

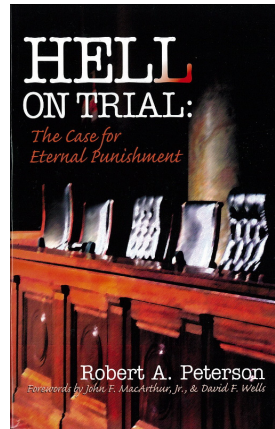


## Hell on Trial Book Review

by Jeremy Cagle

When one thinks of popular preachers today, the name Rob Bell comes to the top of the list. Bell is a graduate of Wheaton College and Fuller Theological Seminary and is the founding pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. His Sunday morning attendance averages around 11,000 people. It is estimated that the podcasts from his messages come out to around 50,000 per week.

And, due to his popularity as a speaker, Bell has undertaken several national speaking tours and has produced a series of ten minute monologue videos called Nooma that have sold an excess of one million copies.



The Michigan pastor is also popular with the press. The *Chicago Sun-Times* has called him an heir to Billy Graham and *Time Magazine* has claimed that his Nooma videos “may make him to YouTube what Graham was to the arena.” Andy Crouch, the editor of *Christianity Today*, boasted that he will continue to be a “rock star in the church world” and evangelical blogger, Ben Witherington, wrote that “He could be one of the most important 21st Century Christian leaders.”<sup>1</sup>

And Rob Bell is also a best-selling author. His books *Velvet Elvis*,<sup>2</sup> *Sex God*,<sup>3</sup> and *Jesus Wants to Save Christmas*<sup>4</sup> have sold hundreds of thousands of copies. But his latest book, *Love Wins*,<sup>5</sup> has gotten him into some trouble with members of the evangelical church. Here is how the publisher promotes the book:

Fans flock to his Facebook page, his NOOMA videos have been viewed by millions, and his Sunday sermons are attended by 7,000 parishioners—with a downloadable podcast reaching 50,000 more. An electrifying, unconventional

pastor whom *Time* magazine calls “a singular rock star in the church world,” Rob Bell is the most vibrant, central religious leader of the millennial generation. Now, in *Love Wins: Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*, Bell addresses one of the most controversial issues of faith—the afterlife—arguing, “would a loving God send people to eternal torment forever?” With searing insight, Bell puts hell on trial, and his message is decidedly hopeful—eternal life doesn’t start when we die; it starts right now. And ultimately, *Love Wins*.<sup>6</sup>

The back cover of the book also gives further insight into the book’s message:

God loves us. God offers us everlasting life by grace, freely, through no merit on our part. Unless you do not respond the right way. Then God will torture you forever. In Hell. Huh?<sup>7</sup>

It is because of comments like these that MSNBC Reporter Martin Bashir said this to the controversial author in an interview on March 15, 2011:

You’re creating a Christian message that’s warm, kind, and popular for contemporary culture . . . What you’ve done is you’re amending the gospel, the Christian message, so that it’s palatable to contemporary people who find, for example, the idea of hell and heaven very difficult to stomach. So here comes Rob Bell, he’s made a Christian gospel for you, and it’s perfectly palatable, it’s much easier to swallow. That’s what you’ve done, haven’t you?<sup>8</sup>

While we would all applaud Martin Bashir for his bravery and candidness, it does raise the question, “Should Hell be on trial?” “Is Rob Bell right?” “Should we re-evaluate the traditional teaching on this frightening doctrine?” “Should it make us say, ‘Huh?’” The idea of people spending eternity in ceaseless torment is hard to swallow. It is not easily palatable. Does it need to be changed?

Robert A. Peterson has written a book to deal with that very issue and his answer is a resounding “No!” Published in 1995 by P & R Publishing, *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment*<sup>9</sup> deals with the difficult doctrine of Hell. Robert Peterson is Professor of Systematic Theology at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri and a teaching elder in the Presbyterian Church in America. Here are his reasons for writing this book:

There is a day of even greater unforeseen catastrophe in store for men and women who die without Christ. Little do they imagine the horror that awaits them. Though the church has traditionally taught that the fate of the lost is eternal punishment, fewer and fewer people are willing to think seriously about that dreadful prospect. Can the future of unbelievers really be that bad? Today

a growing number of scholars are answering no . . .

Confusion about the afterlife - is there anything more tragic? What are the competing views about the destiny of the wicked, and how do they measure up to Scripture? As scholars challenge historic teachings on hell, how solid is the biblical evidence for eternal punishment? And what difference should that biblical teaching make in our lives? Those are the concerns of this book.<sup>10</sup>

*Hell on Trial* is 258 pages and includes more than 400 footnotes. It is endorsed by such well-known men as John MacArthur, J. I. Packer, Millard J. Erickson, David Wells, and Leon Morris.<sup>11</sup> It clearly answers the objections of those who disagree with the traditional idea of Hell and it shows from Scripture why this doctrine should be taught by the church today. It is a book that is well worth the attention of every student of Scripture.

### Content.

*Hell on Trial* contains 12 chapters that cover everything from the views against Hell to the doctrine of Hell taught in the Old and New Testaments and the doctrine of Hell taught in church history. The book even has a few chapters devoted to miscellaneous issues related to the doctrine of Hell

such as “What Happens to Babies Who Die?” and “What is the Fate of Those Who Have Never Heard the Gospel?” For the sake of time, here is a summary of the contents of Chapter One and Chapter Four.

Chapter One is entitled “Hell on Trial” and it discusses the various views concerning the doctrine of Hell: life after death is unlikely, universalism, postmortem evangelism, annihilationism, and the orthodox view. The view that life after death is unlikely was taught by Bertrand Russell who believed that the idea of an after-life was created to soothe the fears of the dying. In his own words:

Immortality removes the fear from death. People who believe that when they die they will inherit eternal bliss may be expected to view death without horror . . . I believe that when I die I shall rot, and nothing of my ego will survive.<sup>12</sup>

According to Russell, it is the goal of modern science to dispel myths like Heaven and Hell. Only empirical<sup>13</sup> facts should be believed. Since Heaven and Hell are not empirical, since they cannot be seen or touched or tasted or felt or heard, they should be denied.

Universalism teaches that no one is

going to Hell. But, instead, everyone is going to Heaven. There will be a “universal” salvation where every human being will be saved. John Hick was a proponent of this view. In his own personal testimony, he claimed that his study of philosophy and personal interaction with people from other religions made him reject traditional Christianity and accept the view that everyone will be found acceptable in the sight of Almighty God. Hick writes,

Occasionally attending worship in mosque and synagogue, temple and gurdwara, it was evident that essentially the same kind of thing is taking place in them as in a Christian church - namely, human beings opening their minds to a higher divine Reality, known as personal and good and as demanding righteousness and love between man and man . . . If we see as the heart of Jesus’ teaching the message of the active and sovereign divine love, we shall find incredible and even blasphemous the idea that God plans to inflict perpetual torture upon any of his children.<sup>14</sup>

Postmortem evangelism refers to the view that, after death, everyone will have the opportunity to hear the Gospel and respond to it. People often ask, “How can God send people to Hell who have never heard of Jesus?” Postmortem Evangelism answers that question by saying, “He doesn’t. Those

who never heard of Jesus in this life will get to hear about Him in the next life.”

Clark Pinnock was a major proponent of this view. In support of postmortem evangelism, he says,

The logic behind a postmortem encounter with Christ is simple enough. It rests on the insight that God, since he loves humanity, would not send anyone to hell without first ascertaining what their response would have been to his grace. Since everyone eventually dies and comes face to face with the risen Lord, that would seem to be the obvious time to discover their answer to God’s call.<sup>15</sup>

Annihilationism claims that those who reject Jesus Christ in this life will be completely destroyed or annihilated in the next. They will not suffer endless torment at the hands of an angry God. Instead, they will be totally wiped out. Their souls will be obliterated. John Stott is a proponent of this view of Hell. In his own words, he writes,

The main function of fire is not to cause pain, but to secure destruction, as all the world’s incinerators bear witness. Hence the biblical expression “a consuming fire” and John the Baptist’s picture of the Judge “burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Matt. 3:12, cf. Luke 3:17). The fire itself is termed “eternal” and “unquenchable,” but it would be very odd if what is thrown into it proves

indestructible. Our expectation would be the opposite: it would be consumed forever, not tormented forever.<sup>16</sup>

The orthodox/traditional view of Hell claims that God punishes the wicked for all of eternity in a Lake of Fire. Those who reject Jesus in this life are tormented endlessly under the wrath of God in the next life. On the one hand, they live eternally because they never cease to exist. On the other hand, they die eternally, as they are punished forever for their sins. J. I. Packer is a proponent of this view of Hell. In its defense, he says,

Jesus himself is strong on the horrific consequences of rejecting him: as W.G.T. Shedd said a century ago, “Jesus Christ is the person who is responsible for the doctrine of eternal perdition.” Granted that Jesus’ references to weeping and gnashing of teeth, outer darkness, worm and fire, gehenna, and the great gulf fixed, are imagery, the imagery clearly stands for a terrible retribution.<sup>17</sup>

The rest of *Hell on Trial* describes this orthodox view of Hell in detail by examining what various portions of Scripture and what Christian theologians of the past have said about it. For a quick sampling of this, Chapter Four is entitled, “The Witness of the Redeemer: According to Mark,

Luke, and John” and is a synopsis of Jesus’ statements about Hell in the Gospels of Mark, Luke, and John.

In Mark 1:24; 3:11; 5:7, Jesus has a conversation with some evil spirits who beg Him not to destroy them or torment them. The implication in these verses is that Jesus is the One Who punishes those in Hell. He is the One doing the tormenting. In Mark 9:42-48, Jesus warns His followers not to tempt new believers to sin and to avoid sin themselves because in Hell there is “the unquenchable fire” . . . “where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.” Annihilationism simply does not square with the Bible because, unlike the fires of this earth, Hell contains a fire that is never quenched. It never dies.

Luke 16:19-31 tells the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Here Jesus speaks of a wealthy individual who had everything he wanted in this life but died and went to Hell. The Lord also tells of a poor man who was denied many things in this life but entered Heaven upon his death. While in Hell, the rich man calls out to Abraham to “Send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this



flame.” Luke’s Gospel teaches that Hell is a place of agony.

John 3:16-21 says that “he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” Those who reject Jesus Christ in this life are already under judgment and when they die, that judgment will be poured out on them forever. John 3:36 echoes this when it says, “but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

John 5:28-29 gives more detail about the judgment for those who reject Christ. It describes the resurrection of two types of people. It says,

Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.

Everyone who dies will rise again in a new resurrected body. Some will rise again to life in Heaven. Others will rise again to judgment in Hell.

John 8:21, 24 closes out the verses in John by describing the consequences of

not believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God:

Then He said to them, “I go away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin . . . Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.”

The repetition of the phrase “die in your sin(s)” shows that this is more than just a reference to natural death. It is a reference to the second resurrection mentioned in John 5. Those who do not believe that Jesus is God (vv. 18-19, 58) will die with the weight of their sins on their head. They will die a natural death and be raised to die a supernatural one that will last forever.

### Evaluation of Content.

In regards to content, *Hell on Trial* is well organized and its material flows in a concise, logical fashion. It starts with the views against the traditional teaching on Hell and moves throughout the Bible to the church and finishes with some detailed questions on the subject. It is an excellent treatise in favor of the view that Hell is a place where the wicked will be judged/tormented by God for eternity.

While the writing style of the book is not always engaging, the material definitely is. For example, Peterson quotes from numerous authors to prove his point that the orthodox teaching on Hell has been the view held by the majority of Christians throughout history. Consider the following quotations from the book.

**Tertullian:**

If, therefore, any one shall violently suppose that the destruction of the soul and the flesh in hell amounts to a final annihilation of the two substances, and not to their penal treatment (as if they were consumed, not punished), let him recollect that the fire of hell is eternal - expressly announced as an everlasting penalty; and let him then admit that it is from this circumstance that this never-ending “killing” is more formidable than a merely human murder, which is only temporal.<sup>18</sup>

**Augustine:**

Therefore, what God said through the mouth of his prophet, about the eternal punishment of the damned, will come true; it will most certainly come true that “their worm will never die and their fire will not go out.”<sup>19</sup>

**Thomas Aquinas:**

The magnitude of the punishment matches the magnitude of the sin . . . Now a sin that is against God is infinite; the higher the person against whom it is committed, the graver the

sin - it is more criminal to strike a head of state than a private citizen - and God is of infinite greatness. Therefore an infinite punishment is deserved for a sin committed against him.<sup>20</sup>

**Martin Luther:**

The fiery oven is ignited merely by the unbearable appearance of God and endures eternally. For the Day of Judgment will not last for a moment only but will stand throughout eternity and will thereafter never come to an end. Constantly the damned will be judged, constantly they will suffer pain, and constantly they will be a fiery oven, that is, they will be tortured within by supreme distress and tribulation.<sup>21</sup>

**John Calvin:**

Now, because no description can deal adequately with the gravity of God’s vengeance against the wicked, their torments and tortures are figuratively expressed to us by physical things, that is, by darkness, weeping, and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 8:12; 22:13), unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:12; Mark 9:43; Isa. 66:24), an undying worm gnawing at the heart (Isa. 66:24). By such expression the Holy Spirit certainly intended to confound all our senses with dread.<sup>22</sup>

**Jonathan Edwards:**

The bodies of wicked men as well as their souls will be punished forever . . . This doctrine is indeed awful and dreadful. It is dreadful to think of it, but yet tis what God the eternal God who made us and who has us soul and body in his hands has abundantly declared to us, so that so sure as God is true there will absolutely

be no end to the misery of hell.<sup>23</sup>

It is the overwhelming testimony of church history that the orthodox view of Hell is the standard Christian doctrine. The uncertainty of life after death, universalism, postmortem evangelism, and annihilationism were not the views held by the early church. While they might appeal to our emotions and provide a way out of the terrible thought that God punishes the wicked in eternity, they do not have the support of history. In fact, as an introduction to the book's section on church history, the author quotes from a modern author as saying that,

Until the nineteenth century almost all Christian theologians taught the reality of eternal torment in hell. Here and there, outside the theological mainstream, were some who believed that the wicked would be finally annihilated . . . Even fewer were the advocates of universal salvation, though these few included some major theologians of the early church. Eternal punishment was firmly asserted in official creeds and confessions of the churches. It must have seemed as indispensable a part of universal Christian belief as the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. Since 1800 this situation has entirely changed, and no traditional Christian doctrine has been so widely abandoned as that of eternal punishment.<sup>24</sup>

Not only does Robert Peterson point to church history to confirm his position that Hell is a place of never-ending torment for the wicked, he also shows this from the Bible.

### Biblical Accuracy.

The Biblical Accuracy of *Hell on Trial* is superb. The book provides a helpful bird's eye view of the doctrine of Hell from Genesis to Revelation and it does not distort the normal meaning of Scripture as it does so. A few examples will suffice.

The author points to Isaiah 66:22-24 as an Old Testament passage that teaches on the realities of Hell:

“For just as the new heavens and the new earth which I make will endure before Me,” declares the Lord, “So your offspring and your name will endure.”

“And it shall be from new moon to new moon and from sabbath to sabbath, all mankind will come to bow down before Me,” says the Lord.

“Then they shall go forth and look on the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched; and they shall be an abhorrence to all mankind.”

As He promises the future existence

of Israel, “as the new heavens . . . will endure before Me . . . So your offspring and your name will endure,” the Lord proclaims the fate of those who have broken His law, of those “who have transgressed against Me.” He says “their worm shall not die” and “their fire shall not be quenched.” Peterson explains those expressions in the following way:

To show contempt, a victorious army would leave the bodies of its foes unburied on the battlefield. To be subject to such exposure was considered a disgrace. It denied the deceased a proper burial. Worse, the birds would feast on the remains. Worst of all, what the birds began, the worms would finish . . .

For exposed corpses to be eaten by worms or burned was a disgrace. Here [in Isaiah 66] was the ultimate disgrace. In all other cases the maggots would die when they had finished their foul work (Isa. 14:11), and the fire would go out once its fuel was consumed. But in the prophet's picture of God's judgment of those who rebel, the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched! The punishment and shame of the wicked have no end; their fate is eternal. It is no wonder that “they will be loathsome to all mankind.”<sup>25</sup>

Isaiah, in a poetic expression, claims that those who belong to the Lord will endure forever, while those who do not will be forgotten and disgraced forever. Their punishment will be an

abhorrence. Their worm will not die and their fire will not be quenched.

The author also quotes from Daniel 12:1-2 to describe the future of the wicked.

Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.

Those whose names are written in the Book of Life<sup>26</sup> will rise to everlasting life. But those whose names are not written in the Book of Life will rise to disgrace and everlasting contempt. The Hebrew language does not have a word for “eternal.” The closest word they have is *olam*, which means “everlasting.”<sup>27</sup> That is the word Daniel uses in verse 2 to describe the fate of the wicked. They will be resurrected to endure (*olam*) everlasting scorn or contempt.

One of the most insightful chapters of the book is Chapter Five, entitled “The Witness of the Apostles.” Here,

Peterson takes the reader on a tour through the Apostles' teachings regarding Hell. Here are the passages where John the Apostle mentioned Hell in the Book of Revelation.

Revelation 14:9-11 gives a prophecy of punishment for those who take the mark of the beast. An angel warns the people of earth that those who receive the mark

. . . will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.

Those who take the mark of the beast will drink God's wrath in its fullest strength. God will pour out His anger on their souls. Not only that, but they will be tormented in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. Jesus will be present when people are punished in Hell. The most terrifying thing about Hell is not that God is not there but that He is there. The wicked are tormented in the presence of the Lamb.

Revelation 20:10, 12-15 echoes Daniel 12:1-2 in describing the resurrection

of sinners unto damnation. After the Devil and the False Prophet are thrown into the Lake of Fire, the dead are raised and those who do not have their names written in the Book of Life are judged and thrown into the Lake of Fire. John calls this "the second death." The first death is the separation of the soul from the body. The second death is the reunion of the soul to the resurrected body and the entrance of the sinner into Hell.

As John describes the New Heavens and the New Earth at the close of his book, he gives a reminder to his readers about the fate of those who will not enter this glorious place. In Revelation 21:8 and 22:15, he writes,

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

Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.

Despite what some may teach, everyone is not going to Heaven. Heaven has an entrance fee: the blood of Jesus Christ.<sup>28</sup> And that blood is only applied

to those who repent of their sins and come to Jesus Christ as the Savior of their sins *in this life*.<sup>29</sup> There are no second chances after we die. There are no do-overs. There is no opportunity to change our minds. If you trust in Jesus Christ as the sacrifice for your sins now and give your life over to Him now, you will enter Heaven when you die. If you do not, you will be thrown outside to endure the second death. As Erwin Lutzer writes,

One minute after you slip behind the parted curtain, you will either be enjoying a personal welcome from Christ or catching your first glimpse of gloom as you have never known it. Either way, your future will be irrevocably fixed and eternally unchangeable.<sup>30</sup>

Robert Peterson does an excellent job of drawing this truth out of the Scriptures.

### Consistency.

*Hell on Trial* is a very consistent book. From the first page to the last, it is very clear on the fact that Hell is a real place with a real punishment from a real God that lasts for a real eternity. And Robert Peterson does not mince words or avoid difficulties in saying that. For instance, one question that often plagues people's minds as they consider

this subject is: "What about those who have never heard the Gospel?" "What about people who have never heard of Jesus Christ and His saving work on the cross?" "What about the native off the coast of Africa who does not own a Bible and has never met a Christian missionary?" "Is he going to Hell, too?" "That isn't fair, is it?"

After dealing with these and other questions, and after talking through some of the issues related to pluralism<sup>31</sup> and inclusivism,<sup>32</sup> the author makes the following statement:

According to Jesus and the apostles the message of salvation is exclusive . . . Nevertheless, I bow before God's sovereignty and am willing to entertain an openness for God to work in ways beyond our understanding. Still, I agree with J. I. Packer that "we have no warrant from Scripture to expect that God will act [savingly] in any single case where the Gospel is not yet known." Packer correctly contends that "living by the Bible means assuming that no one will be saved apart from faith in Christ, and acting accordingly."<sup>33</sup>

Even in the midst of the most difficult questions, *Hell on Trial* remains consistent. The Biblical doctrine of Hell is an exclusivist doctrine,<sup>34</sup> not a pluralistic or inclusivist one. God will punish *everyone* who has not come



to Jesus Christ in faith and repentance. That includes those who have heard the Gospel *and* those who have not.

### Scholarship.

The quality of *Hell on Trial's* scholarship has already been shown in the sections listed above. However, Chapter Ten gives us some more insight into the research and study that has gone into this book. Chapter Ten is entitled “The Case for Eternal Punishment” and it covers subjects like “Hell’s Place in the Outworking of God’s Plan” and “Hell’s Master.” One topic of interest is “Hell’s Description,” where Peterson shows the different ways in which Hell is described in Scripture.

Hell is shown to be a place of darkness and separation (Matt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Rev 22:14-15). Hell is a place that contains fire (Matt 13:40-42; 18:8-9; Mk 9:48; Jude 7; Rev 14:10-11; 20:10). Hell is where there is crying and grinding of teeth (Matt 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Lk 13:28). Hell is the location of God’s eternal punishment of the wicked (Matt 25:46; 2 Thess 1:5-9; Jude 7; Rev 14:10-11). Hell is also where death and destruction will occur forever (Matt 10:28; Rev 19:20; 20:14-15).

Hell is a terrible place. It is where a perfectly powerful and holy God pours out His perfect wrath on sinners forever. There will be no relief from their suffering. There will be no end to their misery. And there will be no hope that it will ever stop. The thought of the damnation of sinners is horrible beyond description and should draw every Christian to greater evangelistic efforts and greater compassion towards our fellow man. As Peterson writes,

We have examined the biblical pictures that depict the final destiny of the wicked. Taken together, these images shock our sensibilities. They present a fate involving utter ruin and loss (death and destruction), the eternal wrath of God (punishment), unspeakable sorrow and pain (crying and grinding of teeth), terrible suffering (fire), and rejection by God and exclusion from his blessed presence (darkness and separation).

Believing readers ought to thank God for sparing them such a horrendous fate. They should pray that he would use them to turn others from the way that leads to hell. Unbelieving readers ought to run to the open arms of Jesus, the Savior of the world, who loves sinners and died to deliver them from the coming wrath.<sup>35</sup>

### CONCLUSION

For Christians, the study of Hell demands a response.<sup>36</sup> It should cause

us to pray and weep for the lost people that we know. It should compel us to tell them of the fate that awaits them after death and of the salvation that has been provided by a loving God to keep them from that fate. Jesus Christ came to save sinners from Hell.<sup>37</sup> He did not come only to give us an example to live by. He did not come only to teach us a “higher way.” Jesus came to rescue those who could not rescue themselves.<sup>38</sup>

For non-Christians, the study of Hell demands a response as well. God is holy.<sup>39</sup> He does not take disobedience to His commands lightly. Said another way, every sin will be punished.<sup>40</sup> It will either be punished on the cross of Jesus Christ or it will be punished by the sinner himself in Hell.<sup>41</sup> If you are not a Christian, there is nothing to stand between you and God’s wrath in eternity.<sup>42</sup> And, when you die, you will suffer that wrath forever.

But there is hope. If you want to avoid this terrible place and have Jesus pay for your sins on His cross, you must believe that you are wicked and that God is holy.<sup>43</sup> You must accept the fact that you have broken God’s laws and that you continue to break them daily.<sup>44</sup> You must realize that Jesus is

the Son of God Who kept all of God’s commands<sup>45</sup> and that He allowed Himself to be punished to pay for the sins of those who would believe in Him.<sup>46</sup> And you must give your life to Him.<sup>47</sup> He will not be your Savior if He is not your Lord. You must turn from your wickedness and turn to Him to live as He has commanded.

If you are willing to do all of this, you need not fear Hell. Hell is not for those who honor God with their lives on this earth. Hell is not for those whose sins have already been punished on the cross. While Hell should make Christians weep with sorrow, it should also make them weep for joy. For, while many are going there, they are not. They rest safely in the arms of Jesus. As Jonathan Edwards writes,

What great encouragement it is . . . that there is a Savior provided . . . For if you should suffer [the punishment of your sins], you would never pay the whole of the debt. Those who are sent to hell never will have paid the whole of the debt that they owe to God, [which is why they are punished eternally] . . .

Justice therefore never can be actually satisfied in your damnation, but it is actually satisfied in Christ. Therefore, He is accepted of the Father, and all who believe are accepted and justified in Him. Therefore, believe in Him, come

to Him, commit your souls to Him to be saved by Him. In Him, you shall be safe from the torments of hell. Nor is that all: but through Him, you shall inherit inconceivable blessedness and glory that will be of equal duration with the torments of hell. For as at the Last Day the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, so shall the righteous, or those who trust in Christ, go into life eternal.<sup>48</sup>

## Doctrinal Scale. 5.

### End Notes

- 1 “The Hipper-Than-Thou Pastor,” TIME Magazine, 12/6/07. [www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1692051,00.html#ixzz1IJDHUWio](http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1692051,00.html#ixzz1IJDHUWio) as of 4/2/11.
- 2 Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).
- 3 Rob Bell, *Sex God: Exploring the Endless Connections between Sexuality and Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).
- 4 Rob Bell & Don Golden, *Jesus Wants to Save Christmas: A Manifesto for the Church in Exile* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).
- 5 Rob Bell, *Love Wins: Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011).
- 6 [http://www.harpercollins.com/books/Love-Wins-Rob-Bell?isbn=9780062049643&HCHP=TB\\_Love+Wins](http://www.harpercollins.com/books/Love-Wins-Rob-Bell?isbn=9780062049643&HCHP=TB_Love+Wins) as of 4/3/11.
- 7 *Love Wins*, Back Cover.
- 8 This quotation is borrowed from [www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2011/03/15/msnbc-martin-bashirs-interview-with-rob-bell/](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2011/03/15/msnbc-martin-bashirs-interview-with-rob-bell/) as of 4/1/11.

- 9 Robert A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment* (Philipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 1995).
- 10 *Ibid.*, 3.
- 11 *Ibid.*, Back Cover.
- 12 Quoted in *Hell on Trial*, 3.
- 13 Webster’s New Explorer Dictionary (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1999) 171. Empirical means “based on observation; subject to verification by observation or experiment.”
- 14 Quoted in *Hell on Trial*, 6-7.
- 15 Quoted in *Hell on Trial*, 10.
- 16 Quoted in *Hell on Trial*, 12.
- 17 Quoted in *Hell on Trial*, 16.
- 18 Quoted in *Hell on Trial*, 99.
- 19 Quoted in *hell on Trial*, 105.
- 20 Quoted in *Hell on Trial*, 109.
- 21 Quoted in *Hell on Trial*, 110.
- 22 Quoted in *Hell on Trial*, 112.
- 23 Quoted in *Hell on Trial*, 122-123.
- 24 Richard Bauckham, quoted in *Hell on Trial*, 97.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 31-32.
- 26 The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Volume One, ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982) 534. *The Book of Life*

refers to the “book” where God has written down the names of those who will enter Heaven. “The ancient practice of keeping various kinds of records has an analogy in the concept of heavenly record books . . . All NT uses of ‘book of life’, except for the mention of it in Phil. 4:3, are found in Revelation, where it refers to the enrollment for eternal life (21:27), sometimes with the implication of predestination (13:8; 17:8), once with an assurance against erasure (3:5). It is related to, but not the same as, the books of records on which judgment is based (20:12, 15).”

- 27 *Ibid.*, Volume Two, 162-163.
- 28 Eph 2:13; Heb 10:19; 1 Pet 1:2; Rev 1:5.
- 29 Rom 14:9-12; Heb 9:27.
- 30 *One Minute After You Die: A Preview of Your Final Destination* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1997) 9.
- 31 <http://www.theopedia.com/Pluralism> as of 4/3/11. “Pluralism sees all religions as legitimate and valid when viewed from within their own cultural background and tradition.”
- 32 <http://www.theopedia.com/Inclusivism> as of 4/3/11. “Inclusivism posits that even though the work of Christ is the only means of salvation, it does not follow that explicit knowledge of Christ is necessary in order for one to be saved. In contrast to pluralism, inclusivism agrees with exclusivism in affirming the particularity of salvation in Jesus Christ. But unlike exclusivism, inclusivism holds



- that an implicit faith response to general revelation can be salvific. God expects from man a response proportional to the light given. Saving faith is not characterized so much by its cognitive content as it is by its reverent quality.”
- 33 Hell on Trial, 228, 234.
- 34 <http://www.theopedia.com/Exclusivism> as of 4/3/11.  
“Exclusivism (in Christianity) refers to the fact that orthodox Christian doctrine maintains only faith in the Jesus Christ of the Bible leads to salvation or heaven. Christianity is exclusive in that its teachings indicate that the faith of other sects or religions will not lead to eternal life; or in other words, that Jesus Christ is the only true way to God. This is contrary to today’s pluralistic environment, which would suggest that, as in the old saying ‘all roads lead to Rome,’ so all faiths indeed lead to God.”
- 35 Hell on Trial, 195.
- 36 For more information about Hell, please see our FAQ, “What is Hell Like” and “Why Should We Talk about Hell.”
- 37 Lk 19:9-10.
- 38 In Matthew 9:12-13, Jesus said, “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick . . . for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”
- 39 Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999) 1243. God’s holiness refers to “The doctrine that God is separated from sin and devoted to seeking his own honor.”
- 40 Matt 12:36.
- 41 James 2:10-11 says, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. For He who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘Do not commit murder.’ Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.” For more information about the holiness of God and how it relates to salvation, please see our FAQ, “What is the Gospel.”
- 42 Such a thought is terrifying. For example, Revelation 6:16 says that those who live through the tribulation would rather be crushed under falling rocks than endure God’s wrath. “And they said to the mountains and to the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.’”
- 43 Jn 3:16, 36.
- 44 Rom 3:9-18.
- 45 Heb 4:15.
- 46 2 Cor 5:21.
- 47 Lk 13:3; 2 Cor 7:10.
- 48 “Exhortations to Escape Hell” in Free Grace Broadcaster (Pensacola, Flo.: Chapel Library, Spring, 2010) 41.