

Hell

“Now see that I, even I, am He,
And there is no God besides Me;
I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal;
Nor is there any who can deliver from My hand. For I raise My hand to heaven,
And say, “As I live forever,
if I whet My glittering sword, and My hand takes hold on judgment,
I will render vengeance to My enemies,
And repay those who hate Me,”
Deuteronomy 32:39-41.

“If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there,”
Psalm 139:8.

“Hell and destruction are before the LORD...”
Proverbs 15:11.

“Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?”
Matthew 23:33.

The doctrine of hell is in all of Scripture. Of the over twenty times the topic of hell is spoken about in the New Testament Jesus spoke of it well over 70% of that time. The person in the New Testament who did the most talking about hell was Jesus Himself. How then if we're preaching His counsel could the subject be absent from our teaching? Or perhaps it would be better to ask if the topic should only be present .02% of the time as it so often seems to be?

No doubt this is a difficult topic, but one that I feel I must undertake nonetheless. Not too long ago I was challenged by a certain liberal that I'll leave unnamed about my traditional understanding of hell. He said that I couldn't possibly believe it to be a place of everlasting torment and damnation. The idea of hell being a dangerous and erroneous idea of yesteryear was a given for this fellow. His attitude was that he had “moved on” from such elementary and infantile non-Christian-like brutalities. The part of his argument that really prompted my months of inward reflection, and consequently this letter, came as he spoke of the super-abundant lack of teaching on the doctrine of hell in the church today. He evidenced this to show that the vast majority of Christians today do not hold to the “traditional view” any longer either. I must sadly confess the extreme rarity of pulpit time dedicated to the doctrine of hell. There is a way to say that you don't believe in something by never saying a thing about it, and our silence on the subject speaks volumes. The man had a very strong point. I would not say that hell is a topic as vital as the Gospel, or one that needs to be taught to the sheep as regularly, but I also definitely don't think it should be absent. There has only been one preacher in my years in the Way who

has ever dedicated any solid block of instruction directly to this subject at all, and that not much. It is mentioned, surely, but in passing. It's just not a topic I've seen expounded. Scripture surely has a doctrine of hell. It is a subject that systematic theology has much to say about, but I just don't hear it spoken of at all.

Could you imagine ever tuning into "Christian" television and catching the end of a show hearing the announcer say, "Call now to get Dr. Blank's latest teaching series on hell; operators are standing by?" I venture to say that this is something most of us have never seen. The subject indeed seems to have become taboo. Have you ever heard a full sermon or teaching on hell? Not necessarily one where hell was warned of for sinners, that also would be unusual, but rather a teaching designed for Christians about it? Folks, if we haven't then there's a lot of text we're skipping. I'm sure some of you could answer yes, but it's likely pretty rare. The liberal gentleman pointed out that the concept of hell as it had once been traditionally held violates modern sensibility and that Christians today have therefore moved past such medieval tyranny into a more robust view of the nature and character of a god who is "all loving." Notice that I did not capitalize that "god." He said that this new understanding is a gift from God and this is intuitively why most preachers never spend any time talking about hell though written confessions mentioning it may still hang in there in some of the faith statements on a couple church websites. He would say that the church as a whole has evolved in its understanding. This person expects to see the whole concept of hell as a place of eternal punishment totally disappear from the landscape of Christianity in another generation or two. This was convicting to me because I soon realized that I myself have never written a letter or preached a message entirely devoted to the subject either. By omission I had sinned. I've mentioned it, but never spent time on it with Christians.

Without wavering I affirm the existence of an eternal hell of conscious torment. I will prove this doctrine from Scripture here. It then simply becomes a matter of obedience.

First I'd like to say that this subject should never be presented in apology. I don't mean apologetically, I mean in apology. When Christians speak about hell and say things like, "I'm sorry that the Bible says this" or "I wish this wasn't true" it does God and His word a disservice. We're saying that He's offensive. We're saying that we don't like that part of what He has revealed in His word. Much of the Christian life, friends, is conforming yourself to the word of God and the doctrine of hell is a part of that. We should be energetic to embrace and incorporate the doctrine of hell into our worship, our Sunday schools and our sermons. We're not excited about hell, sure, but we shouldn't forget it either. We should thank God as Christians that we are saved from it. We should teach our children of its reality and we should build one another with sound understanding regarding it. Adapting oneself by the power of the Holy Spirit to the truths of Scripture is called renewing your mind, Romans 12:2. We must renew our minds to the doctrine of hell. The bottom line is that despite any sinful unpleasantness a Christian may feel in presenting God's word on hell, a true student of Scripture doesn't care whether or not a truth is pleasing to them passing assorted litmus tests of modern psychology or contemporary attitude;

he cares only whether or not it's in the Bible. Regarding hell then we need only ask ourselves if the Scriptures are clear. We need to search the Scriptures and see for ourselves the truth about hell. People are repulsed by the wrath of God and so many preachers will not mention it. Add to this the fact that we are all worthy of hell and the subject becomes even more difficult, but nonetheless it must not be avoided. The subject should be presented softly because it is surely hard enough. Preaching it to a group is to build that group up in the full counsel of God.

I think that there's a lot at stake here. A Christian church that has no doctrine of hell did not get there overnight. There had to be a lot of good doctrine abandoned prior. That church has lost much *if not all* to arrive in that state of delusion. A preacher once said, "The moment God's law ceases to be the most powerful factor in influencing the moral sensitivity of any individual or nation, there will be indifference to divine wrath, and when indifference comes in it always brings in its train indifference to salvation." -A.N. Martin. I see this very clearly in my day and among those of my generation. People are indifferent to Christ and salvation today, in many ways, because they are indifferent to the doctrine of hell. This is most evident in the church. They are indifferent to the doctrine of hell because they are indifferent to God's divine law. Hell is an extreme many think. Sin is no longer worthy of it. Sin has somehow become much less sinful in our day as pop psychology has replaced preaching and life coaches have replaced pastors. Many have worked to lessen the sting of sin in their consciences by removing the severity of hell. People are then not terrified by the law or influenced by it to recognize sin. No, instead we preach only grace. But grace without sin is not grace. A man cannot understand grace without understanding sin. The more he understands one the more he understands the other, Romans 7:7. C.H. Spurgeon once said, "Sin and hell are married until repentance proclaims the divorce." Though this is not a letter about the proper function of God's law today I will say that hell has become so unreasonable in the minds of many today because they have not got a conviction of sin in any respect by the law. The law is a great disciplinarian that illuminates a man's path, Proverbs 6:23. It shows that he is either on the path to hell or that he is on the path to life. Sin today has become synonymous with the idea that man is simply "less than perfect." This is a gross understatement. Man is not just "less than perfect;" he's comparable to a devil. Sin makes hell understandable. Sin becomes clearly understandable as you consider a good definition of it as outlined by God's Moral Law, Exodus 20; 1 John 3:4. See my article *Systematic Evangelism* for a discussion of the use of God's law in evangelism and its role in the Christian life. If we come to understand sin in its Biblical context then the whole of this letter becomes clearer, but I digress.

If you don't believe in hell as the Apostles and prophets describe it. Meaning as a literal and eternal place of conscious torment prescribed by God for sin then there is a reason you deny what they clearly say. I mean to challenge you. It will be with the same texts that you've likely seen before. I've learned in my life that even when the Holy Spirit is your teacher, as I pray it is with you, repetition is still a mighty tool.

One of the first facts that I feel we must appropriate with the doctrine of hell is that God created it along with the rest of His creation. Hell is His. Stop and think on that fact. Before there was a man called Adam there was a place called hell. We know this for certain because all of creation was finished in those first six 24 hour glorious days, Genesis 2:2, and because Adam was created on day six. As the birds sang God's glorious praise on their first glorious morning hell was set in its place. In fact, it probably already had some angelic prisoners, 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6. Even if a person wrongly asserts that hell is merely a temporary place of punishment then that place has still existed for thousands of years since the creation of the world. In fact, not only did God create hell but He has since sustained it, Revelation 4:11; Colossians 1:16. We must learn to associate all of creation with its Creator in this regard or else we falsely come to see God as separate from hell and standing with His back to it as if an enemy had the power to create it. I believe that what most often offends men about God and hell can be traced to our own sinfulness and not always to the design of hell itself. It is not that most men would call God unrighteous for punishing sinners for the cataclysmic villainy of denying His existence or living in sin, but because man is inherently sinful he finds the idea of an infinitely thorough and holy God repugnant. He hates the idea of God judging him. This adds to sin. That's the problem. God's eternally perfect opposition to all evil is offensive to us because we are evil. The idea then of a divine and pure wrath is repulsive to modern man *because God's utter holiness is repulsive*, Psalm 19:9; Isaiah 33:6. All that God does is eternally holy and perfect...even His eternal judgment. It can be no less with Him. This is often the offense. God created hell and it forever represents His opposition to evil.

Are you in love with the God whose every attribute is shown in the Bible? Do you love the God who is opposed to all evil, immutably holy and perfectly righteous? Not one sin goes unpunished! A God who once flooded this earth and killed every man, woman and child because of SIN? A God who put Adam and Eve out of the garden along with all their posterity because of their single act of rebellion? A God who reigns even over those in hell that will forever say that He has done them no injustice? If not, then perhaps it's not the idea of hell that's your problem; perhaps it's the wrathful nature of God Himself. God is God and He shows Himself fully in Scripture. Do you see Him?

Some say God did not create hell for man. I understand why they say it, but it is shockingly misguided at the same time. An omniscient God knew who and what would be in hell. He always knew, Acts 15:18. This verse broadly applied simply shows God's omniscience. Just as He always knew He would reach out to the Gentiles, so He knew who would be in hell.

Another fact that we must come to grips with is that the God of the Old Testament (OT) and the God of the New Testament (NT) are one and the same. There is no difference. What God expects of Christians as opposed to Jews in the manner of our religious observances today has certainly changed, but He Himself has not changed, Malachi 3:6. For example, Christians no longer have to offer sacrifices according to the Levitical Law, but this does not mean that God has changed; it's just that now the New Testament adherent's sacrifices are forever finished at

the cross, Hebrews 9:26; Hebrews 10:14. God’s covenant to His people has changed, but He has always been the same triune God. God is plenty nice in the OT and pleads with people all the time to turn from sin and receive mercy, 2 Chronicles 7:14; Hosea 14:4; Isaiah 45:22. In the NT God is plenty full of wrath and promises a severe judgment to come the likes of which the world has never seen, Revelation 2:23; Matthew 11:23; Luke 13:1-5. God is the same yesterday, today and forever, Hebrews 13:8, however, in the progression of time He has made all things perfect in Christ. He has not changed because change implies a perfecting process. He cannot be improved.

Often we hear people say that God is somehow different between the testaments. One major reason for this is simply a lack of teaching about timeline and chronology, especially in the OT. When we read much of the OT prophets, be they major or minor (titles distinguished by their amounts of textual contribution) we hear them talking a lot about wrath and strong judgment to come against the people. This is because much of their writing was to the nation of Israel before God’s most devastating judgment for their gross national sin. This is just before the close of the OT era. There were many times that God rebuked the nation of Israel and through judgment brought them back to Himself, but there was one time when He really brought them low for their sin. God sent them into exile. The aftermath of this most mighty judgment and the return of many Israelites to their homeland is seen around the chronological close of our OT circa 435 B.C. Over about a 140 year period God destroyed or scattered the nation of Israel. He began this around 722 B.C. by bringing their eastern enemies to victory over them. First the northern part of Israel fell to the Assyrians around the date just mentioned. Then the southern part of Israel called Judah was given over to the Babylonians around 586 B.C. Many of the OT prophets are writing to either warn the people of or in retrospect lament this same time window of severe judgment. Jeremiah is called “The weeping prophet” because his whole ministry was a call of repentance and restoration to a nation that wanted nothing to do with it. Because this sole time of coming judgment is such a major theme in the OT it occupies a lot of its pages. Understanding the dates in which the prophets were speaking shows us a highlight of “judgment talk” on these specific people for that particular time. This was not going to be a good time of exile for them, yet God in His great faithfulness to them and their fathers promised to bring them back, and later did. It is not then that God is “angrier” in the OT. It is that this was a time of great judgment. God warned of it for a long time through many prophets. Reading such things as this is part of the reason why people say that only the God of the OT is one full of wrath. God is a God of wrath and terrible judgment, Ezekiel 38:22, always. Below is a list of dates and the audiences of the prophets organized chronologically. Remember that the date of Israel’s judgment was from around 722-586 B.C. Look how many of them wrote before those times to their audiences.

Prophets (Major or minor)	Focus	Time B.C.
Obadiah	Edom	850-840
Joel	Judah	835-796
Jonah	Nineveh	784-760

Amos	Israel	763-755
Hosea	Israel	755-710
Isaiah	Judah	739-680
Micah	Judah	735-710
Nahum	Nineveh	650-630
Zephaniah	Judah	635-625
Jeremiah	Judah	627-570
Habakkuk	Judah	620-605
Daniel (Wrote in exile)	Babylon	605-536
Ezekiel (Wrote in exile)	Babylon	593-570
Haggai (After the exile)	Judah	520-505
Zechariah (After the exile)	Judah	520-470
Malachi (After the exile)	Judah	437-417

The NT by contrast has much to say to churches or individuals that despite their many failures are now alive in Christ. They all wrote their writings after the Resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The NT was written between about A.D. 45-100. Since God's greatest loving act in redemptive history is the cross it's only natural that most of the text of the NT describe and focus the attention there. God's inspiration of Scripture normally accompanies the times of His redemptive acts in history. God not only talks, but He shows. He shows and tells. This is great for learning. Understanding why there's often a more gentle tenor in the NT is also largely a matter of chronology since the cross is another event surrounded by many others on God's great redemptive timeline. Even roughly understanding the times of Scripture can help us tremendously. Jesus came not to condemn, but to save the world between 5 B.C. and A.D. 28, John 3:17. The writings of His Apostles after that time then naturally tell of that greatest event in inspired detail. His time on earth were days of great mercy, the year of jubilee.

Both testaments, however, still contain both a lot of compassion and a lot of rebuke. Consider how much wrath is mentioned in the NT in places like the Book of Revelation when judgment is again in focus as it was in certain places in the OT as discussed. The God of creation Himself, however, is still no different. By understanding the timeline of Scripture we should be able to see that God has not changed, just the times and textual focus of His works, Galatians 4:1-5.

Another major reason then why some of us assume that God has changed from B.C. to A.D. is because we need to understand the Scriptures as a unified whole. The Bible is comprised of the writings both before and after Christ's earthly life. They are not separate revelations! The New Testament, if examined as one major theme, is merely the pinnacle of the display of God's grace because it most closely surrounds the passion of Jesus Christ Himself who is God. Of course this then sets the gauge as a testament *more of grace* though God Himself is certainly no

more gracious. He has always been most gracious and merciful, Psalm 103:13. The OT supports the NT and the NT then likewise finds its foundation on the OT. The good news of the Gospel is that Christ died, "...according to the Scriptures," 1 Corinthians 15:3. See also 1 Corinthians 15:4.

So why am I writing all of this? It's because I believe that we must come to God as He reveals Himself in Scripture. That's it. Does God reveal His wrath in Scripture? The answer is yes. Does God reveal His grace in Scripture? The answer is yes. If we understand this prayerfully then we can come to the subject of hell, the consummate display of wrath, as something to discover in the nature of God who has *always* shown both mercy and wrath. He is the same, but times change. Also, if we say that God is today less angry than He once was it sets our feet on a path of misunderstanding like those who have dismissed Jesus' copious words about hell.

Despite the textual focus and varied time periods in redemptive history, hell is still hell and God is still its designer, Creator and sustainer. Does hell exist as a place of punishment for SIN? The answer is yes. Did God create a place where He will eternally condemn the wicked to retribution? The answer is yes. God is not ashamed of this place in Scripture. In fact, in maturity we will come to see that hell is a place where the righteousness of God is forever manifested. His enemies hate Him for His righteousness; but the saints adore Him for it.

Many who love God are quick to attest that part of God's overall purpose in creating all of life as we know it is to demonstrate His mercy and His goodness. Surely this is true. I look around and I see God's kindness displayed everywhere every day. I can say that even though I'm currently writing this letter in Afghanistan in the middle of a terrible war. This place is awful, but God is still God. In fact I've had some of the most precious times of my life in His presence and in His word here. But how about the fact that God also created this world to demonstrate His wrath? How are we doing as those who love Him in attesting to this, and giving God His due honor?

God at times determines to show His wrath. Many preachers today seem to simply want to hide it. Amos the prophet declares:

I saw the Lord standing by the altar, and He said: Strike the doorposts that the thresholds may shake, and break them on the heads of them all. I will slay the last of them with the sword. He who flees from them shall not get away, and he who escapes from them shall not be delivered. Though they dig into hell, from there My hand shall take them; though they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down; and though they hide themselves on top of Carmel, from there I will search and take them; though they hide from My sight at the bottom of the sea, from there I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them; though they go into captivity before their enemies, from there I will command the sword, and it shall slay them. I will set My eyes on them for harm and not for good, Amos 9:1-4.

Talking of God's wrath is the purpose of this letter. We must come to see His wrath or we simply will not see Him rightly. It is the same with the doctrine of hell. We should work to understand "all" of God and not just the parts we feel better talking about. This is the job, the advantage, the burden and the privilege of those who have the full Bible today. Speaking of the nature of God and His attributes like wrath and mercy Wayne Grudem in his great work *Systematic Theology* writes:

Why then does Scripture speak of these different attributes of God? It is probably because we are unable to grasp all of God's character at one time, and we need to learn of it from different perspectives over a period of time. Yet these perspectives should never be set in opposition to one another, for they are just different ways of looking at the totality of God's character.

God is always God. His nature has a hell sized wrath because He hates sin. Looking throughout Scripture shows us Him. This is true as we examine His love and His hate. Such reality is reflected in an examination of His heaven and His hell. I think perhaps this is the reason why this letter is so strong on my heart during this third of twelve months in the land of my enemies. It is that I see a certain part of God's character being denigrated so much today. I understand that hell and the wrath of God should not inspire as many hymns in us as His grace, but do we acknowledge the fury of God against sin? I'm not trying to make wrath a lesser attribute of God either. God is *not* more loving than just. I'm asking if as Christians we're prepared to honor God and His wrath, or is this one of those times when we just apologize to people for God's "bad side?"

In Romans we see that God desires to demonstrate both His love and wrath.

Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? Romans 9:18-24.

So what if God wants to show His wrath and to make it known? It's all for Him anyway and God is still God. God is not a politician. God is *not* running for God. This place is His! God is not backwards against sending men to hell, and I never wish to present Him as such. *God is not constrained by justice; He loves justice.* It's not as if He found the law written one day and decided to uphold it. He is not bound to uphold the law of righteousness against a better part of

Him being compelled by fixed laws in the universe. He is justice and true justice comes from within Him. Hell is God's justice for our sin. I will speculate only this far: if God was utterly backwards against sending men to hell then surely He would have ended the world or hell long ago to avoid losing anyone else, *even one more soul*, to that place. If hell wasn't part of the plan then it would have been done away with. If Satan was not part of the plan he would have been done away with. Instead we must understand that hell is as much a part of His eternal plan for this earth as heaven. God wills hell and all things evil to exist. We know this because He is sovereign over all things. Perhaps we are making a god to suit ourselves if we would deny this. Does the God you worship have a desire to demonstrate a hell sized wrath? Paul's did. Surely God does not delight in hell, Ezekiel 33:11. Scripture never presents it as giving Him joy to send men there, but He does desire to show His righteousness against sin and sinner. Please do not forget that there is no sin in hell only sinners. We do not understand the perfect wrath of God. How can a God who is perfectly good send men to hell forever? We can't grasp a justice that final. Many never spend any time in Scripture even attempting to. Many Christians feel they can grasp most things about God except His anger. I think they assume that they grasp everything about God's love too quickly. In fact, it's as if God's love is even expected to be understood when Christians talk about it with the world. People assume that because we've perhaps experienced love on earth from parents or friends that the love of God is easily comprehensible. It isn't. God's demonstration of love involved a cross. Name one other person who loves like that. It is an amazing love that is beyond us. Sinners who don't understand the cross see no love there, 1 Corinthians 1:18. It takes an eternity and even the redeemed will still never fully appreciate it. That's why heaven is forever. We'll need that long to come to see God at all. His wrath is the same in that it is not easily comprehensible. We must work to attain to it or else we'll spend our time apologizing or abandoning the word of God and thus the God of the word in measure. Perhaps we've just not spent the pulpit time on developing our understanding of hell and so it remains a distant concept so often shunned and misunderstood. Has He not shown His great wrath? Yes He has. He is a God of terrible wrath. What of the flood in Noah's day? Where is Sodom? Can you show me the way to Gomorrah? Where is the army of the Egyptians? What judgment was seen on Nadab and Abihu or Dathan or Uzzah or Herod or Ananias and Sapphira? "I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things," Isaiah 45:7. It is not duality in God. It is simply God that I'm writing about. He is the only God, Psalm 90:2. We must understand Him. This is Him folks. He plays for keeps. We must embrace God as He has revealed Himself to be; otherwise we surely embrace idolatry. We must understand His wrath against sin to understand His greatness.

Mr. A.W. Pink (1886-1952) in his inimitable work *The Attributes of God* has a section called *The Wrath of God*. It's not a long section, but in it he writes about God's wrath very well. I would encourage you to go and read the whole work by Pink. He says,

It is sad to find so many professing Christians who appear to regard the wrath of God as something for which they need to make an apology, or at least they wish

there were no such thing. While some would not go so far as to openly admit that they consider it a blemish on the Divine character, yet they are far from regarding it with delight, they like not to think about it, and they rarely hear it mentioned without a secret resentment rising up in their hearts against it. Even with those who are more sober in their judgment, not a few seem to imagine that there is a severity about the divine wrath which is too terrifying to form a theme for profitable contemplation. Others harbor the delusion that God's wrath is not consistent with His goodness, and so seek to banish it from their thoughts.

...the wrath of God as a Divine perfection is plainly demonstrated by what we read of in Psalm 95:11, "Unto whom I swear in My wrath." There are two occasions of God "swearing": in making promises (Gen. 22:16), and in denouncing threatening (Deut. 1:34). In the former, He swears in mercy to His children; in the latter, He swears to terrify the wicked. An oath is for solemn confirmation: Hebrews 6:16. In Genesis 22:16 God said, "*By Myself* have I sworn." In Psalm 89:35 He declares, "Once have I sworn *by My holiness*." While in Psalm 95:11 He affirmed, "I swear in *My wrath*." Thus the great Jehovah Himself appeals to His "wrath" as a perfection equal to His "holiness": He swears by the one as much as by the other! Again; as in Christ "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9), and as all the Divine perfections are illustriously displayed by Him (John 1:18), therefore do we read of "the *wrath* of the Lamb" (Rev. 6:16).

The wrath of God is a perfection of the Divine character upon which we need to frequently meditate. First, that our hearts may be duly impressed by God's detestation of sin. We are ever prone to regard sin lightly, to gloss over its hideousness, to make excuses for it. But the more we study and ponder God's abhorrence of sin and His frightful vengeance upon it, the more likely are we to realize its heinousness. Second, to beget a true fear in our souls for God: "Let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:28, 29). We cannot serve Him "acceptably" unless there is due "reverence" for His awful Majesty and "godly fear" of His righteous anger, and these are best promoted by frequently calling to mind that "our God is a consuming fire." Third, to draw out our souls in fervent praise for having delivered us *from* "the wrath to come" (1 Thess. 1:10).

Our readiness or our reluctancy to *meditate* upon the wrath of God becomes a sure test of how our hearts' really stand affected toward Him. If we do not truly rejoice in God, for what He is in Himself, and that because of *all* the perfections which are eternally resident in Him, then how dwelleth *the love of God* in us? Each of us

needs to be most prayerfully on his guard against devising an image of God in our thoughts which is patterned after our own evil inclinations. Of old the Lord complained, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether as *thyself*" (Ps. 50:21), If we rejoice not "at the remembrance of His *holiness*" (Ps. 97:12), if we rejoice not to know that in a soon coming Day God will make a most glorious display of His *wrath*, by taking vengeance on all who now oppose Him, it is proof positive that our hearts are not in subjection to Him, that we are yet in our sins, on the way to the everlasting burnings.

Pink makes some excellent points here. J.C. Ryle once wrote, "The state of things after the judgment--is changeless and without end. The misery of the lost and the blessedness of the saved--are both alike forever. Let no person deceive us on this point. It is clearly revealed in Scripture. The eternity of God, and heaven, and hell--all stand on the same foundation. As surely as God is eternal--so surely is heaven an endless day without night, and hell an endless night without day!" Where are the preachers who understand and proclaim this today? Now I want to talk about eternity and hell. Hell is forever. Of this there can be no doubt.

The liberal who challenged my view about hell held to a theory called *Annihilationism*. This is the view that hell is not eternal, but that it's merely a place where the dead go to one day become no more, or to be totally snuffed out of all existence. There are several different systems of Annihilationist ideology as well, but they'll not be explored here. There are also many different takes on what hell is throughout the church. Some say it's a mindset. Some say it's just your worst nightmares played over and over. Some say that all of the teaching on hell is merely metaphorical. Some say that the teaching is merely spiritual, but not literal as I hold it to be. I will freely admit that the subject of hell, in my view, is not a salvific matter. It is not essential doctrine. I cannot and will not seek to build the case from Scripture that if a man denies the literal eternal torments of hell that he will lose his soul and end up there. Thank God for that! I do believe that the denial of hell as a place of literal conscious punishment is heretical. However, it is not heresy that leads to death.

Many annihilationists do their best with the Greek language to imply *possible meanings* for words in the Bible as something other than teaching about hell as the church has classically understood it. They say that it's not eternal. The idea is picking up steam today in immature believers. I want to look at a few Bible words with you here so we can be sure about their meaning. Before I do so I'd like to create a context.

The London Baptist Confession was written in 1689. This was the confession of many in the English speaking Reformed Church. In article 32.2 entitled *The Last Judgment* they wrote:

The end of God's appointing this day is for the manifestation of the glory of His mercy in the eternal salvation of the elect, and also His justice, in the eternal damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient. Then shall the

righteous go into everlasting life and receive that fullness of joy and glory with everlasting reward in the presence of the Lord. But the wicked, who know not God and obey not the Gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast aside into everlasting torments, and punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.

I endorse every word of this paragraph. The idea should be as clear to us today as it was to them in 1689. Now this is just one written confession of one group. There are many credal statements that say the same thing throughout history. I assure you that statements like this do not come out of nowhere. From whence then did these London divines adapt their terminology? Was this just some very late medieval-style-dictatorial-fear-monger-tactic as some liberal annihilationists assert? No, over millennia prior the Apostle Paul said:

...it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10.

The London Baptist confession just paraphrased what Paul said. Again, judgment is in focus here so wrath comes to the forefront. God is no different in the NT. So we can see a few things here. One is that "...it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation." What about eternal tribulation? This would be righteous as well seeing that God dwells in eternity as men one day will. We see also that this punishment spoken of by Paul is "everlasting." So what did he mean? What is the meaning of the word "everlasting" here? What is the tenure of the destruction that God will one day distribute to the ungodly? Does it mean forever? We've now established one good context. Soon we'll examine a few Bible words.

One of the best ways to understand the intended use of a word in language is to examine its usage throughout a piece of literature, any given culture, or perhaps by any particular writer. Sometimes this is easily identifiable and other times it's more difficult to pinpoint. Context can help determine usage. The repeated use of a word in the same context can also help. The point is that if I use the word "loaded" in a letter I could be using it in several different ways and context can help you understand my usage of the word. Here are two examples: If I'm talking about a guy who was pulled over yesterday by the police you'll not logically conclude that my use of the word "loaded" had anything to do with a CD-ROM on his home computer. If I'm writing a letter about hunting and use the word you'll likely not conjure up images in your mind of teenage frat parties. The focus of my writing imports meaning into the word. If every time a realtor uses the word "spacious" I see that he refers to homes over 3,000 square feet, and I see this term used

dozens of times in such context then I have a sound reason when I see a house under 1,500 square feet to immediately assume that that realtor would not use the word spacious to describe it. Furthermore, if after confirming his normal usage of the term he tells me he has a spacious home to show me I would immediately assume that I was going to see a home that was roughly 3,000 square feet or more. If at another point in an article I read that this realtor puts forth the word spacious as describing only houses of more than 3,000 square feet, then I can take that meaning and import its meaning to all homes of those dimensions. That realtor's use of the word spacious is then affixed a meaning. Without explanation I wouldn't expect him to alter his use of the word. That meaning sticks unless he qualifies an alternate use of the term at some other time explicitly. So what does this have to do with anything?

Many debates have risen up in history about the meaning of certain words in certain places. Some would argue this with the use of the word *everlasting* like in the previous passage. Sometimes it can become difficult to define words, but this is hardly one of those times. In 2 Thessalonians 1:9, the passage last cited, the word "everlasting" in the Greek is *aiōnios*. Here Paul's context is clearly the Day of Judgment and the punishment in its wake. God has stored up this wrath, Romans 2:5. This passage is directly in reference to the Second Advent or Second Coming of Jesus Christ, the Lion of Judah. This day is universally described in Scripture as a day both of joy for some and terror for others. The punishment of those God is taking vengeance on is called both righteous and everlasting in Scripture. In the Strong's concordance the word *aiōnios* has three listed expressions: "1) without beginning and end, that which always has been and always will be, 2) without beginning, 3) without end, never to cease, everlasting." This word is used in the following places just to name a few. Let's examine this word's common usage in the Bible in a few clear places. This shows us the use of the term in NT culture as seen in that culture's writing. Also remember that since God Himself is Scripture's author, 2 Timothy 3:16, we would expect to see the term used similarly throughout unless otherwise qualified.

"He who believes in the Son has everlasting (*aiōnios*) life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him," John 3:36.

"But now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting (*aiōnios*) God, for obedience to the faith," Romans 16:26.

"For so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting (*aiōnios*) kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," 2 Peter 1:11.

I don't hear much refutation, no matter how liberal one may be, that the life Jesus offers is anything less than everlasting, that God has not been God from everlasting or that the kingdom of God is not everlasting. In every case here they understand these words to mean just what they say, in other words- forever. This isn't denied. It is therefore only logical to assume that Paul's use of the word everlasting in regard to God's destruction of the wicked in 2 Thessalonians 1:9 also means forever. Perhaps the clearest import for the usage of the word *aiōnios* in the NT as it

pertains to the ultimate judgment of men is found in the next passage. It is in this next passage where Scripture again speaks of the Second Advent and the nature of Jesus' eternal condemnation of sinners who refuse to repent. Notice the similarities in the picture painted by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 1: "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats...And these will go away into everlasting (aiōnios) punishment, but the righteous into eternal (aiōnios) life," Matthew 25:31-32, 46. Please take notice of some other things Jesus teaches about this day from the same passage. "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," vs. 34. Notice that this creation is also finished from the beginning. "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting (aiōnios) fire prepared for the devil and his angels," vs. 41. This fire is as everlasting as the kingdom prepared for the Father's elect. If we deny that the wicked receive eternal punishment then we must also by rational inference deny that the righteous receive eternal life. If hell is temporary then heaven must also be temporary. This passage and its use of word everlasting are clear from its context of judgment.

The eternal nature of punishment in Scripture is everywhere. I will list several verses for your reference to search the Scriptures and see if these things are true. Isaiah 66:24; Matthew 3:12; Luke 3:17; Isaiah 33:14; Jeremiah 17:4; Daniel 12:2; Matthew 18:8; Matthew 25:41, 46; Jude 6-7; Revelation 14:11; Revelation 19:3. The NT's use of the term everlasting is incredibly convincing as to the concept of eternity here. See John 3:36; John 4:14; John 5:24; John 6:27; John 6:40; John 6:47; John 12:50; Acts 13:46; Romans 6:22; Galatians 6:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:16; 1 Timothy 1:16; 1 Timothy 6:16; Hebrews 13:20; Revelation 14:6.

Though Scripture often times, as in the case with the doctrine of hell, speaks on a subject multiple times, God does not need to. If a concept in Scripture is presented clearly even one time then that is enough. For example, the tower of Babel and the events surrounding it are only mentioned one time in the Bible yet we know it was a true event. The Christian church has described its stance on hell from numerous texts in the Bible. It is not speculation to state many things about our understanding of hell as these ideas are presented clearly in many ways as we've already seen. It was spoken of clearly in the OT and only more elucidated in the NT. Biblically educated Christians therefore ought to have a doctrine of hell that affirms it as a place of eternal punishment for sin by God.

How do we understand in our doctrine of hell that it's a place of pain and misery? We get it mainly from Jesus. "The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth," Matthew 13:41-42. He says this again in the same chapter in another parable. He teaches His disciples about hell very clearly. When we read of hell we are never led in Scripture to think of it as anything less than an actual

place as literal as this present world. This is not to say that there are not “supernatural” elements beyond our understanding, indeed there are, but rather that Scripture does not lead us to a place we cannot at all go. Jesus has told us a lot. What we know of Scripture and its descriptions of hell are meant to be applied into eternity future. This is why Annihilationism is nothing more than fanciful rhetoric. God’s eternal punishment is not ceasing to exist forever as the annihilationist avows. That is not the imagery prearranged for us in Scripture. Such conclusions can only be wrangled from the text after 1) denying its clear statements, and 2) importing meanings into Bible words with no consistent warrant for doing so. The concepts of an eternal hell (or heaven for that matter) are not beyond the dedicated Bible reader. It’s almost like Scripture takes us to the end of a shore from which we can see an island yet having no way to step foot there. We see hell, but from a distance. It is this way with both hell and with heaven. Christ has tasted the wrath of God for sinners, but He alone is able to bear that revelation. Nevertheless what God has shown us in the Scriptures remains plain.

In Luke 16 Jesus tells us about a poor man in heaven and a rich man in hell. From the text we are not led to see these two men as fictitious characters, but more likely as real men in history. “The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. “Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’ “Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment,’ Luke 16:22-24, 27-28. This man was in torment, felt thirst, and consciously remembered his earthly family. This place Jesus described, and that He Himself had previously created (John 1:3) is therefore literal (he was thirsty) and conscious (he was aware). Here we get a picture of hell. Why would Jesus paint this picture of hell and its sufferings if it was not real? What relevance would it have unless it was simply true? He never once said anything like, “And one day all the suffering in hell will cease.” Never once is anything like that spoken. He often painted images of heaven in the minds of His disciples as well, John 14:2, yet how many would assume that the rooms Jesus is preparing for them are not real? Some annihilationists do teach that both hell and heaven are not eternal, but this brand of them would only be doubly wrong. Jesus spoke of a literal place of torment for the rich man. Though this place is not the final place of hell also called Gehenna it is no less eternal as part of the sentence on unrepentant sinners. The rich man will never escape it and will one day be placed into the eternal lake of fire which is the second death, Revelation 20:14; 21:8. We cannot speculate too far, but hell is very clearly described as a place of great despair, pain, condemnation and sorrow. This is inescapably clear from the text. Regarding Luke 16:23 and the story of Lazarus and the rich man John Macarthur writes in his study Bible, “

...“Hades” was the Greek term for the abode of the dead. In the LXX, [The Septuagint or Greek translation of the Hebrew OT] it was used to translate the Hebrew *Sheol*, which referred to the realm of the dead in general, without

necessarily distinguishing between righteous or unrighteous souls. However, in NT usage, “Hades” always refers to the place of the wicked prior to final judgment in hell...

The words “hell” and “judgment” are spoken of in various ways about 400 times in the New King James Version in various ways, cf. Matthew 23:33; 2 Peter 2:3, 4, 9; Jude 14-15; Hebrews 10:27. The concept is perspicuous. It is clear. In fact, God’s judgment *in its eternal context* is considered an elementary truth for us all to settle in our theology. We should have this settled in the faith if we have been in it for any considerable length of time. Consider why it is then that most Christians cannot discuss it in depth. The writer says, “Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment,” Hebrews 6:1-2. God’s judgment in hell is eternal judgment as is attested throughout the Bible by His use of words like “eternal” and “everlasting,” especially in the NT. All of His judgment is eternal.

There is great punishment in the Bible that is forever. The rich man would be one day cast into the lake of fire and be forever damned for his wickedness. To fancy that a literal hell is not eternal is a mistake. No one can come away from Scripture and deny it without some really torturous exegesis and word peddling.

Jesus taught us about what our attitudes should be towards our sin in many places. He mentions often that sin leads to hell. He quotes the prophet Isaiah in the following text to add to the point. Listen to how plainly Jesus speaks about hell’s eternity. “If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched— where

*‘Their worm does not die
And the fire is not quenched.’*

And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched— where

*‘ Their worm does not die
And the fire is not quenched.’*

And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire— where

*‘ Their worm does not die
And the fire is not quenched,’* Mark 9:43-48.

If going to such extremes could remove your sin it would be better to do so. Of course, Jesus is not suggesting actually doing it. It is hyperbole and makes the point clearly in every generation. You can sin without eyes and sin without hands or feet. Removing them cannot actually eradicate sin. If it could remove sin to eliminate these members then that would be better than keeping them and ending up in hell. By contrast in this passage we know that “life” and “kingdom of God” are both eternal as well. It is written that the fires here will *never* be quenched. The concept is clear. The worms will never die. The only possible conclusion that can be drawn from the Scripture is that people will personally experience it for eternity. He would not teach this if it were not true. Jesus never teaches falsely. There will be fire and worms forever. They will not die or be quenched. This will never stop. This is terrifying and true. What then should be the Christian attitude toward the perishing? Surely some are hard headed and deserve to be told so, but Christians should pity them and spend their lives getting better at reaching out to them with the Gospel. They’re going to hell. This is part of why we mourn in this life, Matthew 5:4. We mourn for our own sins and also for the certain death of those still dead in sin.

So how is it that people, even Christians, deny God’s word on this subject despite its clarity in the Bible? It happens when someone places an idea about God above His word and then measures God’s word according to their ideas. It goes something like this: God is love and I don’t like the idea of hell. My god would never create such a place so that place must not exist. This leads to nothing less than idolatry and I am certain that God will judge it. Men who don’t have a fear of hell don’t rightly fear God. Men who don’t fear God don’t know Him, Proverbs 9:10; Proverbs 1:7; Matthew 10:28; Ecclesiastes 3:14. Again, this is not a primary doctrine, but if a man denies God’s word then he is sinning.

The fear of God is good. Scripture is full of statements about the fear of God being the very beginning of wisdom, Psalm 111:10. To know God is to fear Him! Now I know that fear also means things like reverence and submission. This is true. In fact, for the Christian there should be no more fear of dying in hell. No more fear of God’s wrath for sin. It instantly becomes a new relationship when a man is born again and God’s tender mercies change the very manner of fear in the heart. Fear is reverence and respect for the child of God, but it’s also a quake-in-your-boots kind of fear if you are under His great wrath as a child of satan, Psalm 50:22; John 8:44. If you are not fully pardoned in Christ Jesus then you should greatly fear God. You should fear him like any criminal fears a good judge. Scripture uses the word fear many times in both ways. Fear of God is only right and good. And what reason do we see Jesus immediately attaching to the admonition that all men are to fear God? He connects God and His hell directly. “And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!” Luke 12:4-5. Christians are also called to a fear of God. Not because of the possibility of condemnation (Romans 8:1) but simply because He’s God. God creates planets and makes them spin on orbits

around the sun like nothing. It's nothing to Him! He took His sweet time and did it in a week. It's like me throwing a piece of paper into an open trash can. He causes stars to explode in space just to change the scenery. What sort of a being could do such things? Ask Job! God is God. He is different than us. He is holy, holy, holy. To know of Him is to humbly stand in awe of Him. God alone exercises the power to cast men into hell. He does this. Satan can "drag" no one there. God will cast men there and satan as well one day. We should fear Him because this is His power to do so.

The following Psalm has always fascinated me: "Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD; Lord, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared," Psalm 130:1-4. It's the last statement here that intrigues me so much. Why does the Psalmist say that he fears God? It's because there's forgiveness despite it all. In other words, if God simply condemned us all then what's the point in anyone seeking any grace? There's no hope. Let's eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die, right? No, there's always that tug in the back of the mind reminding us that there is forgiveness and so we should not cast off restraint if we're wise, Proverbs 16:6. Because there's forgiveness God is feared.

There is much truth to the statement I heard recently by one preacher who said that heaven is not a place for people afraid of hell, but is a place for those who love God. What he was trying to get at was the motivation and heart-set of those that God has redeemed. I like this statement, but here we're talking about the doctrine of hell and what Scripture plainly says about it.

In my young satanic life I used to think of hell as the place where satan reigns. Satanists are fond of referring to the devil as "the king of hell" but this is not correct. Satan will be punished in hell along with all the rest of the angels and all of unredeemed humanity. The Apostle John saw the ultimate demise of satan prophetically and guess what kind of punishment satan is said to receive? You got it, it's eternal. John tells us that "The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever," Revelation 20:10. The words "ever" and "forever" used in this passage come from the same root word for eternal that we looked at already. It's the word *aiōn* and like *aiōnios* denotes an eternal or everlasting punishment. The torment satan is given by God is the word *Basanizō*. This is the same as the rich man in the parable we saw earlier in Luke. There the rich man's torment is the word *basanos*. If you put all this together you come out with a place that has eternal fire, smoke, torment, worms, satan and men. This is where the church's imagery has come from for 2,000 years. This is where the writers of our creeds and confessions have taken their statements. We have a very clear picture to build our understanding from. Please search the Scriptures.

God's word is a meta-narrative. This simply means that the whole of Scripture is one massive truth story that covers it all. It is all one inspired book, but written by so many authors. It

contains every truth you will ever need to know about God and the meaning of life. The concept of hell in that meta-narrative developed over time. That is, God chose to reveal it to His prophets more and more as time went on, and speak to us most about it by His Son, Hebrews 1:1-2. By the time we get to the NT and the sermons of Jesus Himself it is a place well understood in Israel as a place of everlasting punishment. It was called *sheol* in the OT and was known simply as the place of the dead where all their wisdom so amounted to nothingness that it could be said that they know nothing, Ecclesiastes 9:5. There is no wisdom in hell at all. The grave is the place of the profitless dead. Nothing good will ever come of its inhabitants again.

The following is speculation. Often times hell is painted as a place of great sorrow and regret for sin. Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* certainly went a long way in influencing this idea in western culture. I tend to speculate much different than Dante though. Sorrow for sin should most closely be associated by us with the work of the Holy Spirit. Sorrow over sin is a very good thing. God uses sorrow to bring men closer to Him, 2 Corinthians 7:9-11. There is no redemptive work in hell. God is not drawing men closer to Him. They are forgotten. There are no exits. Men are not likely sorry therefore in the overwhelming majority. In fact, hell will be man's ultimate display of hate for God. Along the same lines, the Day of Judgment is also often presented outside Scripture as a day of great sorrow. Perhaps for God, but not for men I think. I think of it this way. The closer we get to the light the more we see sin around us. Sin is always illuminated more when the light of God shines around it, John 3:20. More light = more sin in sight. The light doesn't create it; it just reveals it. At the height of all humility and grace, when the glory of God was most radiant, the sins of men were made most plain. As God stood in that courtyard the crowd shouted their community desire to murder Him painfully. Afterward they went home and ate dinner. "Pilate said to them, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said to him, "Let Him be crucified!" Then the governor said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they cried out all the more, saying, "Let Him be crucified!" When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it." And all the people answered and said, "His blood be on us and on our children." Matthew 27:22-25. I don't call these people *more wicked* than anyone else. Men would do the same today if given the chance. Here is God standing before them and they are at his throat like a dog in a fight wishing Him dead. That is SIN and it breaks my heart! It's here that I can see sin in its fullness because the light is so very bright upon it. Jesus was there and they wanted a murderer to be released instead. Shame on us all! God has restrained the sin of men through what theologians call common grace. Common grace was in effect that day in Pilate's court. Not all men are *as depraved as they could be*. There are laws and governments that, despite sin, show a sense of morality, justice and equity. God put this there. Ethics is God's idea. We are seeing goodness shrink in our day in America, but there is still a remnant and a conscience though we among other things murder our babies and call it choice. I digress. The collective conscience is a gift from God. Common grace is just that- gracious. In hell this restraint is gone. Imagine their

viciousness then. There is no more justice. Most if not all men will hate God in full and unrestrained hatred. Some will be sorry, but it will only be a worldly sorrow, 2 Corinthians 7:10.

Years ago I saw a picture in Iraq while heading into a dining facility. I'm reminded of this picture every time I read Peter's passage that I'll cite at the close of this letter. It was a warning not to attempt to "adopt" any wildlife in the area as this is against military protocol. The picture showed a close up frontal shot of a hideously vicious dog. It was bowed up at the camera with its hair standing straight up. Its eyes were bloodshot with adrenaline and its crooked teeth jutted out in diseased warning. I think men will resemble this on the Day of Judgment. They will be like brute beasts to be destroyed. They will shout until the veins pop out of their necks and they lose their voice. They will be drunk with unmitigated hate. They will accuse God and tell Him of their great hate for all things holy. If allowed they would spit, defecate, blaspheme and demonstrate satanic obscenity showing that their hearts are literally full of the darkness into which they are being confined, and which they have embraced. When the light shines on that day it will be even clearer than on the day in Pilate's court. All common grace will be gone. Men will hate God and declare it to His face. All love for Him will be gone, along with all hope. The angels will corral such creatures into the abyss and be relieved to see that man gone. Nonetheless they will all know that God is only just.

However, for all alive today there is great hope. There is mercy available. Jesus Resurrected Himself from the dead (John 10:17-18), was Resurrected by His Father (Galatians 1:1), and was Resurrected by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:11). Each member of the Trinity is given acclaim for raising God the Son from the dead. Jesus' ultimate victory over death, hell and the grave are gloriously detailed in passages like 1 Corinthians 15. He longs to share this victory with all those who have faith in Him. He says to His own, "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom," Luke 12:32. He has come to ransom His elect and it is an innumerable host. In Jesus, hell is destroyed and SIN's power over the lives of His people is forever vanquished, Hebrews 10:14. Christians should have no fear of hell for themselves. Since salvation is an eternal gift then it is certain that there is no chance of hell in the believer's future. The Christian actually has peace with God through Jesus Christ because his or her sin has been *totally forgiven*, Romans 5:1. That's Gospel! That's good news. All those who God has justified He will surely glorify, Romans 8:29-30. The hope of heaven then is not vain speculation. It is Biblical hope. *Biblical hope is the definite assurance of something that has simply not yet been seen.* I can hope in heaven only because it is certain. If it were not certain then I could not hope for it at all.

Have men over speculated about hell and its terrors in the past? Surely we have. Perhaps even I have here. When we're going to speculate it should always be declared when studying Scripture. It's not always bad, but it is always just speculation. We really don't know much about what hell and the Day of Judgment is like. All we know is what God has chosen to reveal to us in Scripture. Let us remain within those bounds and speculate lawfully. No matter what, hell is a

terrifying place and I think that our evangelism would do well to speak about how men should not want to go there.

Despite this, it is *not* that a fear of hell is alone the reason a man should be taught to come to Jesus. This is perhaps the greatest downfall of many who've gone before us in this area. In our own culture some have abused a righteous fear of God and made it a main motivation for salvation. I think it's a good motivation, perhaps usually the first one, but it's a secondary motivation when the whole counsel of God and the Gospel is understood. The light of God's goodness is what truly leads men to repentance, Romans 2:4, this is simply seen best against sin's black backdrop. Understanding of sin and hell sets the backdrop well and so Jesus illuminates grace by talking of both so much before His cross-work. It's the difference between lighting a candle at noon or at midnight. Light shines brightest at midnight! The world was clothed in darkness in that hour (Luke 23:44) but the light was only just being lit. Truth can sometimes be seen in pitch black so close your eyes and come to the cross, Acts 17:27. When a man becomes aware of the chains of his flesh then the Gospel becomes real. Christ is then no option or just some good teacher; He is the way, the truth and the life, John 14:6. Once a man, by grace alone, perceives his guilt by the law then, by grace alone, God can show him His love on the cross. It is God's goodness to do all this. In the words of John Newton, "I once was blind, but now I see." It is this combination of an understanding of sin and grasp of the Gospel that converts eternally. The cross must have sin as its context or else it's simply not real to any of us. After understanding this a forgiven sinner finds his place in the church and comes to understand fellowship with others in the grace of Almighty God.

When I was a youth at church camp I was victimized by a false gospel presentation. Many of you have been there as well. We were outside on that warm summer night at the big bonfire. The smell of bug spray and the residue of smores lay heavy on our clothes and fingertips. We had laughs, confession times, pillow fights and about a week away from home to prepare us for the night. It was that old skit re-enacted each year where two kids get into a car accident and one is being dragged to hell by the angels. He's screaming at the top of his lungs, "No, please God! No! I'm sorry!" and we all got the chills. Just afterward, with barely a mention of sin, the youth pastor asked us to "accept Jesus" to not go to hell. Of course, I didn't want to go to hell so I repeated a prayer to "accept Jesus into my heart" when I was asked to do so. The guitar was strummed, my emotions were overcoming, the preacher's voice changed, and I, with manipulated/tear induced eyes, reached out, not for Jesus, but for heaven. I prayed to "accept Jesus into my heart" and was assured that I was "saved." How long do you think that lasted? Not long at all. I was not "saved" at all. I just prayed a prayer. Decisions save no one for sure. It was a bad use of the fear of God because I was not made to see my sin by it at all. Because I had not got a conviction of my sin I could not see the Savior. The light, even if it was lit, was dim because it was lit at noon. Fear of hell with no real sin context is not good. This was not a good use of the fear of God. Had they spoke to us about sin and gave us the law then perhaps it would have made sense. By this I would have understood more about hell.

Hell is real and it is eternal. It's a place of suffering, irrepressible flame and a place devoid of grace. There will be no end. What sort of a terrible place is this? Should we not fear God? We should weep for those headed there. I sat across the table from a hard hearted scoffer not a month ago who told me "You've got me thinking, sir." He said this because of our discussions, sometimes heated, on the Gospel. I said to him, "You've got me thinking as well. You've got me thinking why I can't weep more for men like you; men who I know are going to hell." I truly meant this. I had hit my knees just the night before in prayer for him and asked God to break my heart with intercession for the lost. He has yet to answer that prayer in the way I pray He will. I can get teary eyed watching that scene at the end of the first *Homeward Bound* movie when Chance, Shadow and Sassy finally make it home, but I can't cry over sinners who will die in their sin. How sinful am I! I believe it was D.L. Moody who said that he'd like the main part of his seminary education to be suspending his students over hell with a rope for 24 hours. This he said would motivate them like nothing else into action. We should ask God to make the reality of hell real to us in our prayers. This is why we should teach it, sing of its reality and share it with our kids. This will motivate us to go with the good news of the Gospel every chance we get. No, rather, we'll obey God and not wait for chance. We'll go. Hell is motivation for me. "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men..." 2 Corinthians 5:11. I know that the terror of the Lord includes an eternal hell. It has become clear to me in many ways why God has not given us much text on this subject for us to mangle in our own sinfulness. I think a true glimpse into hell would make most men mad. They would go insane. We cannot bear it even for a minute. Only Jesus could bear that revelation and suffer an eternity of wrath on the cross. It was the wrath of God that He feared at His death, Matthew 26:39. Christ tasted the wrath of God for His sheep, Hebrews 2:9. Dear God, thank You that I never will! I don't want it!

What we can draw from Scripture categorically is that hell is a place created by God. That it is to demonstrate His wrath against sin for eternity. There is no other viable interpretation unless you first want to change the very nature of God over creation and then approach His word through those "new" pre-suppositions. If you take Him at His word then the subject of an eternal hell becomes clear.

Christian, let us take all that God has revealed of Himself in the word and labor forever to esteem it. Let's be about the task of conforming our minds to it no matter what. Just as with every concept about God it's only our sinful inclinations that interfere with loving Him for every word in the Bible. Every jot and tittle would be adored if we were already glorified, but we are far from it. C.H. Spurgeon once said something to his students like, "When you speak of heaven let light shine from your face; when you speak about the heaven and earth to come let your voice lift, and the joy of your countenance require a veil; when you speak of hell your normal face will do." Be prepared to answer about hell plainly, but be sure to mention that men go there because of SIN. It will not be as pleasant a topic as the Gospel, but complete pleasantries is only for pandering politicians. It is God's goodness that condemns men, not anything evil in God, James 1:17; 1 John 1:5. Make this clear. Speak about hell as plainly as Jesus did. Tell men that sin leads

many there, Matthew 7:13. Speak of the end of an unrepentant life as perishing, Luke 13:1-5. Do this not as God, but as witnesses of Christ. Season your talk of heaven with talk of hell as the Master Himself did, Matthew 13:40; John 15:6. Warn of God's great judgment, Matthew 7:23; Revelation 18:8. Preach the Gospel in the same manner as the twelve and remember all things that Jesus has taught you in the cities that you enter, Luke 10:8-12. Subvert the subversion of our culture that has made talk on God's judgment a stigma, Matthew 10:27. In the very same cities and among the very same people that Jesus performed the greatest acts of kindness and power He shouted about their condemnation, "Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you," Matthew 11:20-24. The very concept of God and His hell has become repugnant to so many today by the efforts of satan *in the church*. False teachers have painted a devilish image of an omni-benevolent god sitting blindly in the heavens having nothing to do with hell. He has managed to breed a crop of false prophets who have made the whole idea of divine wrath and hell disgusting and antiquated. We call this, among other things, liberalism. Really it's just evil. It's as one preacher said, "They have a god without wrath bringing men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through a christ without a cross." The true church, however, can never be overcome.

SIN is not "hell offensive" in our day. It just doesn't warrant hell. That's extreme many would say in nearly every case. Consider this brief argument for the egregiousness of sin. I heard this argument from Mr. Todd Friel. If I lie to my kids, I'm not going to get into trouble. If I lie to my wife, I'm sleeping on the couch. If I lie to my boss I can lose my job. If I lie in court I can go to jail. What's the difference? It's the same sin, but the person against whom I've committed the act just got bigger or higher in authority or power. Scripture teaches in many ways that all sin is primarily against God. When David was brought to Godly sorrow and repentance for his great sin against Uriah and Bathsheba he cried out to God, "Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight," Psalm 51:4. When Joseph was tempted to lie with Potiphar's wife he said, "How...can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Genesis 39:9. Sin is against God and the testimony of these men reflected it in their wisdom. God is the judge of all sin. It offends Him and is an affront to His very being. If this is the case then we see the serious nature of our sin the more we see the holy nature and sheer authority of God. Preach this and hell becomes reasonable; many men will hate you for it, but some will be saved by it from it.

Why do we think men hate the message of God? Why did they hate Jesus? Why was Paul persecuted so much? Why was Peter crucified upside down? Was it because they all went around telling everyone how much God loved them and had such wonderful plans for them? No, that's a

perversion. That doesn't get you killed. That gets you a spot on prime time "Christian" TV, right Mr. Osteen? Preach about sin that deserves hell and see how the world receives you. It is a proof of Scripture. Jesus promised hatred from the world to His own if they follow Him, John 15:18-19; see also 1 John 3:13. If non-believers don't sometimes hate you and you claim to be a preacher of the Gospel, then you're a false prophet. There's no mistaking this. You don't preach you just play with preaching; you peddle the word of God. You should repent and stop. I can't stomach weak kneed preachers or wimpy Chaplains who don't want to offend anyone. Their messages are just boring to me and no I'm not talking about sermons on hell every Sunday. They never speak of sin in a proper context. Ever! Oh, they'll give you the right answers if you ask, but there is no soundness emanating from their larynx. There's a hell and they're more worried about people's feelings. Salvation to them is as fragile as whether or not someone likes you for three months before you share the Gospel with them. They're pulpit politicians and a disgrace to grace. SIN is offensive to God and it leads people to hell. Tell people. By God tell them plainly by any means. If a man will not preach this often and in many ways then he does not follow after Christ in public ministry very well. I refer you back to the questions in the first paragraph of this letter.

Hell is a serious subject and we need serious people. Oh, how I long to see young men and women sober and serious about the word of God! Where are the Spurgeons of my day? Where are the Whitefields? Where is the heart of MacArthur? Where are the John Pipers and Gil Arthurs? Where are the men strong in faith? Not ten-year-in-the-faith sissies who confess at each turn, "now I haven't read the Bible all that much" as if that's ok? Where are those excellent in spirit fully seeking Christ? Where are the young men and women who will boldly proclaim heaven and hell? I long to see more of them in the church!

Friends, hell will always be. It will be a fixture forever. Of this God has left us no doubt. He is not ashamed of His creation. Hell is just. While the saints will never delight over it, I think we must understand it lest we make for ourselves a golden calf. Men go there because they sin and deserve it. Sin is the reason men go to hell without exception. Have your sins been forgiven? Has the very image of God been restored in you? Adam and Eve were created in the *imago Dei*. They were the very *image of God*. Sin destroyed that image. They died, Genesis 2:17. The life in them died. Sin corrupted everything and the image was lost. In Christ men have the promise of the full restoration of that image and more. In this life men are brought into faith in Jesus. That faith is fully perfect in its assurance of heaven, but Christians are not *yet* perfected. They are now redeemed, but not yet fully redeemed. That full perfection and full restoration, while guaranteed at salvation, is not *yet* seen. That's why the Bible calls it hope. Hell is a place where the image of God will never be seen again. There will be no innovation, no art, no music, no seasons, no laughter, no satisfaction and worst of all no glimmer of hope of it ever changing. Eternity is a long time, reader. How long is eternity? Try to picture Mt. Everest and a sparrow at its highest peak. Imagine that every day that the bird rubs its beak against the rocks, flies down to the bottom to eat and returns repeating the process daily. By the time Everest is worn completely

away in every direction eternity will have only begun. Please consider your sin before God. Consider His Ten Commandments and how many times you've violated His blessed law. Go to www.needGod.com. Let the law of God shine into your heart by considering it. God is not evil, you are. Just look at the law. Consider how justice waits in God's patience, but that you will indeed have a day in court. There is the possibility of mercy for every person on earth. If they will only repent and turn from their sin then, through the sacrifice of Jesus, God will forgive them everything. One preacher spoke of earth as a gigantic insane asylum. God offers men forgiveness and eternal life and they refuse it. That's a perfect definition of insanity. God will demonstrate His wrath. I pray that it will not be on you. Should you die and be in the torments of hell then the words from this page will haunt you forever. You'll remember when you read of the judgment of Christ and the fear that you should have had before Him. Repent, turn from your sin and be forgiven now. Why should you die? God is merciful and is quick to forgive. Scripture says that, "The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy," Psalm 145:8. Seek the Lord while He may be found. God will not always hold his peace against your sin. There is a Day of Judgment to come, Acts 17:31.

God created man for His own glory and for their joy. The Westminster Confession was written in 1646. It's written in a question and answer format. Question number one asks: "What is the chief end of man?" The catechumen was to respond, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever." Amen to that! That is the Gospel! The end of the Gospel is *not just* an escape from hell and is *not* just a summons into court. It is not even just the forgiveness of sin. The end of the Gospel in all its fullness is perfect fellowship with God in eternal heaven. You can know the Creator of all stuff. You can know God. You can. I know Him. The Gospel begins with the forgiveness of sin, but endures forever with God and man restored. Please consider your sin and the Day of Judgment to come. I know of no better way to prepare you for the revelation of grace than to ask you to consider the reality of sin. Sin is, in simple terms, breaking God's moral law, 1 John 3:4; Romans 2:21-23, 12-16; 7:7-12. Lying, stealing, blasphemy, disrespect to parents, covetousness, lust, greed, idolatry. Understand that you are personally liable to the law. Forget about everyone else. Just you and God and He will crush you for sin, Luke 20:18. The law calls for your death rightly. It is not wrong of God in the least. Who is not dead under God's holy law? No one, Romans 3:19. We're all sinners, Romans 3:23. That means we're dead. Consider God's goodness in sending His Son to pay for the sins of the world. That instead of just sending us to hell He made the way for us to be pardoned. Look to the cross. The message of the whole Bible is the same to all who hear. God says, "Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other," Isaiah 45:22. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life," John 3:16. Believe in The Son and you will have life, Acts 16:30-31. Consider your sin today. Agree with God that you're not a good person; that you're a sinner. Being a sinner means you're not a good person. You deserve hell. Consider it. Think and work to gauge your understanding of sin, if even only for an hour, by the law and accept it. Memorize the Ten Commandments. Consider how many times you've sinned. Consider how it has offended God.

Repent, that means turn from sin, and put your trust in Jesus alone if you find ears on your head that hear not only the law, but its message, Galatians 4:21, 3:24; Mark 4:23.

Hell is real and it is eternal. We live in a day where the idea is challenged as barbaric and cruel. This is because we have far too high an opinion of ourselves and we do not fear God's judgment. We live in a day of a gospel often devoid of wrath and so writing such as this is awkward and difficult. It's almost like I have to establish a vocabulary to talk with my brothers today before I can even talk of hell. We have not applied ourselves to the doctrine of hell in our studies and prayer. Our teachers have failed us. Let's not do the same to those we teach.

I'll speak of an eternal hell because Scripture speaks of an eternal hell. This has been proven here. Follow men who speak of it. I'll end with an appropriate and timely word from the Apostle Peter. It's like he could have written this a decade ago, but it was written around A.D. 67 just before his martyrdom under Nero. Peter spoke of dangerous teachers in his day, just as we have them in ours, and said,

...many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber. For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)—then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment...But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children. They have forsaken the right way and gone astray...These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever, 2 Peter 2:2-9, 12-15, 17. And again we say, "Forever."

Thank you for your attention to this letter.