on how to define the term as it relates to the nature of Hell.

**While the medieval concept of devils with pitchforks has enjoyed varying degrees of popularity, this is not an accurate scriptural depiction of Hell.** As noted by theologian and author Wayne Grudem, the two essential aspects of eternal punishment, which the wicked will endure, are the punishment of separation and the punishment of loss. What the wicked will endure for eternity is the eternal conscious realization of their decision to reject God's grace. No greater punishment can be meted by a just and holy God than to be forever dismissed from His glorious presence and the realization thereof. Thus, Hell is a place of everlasting torment and eternal separation from God. That separation results in the weeping and gnashing of teeth described in Matthew 8:12. As believers we must be mindful of what John Wenham has noted, namely that, "Jesus and his disciples taught again and again in terrible terms that there is an irreversible judg-

ment and punishment of the unrepentant. Warnings and loving invitations intermingle to encourage us to flee the wrath to come."

**In opposition to this position of the eternality of Hell,** some propose that eternal conscious punishment is nothing more than the sadistic machinations of an unloving God. Since God is love, even in relation to the wicked, surely we cannot make the statement that the wicked will be tortured throughout all eternity. Or can we?

When it comes to matters of eternity, especially how one responds during their time on Earth to an eternal God, the consequences of one's actions in this life have what can rightly be described as eternal consequences. Puritan author Christopher Love saliently commented that when we commit sin against an eternal God, devoid of repentance and covering of that sin by the blood of Christ, it is deserving of eternal punishment. The escalation if you will of the crime is related to the One against whom the crime is committed. In the case of the wicked, the crimes committed are against an eternal God, thus resulting in eternal consequences, specifically eternal punishment and separation from God.

Pastor and author Michael Rogers notes, "No Bible spokesman places more stress on Hell as the final consequence of God's judgment of condemnation than Jesus." This means that when Jesus declares such things as there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, we have must pay heed and evaluate what this means. His descriptions are not merely page fillers or unimportant adjectives meant to scare with no reality associated with them. Conversely, they are vital statements provided

to us regarding the nature of Hell. One can either spiritualize away such statement and descriptions as mere symbolism, or contrariwise, we can more properly accept the reality that Hell will be a place of endless torment. This weeping and gnashing

Some theologians hold the position that punishment cannot be eternal, given one possible definition of the Greek word *kolasis* is "correction" or "paying a penalty for wrongdoing".

of teeth described by Jesus denotes that some will clearly recognize the eternal impact of their rejection of God, while others continue into eternity shaking their fists at God.

**Moreover, the reality of eternal separation from God is further elaborated by Jesus** in his statement found in Mark 9:43-48 which states:

*"And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.'"*

When we examine such a passage, the same approaches are potential solutions, as were applicable to the weeping and gnashing of teeth verse – merely symbolic or indicative of a stark eternal reality. The implications of continuing in sin are so great, Jesus actually suggests removing one's offending body part rather than having to endure the eternality of Hell. In fact, Jesus describes Hell as a place where "their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched." It begs the question as to why would a fire never be quenched that was devoid of the wicked? Wouldn't it make more sense if the wicked were immediately annihilated for the fire to eventually burn out? Jesus is declaring the fire is never quenched, thus noting that Hell is a place of eternal separation with that knowledge of eternal separation from God being the basis of the eternal punishment.

Yet another passage that must be considered when determining the nature of Hell is Matthew 25:41-46, which states:

*"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment,*

*but the righteous into eternal life.”*

Here we have the outline of what will happen to the wicked at the Day of Judgment. These individuals will be cast into eternal punishment, while the righteous will experience eternal life. The aforementioned important term *aionios* comes into the forefront of discussion in this passage, mainly due to the fact that we have a comparison of two destinations being presented. The wicked go to eternal (*aionios*) punishment and the righteous go to eternal (*aionios*) life. Given that *aionios* as used in this passage not only presents a comparison of the nature of two opposite destinations, but also has the explicit meaning of eternality, the context demands *aionios* be defined and exegeted as noting the eternality of both the nature of separation from God in Hell and the nature of being in the presence of God in the new heavens and new earth. In order for eternal life to be eternal, eternal punishment must also be eternal and vice versa. Any other explanation requires an incorrect exegesis of the context, as well as a confusion of two terms used in the same manner to explain the eternality of two opposing destinations.

**The term “punishment” as used in Matthew 25:46 has also, at times, been a source of debate.** The notion of devils with pitchforks courtesy of medieval paintings and literature, as well as more modern cartoons, contributes to this mental picture. Some theologians hold the position that punishment cannot be eternal, given one possible definition of the Greek word *kolasis* is “correction” or “paying a penalty for wrongdoing”. In response to such a position, theologian and author W. G. T.

Shedd in his book, *The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment*, aptly comments, “Had Christ intended to teach that future punishment is remedial or temporary, he would have compared it to a dying worm, and not to an undying worm.” Shedd goes on to note, “If God by a positive act extinguishes, at death, the remorse of a hardened villain, by extinguishing his self-consciousness, it is a strange use of language to denominate this a punishment.”

God has, throughout history, reached out through various means to humanity in an effort to bring them into relationship with Himself. Unfortunately, man continuously rejects God’s call to repentance, missing His opportunity to commune with the Almighty. Whether through special revelation, oral tradition, or through the proclamation of the gospel message, man ultimately has no excuse when the Day of Judgment arrives. Those who have chosen to close the door on God will face the consequence of eternal conscious separation from their Creator, as all men will have to give an account of their lives and decisions to the One who truly knows the content of their heart.

As believers, the nature of Hell should be a sobering reminder of the need to declare the saving message of the gospel at all times to all men. Jesus took the doctrine of Hell and eternal punishment seriously given He spoke about it three times as much as He did Heaven. We should take a cue from our Lord and do the same. This is no laughing matter, for this doctrine shouldn’t take the proverbial back seat. The wicked will spend eternity separated from their Creator. The idea of annihilation or some future end to this punishment has no root in sound biblical exegesis. When it comes to Hell, it will be a

place of eternal torment. The descriptions of Hell found throughout Scripture and most pertinently in the words of Jesus are clear and stark.

### **Final Thoughts**

John Frame reminds us that “No one should try by some exegetical or theological trick to mitigate the harshness of this doctrine. That harshness is the whole point. To be separate from God, from his inheritance, from his people, and to be under his wrath forever is terrible to contemplate.” Hebrews 10:31 declares a rather terrifying yet important reality: “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” The wicked will indeed experience what it is like to fall into the hands of the eternal living God and it is clear from the pages of Scripture their destination will be none other than a terrible eternal existence as punishment for their rejection of God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

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## ***Becoming Worldly Saints: Can You Serve Jesus and Still Enjoy Your Life***

### **An Author Interview with Dr. Michael Wittmer**

**By Craig Hurst**



**Dr. Michael Wittmer is currently Professor of Systematic Theology at Grand Rapids Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, MI. He is the author of [Becoming Worldly Saints](#), [Heaven is a Place on Earth](#), [Don't Stop Believing](#), [The Last Enemy](#), and [Despite Doubt](#). He and his wife, Julie, are blessed with their three children: Avery, Landon, and Alayna.**

**T4L:** What has happened to Evangelical theology and its view of Heaven and Earth that makes this book necessary? How far back in church history does the problem go?

**Dr. Wittmer:** Evangelicals have been unknowingly influenced by a platonic view of the world and the afterlife. Plato taught that Heaven was good and the earth was bad; the spiritual was good and the physical was bad. His view influenced Augustine, who had been Neoplatonic before he became a Christian. Augustine checked Neoplatonism's worst excesses—he knew better than to say that matter is evil—but he believed that matter was significantly inferior to the higher, spiritual realm. Since Augustine is the most important theologian in church history, he passed this too low view of the physical world on to the rest of us. For instance, several times in his *Institutes*, John Calvin says the body is the prison of the soul. This does not come from Scripture, but from Plato.



A second influence on evangelicals is classical dispensationalism, which teaches a sharp divide between Israel and the Church. Israel is the earthly people of God and the Church is the heavenly people. Since we belong to the Church, classical dispensationalists taught that we shouldn't be too concerned about earth, but rather focus on our true home in Heaven. For an example of this, see chapter six of *The Purpose Driven Life*.

**T4L:** How do we get past the difficulty of our work, due to the curse, to the value of our work for God and others? Or, how do we find joy in the struggle of work?

**Dr. Wittmer:** Like everything else, our work suffers from the effects of the Fall. In a fallen world, work can be drudgery and tiresome. But work also belongs to the goodness of creation. God commanded Adam to work the Garden in Genesis chapter two. The Fall did not occur until Genesis chapter three. This means work predates the Fall. It belongs to God's good world.

Ideally we want to find work that inspires us to use the full capacity of our image bearing gifts. But even if we have a dreadful, dead end job, we can still find significance in it if we ask how what we are doing serves our neighbor and develops the raw materials of nature into human culture. Answering these questions will help us to realize that we don't merely have a job. We are obeying the first command God ever gave us, to rule over creation and develop its resources for him (Genesis 1:28).

**T4L:** What does the *Christian* worldview have over other worldviews that enables it to bring value to the everyday stuff of life?

**Dr. Wittmer:** Most worldviews lean towards either materialism or spiritualism. For instance, the secular West believes in materialism, that matter is all that matters. The spiritual East, such as Buddhism, goes the other way and says that matter is the matter. The Christian worldview avoids both extremes and declares that matter matters, because God

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"The Fall did not occur until Genesis chapter three. This means work predates the Fall."

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made it. But matter is not the only thing that matters, because God matters more.

Christians are able to put this world in its rightful place because we realize it was made by God. The world cannot be as important as the God who created it. But it must be important, because God did create it. God said this world was good, and then commanded us to develop and enjoy it (Genesis 1:28; 1 Timothy 6:17). When we do our ordinary jobs with all our might, Paul says we are serving the Lord Jesus, who as the Creator is the one who commanded us to do so (Colossians 1:15-18; 3:23-24).

**T4L:** You have said in several places that we tend to believe the theology in our songs about the Bible more than the theology of the Bible itself. How have the Church's songs shaped our view of Heaven and Earth, beyond what the Bible tells us?

**Dr. Wittmer:** The terms "world" and "earth" are usually used negatively in our

hymns and choruses. We sing that we want to “rise above the world” to “our true home in the skies.” We warn against “earthly pleasures” and say that we will turn our back on the world and follow Jesus.

Now, Scripture does use the term “world” to describe sin that we must avoid (1 John 2:15-17), but it also uses the term “world” to describe the good creation that God loves (John 3:16). My concern is that our music does not reflect the same nuance and balance that appears in Scripture. It’s difficult to go through one Sunday worship service or one set on Christian radio and not hear how bad or inferior the world/earth is. Since what we sing is what we believe, until we change our music we are not going to make much headway in recovering the biblical view of the world.

**T4L:** How can loving God and loving others transform our view of life on Earth?

**Dr. Wittmer:** A whole world of appreciation and significance opens before us when we realize that we love God by serving others and enjoying His gifts. We serve Jesus when we share our faith, read the Bible and pray, and serve in our local church, and we also serve Jesus when we love our spouse, do our work with all our might, play with our kids, mow our lawn, walk the dog, and savor a slice of peach pie. There is nothing so spiritual that we cannot do it for sinful motives, and there is nothing so seemingly small that we cannot do it for Jesus and receive His reward. Jesus said that even a cup of cold water counts.

We must not take away the importance of what we typically call the “spiritual” things. But we must add to this list everything else we do. If Jesus is Lord of all then He must be Lord of everything, like brushing our teeth and shopping and surfing the web. It all counts now.

**T4L:** Realizing that Scripture does not give us much information about this, how similar will life on the New Earth be to life on the present Earth? Will I have a car? Can I have my strawberry cheesecake? Will there be a Super Bowl—or even football at all?

**Dr. Wittmer:** We have more questions than answers, but the rule of thumb is that if something belongs to creation it should be here on the new earth and if something belongs to the Fall it should be gone. There may well be cars, or something like them, as we will need some mode of transportation. There will undoubtedly be strawberries, cheese, and sports. We will remember how to make cheesecake and play football, so there is nothing to stop us from doing so again. The main advantage is that our glorified bodies in a redeemed world will not suffer any of the effects of the Fall. So our mode of transportation will not pollute the air, cheesecake will not cause obesity or diabetes, and football will not be the violent sport that causes concussions. Redemption eliminates the Fall so we can fully enjoy creation. If you like being human and you like living here, you’re going to really love the New Earth.

**T4L:** Thank-you so much for your time, Dr. Wittmer! We look forward to reading any of your future writing endeavors.

## Heaven and Hell: Implications for the Christian Life and Ministry

By Dave Jenkins



**Few issues are as important or as neglected as the topic of Heaven and Hell.** Even as I sit in my office and write this, there are hundreds of thousands of people dying every day—over 6,000 per hour (not even including abortions). There is the issue of Planned Parenthood that is raging in the news every day. There are nearly 1,000 babies being aborted each day. There are millions of people dying every year who haven't heard the gospel and are headed to Hell. With that said, there are *also* thousands of people who are dying each

day who do know the Lord Jesus Christ and are going to Heaven to be with Him, worshipping Him forevermore. In this article I want to sketch out a picture of the implications on Heaven and Hell for Christian life and ministry. In doing so, I hope you'll be encouraged by the picture it paints of our calling as Christians, challenged, and convicted to pursue the lost, make disciples, and build up the Church to the glory of our Risen Savior Jesus Christ.

### Heaven: A Love for Worship

Heaven is a *real place* that exists outside of our time and space. It is a place where the Trinity dwells and where true Christians will go to worship. Heaven is a place for the worship of the Risen Savior Jesus Christ. Without Jesus, Heaven would be Hell. Some people will be alarmed by that statement. You still have the Father in Heaven. Without the finished work of Jesus there is no way for any person to ever go to Heaven. Without the cleansing blood of the Lamb of God dying in our place for our sin—there is no way a holy God who demands retribution for sin would ever allow anyone tainted by sin to go to Heaven and stand before the awesome holiness of His splendor and might. Heaven is a place for the worship of the saints glorified by the One in Jesus who is glorious. Heaven is a place where those who love Jesus will worship Him in the full splendor of His might and majesty. Heaven is a place where Christians will worship the Trinity and bow before the brilliance of the Three in One.

#### A Love for Jesus

As we're exploring the topic of Heaven and its implications for our lives—it's important to note that Heaven is a place for those who are born again. Heaven is a place for those who love Jesus and obey His commandments. People today think, "Well, I'm going to Heaven." But the truth is that you're not going to Heaven, *unless* you know Jesus. The only way to know Jesus is to be born again. To be born again is to have Jesus take your heart of stone and replace it with a new heart, with new desires, and with new affections for Him. Only Jesus can cause you to be born again. This is why biblical Christianity is offensive. Rather than an inclusive kingdom—Jesus has an exclu-

sive Kingdom—made up of those for whom He died and saved.

Heaven is a place for the elect of God to sing praises unending in response to the love of Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection. Jesus says that He is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6). This means that if we have believed in Jesus, we believe that His Kingdom is the *only* Kingdom and that it is only by the means of salvation, in His name, that

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"Heaven is a place for the elect of God to sing praises unending in response to the love of Jesus..."

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we'll be saved. The Apostles, the early church, and faithful gospel preaching local churches today preach the exclusivity of Christ in faithfulness to God's Word. A real love for Jesus will lead us to declare the glories of Heaven.

#### A Love for the Church

Some people today say that they can be lone-ranger Christians and have no need to regularly attend church. What these Christians fail to understand is that the New Testament epistles were all written to churches in cities led by biblically qualified men, who met in houses to worship together and declare the truth about who Jesus is, and what He has done. To suggest, as some people do, that one doesn't need the local church for his/her Christian life, but instead can just meet at a coffee shop or eat a meal and enjoy worship with another Christian, is to fail to understand not only what the church is, but how great Heaven will be.

Jesus bled and died for the

Church, so the Church would gather together. Furthermore, all the redeemed of God will celebrate at the wedding supper before the throne of God in Heaven (Revelation 20). Lone-ranger Christianity makes no sense when compared to how the New Testament describes the normal Christian life (Ephesians 5). The Christian who loves Jesus is one who loves the

“When we do away with the traditional and biblical understanding of Hell, we undermine—and even deny—the seriousness of Hell and the glory of the cross upon which Christ died.”

Church, commits to serving and growing inside of the confines of the local church, and scattering during the week to spread the fame of God to the nations.

### **A Love for the Word of God**

A Christian is one who has a love for Jesus and the Church (Ephesians 5). A real Christian will manifest His love for Jesus and the Church through a love for God’s Word. We are living in a time when statistics tell us that Christians don’t read their Bible’s daily. And yet, “the Lord” they claim that they believe and follow is the Lord of the Word. Jesus gave us 66 books in the Bible that are the inspired, inerrant, sufficient, and authoritative Word. Not only are Christians to read and believe what the Bible teaches, but they are also to obey it and come under its teachings. Jesus had much to teach His people and used words to communicate them to His disciples. His disciples, in turn, used words to communicate with

God’s people. Today we communicate God’s words through what is recorded in the Bible to the people of God. A clear love for God’s Word like a love for Christ’s Church, worship, and Jesus is a sign that we’ve been transferred from death to new life in Christ. If we say we love Jesus, we will love His Word, and live by it. May we would never be Christians who believe what the Bible says while failing to do what the Bible says we should do.

### **Hell**

Some people in the progressive-theological camp suggest that Hell is not real. To them Hell is not a place where people go when they die without Jesus Christ. To them, “love wins”—whatever that means. As we’ve seen in this article, real love demanded a sacrifice. Love has won, but not in the way the progressives would like to suggest. Real love won on a bloody cross, where Jesus bled in our place for our sin. Yes, love has won, which has enabled us to have salvation through Christ.

As we have explored in the first half of this article, understanding what Heaven is, is critically important to understanding the mission of the Church and the Christian life. Equally important to this discussion is understanding the doctrine of Hell—that Hell is a place of unrelenting, unending, conscious punishment. When we do away with the traditional and biblical understanding of Hell, we undermine—and even deny—the seriousness of Hell and the glory of the cross upon which Christ died. In this section, we’ll explore Hell under the banner of compassion for the lost, a desire for evangelism, justice, discipleship, and world missions.



### Compassion for the Lost

I remember being in the Philippines in a canoe and going over one of the rivers, which was polluted by the waste from the city of Manila. This heart-breaking situation isn't hypothetical, it's real. The water was orange in that particular river from all the sewage. Now, imagine the carnage in Hell.

Imagine your neighbor screams for your help while their house is burning down. In Hell they will have no one to hear their pleas for rescue. Here in the present they have you—a believer to share the truth with them. In Hell, they won't have another opportunity to accept Jesus. I share this very real scenario because all around you are unsaved people. They need saved from the fires of Hell. If you truly believe the doctrine of Hell as outlined in the Bible, you will have compassion for the lost. This compassion will lead to caring for, and witnessing to the lost.

### The Bible's Teaching on Hell

The Church has traditionally held that the wicked will be cast into Hell, where they will experience unending suffering. This doctrine challenges ideas about the "inherent goodness" of people and the kindness of God. For many, this doctrine is just not a tenable position to hold.

In the Old Testament, little was explicitly revealed about the afterlife. While the Old Testament authors sometimes expressed an awareness of rewards and punishment (Isa. 25:8-9; Dan. 12:1-3), they were much more concerned with God's justice being administered in the present age. Still, several texts make it clear that even at this stage of biblical revelation, some were aware of the unending joy of the righteous and the un-

ending suffering of the wicked.

In Daniel 12:2, the author proclaims that there will be a resurrection of the dead in which some will be granted everlasting life, while others will be condemned to shame and everlasting contempt. Annihilationists teach that the punishment of the wicked is everlasting in consequence, not duration. That is the effect, but not the experience, of the judgment of the wicked is unending or irreversible. This passage refutes this conception, however. How could the wicked experience shame and contempt if they had been annihilated? And why would the author contrast the everlasting shame of the wicked with the everlasting joy of the righteous, unless the shame was as much an ongoing experience as the joy? Not only this, but it seems odd that God would resurrect people from the dead only to annihilate them.

Another Old Testament passage that supports the traditional view of Hell as *unending torment* is Isaiah 66:24. The prophet offers an eschatological vision in which the righteous "shall go out and look at the dead bodies of the people who have rebelled against me; for their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."

**In Old Testament times, the ultimate disgrace was for a person's corpse to be left above ground,** where it would be eaten by maggots or burned with fire. The prophet uses this imagery to communicate the intense disgrace in the afterlife of those who oppose the Lord. When people suffered this terrible fate in history, the maggots or fire eventually consumed their corpses. In the final judgment, however, the maggots will never die and the

fire will never go out. To enter into eternity in opposition to the Sovereign Creator is to enter into unending suffering.

The New Testament has much more to say about the nature of Hell than the Old Testament. One of the clearest passages on the unending nature of Hell is Matthew 25:31-46. Here Jesus acts as King on the Day of Judgment. Those who know Christ will be given eternal life (v.34), while those who do not know Him will be condemned to eternal punishment (v.46). The fact that Jesus contrasts the “eternal punishment” of the wicked with “eternal life” of the righteous teaches that the wicked will endure punishment forever (Matthew 24:41, 46; John 5:28-29). If the state of eternal life is an eternal state of consciousness, the state of punishment must also be one of eternal consciousness. In other words, Hell cannot simply be eternal in consequence, as annihilationist’s teach. The fact that Jesus explicitly refers to the fire of this punishment as an *eternal fire* seems to confirm this (v.41).

**The parable of the greedy rich man, who would not care for Lazarus,** supports the traditional view of Hell as well. After death, the rich man finds himself “in Hades being tormented” (Luke 16:23). In this state, he begs Abraham to send Lazarus to “dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames” (Luke 16:24). Despite the figurative language, the passage certainly teaches that the wicked continue to exist in a tormented state after death. So does Jesus’ teaching that the sin against the Holy Spirit is “an eternal sin” (Mark 3:29), which “will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come” (Matthew 12:32). Scholars debate what this sin against the Holy Spirit

consists of, but this debate does not affect the passage’s implications for our understanding of Hell. Why would Jesus say that certain people will not be forgiven in the age to come if these same people will be annihilated?

The unending nature of Hell is al-  
so

“Other teachings of Jesus teach that Hell is conscious in nature and unending in duration.”

evident in Jude’s reference to fallen angels who are kept in “eternal chains” (Jude 6). If the chains are eternal, what those chains hold must be eternal as well. As similar argument can be made of Paul’s teaching that the Lord will be revealed “in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God. These will suffer destruction.” (2 Thess. 1:8-9). One can be separated from someone else only if one continues to exist. In addition, in the preceding verses, Paul draws a parallel between the affliction that the Thessalonians innocently suffered at the hands of persecutors, and the affliction the persecutors will justly suffer at the hands of God (2 Thess. 1:6-7). If the affliction the Thessalonians suffered was conscious—and it obviously was—the affliction of the persecutors must also be conscious. Along the same lines, Paul teaches that there will be “wrath and fury” to all who reject God, adding that this fury will cause “anguish and distress” (Rom. 2:8-9). The fact that people must be conscious to suffer anguish and distress implies that Hell is a conscious state.

Other teachings of Jesus teach that Hell is conscious in nature and unending in duration. For example, when the wicked are cast into “outer darkness” or “into the furnace,” Jesus says, “there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:42; 22:13). People must be conscious in order to weep and gnash their teeth. Following Isaiah, Jesus teaches that, in this horrid place of torment, the worm that devours will never die and the fire will never go out (Mark 9:48), which as we have already seen, implies that the wicked will suffer eternally.

Along the same lines, Jesus’ teaching that it would be better to be “drowned in the depth of the sea” than to be cast into Hell for being a stumbling block, makes sense only if the wicked consciously suffer throughout eternity (Matthew 18:6). If Hell is annihilation, then its consequence is the same as being drowned. So, too, only if Hell is eternal in duration does it make sense for Jesus to say that Hell is annihilation, then Judas’s fate would, in fact, be as though he had never been born. But in this case how could Jesus describe his fate as worse than non-birth? And how could Jesus describe the fate of some as being worse than others on the day of judgment, if indeed all the wicked are annihilated (Matthew 11:20-24)?

**The most explicit statements on the unending nature of Hell, are found in the Book of Revelation.** Here an angel proclaims that anyone who worships the beast and its image will “be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb” (14:10). Then he adds, “The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship

the beast and its image and for anyone who receives the marks of its name” (v.11).

Annihilationists argue that the “smoke of their torment”, not the torment itself, goes on forever. But lest there be any doubt, Revelation 20 explicitly states that the devil, the beast, and the false prophet were all thrown “into the lake of fire and sulfur”, where “they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (v.10). Later it is said that “anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire”, apparently to suffer the same eternal fate as the devil they followed (v.15). It is not just the smoke that goes on forever; it is the torment that gives rise to the smoke.

Church tradition has taught that the wicked suffer unending torment, and this has been the dominant teaching of the Church throughout its history, counting in its favor. Second, sin is against an *infinite* God. As Anselm taught, sin against an infinite God is an infinite crime exacting an infinite punishment. We have difficulty fathoming the justice of an infinite punishment only because we have difficulty fathoming the glory of an infinite God.

Criminals must pay. Even apart from the infinite glory of God, it does not seem as though annihilation is an adequate punishment for the wicked. We instinctively want criminals to pay for their crimes. If criminals simply cease to exist, however, their crimes are not atoned for. Justice is not served. True, they miss out on eternal joy in Heaven, but what punishment is this if the wicked are not around to experience their loss? Finally, no fear of Hell. Many non-believers do not expect to live on after death. The threat of

annihilation is thus no incentive to trust God for salvation. Yet Jesus and the New Testament authors used warnings about Hell to convince people that they should get right with God. This means that Hell is *not annihilation*.

### **Objections to the Traditional View of Hell**

First, eternal Hell is cruel. The main objection to the traditional view of Hell has always been that it is cruel. How could an all-loving God send anyone to a place of unending pain? Three things can be said in response to this objection. First, God is not cruel if this punishment is just. It may be difficult to fathom the justice of unending punishment, for, as we have noted throughout, we have difficulty fathoming the infinite glory of God. But if we agree that God's glory is infinite and that sin is therefore an infinite crime, we cannot accuse God of being cruel for meting out this unending punishment.

Secondly, while the Bible at times portrays God as sending people to Hell, other passages suggest it is a state that the wicked actually choose for themselves. C.S. Lewis noted that Hell is simply the result of God letting obstinate people have their own way. Along these same lines, Lewis suggested that if Hell is locked for all eternity, it is locked from the inside. In other words, it is not that God keeps people in Hell throughout eternity against their will. Rather people refuse to accept God's love and submit to God's will throughout eternity. In the words of John 3:19, "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil."

Annihilationists argue that some passages of Scripture suggest that the wicked are annihilated. These passages

can be accounted for in two ways. First, the Old Testament authors are interested in how God's justice gets played out in history. The majority of passages that speak of the wicked being utterly destroyed are taken from the Old Testament, and refer not to the ultimate destiny of the wicked, but to the earthly fate of the wicked (Psalm 37:88; Isa. 1:28, 30-31).

Finally, when the New Testament speaks about the judgment of the wicked as "death", corruption", or "destruction", it is contrasting the fate of the wicked with the destiny of those who belong to Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:23; 1 Thess. 5:3). Those who are in Christ will eternally experience life as God intended it to be lived. Those who reject Christ eternally exist in antithesis to this. Their life can only be described as a kind of death. What God intended humans to be is corrupted and destroyed in Hell.

### **A Desire for Evangelism, Discipleship, and World Missions**

Some Christians at this point might think, "Okay, I have an understanding of why I should have compassion for the lost." Yet, we shouldn't stop at just having compassion for the lost; we must witness to the lost. The Apostle Paul told us that we're to do the work of an evangelist (2 Timothy 4:5). In Acts 1:8 we're called to be "witnesses". Furthermore, Jesus told us *five times* in the Gospels that we're to "make disciples of all the nations".

It is one thing to say you believe in the doctrine of Hell intellectually, but another to actually have that belief pierce your heart. All around you are people who are dead in their sins and trespasses. All around you are people who are blinded to the reality of sin. They are lost and need

Jesus. You have hope and the good news for them. If you love Jesus, then you'll love those who are lost. And you won't just preach hellfire and brimstone to them. You'll tell them about sin, and how awful it is, but you'll also proclaim the glory of what Christ did on the cross for them. You'll tell them that Jesus isn't dead and gone. You'll tell them that Jesus died and rose again. You'll tell them that He is exalted and serves now as our High Priest, Mediator, and Intercessor.

**It is one thing to recite correct doctrine, but it's another to have correct doctrine inform your**

**life.** Our view of evangelism, discipleship, and world missions would deepen and be set ablaze if we truly had compassion on the lost, desired to see them saved, grow healthy disciples, and engage lost people groups. How our giving would be different, our lives would truly reflect the love of Jesus instead of our apathy towards our own sin that cripples our witness. Instead of loving our sin we would hate our sin and embrace the hard old rugged cross of Jesus Christ. Jesus didn't call us to a life of ease and comfort as Christians; He called us to seek the lost, so Jesus can save them (Luke 19:10), and to be about His business of making disciples. Seeking the lost, making disciples, and engaging in world missions is just scratching the surface. These are the natural results of one who loves God, His church, and those who don't know him. This is a great commandment issue, as Jesus said, we're to love Him with all of our heart, mind, and strength. To love Jesus is to care for those who are unsaved. To *not care* for those who are lost in their sin, dead in their trespasses, and without the Savior, is to demonstrate that you haven't yet understood the seriousness of sin or the depths of Hell that each of us deserve.

It is because we understand what we've been saved *from* that we desire to see others turn to Jesus. This is why we build relationships with the lost, make disciples to the glory of God, send people out on missions, and more. We do it because of the gospel that has saved us, is transforming us, and will one day glorify us.

### Justice

I've left justice for the last for this article for a reason. As we've looked at throughout this article, Heaven and Hell are hugely important topics. Throughout this magazine issue, you've been instructed about this topic, but now you need to know what to do with it. This is why we're looking at the topic of justice. Many people get this topic wrong; they emphasize that we should focus on *social* justice issues like abortion, apart from the gospel. They emphasize the imperative (what we are to do) to the neglect of the indicative (what Christ has done). The reason that we care for justice is because our God is a God of justice. The good news is that we don't get what we deserve; instead, we get what we don't deserve—mercy and grace instead of judgment and condemnation.

The reason that we care for the unborn, for the sex addict, for the prostitute, and even the porn producer is because of Jesus. The reason we care for the person who has been thrown away into the sex trafficking ring is because of the gospel. This person is made in the image and likeness of God, and therefore worthy of dignity and respect. So Christians go into the poor areas of the world—the slums around the world—and shine the light of Jesus. They do so knowing that our God is a God of justice who will bring every thought and deed to account. They also know that by shining the light of Jesus they are exposing the works of darkness. They are showing forth



the greatness of Jesus in all of life. This is why we should care for social justice issues—because our God is a God of justice, and justice has been meted out and satisfied in the death of Christ. It is through the death of Christ that you and I can be about God’s business of seeing people like ourselves—who were lost—redeemed, adopted, and restored through the gospel.

### A Few Closing Thoughts

The Bible says that God created Hell to serve as the ultimate destiny of the Devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). The Bible also teaches that Hell will be the destiny of all people who reject the grace and mercy God has provided through Jesus, and who chose, instead, to reject God by following Satan (Matthew 25:46). Hell is described in the Scriptures as a place of darkness and sadness (Matthew 22:13), a place of fire (Matthew 5:22), a place of torment (Revelation 14:10), a place of destruction (Matthew 7:13), and a place of disgrace and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2).

Jesus spoke more about Hell than any figure in the Bible combined. His warnings of the eschatological judgment are colored with the imagery of Hell. He portrays this future judgment through the picture of Sodom’s destruction. These images of God’s judgment were well established in the Old Testament and intertestamental literature. Hell in the parables of Jesus are presented in the tares, the net, the great supper, the good servant and the wicked servant, the talents, and the last judgment. Mankind legally, morally, and spiritually deserves to rot in Hell for all eternity. Jesus did not leave people to the punishment of sin, but came

into the world to take upon Himself the wrath of God, and die in our rightful place. Salvation therefore is wholly by God’s grace, and not by man’s effort, merits, or ability.

As we conclude this article, I want to challenge you to fill your heart and mind with Heaven. I want to challenge

“You might be the only Christian in your family or your work place. As our culture continues to get worse, Christians need to shine the light of Jesus *more and more*.”

you to care for the lost. To care about those around you every Sunday and at your work place. You might be the only Christian in your family or your work place. As our culture continues to get worse, Christians need to shine the light of Jesus *more and more*. We have work to do, friends. Let us be about loving our Lord and loving our neighbors. People are watching you. They need to see the love of Jesus radiating in and through you. Grow in the grace of God, and may the Lord develop godly character in you—character that will stand in the face of hardships and difficulty, and glorify our God all the more in testifying for His name and glory.

## ***Heaven (Theology in Community)***

### **An Author Interview with Christopher Morgan and Robert Peterson**

**By Dave Jenkins**



**Christopher W. Morgan** (PhD, Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary) is Professor of Theology and Dean of the School of Christian Ministries at California Baptist University. He is the author and editor of several books, including [\*Suffering and the Goodness of God\*](#).



**Robert A. Peterson** (PhD, Drew University) is Professor of Systematic Theology at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. He is the author and editor of numerous books and articles, including [\*The Glory of God\*](#) and [\*The Deity of Christ\*](#).

**T4L:** Thank-you for joining us for this interview today, gentlemen. Our readers are excited to find out more about your reasons for writing this book. So, without further ado, let's get started. With the abundance of theological books, both single volumes as well as collections, what prompted you to produce a new series? What lack did you see that you hoped to fill with the *Theology in Community* series?

**Chris and Robert:** As the series name, *Theology in Community*, indicates, *Theology in Community* aims to promote clear thinking on and godly responses to his-

toric and contemporary theological issues. The series examines issues central to the Christian faith, including traditional topics such as sin and Heaven, but also some which are more focused or contemporary, such as suffering and the goodness of God, the glory of God, the deity of Christ, the Kingdom of God, the love of God, and biblical spirituality. The series strives not only to follow a sound theological method, but also to display it. Chapters addressing the Old and New Testaments on the book's subject form the heart of each volume. Subsequent chapters synthesize the biblical teaching and link it to historical, philosophical, systematic, and pastoral concerns. Far from being mere collections of essays, the volumes are carefully crafted so that the voices of the various experts combine to proclaim a unified message.

And as the name suggests, *Theology in Community* seeks to demonstrate that theology should be done in teams. The teachings of the Bible were forged in real-life situations by leaders in God's covenant communities. The biblical teachings addressed concerns of real people who needed the truth to guide their lives. Theology was formulated by the Church and for the Church.

This series seeks to recapture that biblical reality. The volumes are written by scholars, from a variety of denominational backgrounds and life experiences with academic credentials and significant expertise across the spectrum of theological disciplines, who collaborate with each other. They write from a high view of Scripture with robust evangelical conviction and in a gracious manner. They are not detached

academics, but are personally involved in ministry, serving as teachers, pastors, and missionaries. The contributors to these volumes stand in continuity with the historic church, care about the global church, share life together with other believers in local churches, and aim to write for the good of the Church to strengthen its leaders, particularly pastors, teachers, missionaries, lay leaders, students, and professors.

"...Instead of getting sidetracked in speculation, we wanted to focus readers on the biblical emphases related to Heaven."

**T4L:** Why did you decide to produce a volume dedicated to the doctrine of Heaven?

**Chris and Robert:** We want to highlight what the Bible actually teaches about Heaven. We must seek to ask questions the Word actually answers. Even well-intentioned believers often ask questions Scripture does not answer. Examples include the following: What age will we be in the age to come? Will we live as families or as one family of God? What will we be doing day in and day out? How will we interact with other Christians?

But, instead of getting sidetracked in speculation, we wanted to focus readers on the biblical emphases related to Heaven. Accordingly, this volume begins with Ray Ortlund's treatment, "Heaven in the Old Testament". Because final salvation receives more attention in the New Testament than in the Old, four chapters are allotted to it. Jonathan Pennington explores "Heaven in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts". Stephen

Wellum tackles the difficult subject “Heaven in Paul’s Letters”. Jon Laansma takes up a neglected topic, “Heaven in the General Epistles”, with some surprising results. Andreas Köstenberger, an expert in the Johannine literature, pens “Heaven in John’s Gospel and Revelation”. Those five chapters provide a solid base upon which the rest of the volume stands. Robert Peterson, coauthor of a book on Heaven, in “Pictures of Heaven” traces five biblical images: Heaven and Earth, Sabbath rest, the Kingdom of God, God’s presence, and God’s glory. Attention is then given to the history of the Church’s understanding of Heaven, through Gerald Bray’s essay, “The History of Heaven”. Stephen F. Noll, who wrote an important book on angels, here brings his expertise to bear with “Angels and Heaven”. Ajith Fernando, director of Youth for Christ in Sri Lanka, writes, “Heaven for Persecuted Saints”. David Calhoun, who has far outlived medical predictions of his death by cancer and who knows his subject, writes “The Hope of Heaven”.

And we address frequently asked questions concerning Heaven that the Bible actually does speak to: Will everyone go to Heaven? What happens when believers die? What about purgatory? Will we recognize others in Heaven? Will we be married and enjoy sex in Heaven? Will there be sorrow in Heaven over those in Hell? What kind of bodies will we have in Heaven? Will the current Earth be completely destroyed and a brand-new Earth created?

**T4L:** Good questions...I guess we’ll have to wait and see! So, how would you counsel Christians to respond to the genre of books written by authors who have alleg-

edly gone to Heaven and returned back (or had some other type of heavenly vision/experience)?

**Chris and Robert:** We suggest caution. Seeking to know Heaven through experience may be fascinating, but reflects poor theological method. As we previously affirmed, we should build our theology of Heaven on the Bible, not speculation, undefinable experiences, or interesting theorizing. The Bible tells us the truth, what we need to know, and what is important about Heaven. Whatever else we can learn for other sources pales in comparison. So let’s be content with what God has said and be fascinated with the teachings of his Word.

**T4L:** Sage advice. What do you hope lay Christians get out of this book?

**Chris and Robert:** We hope readers are captured by the wonderful biblical passages on Heaven and notice the biblical pictures of Heaven. These major pictures of Heaven are Heaven and Earth, Sabbath rest, the Kingdom of God, God’s presence, and God’s glory. We hope readers observe how these appear in and relate to the historical stages of the biblical story: creation, rebellion, redemption, and consummation.

**T4L:** And how about pastors preaching on Heaven—what advice would you give them?

**Chris and Robert:** It sounds obvious, but we’d urge them to preach the Bible and its

emphases mentioned above. And we'd urge pastors to show how the doctrine of Heaven functions in the Bible. It is not taught to intrigue, but offers encouragement to persevere for persecuted believers. And Heaven offers hope to suffering saints. God wins, evil loses, justice prevails, suffering and death do not have the last word—God does! And God graciously includes His people in His victory. When we deserved Hell, God sent His Son to redeem us and blessed us with Heaven!

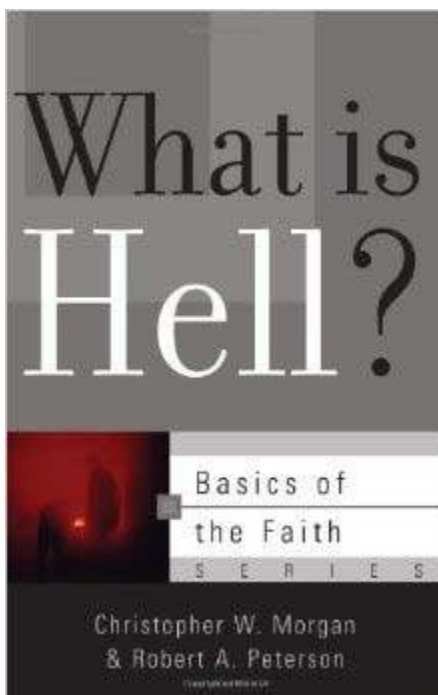
**T4L:** Thank-you both again very much for this interview. We look forward to chatting with you both again in the future!



## A Book Review:

### ***What is Hell? (Basics of the Faith)***

By Craig Hurst



**The doctrine of Hell is perhaps one of the most distinguishing theological beliefs of Christianity and the Bible.** Though this is true, there is no unanimity as to what Christians believe the Scripture teaches about Hell.

When it comes to drawing out what the Bible teaches about Hell, Christopher Peterson and Robert Morgan are no strangers. They are referenced in almost every book on the subject and have been involved in a number of other related edited works dealing with the Biblical doctrine of Hell. Just last year they condensed some of their work into a short book called, [\*What is Hell? \(Basics of the Faith\)\*](#) for the *Basics of the Reformed Faith Series*, published by P&R.

[\*What is Hell? \(Basics of the Faith\)\*](#) is a short succinct discussion on the Biblical doctrine of Hell. Peterson and Morgan believe that despite the confusion with some on what Hell is, Scripture is clear that it exists as a place where unrepentant sinners will spend eternity. The authors approach

the doctrine of Hell from a conservative evangelical vantage point. They take Scripture seriously when it comes to its teaching of Hell and write from a clear convincing case that we should take Hell seriously.

**Peterson and Morgan begin their short book by addressing the often quoted statement,** “Would a loving God really send good people to Hell (p. 8)?” In short order they walk through Romans 1-5 and show that this is the wrong question to ask. In fact, Paul himself seemed to ask a very different question – “How could a just and holy God ever declare guilty sinners to be righteous in his sight (p. 8)?” In these few pages, the authors turn the tables on the first question by showing that we are all sinners who do not deserve God’s mercy. Salvation is merci-

ful because we don't deserve it. We don't deserve it because we have rebelled against God our creator.

### Hell in the Bible

Peterson and Morgan convincingly show that all of Scripture speaks of Hell especially the New Testament where it is mentioned by every author and in every book. Some of the clearest and extensive passages are Matthew 25:31-46, 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 and Revelation 20:10-15. There are at least five distinct ways in which Scripture speaks of Hell:

1. **Punishment** – This is the primary description of Hell in Scripture and shows that “hell is the place where people suffer the just penalty for their moral crimes (p. 10)” and “reassured God’s people that ultimately evil and evildoers would be defeated (p. 14).” Some relevant passages for Hell as punishment are Matt. 25:31-46, 2 Thess. 1:5-10 and Rev. 20:10-15.
2. **Destruction** – In Revelation 20:14 and 21:8 John speaks of Hell as destruction when he describes it as “the second death.” That Hell is referred to as destruction does not mean people or their souls are annihilated (as annihilationists would claim). Rather, as Moo ably describes, “Destruction and its related words in the New Testament ‘refer to the situation of a person or object that has lost the essence of its nature or function (p. 15).’” Relevant passages include: Matt. 7:13-14; Jn. 3:16 and Rom. 6:23.
3. **Banishment** – As banishment, Hell is a place of “separation, exclusion, or being left outside (p. 16)” as seen in Revelation 22:14-15. It is pointed out that Jesus Himself will be the one to banish unrepentant sinners (Matt. 7:21-23 and Matt. 25:41).
4. **Suffering** – With descriptions of Hell as “unquenchable fire” (Matt. 3:12) while “the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever” (Rev. 14:11) and as a place of “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 8:12), there is little doubt that people will consciously (p. 18) experience real emotional/spiritual and physical suffering in Hell (Jn. 5:28-29).
5. **Eternal** – Perhaps the most sobering aspect of Hell is that it is as eternal a fate for unrepentant sinners as is the experience of heaven for repentant sinners. Frequently the eternality of Hell is juxtaposed the eternality of heaven (Dan. 12:2; Matt. 25:46 and Jn. 3:16).

### Hell and Theology

While some may find it hard to theologically reconcile the reality of Hell with some of the aspects of God’s nature, Peterson and Morgan show that it is in fact quite coherent and even necessary. God is loving, but His attribute of love does not extinguish any of His other attributes, such as His wrath and justice. Peterson & Morgan write:

*Our loving God is also just, holy, good, and, because we rebel against him, wrathful. God’s love does not drive his justice. The implementation of God’s jus-*

*tice does not undermine his love. God's love and justice cohere, as do all his other attributes (p. 24-25).*

God cannot be solely defined by one attribute, nor can one attribute be used to minimize or trivialize any of His other attributes. God is all of His attributes all of the time. The authors further show how the doctrine of Hell is coherent with the Christian worldview, as just punishment for sin and is complementary to the teaching of Jesus.

### **Hell Shapes our Lives**

Admittedly, the doctrine of Hell is not the most exciting doctrine to discuss among believers, let alone with unbelievers. This should not deter us from teaching and preaching it from Scripture. When we do, it should cause us to turn to praise for our salvation, drive us to our knees in prayer for the lost, and push us into the streets with desire to share the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ—who is both a judge of sin and sinners, and a friend and Savior of them as well.

When it comes to the place of Hell in our teaching, preaching, and evangelism, Peterson and Morgan fittingly point out that as horrible as Hell is sin is worse:

*That people go to hell is a tragedy. It is tragic that sin entered the world through Adam. It is tragic that humans continue to rebel against God.....the horror of hell should bother us....but the problem is not hell, and the problem is not God. Sin is the problem, and it is what should repulse us (p. 31-32).*

[What is Hell? \(Basics of the Faith\)](#) is a great introduction to the Biblical doctrine of Hell for those who are confused about its teaching, or who are looking to study it for the first time.

## Recommended Books on Heaven and Hell

This season at **Servants of Grace**, we've been considering the topic of Heaven and Hell. In this day and age, the majority of the secular world denies the very existence of Hell, while also only having a vague understanding of what Heaven is (if they believe in it either). With this issue of *Theology for Life Magazine*, it was our hope that the readers would grow, not only in their understanding of these very real places, but also what the Bible teaches us regarding our eternal lives.

If you've found this subject interesting and want to study the issue further, please check out the recommended reading list below. These books are at the top of this genre in both excellence and readability. I promise that you'll find them worth your while. Please note that this list is provided in no particular order.

- [\*Doctrine of Endless Punishment\*](#) - W. G. T. Shedd
- [\*Heaven\*](#) (Theology in Community) - Christopher Morgan & Robert Peterson
- [\*What is Hell? \(Basics of the Faith\)\*](#) by Robert Peterson and Christopher Morgan

I trust you'll enjoy these books as much as I have. For more resources, please feel free to visit <http://theologylife.org> or <http://servantsofgrace.org>!

In Christ Alone,  
Dave Jenkins  
Executive Editor—*Theology for Life Magazine*

## REDISCOVER YOUR SENSE OF WONDER AT THE BIG STORY OF THE BIBLE



“Rarely has one heard The Greatest Story ever told like this—with such winsome grace and compelling truth. Once we began, we couldn’t stop reading the *The Biggest Story* aloud to our family, all in one sitting.”

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“I love what Kevin has done here! I’m buying a copy for each of my grandkids.”

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## Servants of Grace Ministries

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