

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

What in Hell Conflicts with God?

The Divine Promulgation View of Hell Confirms the Reality of Hell Does Not Make God a
Moral Monster

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Abstract

WHAT IN HELL CONFLICTS WITH GOD? The Divine Promulgation View of Hell Confirms the Reality of Hell Does Not Make God a Moral Monster
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The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that God is not morally at fault for humans consigned to eternal punishment in hell. In this work, I contribute to the ongoing conversation of hell in the following ways: (1) I provide an exposition on the words translated as hell in the Bible; (2) I uncover the progressive nature of the doctrine of hell as sin increases and God advances His plan of salvation to rescue humans from such an eternal fate; (3) I argue that Christianity and the biblical doctrine of hell are bound principally as Christ's work on the cross ultimately saves humans from being consigned to *hell*; (4) I demonstrate that God assists humanity to avoid *hell* by promulgating necessary information on hellish doctrine in various ways such as the creation, Scriptures, general and special revelation, Jesus, Holy Spirit and ministers of the gospel. The Divine Promulgation View of Hell will be introduced and elucidated in this thesis as a fresh perspective in defense of God's attributes in the face of hellish doctrine.

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Dominus Vobiscum

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**To all my brothers and sisters in Christ, there is no need to be wary about your lot, for, in
Christ, hell is no longer a threat.**

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Statement of Problem

I am persuaded that the phrase ‘child abuse’ is no exaggeration when used to describe what teachers and priests are doing to children whom they encourage to believe in something like the punishment of unshriven mortal sins in an eternal hell.¹

“And whenever people claim that one group is in, saved, accepted by God, forgiven, enlightened, redeemed—and everybody else isn’t—why is it that those who make this claim are almost always part of the group that’s “in”?”²

These two quotes, from an atheist and a Christian, illustrate that the problem of hell causes significant disagreement of the doctrine on both sides of the spectrum. Hell is considered the most controversial aspect of the problem of evil; it is thought to be the most grotesque of gratuitous evils. The doctrine of hell presents a troublesome problem for believers as they grapple with marrying a loving God to a place of everlasting torment. If God is omnipotent, He has the power to eliminate hell. If God is omniscient, He has the knowledge to eliminate hell. If God is all-loving, He would want to eliminate hell and not consign any of His created beings to such a place. Many philosophical theologians reject the teaching of eternal punishment, believing that it is inconsistent with a good God. Philosophical theologian, J. Hick, discards hellish doctrine as ‘sinful imagination.’

This is a morally repugnant set of ideas; and a theology cannot go unchallenged when it is repugnant to the moral sense that has been formed by the religious realities upon which this theology itself professes to be based. It is without biblical warrant, and can be connected with the teaching of our Lord only by long speculative and theoretical extensions and constructions. Not only are these theoretical constructions the work of the human mind, rather than any kind of divinely revealed truths, but they are not among the

¹ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Trade & Reference Publishers, 2006), 358.

² Rob Bell, *Love Wins: A Book about Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 3, Kindle.

more beautiful or morally elevated creations of human speculation. There is no reason why they should not be subjected to uninhibited Christian scrutiny; and in the light of this they may well have to be rejected as products of a sinful imagination.³

The doctrine of hell is quite simply immoral to many who believe that it is enormously hopeless, especially considering there is so much suffering in the world already; *hell* is overkill.

Ordinary pain and evil, it may be thought, can be accounted for if events in the future “make up for” what leads to them, but the evil of hell leads nowhere; at no point in the future will something of value make up for the evil of hell or will some reward be granted to those who endure the suffering of hell. Hell is apparently paradigmatic as an example of truly pointless, gratuitous evil. Thus arises the problem of hell.⁴

A satisfactory response to the problem of hell must be one that maintains God as the highest moral agent. This response must seek to explain what God has communicated about *hell*, His intentions for *hell*, and the actions He has taken to prevent humans from going to such a place. This thesis will introduce the Divine Promulgation View of Hell to defend the moral nature of God. This view will focus on God’s communication methods to humanity and His actions to prevent humans from an eternity in hell. God’s words are falling on deaf ears in this secular society. It is critical to bring attention to what He has communicated about the serious subject of hell to the forefront of human thought. The attributes this work will concentrate on are God’s love, sovereignty, and mercy, as this view will demonstrate that God’s communication is primarily issued from these characteristics. This work will further argue that God is not morally responsible for some humans being in hell. Employing the Divine Promulgation View of Hell provides adequate evidence that God has promulgated necessary information, in various ways, to prevent humans from an eternity in hell; therefore, He is not a moral monster. The following *Modus Ponens* statement can express the Divine Promulgation View of Hell:

³ J. Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010), 92.

⁴ Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 4.

1. If God has employed various methods of communicating the dreadful reality of hell to humans, including His plan of salvation to help them avoid such a fate, then God is not an immoral persecutor, and His attributes remain untarnished.
2. God has employed various methods of communicating the dreadful reality of hell to humans, including His plan of salvation to help them avoid such a fate.
3. Therefore, God is not an immoral persecutor, and His attributes remain untarnished.

Statement of Purpose

This thesis is an apologetic primarily for believers to understand that God should not be held morally accountable for humans ending in hell due to the extreme actions He has taken and the information He promulgated. God's perfect nature remains intact. This thesis will establish how God promulgated necessary information to humans to avoid hell. God communicated to humanity in various forms ensuring to get His salvific message through one way or another. This treatise will show that God's communication is issued from His love, sovereignty, and mercy. Because God loves humanity, He speaks to them. Because God is sovereign, His truths are declared and will stand forever as He promulgates them in various forms. Because God is merciful, He warns humanity of coming destruction, giving them additional opportunities for repentance. It is not God's will for any human to endure eternal damnation (2 Pet 3:9), but that all humans would have everlasting life in harmony with Him. This thesis will demonstrate that God is not morally responsible for humans being in hell because He has provided a means to escape this awful place, and He communicated precisely how. All who decide to receive Christ and desire to live an everlasting life with God will do so. All who decide to reject Christ and live an everlasting life separate from God will have the free will to do so.

Statement of Importance of the Problem

Believing that God is a moral monster or, even worse, a cosmic child abuser can have a negative impact on human lives. It is difficult to fathom how God can be all-powerful and all-good yet consign some people to hellfire. Misunderstanding the nature of God may cause many to reject Christ and the salvation He offers, subjecting themselves to an eternity in hell. Also, not understanding God's attributes may severely impact one's decision-making ability causing one to mistreat others. A wrong view of God can lead to a life filled with fear, torment, and disdain towards God and loved ones. This work seeks to correct unhealthy views of God's characteristics and what He has spoken about *hell*. This work will also help Christians and non-Christians alike understand that God has not abandoned anyone to hell. He has promulgated, in various forms, the necessary information that humans need to avoid hell. Also, God went beyond that by allowing His Son to take on humanity's sins so that they would be saved from eternal punishment. Without a correct understanding of what God has done to help humanity escape hell, many will have a warped view of Him and not reverence Him the way He should be. It is up to humans to receive Jesus and accept the salvation He offers to all. However, those who do not accept Jesus' payment for their sins would then be responsible for paying for their own sins.

All sin is directly against God as it violates His holy and perfect nature. David understood the adulterous sin he had committed with Bathsheba did not stop with the two of them; it was an explicit offense against the eternal God. David confessed this sentiment as He prayed: "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge" (Ps 51:4). David also acknowledged that God would be right to condemn him for his sinful actions. Since sin is against the eternal and infinite God, the only fitting punishment for those who continue to reject God would be eternal punishment in hell. Not

accepting the salvation God has offered through Jesus Christ and the blood He shed on Calvary has dire and eternal consequences.

Statement of Position on the Problem

This research is based on the presupposition that the Word of God triumphs all other commentaries, books, and articles that are written by humans. When describing the nature of God, it makes sense to rely on the information He has promulgated about Himself. God has provided a wealth of information for this defense regarding hell to support this thesis's conclusion; God will speak for Himself. The position this thesis seeks to establish is that God is not morally responsible for some humans ending in eternal torment. To support this moral apologetic, proper exegesis and word studies will be employed to expound on God's nature and the information He has provided about hell in the Scriptures, in hopes of bringing others to God through Christ and clearing up misconceptions about the doctrine of hell and God's character.

Limitations/Delimitations

The selection of methodology poses some natural drawbacks to the scope of the present work. This thesis will not include a study or sampling of various religions and how they understand the doctrine of Hell concerning God's attributes. This research will be significantly based on the primary source of biblical Scriptures and scholarly sources of existing works by various authors on *hell* and God's nature. The scholarly sources used in this thesis will come

from both sides of the spectrum to develop a moral apologetic in defense of God's nature concerning the biblical doctrine of hell.

While philosophical theologians prefer to see a more analytical and systematic approach to highly debated central concepts of religion, this approach will be more of progressive biblical research. “Systematic theology always addresses a particular situation and attempts to catalyze an alternative situation that more closely approximates the reign of God in human affairs. In this sense systematic theology is a form of praxis, the praxis of meaning.”⁵ This biblical research approach will examine the progressive teaching of hell's doctrine and how it comes to full completion. The work of contemporary scholarly theologians will be applied to ensure that the most up-to-date information is presented.

⁵ Robert M. Doran, “Lonergan and Balthasar: Methodological Considerations,” *Theological Studies* 58, no. 1 (1997): 61-84.

CHAPTER TWO

Methodological Considerations

Although the study of God's character is not an exact science, it involves both a systematic and biblical approach. Systematic theology provides a rational and coherent explanation of central biblical doctrines while addressing truths about God. Theological discourse is comprised of various strategies and unique standpoints that contribute to the study of religion. Religious studies, especially on one of the most central and controversial creeds of the Bible, the doctrine of hell, requires complexity in thinking.

We have seen that complexity thinking provides an insightful way to describe essential characteristics of religious experience with respect to the individual, society, and the changes of religion over time. Sacred writings involve a complex web of interactive, emergent systems—the religious communities who use and produce sacred writings, sacred writings as incipient (source) texts, sacred writings as subsequent (target) texts, and often subsequent sacred writings as both emergent sacred texts and incipient texts for further translation.⁶

The tools available for theological studies should be used with extreme care and great attention to detail. The choice of methodology will largely impact the outcome of the analysis. While current work on the subject of hell by philosophical theologians has principally focused on the varying perspectives, this work will focus on God's promulgated actions that may have been overlooked or not understood.

The approach of this thesis is chiefly biblical research that shows the progressive development of hell's doctrine throughout the Bible. This work will trace the advancement of this central Christian doctrine from creation, prophets, Jesus, the Epistles through to the end times in Revelation.

⁶ Kobus Marais and Reine Meylaerts, *Complexity Thinking in Translation Studies: Methodological Considerations* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 202.

The tools used in this work were specifically chosen to ensure that conclusions are without error and biblical interpretations are correct. The Bible is the primary source used in this work; it is critical to rely heavily on Scripture when dealing with hellish doctrine. Parallel Bibles assist in viewing common translations for theological studies and are instrumental on the topic of ‘hell.’ Hellish doctrinal studies require a deep dive into authorial intent and often require word studies. This work will employ word studies and the use of Concordances for Hebrew and Greek translations and allows for cross-references. The primary tools used for the word exposition are Strong’s Concordance and Bauer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature.

Exegesis of Scripture is another critical method used in this treatise to ensure correct understandability while also comparing deductions to other scholarly resources. Scripture is the primary tool used during exegesis and comparison of other scholarly works on the subject.

Patristic studies have extensively contributed to the various views of *hell* within this thesis. The fecundity of the work throughout history by the church fathers on the doctrine of hell continues to fuel current discussions. “They point us to a “mere Christianity” that defines the very essence of the Christian faith. In other words, the church fathers have collectively blazed a theological trail for us.”⁷ The views of hell addressed in this thesis: traditional, annihilationism, conditionalism, and universalism, all derived from the far-reaching work of the church fathers such as Augustine, Tertullian, and Origen, to name a few.

The chosen methodology aims to serve as an apologetic moral defense of God's nature concerning the doctrine of hell. An essential element of this study is how the word *hell* has been

⁷ Bryan M. Liftin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers: An Evangelical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 17.

mistranslated. Another significant component of this methodology is the interpretation and clarification of texts that contribute to God's moral defense. By using these theological systems and developing a fresh contribution in support of God's morals on the topic of *hell*, I will test beliefs that reject this central doctrine.

For this endeavor, analyzing the nature of hell's degrees, geography, and duration would be out of the scope of inquiry. While some theologians have emphasized such characteristics, it is inadequate as a moral defense for God's nature. The issuant view of hell is more closely related to this study and has been mentioned as such. While I will not try to prove or disprove the issuantist view, the Divine Promulgation View of Hell's new contribution in this treatise endorses that hell is issued from God's love.

Providing a moral defense for God as it relates to *hell* is not without risks. Contemporary scholars are systematically undertaking hard doctrines, such as *hell*, and challenging them as a mere chimera. Because biblical texts are open to interpretation and other researcher's perspectives are filled with presuppositions and biases, striving for objectivity in defense of difficult doctrines is burdening, to say the least.

Research Methods

This work will not present descriptive research but literary. Researching authors who have an extensive background in the doctrine of hell and theological studies will be used as primary sources in this work. Opinions will not support this work, but well documented and researched written sources. This treatise will entail a descriptive study of existing data and subsequent analysis on the problem of hell and various solutions. The sources used in this thesis

will be a compilation of philosophers, theologians, and skeptics on this topic in order to develop a sound apologetic. It will further consist of scholarly books, websites, and articles that pertain to the topic of hell. No tests or questionnaires will be included in this work, only the selected scholarly sources.

Data Collection Methods

Searching for keywords related to hell provides for pointed results. Words like *eternal* punishment, hell, annihilationism, universalism, and damnation will result in resources that provide a wealth of information on hell's doctrine. In the search for the highest quality sources, periodical indices and online databases were heavily utilized. Attention to detail must be given to the complex keyword searches and the nature of authors utilized. "Searching is admittedly something of an art; it is very easy to miss references, or to summon up too many or too few. Selecting keywords involves a great deal of imagination, and searches will generally require several different combinations of keywords to cover the range and then narrow down the selection to an inspectable number."⁸ Becoming acquainted with journal articles, scholarly online databases, full textbooks online, websites, and online card catalogs is mandatory to produce quality work.

⁸ Roger Sapsford, and Victor Jupp, eds, *Data Collection and Analysis* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006), 126.

Data Analysis

Careful consideration is given when analyzing the sources that resulted from the search efforts. A subject such as hell is highly complex, and the unfitting sources could confuse the authorial intent. “With the exception of highly structured data which are to be analyzed in a prespecified way, the process of ‘preparing’ data always involves exploration of their characteristics and structure. This is the stage at which the researcher ‘tunes into’ the meaning and messages in his or her data and builds up an appreciation of the nuances and structure and the possibilities for analysis.”⁹

Summary of Present Work

This thesis will provide an exposition of the biblical words translated as hell. This chapter will take a close look at the terminology in both the Old and New Testaments. The word study will review ‘Sheol,’ ‘Hades,’ ‘Gehenna,’ and the Lake of Fire to provide clarity around the progressive nature of this intricate doctrine. This chapter will also provide an exegesis of Scripture spoken by Jesus that includes the translated word ‘hell,’ and it will be contextualized and analyzed for correct understanding.

Words are like pieces of a puzzle. They fit together to form a story or a paragraph in a letter (i.e., the big picture). Until you know the meaning of certain words, you will not be able to grasp the meaning of the whole passage. Not knowing the meaning of certain words in a passage of Scripture can be compared to the frustrating discovery that you don’t have all the pieces to your puzzle. Like individual pieces of a puzzle, words bring the larger picture to life. Words are worth studying!¹⁰

⁹ Roger Sapsford, and Victor Jupp, eds, *Data Collection and Analysis*, 154.

¹⁰ J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word : a Hands-on Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible* Third edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 163.

Chapter four will highlight various views of the doctrine of hell. The significant views that will be given attention are Traditional, annihilationism/conditionalism, universalism, issuantism, and the Divine Promulgation View of Hell. Each of these views has substantially contributed to the doctrine of hell. The Divine Promulgation View of Hell is a new view introduced to contribute significantly to the overall conversation. This chapter is necessary to provide an understanding of the various views of hell that are circulating. The traditional view of hell is what has been believed by the majority of Christians for years. Conditionalism is the belief that only the saved will inherit eternal life, and the unsaved will perish. Conditionalists believe that humans have been mortal since the fall of man, and the only chance of them achieving eternal life would be for God to grant it to them. Annihilationism is the thought that unbelievers will not suffer in Hell for eternity but will be “cut off,” annihilated, or utterly destroyed to no longer exist after receiving judgment. Annihilationists argue that the word eternity used in the Bible does not mean forever as in eternal destruction. Instead, they believe this meaning to be once destroyed; the person stays destroyed forever. The view of universalism is the thought that everyone will be saved and not have to endure hell at all. Universalists believe that all humans will end up in heaven, and it does not support eternal torment in hell despite what the Bible has to say. It is necessary to understand the different views of Hell to comprehend how they line up biblically.

Chapter five of this work will discuss three attributes of God: love, mercy, and sovereignty. These specific attributes will be discussed in terms of the reality of *hell*. God’s love, sovereignty, and mercy will be examined in depth to show that God has gone to great lengths to save humanity from eternal punishment. It is imperative to understand God’s attributes as they directly impact how humans behave, make decisions, and treat others while on this earth. Once

achieving a clearer understanding of God's primary attributes related to the Divine Promulgation View of Hell, it will become clear that God's morals are not at risk. A clear understanding of the attributes that drive God to communicate truths about Himself and *hell* proves He is not a moral monster when it comes to the doctrine of hell.

Chapter six is the crux of this work, and it will introduce the newly contributed view of *hell* coined The Divine Promulgation View of Hell. This view will show that God communicates to humans in multiple ways to help them avoid eternal punishment in Hell because of His moral character. God speaks, and His Word will never return empty. God offers a way to escape the grips of *hell*, and He has not been silent about it. God's communication is issued from His love, sovereignty, and mercy. The Divine Promulgation View of Hell will prove that God, as a communicator, speaks to humans, and this communication continues even today. God did not conceal any information regarding *hell* in His word. He wants His children to understand exactly what He has to say about hellish doctrine so they can avoid it.

Chapter seven delves into the various ways God employs to communicate to humanity. God has spoken to His image-bearing creation throughout history. This work will show that God has spoken through creation, Scriptures, namely the Old Testament prophets, Jesus, and the Epistles. Through revelation, God has also spoken both in general and divine ways to help get His salvific message across to humanity. This chapter will bring to the forefront how important communication is to God and how He has not left humanity hopeless and in the dangers of *hell*.

Chapter eight will allow the new Divine Promulgation View of Hell to address some of the significant objections to the doctrine of hell. This chapter is critical to help both believers and non-believers assess and reassess their understanding of God and a loving, sovereign, and merciful Father. Addressing these objections about God's attributes will show that God is not a

moral monster. Responding to objections in light of who God is will put all accusations against His existence and moral code to rest. This chapter is essential because many are afraid to ask questions on *hell*, and offering responses will help those who are conflicted about God gain peace and fall in love with Him even more. This chapter is pertinent to helping the reader understand the seriousness of sin and how it separates humans from God. It will also help the reader understand that God provided a way to escape the penalty of sin, death. This section is critical to God's apologetic moral defense because it brings home the truths God has spoken and the actions He has taken to protect humans from eternal devastation. This chapter demonstrates that God is moral and is the standard of objective morality, and the doctrine of *hell* does not taint that in any way.

The conclusion of this treatise will do more than summarize the thesis. It will briefly summarize each chapter's contents in a way that will help the reader see the full picture and idea of this thesis. This final summation will provide that this paper intends to bring believers closer to God and His son Jesus Christ through His precious Holy Spirit. Hopefully, the reader will gain a higher understanding of who God is and release any fear or unhealthy presuppositions of *hell* that may have once gotten in the way of having a relationship with Christ. This chapter will explain that believers should not be confused about reconciling *hell* with God's loving nature. God has taken actions to keep His children from a disastrous fate. This final chapter will prove that God's nature is intact and is in no way damaged by the doctrine of hell. The doctrine of hell should not make believers abandon God; it should make them avoid *hell*.

CHAPTER THREE

Exposition of Biblical Words Translated as Hell

“For estrangement and turning away from God are more unbearable than the punishments expected in hell, and more oppressive to the one suffering than the deprivation of light is to the eye, even if no pain is added to it, or than the deprivation of life is to a living creature.” (Basil the Great, d. AD 379)¹¹

God has demonstrated from the Old to the New Testament His progressive plan to bring all things to final fulfillment; this includes the doctrine of ‘hell,’ also known as eternal punishment. God’s strategy to carry out His plan through Christ over time, to final completion, is a result of the ruling sovereignty, compassionate mercy, and love He embodies. These characteristics will be discussed and illuminated in greater detail in chapter five of this treatise. In the New Testament, Jesus, who was crucial to God’s plan, explained that He came to fulfill the Old Testament’s laws and doctrines taught by the prophets and to ensure they were all accomplished (Matt 5:17-18). Christ made it unmistakable that He did not come to abolish the Old Testament laws but to build upon them and establish the New Testament execution of them. While *hell* or eternal punishment may not have been emphasized in the Old Testament as it was in the New Testament by Jesus, this teaching is in no way a new ideal.

It is thought by many that the doctrine of *hell* is absent from the Old Testament and that it is a New Testament thought, but that is not the case. Much of this confusion results from the word *hell* being mistranslated and used interchangeably with words like *Sheol*, *Hades*, *Tartarus*, and *Gehenna*, which have different meanings. “Since these four terms do not all speak of the same place or concept, the use of the same English word to render all of them was unfortunate,

¹¹ Father Ted, “Patristic Images of Hell,” *Fraternized*, last modified August 7, 2009, accessed January 8, 2021, <https://frted.wordpress.com/2009/08/07/patristic-images-of-hell/>.

and has led to much confusion and inconsistency in the way we have come to understand and speak about “hell.”¹² A correct word study, including defining these words in Hebrew and Greek, will allow for an improved and right understanding of each used in Scripture.

Old Testament Sheol

Sheol, according to Strong’s Hebrew concordance, is defined as the Underworld, considered a place where people descend after death. *Sheol* used in the Old Testament is referring to either the grave or the pit. “Whenever the word “hell” occurs in the Old Testament, it is always translating the Hebrew word Sheol. Occasionally, this word is also translated “the grave” or “Sheol” refers to the place where all the dead— both the righteous and the unrighteous— go at the end of this life. Though the KJV frequently translated Sheol as “hell,” there is no exact English equivalent.”¹³ Once a human passed away from this earth, their destination was *Sheol*, considered to be located in the lower parts of the earth.

Sheol is a place of gloom and decay, the abode of the dead. In Job 11:8, Proverbs 15:24, and Ezekiel 31:15–18 it is located in the depths or bowels of the earth. Most of the biblical images suggest that Sheol was thought of as a place with identifiable structure and geography. Five times the Hebrew Bible mentions the gates of Sheol that are secured by posted guards, and three times it mentions bars, ropes, and snares that prevent escape.¹⁴

The book of Job describes *Sheol* as a place of darkness (Job 17:13); Solomon describes the realm of the dead as a place where there is no love, hate, jealousy, work, planning, or learning (Eccl 9:6-10). The author of Psalm 6:5 gives the bleakest description stating that there is no praise of God among the dead. According to the Old Testament, nobody could escape *Sheol*

¹² Steve Gregg, *All You Want to Know about Hell: Three Christian Views of God’s Final Solution to the Problem of Sin* (Nashville: Thomas Incorporated 2013), 71.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ J. Harold Ellens, *Heaven, Hell, and the Afterlife: Eternity in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger), 3.

and would endure its darkness and silence in a state of oblivion. “In the Old Testament, the underworld is “the pit,” *Sheol* in Hebrew. It is not a place of punishment, but simply the final destination of all souls, good and bad, who after their death continue to exist in a kind of comatose half-life.”¹⁵

Tartarus

Tartarus is mentioned one time in the New Testament. According to Strong’s, it is a subterranean place of darkness, the most bottomless abyss of *Hades*, meaning to incarcerate in eternal torment or cast down to *hell*. *Tartarus* is considered a section of *Hades* that is deeper and separate from where humans abide in the afterlife. “Tartarus, thought of by the Greeks as a subterranean place lower than Hades where divine punishment was meted out, and so regarded in Israelite apocalyptic as well: Job 41:24; En 20:2; Philo, Exs. 152; Jos. C. Ap. 2, 240; SibOr 2, 302; 4, 186) hold captive in Tartarus 2 Pt 2:4.”¹⁶

Different from *Sheol* and *Hades*, which were both underworlds for the righteous and unrighteousness dead, *Tartarus* is considered a torturous holding place for demons until the judgment.

In the New Testament, we are told nothing about Tartarus, except that it is the temporary abode of the fallen angels, where they remain chained while they await their final judgment. There is nowhere any suggestion of humans going there. Thus, Tartarus is not really what we think of as “hell” either. Even for the fallen angels it is not the final place of judgment, nor are we given any reason to believe that any, other than angels, will ever be there.¹⁷

¹⁵ Isabel Moreira and Margaret Toscano, *Hell and its Afterlife: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (London: Routledge 2016), 121.

¹⁶ Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 991.

¹⁷ Steve Gregg, *All You Want to Know about Hell*, 72.

In the Bible, the Apostle Peter is linking false teachers to those fallen angels that apostatized and rebelled against God. He is suggesting they deserve a similar fate as the demons in *Tartarus*: “For if God didn't spare angels when they sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus, and committed them to pits of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and didn't spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah with seven others, a preacher of righteousness, when he brought a flood on the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly;” (2 Peter 2:4-6, WEB). Like *Sheol* and *Hades*, *Tartarus* is not the final place of eternal damnation; it is a place where fallen angels, demons, are reserved until judged by the saints (1 Cor 6:3).

Hades

According to Strong's, the Greek word *Hades*, like *Sheol*, is defined as a place where departed souls abide. *Hades* is often incorrectly thought to be associated with the Lake of Fire; however, that interpretation is not valid given what Rev 20:14 says: “Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.” So they cannot be one in the same. “Greek usage of the term Hades exactly parallels the Hebrew Bible's use of the term Sheol. As with Sheol the Greek mythology of the afterlife referred to Hades as a place, the House of Hades, and as the name of the god, Hades, who was the manager of the Underworld.”¹⁸ Similar to *Sheol* in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, *Hades* is the Underworld that does not differentiate between the righteous and unrighteous; all who die go there. Since both *Sheol* and *Hades* are resting places for both the righteous and unrighteous dead, it makes sense that

¹⁸ J. Harold Ellens, *Heaven, Hell, and the Afterlife: Eternity in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger), 4.

Jesus comforted the mourners in Luke 8 by telling them not to weep for Jairus' daughter, who was only asleep. Jesus knew all about the place where all who departed an earthly existence rested in a comatose state of oblivion, and He was the only One who could call someone from that Underworld back to the living.

Exegesis of Matthew 16:16-18 The Gates of Hell

A passage of Scripture often misunderstood due to the confusion of the translated term *hell* is when Peter made his impressive confession of Christ: “Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of *Hades* will not overcome it” (Matt 16:16-18, NIV).¹⁹ Peter made this great proclamation of faith after Jesus asked His disciples a crucial question in verse 13: “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?”

“Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God”

The question Jesus asked was posed to all of the disciples. The initial responses given by the other disciples were John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets (Matt 16:15). Jesus then presented the question directly to Peter, and he replied, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16). While the other disciples may not have been ready to admit that Jesus was the Messiah, Peter, without hesitation, declared boldly his belief that Jesus was the promised

¹⁹ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *New International Version*.

Christ. Peter acknowledges not only the office of Jesus Christ but also that He is the Son of Man predicted by Daniel the prophet.

“Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.”

Jesus’ response clearly shows his joy over what Peter has declared about Him. Finally, a disciple that was willing to boldly proclaim who Jesus was with unshaken faith and by disclosure from God the Father. Jesus understood that Peter could not have known His true nature with his natural instincts or human faculties; this was direct promulgation from God into Peter’s heart. No mortal being had taught Peter that Jesus was the Christ, it was revealed to him, and his eyes were opened at the very moment Jesus asked him the question.

“And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church,”

When Simon first met Jesus, He changed his name to Peter, which means rock. Jesus changed his name to match the identity that He saw in him because He knew that Peter would be a significant part of God’s plan and leader of the disciples. The confession that Peter made about Jesus, to believe that Jesus is the Christ that came to propitiate for the sins of humanity, is the essence of the Christian faith. Jesus used the word church, “Ecclesia” for the first time in the New Testament. Jesus is not referring to a concrete building, but in a transcendent sense, a united spiritual body of believers. Peter’s monumental belief would be what the assembly of the Lord would build on. Christ is the master-builder, but the foundation He builds on is the belief that He is the Christ and Son of God.

“The gates of Hades will not overcome it.”

As stated earlier, *Hades* is an abode for those who have departed an earthly life, a holding place until the final judgment. All pass through the gates of *Hades*, the Underworld, where people are cut off and are deprived of the residue of their years (Isa 38:10). *Hades* had the power to cut off learning, emotions, and even praise to God; it held those who comprised the great cloud of witnesses because of their tremendous faith. With all of the power that *Hades* possessed, according to Jesus, it would never be able to stand against His church, and it would no longer be a holding place for Christians to lie in limbo wasting away. *Hades* would have no victory over the Lord’s Church, and His assembly would live on forever. Jesus is making a great prophecy about His church and its victory because of the solid foundation it is built on – the truth of who He is. *Hades*, in this verse, cannot mean final punishment, for it will ultimately be overthrown and cast into the *Lake of Fire*, which is the final punishment (Rev 20:14).

Jesus gave a vivid illustration of what He meant concerning the gates of *Hades* and how it would not prevail against His church when He told the story about the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. The parable that Jesus told is prophetic in that it is showing how He will split *Hades* and move the righteous to a section called *Paradise* while changing *Hades* from only a holding place to a place of punishment for the wicked as they await judgment. In the parable, Lazarus died and was carried to the afterworld's *Paradise* side, also called *Abraham’s Bosom*, while the rich man died and departed to *Hades*, where he is in agony. Jesus used this parable to prophesy what *Hades* would be like after His descent to the bottom parts of the earth, before His resurrection. “Hades was the abode of the dead (roughly equivalent to the Old Testament Sheol); by New Testament times it was said to be divided into two sections, the abyss (or Gehenna) for

evil people and paradise for the righteous.”²⁰ After Jesus was crucified, it is believed that He descended to *Hades*, preaching the Gospel and releasing those who accepted, becoming a part of His church, to *Paradise*. The gates of *Hades* could not prevail or stop this mighty transfer. “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits” (1 Pet 3:18-19). It is at this point when the righteous are moved to *Paradise*; *Hades* becomes something terrifying. God is no longer inclined to hold back His fiery wrath on the occupants of *Hades* since it no longer imprisons the righteous; it becomes what Jesus will come to call “Gehenna.”

Hades, according to Origen, was the place where all the dead went before Christ’s descent, including Abraham, Samuel and John the Baptist. Until Christ’s descent, these just ones could not leave Hades due to the sin of Adam and Eve. Christ’s activity in Hades allows some of the dead to be transferred to Paradise, just as acceptance of Christ by the living allows them to enter Paradise upon their deaths.²¹

Jesus holds the keys to death and *Hades* and has the power to release the righteous from its grips: “I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades” (Rev 1:18).

Gehenna

The word *Gehenna* is “geenna” in Greek, according to Strong’s. *Gehenna* is used only by Jesus in the New Testament as a place of judgment and symbolic for the final abode of punishment for the wicked. Gehenna is a Greek word, of which the English word “hell” is not a

²⁰ Joel Buenting, *The Problem of Hell: an Philosophical Anthology* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 98.

²¹ Isabel Moreira and Margaret Toscano, *Hell and its Afterlife: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (London: Routledge 2016), 34.

translation but an interpretation. The term's accurate meaning is "the Valley of Hinnom."²² This valley was and is an actual place on the earth, not in the next world. It is the valley southwest of, and adjacent to, the old city of Jerusalem, where one can walk today upon green grass."²³ Jesus used the term *Gehenna* as a visual for His audience, who knew very well the evil that took place in this valley as an illustration of eternal judgment for the wicked.

A deep, narrow ravine separating Mount Zion from the so-called "Hill of Evil Counsel." It took its name from "some ancient hero, the son of Hinnom." It is first mentioned in Jos 15:8. It had been the place where the idolatrous Jews burned their children alive to Moloch and Baal. A particular part of the valley was called Tophet, or the "fire-stove," where the children were burned. After the Exile, in order to show their abhorrence of the locality, the Jews made this valley the receptacle of the offal of the city, for the destruction of which a fire was, as is supposed, kept constantly burning there.²⁴

Gehenna is considered the place where the wicked and unrepentant souls go post-resurrection to experience divine judgment and the closest translation for what is believed to be the traditional doctrine of hell or eternal punishment. Jesus spoke more of *Gehenna* than He did of heaven; He went above and beyond trying to make humanity understand the great punishment that would be suffered for wickedness. Jesus told of the ceaseless agony of 'hell,' comparing it to *Gehenna* so that the people would have a clear image of eternal punishment. From sacrificing children to Molech in the Old Testament to burning trash and consuming human waste in the New Testament, *Gehenna* was a place filled with worms and maggots, and the smoldering fires never ceased. Jesus was so adamant on warnings about *hell* that he said in Mark 9:43-46 (WEB):

²² Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 191. Valley of the Sons of Hinnom, a ravine south of Jerusalem. There, acc. to later Jewish popular belief, God's final judgment was to take place (cp. Just. A I, 19, 8). In the gospels it is the place of punishment in the next life, hell: κρᾶσις τς γ. condemnation to G.

²³ Steve Gregg, *All You Want to Know about Hell*, 86.

²⁴ M. G. Easton (2012). Easton's Illustrated Bible Dictionary. Courtesy of Wordsearch. Accessed January 11, 2021, <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com>.

If your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off, and throw it away from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish, than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna into the unquenchable fire, 'where their worm doesn't die, and the fire is not quenched.' If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life lame, rather than having your two feet to be cast into Gehenna, into the fire that will never be quenched— 'where their worm doesn't die, and the fire is not quenched.

Jesus was quoting from the book of Isaiah, "They will go out, and look at the dead bodies of the men who have transgressed against me; for their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind," (Isa 66:24, WEB). As stated earlier, the Old Testament was not entirely void of eternal punishment. The prophet Isaiah prophesied that it was coming and that *Sheol* would one day be emptied of the precious righteous cargo it held captive. "A comparison of Isaiah 66:24 with Mark 9:43 confirms that both passages are talking about Gehenna, and it is at least possible that both passages have in view the Valley of Hinnom."²⁵ It can be known from Isaiah 30:33 that *Gehenna* had been long prepared, its pyre made deep and wide with an abundance of fire and wood fueled by sulfur. While not called *Gehenna* in the Old Testament, it was introduced, and Jesus expounded on it in the New Testament. *Gehenna* is the word Jesus used the most when referring to eternal punishment in the New Testament; He made sure that all who heard Him would not want to go there.

Lake of Fire

Unlike *Sheol*, *Tartarus*, *Hades*, and *Gehenna*, words translated to *hell* in the Bible, the *Lake of Fire* is a phrase used solely by the Apostle John in his apocalyptic vision given to him by

²⁵ Steve Gregg, *All You Want to Know about Hell*, 97.

Jesus Christ and written in the Book of Revelation. It is commonly thought that *Gehenna* and the *Lake of Fire* are the same, but there appear to be some differences. While *Gehenna* is an abode for the unrighteous dead, the *Lake of Fire* is called the second death, as this is the final place of punishment after the judgment of the bodily resurrection has taken place. Hebrews 9:27-28 tells us that humans are appointed to die once, the same as Christ was sacrificed only once for sins. Then it goes on to say that Christ will return a second time to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him. However, for the ones that will not receive salvation from Christ during His second return, due to their rejection of Him, there awaits them a second death in the Lake of Fire along with Death and *Hades*. “Death will face the second death, and Hades a lake of fire. Their double defeat comes at the hands of a coupled fate orchestrated by God that recalls their own traits. Death and Hades, the twin forces of mortal despair in this world, now meet their final reckoning in the form of another, corresponding pair: the second death and the lake of fire.”²⁶

There is much the Bible has to say about the second death or *Lake of Fire*. It can be known who will end up there: The beast and the false prophet (Rev 19:20); the devil (Rev 20:10); death and Hades (Rev 20:14); all not found in the book of life (Rev 20:15).²⁷ It can also be known from the Bible that the *Lake of Fire* burns with sulfur (Rev 21:8). From that description alone, it can be understood that the *Lake of Fire* smells badly like rotten eggs. The Bible says that the *Lake of Fire* will torment the devil, the beast, and the false prophet day and night forever (Rev 20:10). God’s word is particular about the *Lake of Fire* and ensures to expose all the necessary

²⁶ J. David Woodington, “Crafting the Eschaton: The Second Death and the Lake of Fire in Revelation,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 41, no. 4 (June 2019): 501–18.

²⁷ Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 596. A transcendent lake-like phenomenon, lake (in apocalyptic scenario) lake of fire Rv 20:14ab, 15 (cp. JosAs 12:10 7-υσσ ζ τ. φουβς) or of fire and brimstone vs. 10; cp. 19:20; 21:8, in which the enemies of God are punished.

information about this final fiery fate so that His children would do well to escape it. “He has attempted to leave no doubt in the reader’s mind about what the second death entails: not a painless end to existence, but a continuous state of fiery anguish. With the forever-burning lake of fire and the second death brought together as one, there is no room for any misunderstanding about what awaits those who suffer this fate.”²⁸

Conclusion

According to the Bible, no one is burning in *hell* or the *Lake of Fire*, not yet. Those who have passed from this life are either awaiting in *Paradise* or *Gehenna* (the new *Hades*), depending on the choices they made on this earth. Analyzing the words that translated into *hell* has made it very clear that they most likely should have kept the original words, as many versions of the Bible do, to give the reader more clarity on the concept of eternal punishment. “Considering the actual meanings of Sheol, Hades, and Tartarus, it seems clear that Christian parlance should never have adopted the English word “hell” for these terms— unless some entirely different term was to be adopted to represent the entirely different concept of final destiny of the lost.”²⁹ To be sure, ‘hell,’ no matter what term, is not desirable for any human, and it should be avoided at all costs. Those unrighteous dead, currently awaiting judgment in *Gehenna*, also called *hell* in some translations, are suffering a great deal, and the worst is yet to come for them. “But Hell is separation from God in the sense of being cut off from the source of

²⁸ J. David Woodington, “Crafting the Eschaton: The Second Death and the Lake of Fire in Revelation.” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 41, no. 4 (June 2019): 501–18.

²⁹ Steve Gregg, *All You Want to Know about Hell*, 72.

all love, joy, peace, and light. There is no deep or ultimate joy in Hell and I believe its denizens are miserable. To be apart from the source of love, joy, peace, and light, is to live miserably.”³⁰

³⁰ Joel Bunting, *The Problem of Hell: an Philosophical Anthology* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 96.

CHAPTER FOUR

Various Views of the Doctrine of Hell

Many a curious brow has been raised at the doctrine of hell. Hellish doctrine has caused a ripple effect in the spiritual world. In contrast, philosophical theologians have published their perspectives for the religious and scholarly communities seeking to make sense of this ever so challenging teaching. Hell is so crushing that arriving at alternatives to eternal punishment seems to be the only way to deal. Many philosophical theologians have tirelessly contributed to making hell more amicable or obsolete altogether. Fictional accounts of hell and blood-curdling sermons have not helped soften the blow of this doctrine that causes many to be repulsed at its accounts.

From the Apocalypse of Peter's gruesome depictions of women hanging over boiling mire, to skin curling images of hell in Dante's *Inferno*, to Jonathan Edwards's blistering sermon *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, to twentieth-century Bible-belt preachers barking with anger about the wrath to come, hell has been used — and some would say abused — to scare people into obedience or increase their tithe.³¹

While these accounts may be looked upon as entertainment or scare tactics, Dante's hell has left a mark on the literary world. While it may be considered fiction, it is taught in classrooms and considered a significant scholarly work. Dante's work left the world startled with the famous saying noted above the gates of its hell: "All hope abandon ye who enter here."³²

Traditional View

The traditional view of hell, also known as eternal conscious torment, is associated with many sufferings and with no apparent end in sight. With so much variableness in modern culture,

³¹ Preston M. Sprinkle, *Four Views on Hell*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 9.

³² Dante, *Inferno*, canto III, line 9.

the thought of everlasting damnation and punishment is no easy belief to comprehend. This view leaves a feeling of repulsion at the thought of it, even among theologians.

On the traditional view, the misery in hell is not temporal and has no positive end in view. It is sheer misery, which appears to accomplish no purpose other than divine vengeance. Most Christians will allow that God has the right to execute whatever degree of vengeance upon His enemies He may judge to be fitting. However, a sovereign being who finds it necessary to punish endlessly, without accomplishing thereby any ultimate improvement in the universe or the individual, seems to welcome the criticism that, were He a God of both love (at least as loving as most humans), and of infinite wisdom, He ought to have been able to come up with something better than this.³³

This view concedes that there will be some humans that will not receive salvation due to unrepentance. These damned individuals will receive final judgment and be sentenced to spend eternity in unquenchable fires. The suffering in this view is both physical and mental as being eternally separate from God's presence has profound effects, especially on one's psyche. This view also admits that those tortured in hell will be aware and feel the pain of their bodies burning and will never be destroyed.

The "dead bodies of those who rebelled" against God are in a perpetual state of dishonor (v. 24 NIV). Under normal circumstances, fire and worm would consume a corpse until there was nothing left. But in the eschatological age, the circumstances are not normal. The devouring worm "will not die" and the consuming fire "will not be quenched" (v. 24). This means that the bodily degradation of the wicked never ends but partakes of the same longevity as the new heavens and the new earth. What kind of body could withstand fire and worm such that their work would go on forever? Though not mentioned specifically in this text, this scene seems to assume that God's enemies have been given a body fit for an unending punishment. This implies the coming of a special resurrection of the damned — one anticipated in Isaiah 26:19 but revealed most clearly later by Daniel 12:1 – 2. 16 This resurrection implies that their experience will involve consciousness of their unending punishment.³⁴

³³ Steve Gregg, *All You Want to Know about Hell: Three Christian Views of God's Final Solution to the Problem of Sin* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Incorporated, 2013), 2.

³⁴ Preston M. Sprinkle, *Four Views on Hell*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 23.

The Bible offers support for the traditional view of hell. Some Scriptures that support this view are:

1. “You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? (Matt 23:33).
2. “But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him” (Luke 12:5).
3. “If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out” (Mark 9:43).

The traditional view of hell has held on to its position of being the most widely accepted yet daunting view of all time. Many theologians have abandoned the eternal conscious torment doctrine of hell simply because it is tension in believing God is all-loving and the possibility of eternal torment. While this view has caused angst and confusion among the religious community, alternate views have surfaced to make this doctrine more palatable.

Annihilationism/Conditionalism

Annihilationism is a popular alternative to eternal conscious torment. As the traditional view, annihilationism accepts the caveat that some people will not be saved. “It shares the doctrine of judgment held by the upholders of everlasting torment in almost every particular—except for one tremendous thing: it sees no continuing place in God’s world for human beings living on in unending pain, not reconciled to God. The wrath of God will put an end to sin and

evil.”³⁵ The most significant element of this view is that, while some will be consigned to hell, the punishment will not be unending. This outlook supports that the stay in hell will be shortened as the person suffering will ultimately be destroyed. The annihilationist conclusion results from a word study for words translated eternal or everlasting in the Greek and Hebrew texts. The rationale is that the term eternal salvation does not mean that God will be continuously saving throughout all eternity; instead, the result of His salvation is eternal. The same is true for eternal judgment. God will not judge throughout eternity; the result of His judgment is final. This same logic is then applied to eternal destruction; God will not continuously destroy throughout eternity, but once He destroys someone, they are completely and utterly annihilated.

Finally, when an adjective (including but not limited to *aiōnios* = “eternal”) modifies a noun—in this case a result-noun, recognizable by its form, or morphology, the adjective describes the result of the action (which is what the noun names), not the action itself (named by the noun’s cognate verb), that produced the result. We have seen this in regard to eternal salvation (not an eternal act of saving), eternal redemption (not an eternal process of redeeming), eternal judgment (not an eternal act of judging), eternal destruction (not an eternal process of destroying), and eternal punishment (not an eternal act of punishing). This punishment, more specifically identified as this destruction, will last forever. Those who are punished with everlasting destruction will cease to exist.³⁶

This view is more palatable to some as they cannot fathom ceaseless punishment in unquenchable flames. Some traditionalists have accepted this view and agree with the word study's findings. Conceding that suffering in hell will not be for eternity but will be terminated instead; for them, this is also more fitting for a loving God.

Because of the admitted ambiguity of the words “eternal” and “everlasting” in the Greek and Hebrew text, it is not necessarily clear that “endless” suffering is actually what these words are threatening. William Crockett (traditionalist) has pointed out that among the Qumran sect members (contemporaries with the New Testament writers), “*aionios*

³⁵ Christopher M. Date, Gregory G. Stump, and Joshua W. Anderson, *Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2014) 75.

³⁶ Edward Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of Final Punishment*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth Press, 2012), 42.

torment” and “aionios damnation” were seen as concepts harmonious with “extinction” or annihilation.³⁷

Conditionalism is similar to annihilationism in almost every aspect, which is why the two views are customarily combined. Conditionalism is coined such as immortality is conditioned upon right standing with God. “By way of definition: belief in conditional immortality is the belief that God created Man only potentially immortal. Immortality is a state gained by grace through faith when the believer receives eternal life and becomes a partaker of the divine nature, immortality being inherent in God alone.”³⁸ Those who hold these views stress that the Bible is full of imagery and figurative language and to take it literally is a gross misinterpretation of Scripture and ultimately what God was relaying in His word.

As evangelical conditionalists see it, the burden of proof demanded of the conditionalist view seems unfairly heavy, for even if conditionalists show that Scripture teaches repeatedly that the lost will die, will be destroyed, will be cut off, will be consumed and the like, our claims are dismissed as “twisting” or taking things out of context, and in the name of a more compelling case we are offered a paltry list of vague references, parables of questionable interpretation, and figurative imagery. Let Bible translator R. F. Weymouth speak for us: My mind fails to conceive a grosser misinterpretation of language than when the five or six strongest words which the Greek tongue possesses, signifying “destroy,” or “destruction,” are explained to mean maintaining an everlasting but wretched existence. To translate black as white is nothing to this.³⁹

These views are more agreeable as it is easier to believe that a loving God would not punish some humans for all eternity in hellfire.

³⁷ Steve Gregg, *All You Want to Know about Hell: Three Christian Views of God’s Final Solution to the Problem of Sin* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Incorporated, 2013), 108.

³⁸ Christopher M. Date, Gregory G. Stump, and Joshua W. Anderson, *Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2014) 75.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

Universalism

Universalism is the belief that everyone will be saved and all will end up in heaven. If God desires for all to be saved, His will be done. He is powerful enough to get what He wants. Those who hold this belief substantiate them with biblical Scripture. “For example, Romans 11:32 indicates that God will “have mercy upon all.” John 12:31 quotes Jesus as saying, “I will draw all men to myself.” Some claim these texts remove the possibility of eternal damnation. Advocates of universalism still belong in the tradition of moral death, because they accept the need for postmortem punishment. In universalism, however, postmortem punishment is curative and removes the taint of sin; it is not eternal.”⁴⁰ Universalists take sin seriously and do not deny a final judgment of humanity by God. However, they believe that Jesus’ sacrifice is sufficient to save all, and they claim that is precisely what it will do.

Sin rots creation from the inside out, and humans need to be rescued from it and its consequences. Only God can deliver us from this predicament, and that is precisely what God has done through the atoning work of Christ. What makes universalism universal is simply its insistence that “God will reconcile all people.” Does this mean that universalists don’t believe in eschatological judgment? No. There is eschatological punishment, but “in the end” there will be deliverance.⁴¹

Universalists reject the doctrine of election and do not believe that a loving God would save some and subject a portion of humanity to eternal hellfire. While they concede to some form of punishment in the afterlife, it is purifying castigation, preparing all to be reconciled to Christ. “Universalists emphasize God’s sovereignty and God’s loving desire that no one should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Although some people may experience hell after death, the fires of hell serve a remedial and purgatorial function such that no one persists in

⁴⁰ Alan E. Bernstein, *Hell and Its Rivals: Death and Retribution among Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the Early Middle Ages* (Cornell University Press, 2017), 12.

⁴¹ Preston M. Sprinkle, *Four Views on Hell*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 9.

rebellion against God forever. All of creation is eventually reconciled to the loving God that created it.”⁴² This view goes so far as to say that even Satan can repent and eventually be saved.

Issuantism

A more modern view that seeks to engage the traditional view is the Issuant View of Hell. This view is comprised of three main attributes that do not end in universal salvation.

The first characteristic of issuantism is the belief that there is a fundamental inconsistency in claiming that heaven or eternal fellowship with God “issues” from (or is an expression of) God’s love while hell or eternal separation from God “issues” from God’s righteousness. For proponents of issuant views, both heaven and hell must “issue” from the same divine character quality, namely God’s love. The term issuantism takes its name primarily from this characteristic. The second characteristic of issuantism is the belief that humans have metaphysical libertarian freedom. Scholars who emphasize this aspect of issuantism sometimes call their perspective “the choice model of hell.” A third characteristic of issuantism is the view that hell is non-retributive in nature. Rather, it is the natural consequences of the choices that free human beings make in life. Scholars who emphasize this aspect of issuantism sometimes call their perspective the “natural consequence” theory.⁴³

This view looks at *hell* by analyzing God’s attributes. Those who support this view believe it is a mistake to think that hell is issued only from God’s wrath and justice. Since heaven and hell are polar opposites, it makes sense to view them as being issued from the same attribute, God’s love. “Any adequate account of hell must begin with an understanding of the nature of God and present the possibilities of heaven and hell as flowing from this one nature; that is, a solution to the problem of hell can be obtained only by an integrated account of heaven and

⁴² Ramon Baker, “Contemporary Shifts in the Christian Doctrine of Hell in Anglo-American Philosophical Theology”, *Religious Inquiries* 4, no. 8 (2015): 5-16.

⁴³ Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 112.

hell.”⁴⁴ Many scholarly theologians support the issuant view of hell as they are partial to human autonomy and both heaven and hell issuing from God’s love to defend this hard doctrine.

Scholars such as Richard Swinburne (1983), Jerry Walls (1992), Stephen Davis (2010), Jonathan Kvanvig (1993), and N.T. Wright (2008) have not been content with the solutions to the problem of hell presented by defenders of eternal conscious torment, universalism, or conditionalism. They seek to “lower the temperature” of hell by reinterpreting hell along nonretributive lines. Instead of being an expression of God’s wrath, hell is seen both as an expression of the love of God for created beings and as the natural consequences of a person’s free choice to reject God.⁴⁵

While this view does not take away the reality of hell or lessen its strength, it gives the moral responsibility of hell to humans due to their free will choices to sin.

Divine Promulgation View of Hell

Like the issuant view of hell, the divine promulgation view of hell seeks to defend God from a moral standpoint. It lays the responsibility of being consigned to hell on human autonomy. The foundation of this view is God’s various forms of communication to humans on the topic of hell. Out of God’s love, mercy, and sovereignty, He promulgates necessary information to humanity in opposition to hell. This view will also rely heavily on the actions God has taken to prevent humans from hell. DPV does not seek to wrangle about the duration of hell as the annihilation view does. Any amount of time in hell is awful; a shorter stay should not be a decision-maker on if one wants to risk hell or not. The following Modus Ponens statement can express the Divine Promulgation View of Hell:

⁴⁴ Ramon Baker, *Issuant Views of Hell in Contemporary Anglo-American Theology* (Turku: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2014), 10.

⁴⁵ Ramon Baker, “Contemporary Shifts in the Christian Doctrine of Hell in Anglo-American Philosophical Theology”, *Religious Inquiries* 4, no. 8 (2015): 5-16.

1. If God has employed various methods of communicating the dreadful reality of hell to humans, including His plan of salvation to help them avoid such a fate, then God is not an immoral persecutor, and His attributes remain untarnished.
2. God has employed various methods of communicating the dreadful reality of hell to humans, including His plan of salvation to help them avoid such a fate.
3. Therefore, God is not an immoral persecutor, and His attributes remain untarnished.

Employing the Divine Promulgation View of Hell provides adequate evidence that God has promulgated necessary information, in various ways, to prevent humans from an eternity in hell; therefore, He is not a moral monster. This view will be fully introduced in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Divine Promulgation View of Hell

God and Communication

God speaks about Himself to the world He created with an expectation of active and obedient hearing from those made in His image and likeness. From a theological perspective, it is not a new thought that God speaks directly to His creation in various forms. “The affirmation that God speaks is the primary affirmation of theology, because the event of God’s speech is the event that makes theology possible.”⁴⁶The Bible affirms that God speaks in many ways: “In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe” (Heb 1:1-2). God’s words are so powerful that He spoke all of creation into existence, and His work speaks to His glory and gives insight into the mind of God and His eternal nature.

The Bible tells us that the heavens declare the glory of God, and so anyone capable of admiring the heavens ought to have some knowledge of God. The apostle Paul confirms this and adds that God has revealed his eternal power and divine nature to everyone—a truth that we have suppressed in our rebellion against him. For that reason, says Paul, we are without excuse if we deny God’s existence. All people have a law written on their hearts that performs much the same function for them as the law of Moses did for the Jews. The rational order of the universe, innate notions of goodness, beauty, and justice, and the sense of our own smallness in relation to the world we live in all suggest that there is a higher power that holds everything together and makes sense of it.⁴⁷

God is the author of words and all forms of communication. Creating humans in His image has allowed them also to be able to communicate directly with Him, which distinguishes them from His other earthly creations. Communication is exceptional and is something that God

⁴⁶ Rachael Muers, *Keeping God's Silence: Towards a Theological Ethics of Communication* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2004), 29.

⁴⁷ Gerald Bray, *God Is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 25.

chose to share and have in common with humans. God’s purpose for communication is to ensure that humans not only have a relationship with Him but with one another. “Communication is very important in our daily lives. It is the most common everyday activity and it is at the core of all human contact. It permeates every aspect of who we are and what we do and is a highly complex human phenomenon. The ability to communicate is a gift from God to enable us to develop relationships with others and to create culture.”⁴⁸ It is important to God for humanity to receive information directly from Him to live out the plans He has for them, which is why He enabled humans to communicate with words the same as He does. It is also important to God that humans communicate back to Him through prayer and actions that line up with His Holy Word. Actively listening when God speaks is vital and plays a massive part in how one’s life is lived on earth and throughout eternity. Once a person understands that they are a creation of the Almighty God, their behavior towards God and other humans should reflect His morals and characteristics. “If a person thinks he has been created by God, that he is known by God, and, in the Christian tradition, that he has been redeemed by the incarnate God, he will see his life and his relations to others in a distinctive light and will feel obliged to act in an appropriate way.”⁴⁹

God is not only speaking to humans; He is also listening to them. The listening God knows precisely how and what to communicate to humanity to assist them in living a life that guarantees a heavenly future, should they observe His words. The words that God communicates to humanity offer abundance, not only in this life but also in the next. When it comes to the

⁴⁸ Emmanuel Ayee, “Human Communication Revisited - A Biblical perspective/Menslike Kommunikasie Herbesoek – ‘n Bybelse Perspektief,” *Koers* (Potchefstroom, South Africa) 78, no. 1 (2013): 1-16.

⁴⁹ Robert Sokolowski, *Christian Faith & Human Understanding: Studies on the Eucharist, Trinity, and the Human Person* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 300.

reality of hell, God has vital information that He has shared with humans, and His message is still reverberating to this day.

Communication is particularly important when it comes to the subject of Hell. God is the subject-matter expert on hell's doctrine, and humanity desperately needs to hear what He says on the topic. Not only does God hold vital information about hell, but He also holds absolute power over this particular evil of all evils. "God has ontological priority over evil and Hell (God has the most fundamental and ultimate reality) and God has supremacy over evil and Hell (neither can make anything happen that God doesn't permit to happen). Evil and Hell couldn't have any reality or causality without God."⁵⁰ The all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-benevolent God communicates to humanity, in graphic detail, the gravity of hell out of the abundance of His sovereignty, love, and mercy. The Omniscient God understands that diverse communication methods are necessary to prick listeners' hearts to get them to turn from evil forsaking the grips of hell. The book of Hebrews clarifies that God utilizes multiple means of communication to get His message of salvation to humans.

Thus in Hebrews the very nature of God is to speak, to disclose, to reveal. To accomplish these ends, there are a variety of media at God's disposal. The opening verse mentions the prophets as a prelude to the manner of speech that is of special interest to the author, namely the Son. In the next chapter communication between God and humans will include the mediation of angels (Heb 2:2). So the author of Hebrews speaks of the manifold attempts on God's part to communicate through the ages, suggesting that God's desire for self-communication is an ongoing process of selfdisclosure, which culminates in the revelation of the Son.⁵¹

God has not kept the most perilous final possible fate for humans a secret. In reality, He has effectively communicated, in many different forms, the seriousness of Hell and how

⁵⁰ Benjamin W. McCraw, and Robert Arp, *The Problem of Evil: New Philosophical Directions* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 131.

⁵¹ Alan C. Mitchell, *Sacra Pagina: Hebrews* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 57.

to avoid it. If God did not divulge everything humans needed to know about Hell, that would make Him a moral monster and morally responsible for those who end up in this dreadful place. To be sure, God has revealed a wealth of information about Hell, so He is, in fact, not a moral monster nor morally responsible.

God's Authoritative Promulgation

An authoritative figure who creates and enforces laws for its citizens' good has some responsibility to ensure that those under their jurisdiction know those regulations. A governmental system with the best interest of its citizens will ensure that all guidelines are made public and readily accessible, especially those that, when broken, deserve capital punishment. Such an authority would create laws, especially moral laws, for those citizens who may neglect their moral responsibilities as an added precaution to protect its citizens. Laws are put in place to ensure innocent people are not taken advantage of, and perpetrators are held accountable for their actions facing a punishment that fits the transgression. However, while it is necessary and even beneficial for laws to be created, many secular governments do not always publicize or make laws accessible, leaving their citizens exposed. Countries may have reasons for not disclosing specific laws for security reasons, but what constitutes what should be kept secret is not always obvious. A just government understands that laws' transparency enables the people affected by them to uphold those laws and ultimately refrain from defying them.

God, as the highest authority, has not left humankind ignorant of His statutes by promulgating the details and how they relate to their eternal salvation. It is necessary to define the term promulgation to recognize how much further God has taken this concept to make

humanity knowledgeable about hell. “Promulgation is the declaration of a law, the formal statement or proclamation of new legislation. It is the act by which the authorised official (for example the Head of State) attests that a given text has been approved as a law. Promulgation hence attests the creation and validity of a law.”⁵²

God’s promulgating methods surpassed how natural humans communicate secular laws hierarchically; He does not discriminate against the poor or disenfranchised; all can receive His message. This inspired dissemination of salvific information that provides deliverance from eternal punishment is known as The Divine Promulgation View of Hell. The Divine Promulgation View of Hell, or DPV, states God’s communication to humans on Hell issues from His characteristics, namely His love, sovereignty, and mercy. The everlasting God is the only one who can create, authorize, and enforce laws that have an eternal consequence for transgressing against them. As the creator and sustainer of all that exists, the author of words, and the only One who can give salvation, God’s authority surpasses all. What God declares over humankind and the world matters most and is trustworthy.

God’s Moral Promulgation

Being that humans are made in God's image, they are imbued with morals and have intrinsic value. God is the source of morality for humanity and is the only One who could bestow these values intrinsically whether the person believes in God or not. “Even Gentiles, who do not have God’s written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even

⁵² Claire Grant, “Promulgation and the Law,” *International Journal of Law in Context* 2, no. 3 (09, 2006), 326.

without having heard it. They demonstrate that God’s law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right” (Rom 2:14-15, NLT). As the highest moral authority, God is perfectly capable of creating values that are objective and not subject to gender, nationality, belief, or economic status. The evolutionist’s worldview states that humans are without value or purpose and that they merely exist by chance, offering no explanation of how moral knowledge is universally obtained. “The position of the modern evolutionist is that humans have an awareness of morality because such an awareness is of biological worth. Morality is a biological adaptation no less than are hands and feet and teeth.”⁵³ Evolutionists compare intrinsic human morality to physical body parts, which does not follow as only physical can derive from physical and morals are not physical. However, theism argues that moral knowledge and intrinsic human value come directly from God, informing humans on right and wrong. God is the source of morality, and He has promulgated His moral knowledge to humanity. “And because God is omniscient, he knows what is good and obligatory for reasons other than his command and commendation. And because we do not always have such knowledge, he can inform us as to which actions are good or obligatory for such reasons.”⁵⁴ Theism, especially Christianity, offers the best solution to universal morality. Without God’s moral code, humanity could not stand a chance against the hellish reality of the lake of fire and would most certainly succumb to it. Even with God’s moral code imbued in humans' hearts, sin has infectiously damaged and confused the heart making it difficult to do what is right in the sight of God. “First, that human beings, all over the earth, have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way, and cannot really get rid of it. Secondly, that they

⁵³ Robert K Garcia and Nathan L King, *Is Goodness without God Good Enough?: a Debate on Faith, Secularism, and Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 31.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 156.

do not in fact behave in that way. They know the Law of Nature; they break it.”⁵⁵ Unlike any other worldview, Christianity understands that sin has caused a moral disease in humans and negatively impacted their ability to display God's image behaviorally. Hence, it asks them to trust God and not rely on their own abilities. God has developed a plan of salvation for all of humanity, and He has communicated to them how to achieve it. “The work of salvation involves a creative act of God, one of complete moral transformation, delivering us from our sinful natures and enabling us to experience the very life of Christ within.”⁵⁶ God promulgated morals to His created image-bearers because He is concerned about their soul, character, and eternal outcome. Without God, objective morality and intrinsic human value seem queer, especially to evolutionists, but they should be considered real to humans because they are real to God. “Moral demands on us aren't a figment of our imaginations or subjective preferences; they are as objective as can be. This is a world in which our choices shape our characters and our destinies.”⁵⁷ Allowing God’s moral code, He ensured was innate within all humankind, to direct actions and behaviors will result in an everlasting eternity together with Him in peace.

God Promulgates from His Love, Sovereignty, and Mercy

Many believe that hell is incompatible with God’s characteristics, especially His love. It is also believed that God is morally wrong to consign any human to hell because He could do something to stop it since He is the Omni-God. Thinking of God and hell in this manner has

⁵⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 8.

⁵⁶ David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), Chap 10.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Chap 10.

profound implications, but it also does not take into consideration what He has done to help humans avoid hell. The Divine Promulgation View of Hell brings to the forefront the actions God has taken to protect humans from eternal punishment. It reassures that these actions flow from His characteristics. Similar to Kvanvig's Issuant View of Hell, DPV supports that hell is deeply entrenched in God's love and does not switch attributes flowing only from His justice or wrath. According to Kvanvig, "any adequate account of hell must begin with an understanding of the nature of God and present the possibilities of heaven and hell as flowing from this one nature; that is, a solution to the problem of hell can be obtained only by an integrated account of heaven and hell."⁵⁸ The most common thought is that hell flows from God's wrath or justice; arguing that it flows from His love is perplexing even among theologians. "At first blush, attempting to explain hell by appealing to God's loving nature seems counterintuitive. The issuant rationale is that God's love for created persons motivates creating a place for people who genuinely do not want communion with him."⁵⁹ However, DPV goes further by including that hell and heaven are also issued from God's sovereignty and mercy in conjunction with His love. God's sovereignty has declared the conditions of hell and its devilish inhabitants, and He will not renege on His word. God's mercy communicates the terrors of hell and ways to avoid it while offering multiple repentance opportunities. God's love communicates His desire to live in a relationship with humanity for all eternity while lovingly guiding them away from the unquenchable fires of hell. DPV does not seek to wrangle over the nature of hell, debate the length, degrees, or any other characteristic of hell, but to convey God's saving message on this hellish doctrine. DPV is concerned with proving that God is not morally responsible for

⁵⁸ Jonathan L Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 112.

⁵⁹ Joel Buenting, *The Problem of Hell: an Philosophical Anthology* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 3.

consigning humans to hell due to His drastic actions to disseminate information about hell and how to eschew it. DPV defends the morality of God with the following statements:

1. A loving God would create a world with humans that bare His image, who can reflect His morals, reciprocate love back to Him, and live in eternity with Him.
2. A sovereign God would know that some humans will reject Him by living sinful and unrepentant lives, eternally separating themselves from Him in hell.
3. A merciful God would disseminate information in various ways to help restore the relationship between God and the unrepentant immoral humans.
4. A loving God would not immediately destroy those humans that outright reject Him, allowing them to live out their lives on earth, providing opportunities for repentance.
5. A merciful God would offer His only begotten Son to save sinners from eternal punishment should they accept Him.
6. A sovereign God would know that despite creating humans in His image, divulging salvific information in various ways, allowing opportunities for repentance, and sacrificing His only Son, there will still be some humans in hell.
7. A loving, sovereign and merciful God is not morally responsible for some humans being in hell for eternity due to His preventive actions.

An all-powerful, all-knowing, and omnipresent God does not need to communicate or explain Himself or His actions to anyone. Being the highest moral authority, God is praiseworthy because He has chosen to communicate with humans directly and made steps to break down barriers that would separate Him from them, not out of necessity but out of His nature. The fact that the God of the Bible does communicate His actions and His plans to humans concerning hell and salvation proves that He is not a tyrant but rather a loving, merciful, and sovereign God

concerned about the eternal fate of all humanity. Not only does God show concern by communicating, but His methods of promulgating to humans are also pristine. God knows precisely how to communicate with humans the information they need to know and how best to receive it. As the creator of words and languages, God has considered His message's conveyance and context to ensure the intent is understood.

We believe that God has inspired the locutions (words, whether spoken or written) that the communicator has used to accomplish with God their joint illocutions (which lead to an understanding of intentions, claims, affirmations and, ultimately, meaning), but that those locutions are tied to the communicator's world. That is, God has made accommodation to the high context communication between the implied communicator and implied audience so as to optimize and facilitate the transmission of meaning by means of an authoritative illocution. Inspiration is tied to locutions (they have their source in God); illocutions define the necessary path to meaning, which is characterized by authority and inerrancy.⁶⁰

No one understands the importance of effective communication more than God, especially when it comes to hell's seriousness. The importance He placed on providing information about hell resulted in Him revealing every aspect of this dreadful place through various methods. God's message concerning Hell is for anyone who will hear it; He is not a respecter of persons. As an outcome of His loving nature, He communicates without prejudice, favoritism, or partiality; His message even extends to those who reject Him.

A perfectly loving God would communicate on a frequency available to all people who are open to divine rescue on God's terms. God's frequency wouldn't be the exclusive possession of the educated, the "morally good," the physically strong, the wealthy, the "religious," or any group that selfishly excludes other people. A perfectly loving God would seek all-inclusive community under the umbrella of divine unselfish love. Such a God would desire that everyone be rescued from selfishness and destruction, on God's terms, even the most pathetic and repulsive among us and even all of our enemies, including God's enemies.⁶¹

⁶⁰ John H. Walton and Sandy D. Brent, *The Lost World of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 44.

⁶¹ Paul K Moser, *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 116.

To be sure, God loves His creation. First of all, He could have chosen not to create, but out of His love, He did. Secondly, God created the earth specifically for human habitation and sustained it. Thirdly, He communicates His love through various methods to His human creation to ensure His love, sovereignty, and mercy are felt and can be known. Fourth of all, He warns of destruction and gives specific instructions and details around the two eternal options to help humans make the right choice. God behaves as a loving father who creates, provides, sustains, and speaks to His children, warning them of impending destruction and taking actions to prevent it.

Divine Promulgation View of Hell Addresses the Problem of Hell

God has been accused of being many characteristics that go against His nature when it comes to the problem of hell. He has been called unloving, un-omnipotent, un-omniscient, and, worst of all, not good. Hell is considered to be the most gratuitous evil of all evils. Those who reject God because of hell have only accused Him of not using His power to combat hell so that no one goes there. Those accusers never look at what God has done to prohibit humans from an eternity in hell. The Divine Promulgation View of Hell does just that; it considers what God has done to prohibit humans from an eternity in hell by communicating precisely what they need to know. Many theologians defend that, on the Day of Judgment, God will consign those to hell who have outright rejected Him and actively disobeyed His will. Unlike other forms of obscure evil, hell has specific qualifications for its inhabitants, and they are detailed in the Bible. The components of hell consist of the following statements:

1. Hell exists

2. Humans who reject God will be consigned there
3. Hell is eternal

The following Modus Ponens statement can express the Divine Promulgation View of Hell:

1. If God has employed various methods of communicating the dreadful reality of Hell to humans, including His plan of salvation to help them avoid such a fate, then God is not an immoral persecutor, and His attributes remain untarnished.
2. God has employed various methods of communicating the dreadful reality of Hell to humans, including His plan of salvation to help them avoid such a fate.
2. Therefore, God is not an immoral persecutor, and His attributes remain untarnished.

Application of Divine Promulgation View of Hell

The topic of hell does not sit right with most people today and is not easy to discuss. Most church leaders have chosen to only speak about blessings from God and subjects that are more palatable to their congregants. No one wants to speak of a loving God consigning His beloved image-bearers to an eternity in the lake of fire; it is difficult to hear. Because of this, the Divine Promulgation View of Hell presents a way to discuss the subject of hell in a way that gives hope. Instead of taking the stance that God is just sitting by allowing people to make their own choice to eternity in hell, DPV talks from what God has done and is still doing to prevent such a terrible fate. Discussing hell from the standpoint of the preventative actions God has taken against humans going to hell and how He communicates them to humanity, not only assists in pricking the hearts of listeners but upholds the image of God in the sight of His children.

Hell has been ripped apart by philosophers and theologians, accusing that God could do more about this awful place. This direction has caused many to question God's word on hell and even turn away from Him altogether. All of the debate on the degrees of hell, hell's location, and hell's longevity have distracted from the truth of hell; Hell is real. The human mind alone cannot comprehend hellish doctrine; God must be taken at His word on the matter. If believers trust God's word, the challenging teachings must be accepted the same as pleasant teachings. Bringing forth the Scriptures that God has inspired to communicate hellish doctrine will do precisely what the Bible guarantees about God's word: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). From the standpoint of what God has communicated and the preventative actions He has taken, solid teaching on hellish doctrine will bring more souls to repentance and into God's loving arms.

Conclusion

God is a communicator, and He demonstrates it by promulgating to humanity. Not only does God know how to communicate, but He has the authority to communicate on the seriousness of *hell* because He has the information humans need to know to avoid it. As the highest moral being, God promulgates His moral code to humans, assisting them in evading eternal punishment. The God who created the universe and everything in it is not indifferent to the problem of human sin; He cares a great deal. The human race is in danger, and God has the divine remedy. God has assessed the seriousness of the human dilemma, and the information He promulgated speaks to the diagnosis. The Divine Promulgation View of Hell states that God promulgates this necessary information from His love, sovereignty, and mercy and is a solid moral defense of God. Of the many approaches, God chooses to disseminate knowledge to all

humans on the topic of Hell, the creation, the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit, and divine revelation are the most prevalent.

CHAPTER SIX

God's Attributes on Hell

There is a panoply of attributes that make up God's perfect nature. Trying to list all the Triune God's attributes could prove to be a worthy yet lengthy task. While many philosophical theologians have attempted to arrive at a complete list, they still vary as no human can define such an auspicious and eternal being. Professor W Jay Wood defines God this way: "God is a necessarily existing person who is an essentially omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, a se, immutable, impassible, incorporeal, timeless, and metaphysically simple act of perfect being."⁶² While Professor Wood's definition of God is extensive, it is by no means exhaustive. A correct understanding of God's attributes is necessary to each person's theology of who God is. "Our aim in studying the Godhead must be to know God himself better. Our concern must be to enlarge our acquaintance, not simply with the doctrine of God's attributes, but with the living God whose attributes they are. As he is the subject of our study, and our helper in it, so he must himself be the end of it. We must seek, in studying God, to be led to God."⁶³ Humans do not get to choose the God they want, but they must be willing to accept God as He is, and this is difficult to do without a right understanding of His eternal nature. God wants His people to know who He is; that is why He filled the Bible with so many details about what He has done, will do, and His moral code.

There is a long and complex history of the problems that persist when finite creatures attempt to explore the infinite. Specifically, how can we who are limited grasp in any coherent way the One who is infinite and beyond all comprehension? God's essence is altogether above and beyond our ability fully to comprehend. Part of the answer to that question is given above— God has seen fit to condescend and reveal himself. He has given us a revelation, not only of his plan and purpose for history, but of himself, even of

⁶² W. Jay Wood, *God* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 193.

⁶³ J. I Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 23.

his essence. Thus, we can know him because, and only because, he has made himself known.⁶⁴

When one studies the Bible accurately and gains a strong knowledge of God, that information shapes who they are and how they live their lives in community with others. Not only is knowing who God is imperative to living healthy spiritual lives, but it is also essential when delving into hellish doctrine. A deep dive into God's characteristics and how they work together to benefit all humanity to avoid eternal damnation will prove that the reality of *hell* does not make God a moral monster. The fact that a Holy God created such an existence as *hell* says that it serves an intended purpose: to castigate the wickedness that has destroyed human lives, disrupted the relationship between God and His creation, and interrupted God's plan for His people. The Bible explains that God created *hell* to punish Satan and his demons and to imprison them until the Day of Judgment: "Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons" (Matt 25:41, NLT). For humanity, God created a beautiful garden and earth full of trees, fruit, and all sorts of tame animals and creatures, which is a far actuality from *hell*. Hell was not a part of God's original plan for humanity. A close study of His attributes will prove that truth. This section of the treatise will expound on God's selected attributes that issue deliverance from the grips of *hell*. Looking at *hell* through the lens of God's attributes will allow an in-depth understanding of the actions He has taken and how humans are to respond. While all of God's attributes are immutable and perfect within the Godhead, a close examination of His love, sovereignty, and mercy will show the lengths He has gone to prevent humans from an eternal gruesome fate.

⁶⁴ Scott K. Oliphint, *God with Us: Divine Condescension and the Attributes of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 42.

God's Love on Hell

It is a beautiful thing to fall into the hands of a loving God. “Love is the keystone of the Divine Perfections, we should say, the Attribute that holds together, sums up, and makes lovely the entire Divine Nature, all its Properties and its Glory.”⁶⁵ It is safe to say that love is the preeminent attribute of God that drives His heart towards people. God’s love does not quickly jump to hatred for humans because they have sinned and fallen short of His glory. His love seems to deepen for those who stray away from Him as He continues to provide opportunities for grace, mercy, and salvation to bring them into His loving arms. Unlike human love, God’s love for others is not grounded in corporeal virtue, good deeds, or receiving love in return. He loves because He is love. God’s love does not contain elements of change, it has no potential to grow or develop, and it is not dependent on anything for its success. To that end, it can be understood that God loves sinners, and despite their rejection and rebellion, His love for them continues.

It is staggering that God should love sinners; yet it is true. God loves creatures who have become unlovely and (one would have thought) unlovable. There was nothing whatever in the objects of his love to call it forth; nothing in us could attract or prompt it. Love among persons is awakened by something in the beloved, but the love of God is free, spontaneous, unevoked, uncaused. God loves people because he has chosen to love them— as Charles Wesley put it, “he hath loved us, he hath loved us, because he would love” (an echo of Deut 7:7-8)—and no reason for his love can be given except his own sovereign good pleasure.⁶⁶

God’s love cannot be controlled or altered, and because of that, He does not control the free choices of humans nor the outcomes for selfish reasons. The Bible confirms this sentiment when it states: “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs”

⁶⁵ Katherine Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology: The Doctrine of God, Volume 1* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2015), 469.

⁶⁶ J. I Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 124.

(1 Cor 13:4-5). To be sure, love is an enemy of selfishness, which means actions like force and dictatorship do not flow from it.

Because of love, God necessarily provides freedom/agency to creatures, and God works by empowering and inspiring creation toward well-being. God also necessarily upholds the regularities of the universe because those regularities derive from God's eternal nature of love. Randomness in the world and creaturely free will are genuine, and God is not a dictator, mysteriously pulling the strings.⁶⁷

God has revealed His love towards people in a very critical way: by giving His only begotten Son Jesus. Issued from the love of God came an atoning solution to the problem and penalty of sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. "God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love — not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins" (1 John 4:9-10, NLT). This method and measure of love from God towards humans were of great costly munificence to Him. God suffered the death of His Son to redeem His beloved creation, which is the ultimate proof of His infinite love. "The measure of love is how much it gives, and the measure of the love of God is the gift of his only Son to become human, and to die for sins, and so to become the one mediator who can bring us to God."⁶⁸ God is so concerned about humanity's eternal state that He took action to bring about a heavenly outcome for them.

God, as love, wishes to be united with humans in a loving friendship. God desired greater intimacy with his creatures than was possible across the great ontological divide separating creator and creatures. That he might bring about greater loving communion between himself and humans, God took on a human nature and lived among us, enduring our travails, that he might identify with humans in the most intimate way possible.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Thomas Jay Oord, *The Uncontrolling Love of God: An Open and Relational Account of Providence* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 94.

⁶⁸ J. I Packer, *Knowing God*, 126.

⁶⁹ Jay W. Wood, *God* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 179.

From an eschatological perspective, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ removed the barriers that sin placed between God and humanity due to His divine love. Despite the shame, scourging, and ridiculing Jesus endured even on the way to the cross, He stopped to offer another opportunity for repentance: “Jesus turned and said to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ Then “they will say to the mountains, “Fall on us!” and to the hills, “Cover us!” (Luke 23:28-30). “Their sorrow should not be for him but for themselves and for the judgment the nation has brought on itself. They are the “daughters of Jerusalem” and so are intimately tied up with the fate of that onetime holy city. His coming death is his divine destiny and eternal mission. It will bring salvation and joy to countless millions.”⁷⁰

According to the Bible, it is not God’s will for anyone to suffer in *hell*: “The Lord isn’t really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent” (2 Pet 3:9, NLT). “Logic and justice demand the appropriate punishment, but God’s love and mercy are greater than they are. In spite of everything his rebellious creatures have done and everything they so richly deserve, God has reached out to them and allowed them to remain in existence as a sign of his great love for them and of their continuing importance to him as beings he has made and over whom he remains fully sovereign.”⁷¹ Also included in His messages of love were warnings of impending destruction that awaited those who rejected God and the salvation He offered them. God has benevolently provided all of the information humans need to make an eternal choice

⁷⁰ Grant R. Osborne, *Luke Verse by Verse* (Ashland: Lexham Press, 2018), 352.

⁷¹ Gerald Bray, *God Is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 273.

between Heaven and Hell, as He patiently awaits their decision. The fact that God inspired the Bible to be written and provided instructions on how to avoid *hell* prove the depths of His great love for humankind and the desire to give them an eternal life of happiness through Him and not one of eternal suffering.

Love is not a new commandment, but it is the key to keeping them all, remaining in a relationship with the Almighty God, and avoiding eternal damnation. When asked by one of the Pharisaical law experts, “What is the greatest commandment?” Jesus promptly replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ (Matt 22:37-39). While not asked for the second greatest commandment, Jesus, out of His love, offers transparency to show that the first commandment leads to the second and is the fulfillment of the entire law and securing eternity in Heaven.

Neighbour-love, grounded by divine authority, provides a basis for genuine human flourishing despite the fact that this love requires self-denial. God does not suggest neighbour-love but commands it, and being a duty makes neighbour-love steadfast, autonomous, and significant. True happiness is not found when we aim directly at our own happiness, but when we discover God’s love for us and respond to God in grateful obedience. Loving God in the right way, we will want to obey his command – the command to love our neighbours as ourselves.⁷²

Jesus placed great emphasis on love, and as He walked the earth as a man, He personified God’s love for people and further expressed how humans should lovingly respond to God as well as one another. Following Jesus’ example, honoring God in human relationships and displaying love for one another has a significant impact on determining one’s eternal destination.

The way God deals with us depends on how we deal with others. This is the proper law of reciprocity: God treats us the way we treat others. We cannot imitate Christ without emulating his attitudes and reaction to others. To be Christlike we must make certain that

⁷² C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love: Divine Commands and Moral Obligations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), Chap 6.

all our relationships seek to build others up and help them grow. If we take a superior attitude and condemn others, God will condemn us first for the sin of prejudice and then for beating down rather than building up those around us.⁷³

God is the perfect example of love. He pleads with humans through Scripture and Jesus Christ's example, to love like Him, even more so when dealing with their enemies. "God demands we live on a much higher plane than the world. For sinful humanity the law of reciprocity rules—they will merely respond, good for good and evil for evil. This is reversed for Christ followers, who ought to love when wronged and return good for evil."⁷⁴

Despite the instructions God has promulgated on how to love, humans have the autonomy to display love according to their own choices; this includes choosing to love Him or not. "If freedom were not very important and if the capacity for self-determination were a minor subplot in the interactions between God and humanity, God would do right to override our freedom and ensure the presence of all in heaven."⁷⁵ However, God understands forcing one to do His will is not true love. Therefore, He created people in His image, free like Him, capable of making decisions for themselves, based on the information they have received directly from Him. "Only a free being can turn to God's goodness. Love is meant to be a gift, and what is forced is not a gift. God put himself in the vulnerable position of awaiting our gift of ourselves back to him. He will lead us to him by giving us good things and warn us of the evils that result when we turn away from him. But he does not force our love."⁷⁶ The magnanimity of God's love caused Him to create humankind, allow them free will, and love them despite using that free will to sin

⁷³ Grant R. Osborne, *Luke Verse by Verse* (Ashland: Lexham Press, 2018), 124.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁷⁵ Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 130.

⁷⁶ Adrian J. Reimers, *Hell and the Mercy of God* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2017), 47.

against Him. “God can't manipulate His children into being good. So God shows them love and respects their autonomy by not forcing some of his creations to join Him in Heaven if they refuse his grace.”⁷⁷

To be sure, God has communicated a way for humanity to know for certain if they love Him or not: “If you love me, keep my commands” (John 4:15). Not only did He provide a system to know what loves looks like in action, but He also gave all humans the ability to love and display that love properly towards Himself and other individuals. “Since love is eternally commanded by an eternal being who must make it possible to obey the command, love is an eternal reality, at least as a *real possibility* that is present in the foundation of every individual, and this gives love a certain invulnerability to the whims and vagaries of inclinations and feelings.”⁷⁸ While God does not force humans to keep His commands, doing so has rewarding eternal consequences. Jesus promised that those who keep His commandments will live with the Triune God (John 14:23), never see death (John 8:51), and will remain in His love (John 15:10). For Jesus, the opposite is also true; anyone who does not love Him will not keep His commands (John 14:24). Those who do not keep the Father's words will not be entitled to any of the eternal privileges promised by Jesus; they will become alien to Him. These impenitent humans, who have chosen to reject God's commands, are exposed to God's wrath and subjected to eternal punishment. Despite God loving all humans, He also loves justice and will deal with those who behave unjustly accordingly. It is necessary to understand the whole of God's love; God's love is multi-faceted. His love is beneficent towards all, righteous and unrighteous, offering grace,

⁷⁷ David B. Hershenov, “The Fairness of Hell,” *Ratio* 32, no. 3 (September 2019): 222.

⁷⁸ C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love: Divine Commands and Moral Obligations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), Chap 6.

salvation, and multiple opportunities for repentance. Beyond that, His love is salvific towards those who repent of their sins and accept Jesus Christ as their savior. His love continues to extend to those who choose not to repent by allowing them the life and afterlife they desire, separate from Him. While many believe that God's love will keep them out of eternal dangers despite their unremorseful and brazen disregard for His Word, they will find out that His love for His Son and justice will weigh heavily in deciding their outcome.

God's Sovereignty on Hell

God has absolute authority and is all supreme; He is sovereign. He is not dependent on anyone or anything to exist or reign; He is sovereign. The sovereignty of God is a conglomeration of all the characteristics that make up His perfect nature. His omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, love, justice, mercy, Aseity, et cetera, work together to direct His ruling hand on how He interacts with His creation based on His Word. The Almighty God is in full control, and His decree stands forever. This attribute is, by far, the most confusing and distorted of the characteristics that make up God's eternal nature, especially when it comes to the doctrine of 'hell.' Some feel as though God should use His sovereignty to intervene by protecting people from horrendous evils and forbid anyone from going to *hell*; this is the point where human autonomy and God's sovereignty appear to contravene. God declared human freedom in the Garden of Eden when He said, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die" (Gen 2:16-17). In these two verses, it is clear that the sovereignty of God's decree, "You will surely die," overrides, outweighs, and out-rules human autonomy. God made it known

that to misuse their freedom by rejecting His decree would result in dire consequences: death and man's fall into depravity. "When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they were rejecting the Word of God as the basis of life. This was an example of creature-ism—the creature attempts to judge the Creator by creaturely standards."⁷⁹ Similar to the verses in Genesis 2:16-17, we see the sovereignty of God's decree prevailing against wickedness in Revelations: "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death" (Rev 21:8). While humans are free to behave sinfully, it will not be without eternal repercussions.

The message to us is that joining with Satan in his rebellion against God is a waste of time, because those who do so will also be cast into the lake of fire and will suffer the same punishment as their master. God will not destroy them any more than he will destroy Satan, but in his love for what he has made, he will keep them in existence in spite of themselves and exercise his sovereignty over them, which from their perspective will be the ultimate humiliation and punishment.⁸⁰

Humans are free to their vices and to reject the Word of God for a time, but God's decree will stand in the end, and what He said shall come to pass. "According to traditional Christian theism, we are free to sin, perhaps even to sin with a degree of impunity for a while, but we are not free to sin with impunity forever."⁸¹ God allowing humans to reject Him freely does not take away from His sovereignty; it substantiates it as nothing comes as a surprise to Him. "But this is precisely the perspective of the Bible, from beginning to end. That perspective holds that God is

⁷⁹ John Piper and Justin Taylor, *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006), 124.

⁸⁰ Gerald Bray, *God Is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 278.

⁸¹ Thomas Talbott, "Freedom, Damnation, and the Power to Sin with Impunity" *Religious Studies* 37, no. 4 (2001): 417.

indeed “sovereign,” but human existence within history is “fallen.”⁸² The sovereign God is in control, and He knows who will be saved from *hell* and who will have to endure it. “In the face of this universal rejection of God, God has chosen to save some. As Jesus said to his pupils, “You did not choose me, but I chose you.”⁸³

To allow a loved one, especially a child, to choose their own path, knowing that it leads to destruction and not interfere, because of the command that has already gone forth, takes an astronomical amount of strength and control; this cannot be more clear than in the role of parenting. When a parent pronounces to their child the consequences of specific actions, they do well to stick to it, building trust and allowing for correction in the relationship. While the child is free to choose disobedience, knowing the punishment's terms, the parent's authority supersedes the child's poor choice, and discipline has every right to move forth. Like a human parent, God is concerned with shaping the moral codes of all humans. He has provided commandments and Scriptures that shape His children's ethics and mold them into honest human beings that honor Him. “God's relationship to us is even closer than that of the parents to their newborn whom they created and sustained. A wrong to that child is arguably a wrong to the parents, at least when that child is young and being nurtured by them. God not only created everything in the universe but according to the doctrine of divine conservation, sustains all of it at every moment of its existence.”⁸⁴ Choosing to go against the specific decrees of the sovereign and eternal God, as outlined in Scripture, has eternal consequences; *hell* may very well be that ramification.

⁸² Steven B. Cowan and Terry L. Wilder, *In Defense of the Bible: a Comprehensive Apologetic for the Authority of Scripture* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2013), 241.

⁸³ E. Earle Ellis, *The Sovereignty of God in Salvation: Biblical Essays* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), 6.

⁸⁴ David B. Hershenov, “The Fairness of Hell,” *Ratio* 32, no. 3 (September 2019): 218.

“We serve the sovereign God who will accomplish his will no matter what. We find this truth all the way back to creation. When we were created, we were in covenant relationship with God. This was the covenant of creation (others call it the covenant of works). According to the terms of the covenant, obedience would result in blessing. We would experience pleasure as the sovereign will of God was accomplished through us. However, if we broke the covenant, we would be under its curse, and we would experience pain as the sovereign will of God was accomplished through us.”⁸⁵

To be sure, God is all-powerful, has complete authority, and nothing happens without His permission or knowledge. The sovereign God has power over death and Hades and has outstretched His arm to save humans from eternal punishment: “Our God is a God who saves; from the Sovereign LORD comes escape from death” (Ps 68:20). Escape from death, and eternal punishment is issued from God’s sovereign reign. God’s covenant with His people vindicates them from the horrors of eternal punishment, providing they uphold their part of the agreement just as He is upholding His. “The Lord exercises his absolute control in creating his servants, establishing his covenant with them, ruling them, and saving them according to his covenant — all with sovereign power.”⁸⁶

God’s Mercy on Hell

God’s mercy is displayed as Jesus hung on the cross, nailed, beaten, and gasping for the very breath of life that He once blew into His beloved creation. Slowly dying between two thieves, one repentant and the other unrepentant, Jesus is allowing human beings to get a glimpse of how their decisions will impact their eternal state. The repentant thief, heart filled with belief

⁸⁵ John Piper and Justin Taylor, *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006), 123.

⁸⁶ Joel Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology: Volume 1: Revelation and God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 55.

and hope of a better afterlife than the earthly existence he had experienced, received immediate acknowledgment from Jesus after asking Him to remember him once in His kingdom (Luke 23:42). Jesus told the repentant thief, “Today, you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). Jesus’ statement proves to humanity that because of His mercy, repentance gives them access to be a part of His family and wipes a once questionable slate clean making one deserving of an eternal life of peace and happiness despite past wrongdoings committed as sinners. This man may have committed more wrong in his life than good, but it only took a few moments with Christ to turn his eternal state from enduring unquenchable fires to a heavenly abode prepared by the Lord just for him. The absolute acceptance, deliverance, and forgiveness that took place, while even on the cross, is an example of the mercy that God stands so ready to offer each of His beloved creations.

The impenitent thief hanging next to Jesus was the first to speak to Him, chiding Him and questioning who He was. “Save yourself if you are the Christ” (Luke 23:39). These words are strikingly similar to the temptation the devil spoke to Jesus as he was enticing Him in the wilderness, both wanting Jesus to display His power for their selfish reasons. “And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone” (Matt4:6, KJV). The distinctions between the decisions of the two thieves hanging on either side of Jesus reflect the choice that every human being will have to make to determine their own eternal fate. Basically, it boils down to accepting or rejecting Jesus Christ.

It is often thought that justice is the primary attribute that drives God when it comes to the reality of ‘hell,’ but the Bible says otherwise: “Mercy triumphs over judgment” (Jam 2:13). As it relates to God’s plan of salvation, mercy is taking place over justice; mercy prevails in the

life of a redeemed sinner. Mercy is God not giving the sinful human what they deserve, death, and instead gives them another chance at life. In this way, mercy is God's way of enhancing justice by rescuing those who have shown mercy to others at some point in their life, from the threats of 'hell.' The Bible clarifies that mercy is one of several communicable attributes that God has shared with His image-bearing creation: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36). Like love, God has made being merciful a reality between humans; therefore, He expects people to exhibit mercy to one another because He gave them the ability to do so. Biblically, mercy is a conglomeration of virtues that make up the "fruit of the Spirit" that humans can exemplify with the Holy Spirit's assistance. The biblical definition of mercy is:

Compassion or leniency shown to another, especially an offender. In this sense, mercy has special reference to God's act of forgiveness by means of atonement. In a more general sense, mercy is the compassion that causes one to help the weak, the sick, or the poor. Showing mercy is one of the cardinal virtues of a true Christian ([Jas. 2:1-13](#)) and is one of the determinants of God's treatment of us. Christian mercy is a "fruit of the Spirit" ([Gal. 5:22-23](#)), made up in part of love, longsuffering, kindness, gentleness, and goodness. God's mercy toward sinners was shown most clearly and fully in his giving of his beloved Son to die in our stead; and our Lord's mercy enabled him to make willingly the awful sacrifice ([Rom. 5:8](#)).⁸⁷

As Jesus communicated the Beatitudes in His famous sermon on the mount, He emphasized that those who were merciful are ipso facto recipients of mercy: "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy" (Matt 5:7). The same is true in the negative sense. According to James, the brother of Jesus, one who shows no mercy to others, will not receive mercy (James 2:13).

To fail to love your neighbor as yourself is to fail to follow the law, and this will lead to the same judgment that one would experience if s/he were an adulterer or murderer. In the end, James equates this with a lack of mercy and concludes that mercy triumphs over judgment. This, of course, is the essence of the gospel wrapped up in one simple phrase.

⁸⁷ "Free Online Bible Library: Mercy," BiblicalTraining.org, accessed November 16, 2020, <https://www.biblicaltraining.org/library/mercy>.

If it had not been for the mercy of God we would all suffer God's judgment similarly, we are to be merciful to our neighbor.⁸⁸

Jesus communicates what showing mercy to another human being looks like in the parable of the Good Samaritan. One of the ways Jesus promulgates the truth of mercy was using parables to ensure His audience well understood his message.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan Luke 10:25-37

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'" "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Jesus provided many details in this parable, explaining exactly who is considered a neighbor and the actionable mercy humans should have towards one another. This parable clarifies that mercy goes beyond feelings of pity or not giving deserved punishment but is reconciliatory.

Rather than conceive "mercy" as the lenient remission of deserved punishment, this account invites us to conceive it as the practice of transgressive care, the humane and humanizing work of repair and reconciliation in human life. In the first place, this conception of "mercy" is pointedly detached from questions of desert: in the parable, none of the passersby know whether or not the man "deserved" the beating he has

⁸⁸ LeAnn Snow Flesher, "Mercy Triumphs over Judgment: James as Social Gospel" *Review and Expositor* 111, no. 2 (2014): 180-186.

apparently received, and they have no way to discover that information before deciding how to respond. In this sense, this account of “mercy” excludes not only “deserved punishment” but “desert” entirely, and so is not based first of all on lenient remission of penalties, but rather on gratuitous provision of benefits.⁸⁹

This parable further communicates how God bestows mercy upon humans. He goes farther than having pity and has taken action to disseminate mercy towards humanity by giving His only begotten Son as a propitiation for sins when He could have done otherwise.

Mercy is significant to God and weighs heavily during the judgment, as God considers merciful actions during eternal sentencing. The merciful God is not apathetic to sin and wrongful doing; He is greatly concerned about injustice. While God will not shrink back from punishing evildoers, He will allow mercy to intervene where appropriate, allowing room for conversion to save some from an eternity in ‘hell.’

⁸⁹ Jonathan Rothchild, Matthew Myer Boulton, and Kevin Jung, *Doing Justice to Mercy: Religion, Law, and Criminal Justice* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 133.

CHAPTER SEVEN

God's Methods of Promulgating to Humanity

God's promulgation follows the three facets of communication: sender, receiver, and message. The message He shares with humans about hell's reality is one of the direst because it contains instructions on avoiding it. God's words are not mixed with falsehood or deceitfulness; they are pure. The Word of God can be trusted and is reliable. "And the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver purified in a crucible, like gold refined seven times" (Ps 12:6). God makes it clear that His word sanctifies (John 17:17), cleanses (Eph 5:26), and produces faith (Rom 10:17). God's word is the defense that is needed when facing the dangers of the lake of fire. It has already been determined that God is a communicator and that He speaks in various ways to reach diverse crowds worldwide throughout history and over time. God's communication crosses religions, cultures, and every economic status; it is not even bound by sin. "If God tells us true things about himself, then we have another way of knowing things about God. In the monotheistic traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, it is claimed that this is precisely what has happened. Not only can we know things about God by observation and reasoning, we can know things because he has told us."⁹⁰

God has devised various methods of communicating to His beloved created humans so that they understand His truth and know that His words are sure. Despite knowing that some humans will reject His words, that never stopped the sovereign God from communicating the necessary information on how to avoid hell's fire.

⁹⁰ Gregory E. Ganssle, *Thinking about God: First Steps in Philosophy* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 179.

Creation

God created all things; nothing has ever been created that was not created by Him (John 1:3). God is the only being that can create something *ex nihilo* (from nothing at all); He is the source of all that exists. The Bible explains that God created the heavens, earth, sea, and all that exists within six days, including man (Gen 1). The Creation helps humans understand some aspects of God's complex mind as they enjoy the world He spoke into existence. "Creation represents an ontological becoming of God's ideas. God thinks and wishes a creation which has as its model the person of the divine Logos, who is the hypostatic, absolute reason. God is present in his creation through his Logos; that is, through the divine *logoi* of creation who are coming into existence through the Logos and exist toward the Logos."⁹¹ It is essential to understand God as The Creator of all things, especially when it comes to hell's reality. Hell is a created place, and God has assured humanity that it was created for Satan and his fallen angels (Mat 25:41), not humans. As a strategic and efficient designer, all of His creations serve a purpose, even Hell. God's fingerprint is on the creation, and humans can gain a wealth of knowledge about God and the depth of His nature by merely observing His creation. "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse" (Rom 1:20).

As the Creator, God is also the sustainer of that Creation and the One who holds all things together: "He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together" (Col 1:17, NLT). Tremendous trust can be gained from God on behalf of humans because He holds the

⁹¹ Daniel Munteanu, "Cosmic Liturgy: The Theological Dignity of Creation as a Basis of an Orthodox Ecotheology" *International Journal of Public Theology* 4, no. 3 (2010), 334.

world together for their dwelling. “Surely God is worthy of ultimate trust only if it is indeed true (as authors of the Heidelberg Catechism rightly recognized) that nothing can separate us from God’s love (Rom. 8:39). From this perspective, it’s not that the doctrine of creation motivates us to trust God, but that it provides an explanation of why it makes sense for us to trust God in the way that the Gospel says we should.”⁹² The trust gained from creation and the sustaining power that God has over it allows humans to know that His word is true, and it will most certainly come to fulfillment. The same trust towards creation can be applied to trusting what God says about the doctrine of Hell, especially since He is the one who created it.

God Promulgates Through Scripture

Millions have received comfort, peace, and transformation from reading and studying the Bible. “For everything that was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope” (Rom 15:4). The basic premise of DPV is built on the belief that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Word of God. The reader needs to understand that although God chose men to write His words, they are still God’s words. “Studying the biblical texts closely, however, we perceive a noteworthy fact: the relationship between their authors and God is constantly made explicit. This happens in various ways, each of them capable of making it clear that the respective writings come from God.”⁹³ DPV affirms The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy:

⁹² Ian A. McFarland, *From Nothing: A Theology of Creation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 185.

⁹³ Thomas Esposito, *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture: The Word that Comes from God and Speaks of God for the Salvation of the World* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 10.

1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.
2. Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms, obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.
3. The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.
4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.
5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.⁹⁴

The Bible presents the Word of God, not the word of humanity. Scripture's authority is derived from God only and does not need to be approved by any other entity. The Scriptures make it clear to the reader that God is unlike the wooden or stone idols fashioned by men who could not speak, hear, or smell because they were dead (Ps 115). When God speaks through Scripture, His words are alive, meaningful, and salvific; they literally give life.

God's speaking is designed to bring us to salvation. This reminds us that listening to and interpreting the word of God is not an end in itself. The word of God is instrumental to our salvation. In the midst of demanding hermeneutical challenges, it is easy to forget that our listening to the voice of God, our engagements with God's word, are not ends in themselves. Rather, believers engage God's word, we listen to God's voice, to direct our love and our longing towards reaching our true home in God. Keeping our ultimate ends in mind is a crucial step in hearing properly the voice of God in the text of Scripture.⁹⁵

⁹⁴International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* (Chicago: 1978), available at https://www.etsjets.org/files/documents/Chicago_Statement.pdf.

⁹⁵Oliver Crisp and Fred Sanders, *The Voice of God in the Text of Scripture: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2016), 46.

From the Old to the New Testaments, God divulged detailed data that progressed and culminated into what is understood today as the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Luther considered the law in the Bible as dynamically and dialectically connected to the Gospel: the Gospel was understood with the law, and vice versa. They were inseparable parts of the same revelation to humanity. This dyad of law and Gospel pervaded all of Scripture; law was not simply given in the explicit code of Leviticus but was intricately maintained throughout the Old and New Testaments.⁹⁶

The information that God disclosed in the Bible for His precious created humans lead millions and continues to lead millions more to eternal salvation away from the grips of hell. The same words God spoke in Genesis to produce creation and form humans in His image flow straight through the New Testament, offering redemption and salvation to restore what He made in the beginning.

The unique and at the same time telling way in which John describes this momentous event provides another clue to the power of language. “In the beginning was the Word,” proclaims John (John 1:1)—and then continues to suggest that it was the same divine word whose creative power had spoken the world into existence (1:1-3). The clear link to Gen 1 is hard to miss and has been noted repeatedly. When John tells his readers that the Word, the logos, became flesh and dwelt among us (1:14) he mixes creation and sanctuary language (note particularly the key text in Exod 25:8). John tells us that through this incarnate Word salvation is accomplished.⁹⁷

God inspired and wrote Scripture by human hands, not because He wanted to publish a good read but to help humans take a transformative journey to achieve eternal life with Him. “Scripture is a “means of transport” that, when read and received properly, shapes the loves of the reader so that the reader is moved toward the “destination,” which is God himself.”⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Jarrett A. Carty, *God and Government: Martin Luther's Political Thought* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 68.

⁹⁷ Gerald A. Klingbeil, “‘He Spoke and it was’: Human Language, Divine Creation, and the Imago Dei,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 36, no. 1 (2014), 55.

⁹⁸ Oliver Crisp and Fred Sanders, *The Voice of God in the Text of Scripture: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics*, 186.

The purpose of salvific Scripture is to drive the reader away from eternal damnation and into the arms of a loving God. Only a loving God would warn people of eternal damnation and destruction in Hell and then reveal His plans, by inspiring Scripture, to rescue them from such an awful fate. “God “speaks to the person’s heart” as it were, giving him first-person assurance of the Bible’s divine authority (or perhaps more precisely, that a portion of Scripture that he’s reading is divine speech directed toward him).”⁹⁹ Scripture is an invitation to learn God and grow more in-depth into His image; a human who grasps the Word of God successfully becomes more like Him, making hell no longer a threat to them.

Truths Scripture Has Promulgated About Hell

The Scriptures provide critical information about hellish doctrine. It makes little sense to go anywhere other than the Bible to understand truths about hell. Many misconceptions are circulating about hell that a straightforward reading of the Bible could explicate. One fallacy the Bible clarifies is that hell or the lake of fire has current occupants; this is not true. The Bible makes it evident that hell is empty today and will remain empty until after the judgment. “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the Day of Judgment to be punished” (2 Pet 2:9, KJV). Many erroneous teachings have people believing that their loved ones or enemies are burning in hell today, but that is not the case. Much confusion comes from mistranslations, but a correct study will show that the lake of fire is

⁹⁹ Steven B. Cowan and Terry L. Wilder, *In Defense of the Bible : a Comprehensive Apologetic for the Authority of Scripture* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishing Group, 2014), 433.

currently uninhabited. “That the wicked is reserved to the day of destruction? They shall be brought forth to the day of wrath” (Job 21:30, KJV).

Another clarification the Bible makes about hell is that Satan is not ruling there. Satan and his fallen angels will be hurled into the lake of fire to receive their punishment; they will not be the punishers or enjoy the lake of fire. The Bible states, “And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever”(Rev 20:21, KJV). Many people have the wrong idea about hell from cartoons, uniformed teachings, and false testimonies from those claiming to have visited hell and been tortured by demons. God created hell to punish evil spirits; they will not have the ability to govern or act out punishments towards humans.

A third clarification that the Bible makes is that humans will receive equal punishment in hell regardless of their sins. The Bible makes it evident that humanity is judged according to their deeds, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10). Humans are not punished equally, nor are they punished the same as Satan and his demons; God metes out punishment fair, according to what is deserved. Scripture communicates that punishment can be increased or made worse due to compounding evil deeds storing up or increasing God’s wrath. The Bible states: “But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed” (Rom 2:5).

Correcting misunderstandings about hell is critical for defending the nature of God and the unbelief that He exists. Listening to what God has to say on hellish doctrine overrides what any human has to say on the topic. God understands that erroneous beliefs can arise; that is why

He has spoken in various ways.

God Promulgated Through the Prophets

The Bible demonstrates that God often spoke through prophets to relay what He wanted to say to populaces. These messengers were hand-picked by God to speak precisely what He desired to communicate, whether the message was good or bad. “A prophetic title implies divine authority, even where formulas do not claim divine authority. The bearer of a prophetic title is the messenger of God.”¹⁰⁰ Prophets, also known as Oracles, made it clear that their message originated from God, usually by starting with phrases like “Thus saith the Lord.”

The prophet is not an initiator of this particular relationship with God, nor of the particular tasks that he will undertake, nor of the words he will speak. He is a person under authority who can only speak and act at the behest of his Master, just as in the normal slave-master relationship. The initiative, like the source of the communication, lies outside the prophet. Being a prophet is not so much a vocation pursued as something that happens to a person quite apart from his or her plans or will.¹⁰¹

These chosen prophets spoke with the authority of God’s messages concerning future judgment and salvation. “What is notable about these oracles is that they involve a direct command from Yahweh in which God speaks in the first person, and the future is revealed.”¹⁰² Over and over again, the prophets sent the people warnings from God, desperately seeking to keep them from impending destruction due to their rebellion. While the prophets did not use the word hell, they

¹⁰⁰ William M. Schniedewind, *The Word of God in Transition: From Prophet to Exegete in the Second Temple Period* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009), 54.

¹⁰¹ Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Seer: The Progress of Prophecy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014; 2015), 48.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 38.

used terms like everlasting contempt, outer darkness, unquenchable fire, and eternal fire to relay the eternal calamities that await. For example, Isaiah wrote: “And they will go out and look on the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; the worms that eat them will not die, the fire that burns them will not be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind” (Isa 66:24). Daniel wrote: “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan 12:2). God spoke through Isaiah, Daniel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Jude, the Psalms, and others to deliver His message about judgment and salvation. These faithful messengers faced many dangers, but their strength to speak God’s truth came from God the Holy Spirit: “For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:21).

The prophet is one who speaks in the name of God. As a consequence, those who hear the prophet speaking, when he is speaking in his prophetic capacity, are confronted with that which counts as God speaking; the utterances of the prophet are the medium of God's discourse. Speaking in the name of God is not something that a person just undertakes to do; God will "raise up" the prophet, as God raised up Moses. To be a prophet requires being deputized to speak in God's name. In addition, God will tell the prophet what he is to say, putting words in his mouth; the prophet does not devise the words by himself. The prophet is commissioned to communicate a message from God, and God will give that message to the prophet.¹⁰³

The prophets understood that the message God spoke to them was not only for the times they were living in but that those words would continue to speak through coming generations. If the words they spoke were mere human words, that claim could be made that the prophecies were short term; however, the prophets understood that God’s word would never diminish.

When the great prophet Isaiah spoke to ancient Israel about time and eternity, he exclaimed, “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.” Isaiah understood the transitory nature of human existence and would have

¹⁰³ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 48.

agreed with Jesus that those who devote themselves to piling up “treasures on earth” will soon discover how misplaced their efforts have been. His focus was on eternity and his thoughts were concentrated on the word of God. Like the other prophets before him, Isaiah believed that God had spoken, and that this message had been given to particular people, including himself, at specific times in human history. God did not always say exactly the same thing, and often his message was not easy to understand, but whatever he said at any given time, it was his word and would last forever. This is because what God does in time reflects who and what he is in eternity. This gives consistency to God’s actions even if, in our finitude, we cannot always perceive what that consistency is.¹⁰⁴

Scripture provides a look into how God chose individual humans to speak on His behalf and what He had them share about eternal punishment. Those living during the Old Testament times profited from the prophet’s warnings of eternal damnation, as well as those living during the New Testament era, and their message is still resounding today.

God Promulgated Through Jesus

God’s solution to the predicament of sin and, ultimately, hell for humans was Jesus. Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, represented God perfectly in the flesh. In essence, God became His own solution to the problem of sin and ultimately saving humanity from hell or the lake of fire. According to Scripture, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:16-17). Since animal sacrifices were insufficient to take away sins, Jesus became the perfect sacrifice, once and for all time, by shedding His blood on the cross. Jesus was the only sure way to do away with sin and release humans from the penalty of death, and hell should they accept His gift

¹⁰⁴ Gerald Bray, *God Is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 24.

of salvation. Before Jesus was crucified, He spent three years preaching and warning about the dangers of eternal punishment in hell. During His three year ministry on earth, Jesus preached more about hell than He did about heaven. In vivid detail and imagery, Jesus taught about hell's doctrine, continually warning of the dangers of its unquenchable fires. Jesus thought hell was important enough to speak about continuously, so it should be important to everyone. Many try to isolate Jesus' message of eternal punishment by focusing on His love, but that is impossible to separate due to the number of times He included this subject in His historical sermons.

If you want to get rid of hell, therefore, you have to get rid of Jesus. And that's the irony: if we're going to say that the love of God was emphasized to a greater extent by Jesus in the New Testament, we have to acknowledge that the wrath of God also gets ratcheted up in the New Testament. We can't escape the fact that hell, just as much as the love and grace of God, is a central New Testament, Jesus- driven teaching.¹⁰⁵

The reality of eternal punishment became clear through Jesus' teachings as He brought it to full culmination. Giving hellish details through parables and blunt warnings, no one walked away from Jesus's fiery sermons, not understanding that hell was a real and potential eternal option unless some profound changes were made in their lives.

A clearer picture of hell emerges in the teaching of Jesus during his earthly life. It is sometimes forgotten that he is the one who speaks about hell more clearly and more insistently than anyone else in the Bible— and given who he is, he speaks with greater authority as well. In the words of Jesus, hell is a place of fiery torment, and those who go there are cut off forever from the bliss of heaven.¹⁰⁶

Jesus purposefully captured the attention of His audience, which many times consisted of more than five thousand. Here are a few of the numerous warning Scriptures that Jesus spoke on the subject of eternal punishment in hell:

¹⁰⁵ Mark Clark, *The Problem of God: Answering a Skeptic's Challenges to Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 129.

¹⁰⁶ Gerald Bray, *God Is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 574.

- “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt 10:28).
- “Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt 25:41).
- “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them” (John 3:36).
- “And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where "the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:47-48).

“Jesus, then, is not advocating the actual plucking out of eyes or the lopping off of limbs, but rather he is graphically illustrating that if one does not wish to enter into the darkness of hell where no one sees God, then one must resolutely stand against and even violently attack the lustful sinful passions that virulently reside within one’s heart and mind.”¹⁰⁷

There are Scriptures other than the gospels that reinforce the work that Jesus did on the cross to offer eternal salvation to humanity. “Hebrews employs a combination of realized and future eschatology to achieve its purpose of impressing on its readers the full effect of the salvific work of Christ, the High Priest. Having been himself perfected through suffering, Christ became the source of eternal salvation for others (5:9), who are brought to glory along with him (2:10).”¹⁰⁸

The words Jesus spoke on hellish doctrine should not be forgotten or pushed aside in hopes of seeking a more palatable Christ. Jesus embodied God's very essence and all of His attributes, and He made it clear that seeing Him was seeing the Father (John 12:45). It is safe to say that hearing Jesus is also hearing the Father, and they agree on the subject of hell.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas G. Weinandy, *Jesus Becoming Jesus: A Theological Interpretation of the Synoptic Gospels* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 169.

¹⁰⁸ Alan C. Mitchell, *Sacra Pagina: Hebrews* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 39.

God Promulgates Through Revelation

God is so deeply concerned about salvation that His communication methods reach beyond natural methods and into the supernatural. God's revelation to humans is directly connected to the salvation He offers them. To ensure that His message gets through, God reveals information by both general and special revelation. "First and foremost, revelation is the gratuitous, redemptive self-manifestation of the tripersonal God which empowers human beings to respond with faith."¹⁰⁹ God reveals information in ways that impact the human senses and perceptions. God purposefully created humans so that their senses work together to ensure the highest perception of a situation at any given time. Humans are created to detect threats and know the difference between right and wrong by observing their environment and receiving internal signals from the brain. "All knowledge and skill come from the Lord. God is the Teacher of mankind, whether by his ordinary providence or by special revelation. Just as surely as God gave us ears and eyes, so he "teacheth man knowledge" (Ps. 94:9– 10). The ordinary functioning of our minds to think and understand depends on God's continuous activity to impart insight and ability."¹¹⁰ This intentional sensory connection is especially important when God communicates to humans about the horrible reality of hell.

Natural or general revelation is when God chooses to reveal Himself logically through observation, like the creation. All humans can know God, but many choose to neglect that knowledge despite the evidence. "In order to show that mankind has turned away from God, we must first recognize that "they knew God." God has revealed himself to all nations. Theologians

¹⁰⁹ Gerald O'Collins, *Revelation: Towards a Christian Interpretation of God's Self-Revelation in Jesus Christ* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1.

¹¹⁰ Joel Beeke, and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology: Volume 1: Revelation and God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 166.

call this general revelation because it reaches to everyone in all of God’s creation.”¹¹¹ One does not have to accept God’s teachings or believe that He is good; all of creation speaks on His behalf. “This revelation is defined as the benevolent provision of God in nature, “giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17). These occurrences in nature, the apostle proclaimed, should have led the nations to recognize the reality and the benevolence of the one Creator God (Acts 14:15– 17).”¹¹² God’s natural revelation to humans appeals to their conscience and causes them to act following His moral laws, even if they are not believers. “This is demonstrated, he argues, in the fact that Gentiles— quite apart from special revelation— sometimes “do by nature things required by the law” (Rom 2:14). The fact that they have a moral conscience also reveals that God has placed within them a law “written on their hearts” (Rom 2:15). The conscience does not simply reveal the content of God’s decree about human conduct, but it also reveals the consequences of disobedience, serving as a kind of precursor to the judgment seat of Christ. The human conscience “bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus” (Rom 2:15b– 16).”¹¹³ God’s general revelation benefits all, righteous and unrighteous, promulgating His desire to save them from the fires of hell and providing all of the necessary information to assist them in avoiding such a fate.

Special or divine revelation differs from general revelation in that God supernaturally reveals to certain people who then are charged with telling others. “The biblical terminology of

¹¹¹ Joel Beeke, and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology: Volume I: Revelation and God*, 153.

¹¹² Daniel L. Akin, *A Theology for the Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 9.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 12.

divine revelation indicates that God communicates with human beings in language that they can understand and repeat. Revelation is an act of sovereign grace, making known to men hidden divine truth that they cannot discover on their own. Revelation implies an intrusion of eternal glory into our ordinary, mundane existence.”¹¹⁴ Despite humans' fallen nature, God can still communicate meaningfully as there is a true likeness between His thoughts and humankind's being made in His image. God's transcendence allows His higher communication to penetrate the hearts of chosen humans on a level they can comprehend; He promulgates downward. “Although God does reveal himself and his will to human beings, he does so not at his level, but at our level, somewhat like Albert Einstein might talk to a little child about science —except the difference is infinitely greater.”¹¹⁵ God promulgates more profound to humanity by special revelation precisely to decree His plan of redemption and salvation. Being sovereign, God understands that some fallen humans will reject what He has communicated about judgment putting themselves at significant risk of hellfire.

Special revelation is associated with human redemption and salvation. It began in the Garden of Eden, even before the fall. Even sinless Adam and Eve needed more than general revelation to know God's blessing and do his will (Gen. 1:28; 2:15– 17). The Serpent attacked the goodness and trustworthiness of God's word (3:1– 5), thereby making special revelation the focal point of spiritual conflict between God and the Devil. After the fall of man, special revelation took on even greater importance as God manifested his presence to sinners alienated from him and spoke words of both judgment and grace (vv. 8– 19), including the protoevangelium, or first gospel promise (v. 15). Since then, God has progressively revealed his saving will, culminating in the coming of Jesus Christ into the world.¹¹⁶

God has miraculously revealed information to humanity through dreams, visions, angels, the Bible, and Jesus Christ. Continuously inflowing every orifice of communication that he created

¹¹⁴ Joel Beeke, and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology: Volume 1: Revelation and God*, 204.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 208.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 204.

between Himself and His image-bearing humans, relaying life-saving information not only about who He is but His eternal plans.

While the Bible assuredly insists that man still bears the divine image, although impaired by his fall into sin, it nonetheless stresses God's ontological as well as moral and noetic otherness; divine revelation is not manipulatable through man's initiative and mystical techniques, but is mediated everywhere at God's initiative through the Logos of God. The Bible, moreover, represents this mediated divine disclosure as rational and objective, and not as transcending logical distinctions and the sphere of truth-and-error. That the Logos of God is central to the Godhead is an unyielding scriptural emphasis. While there is a mystery side to God, revelation is mystery dispelled and conveys information about God and his purposes.¹¹⁷

God desires for humanity to have the whole truth about His plans of salvation and redemption.

He has revealed information that has the power to save all from the grips of hell, which is made clear in the Bible is His desire: "This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:3-4).

Holy Spirit

God is utterly transcendent. His high ways and thoughts make it impossible for humans to know Him or hear His message independently. Because of God's unmatched nature and knowledge, He allowed His Spirit to interact with humans on a personable level. He created a central communication method between Himself and humans to relay critical messages of salvation and receive unuttered human groanings through intercession.

The model can be simplified as follows: between God and human beings there is an intermediary, who acts as interpreter for the former and can speak to the latter. This intermediary is basically a means of communication, initially pure word—in the sense that he serves as an echo of a superior, divine word, and as the human instrument for

¹¹⁷ Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1999), 51.

transmitting a novel idea, a new view of the world, a word that human ears would otherwise be unable to hear.¹¹⁸

Penetrating all God-given sensibilities, the Creator widens communication between Himself and humanity with His Spirit or *Ruach*. God's Spirit can disseminate information in ways that cannot be easily forgotten and cause internal conflicts of conscience, always making one rethink their choices. By piercing human feelings, thoughts, and intuitions, the Spirit leads humans to the truth of God's message. "The Spirit is revealed in present and future afflictions as helper and first participation in eschatological consummation. Because he is the Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Father and the Son, he is the way to communion with God. It is of the essence of the Spirit to open oneself to others, enable communication, and draw people into unity, *koinonia* /*communio*."¹¹⁹ God's *Ruach* or Spirit of God is the source of all living creatures, producing a lesser *ruach* or human spirit in them for communication purposes. The Spirit of God plays a critical role in promulgating information necessary for an abundant eternal dwelling. The Spirit is responsible for nonforceful promptings, urgings, and longings for heavenly goals; it creates a yearning for something beyond the ordinary, a desire for God. The voice of the Spirit is calm and not brazen; He will never impose His will on anyone but lovingly leads.

God's Spirit, according to Paul, seeks noncoercively to "lead" all willing people to the risen Jesus and his Father as, respectively, their Lord and their God. This experience of "being led," or being volitionally prompted, by an authoritative call is cognitively significant, and goes beyond empirical history. It includes the authoritative divine call to relinquish our selfishness for a life of fellowship in God's unselfish love manifested in the crucified and risen Jesus. This call works through human conscience (cf. Rom. 2: 15, 9: 1, 2 Cor. 4: 2, 6, Gal. 1: 6), and comes with a serious moral challenge to us, even if we are inclined to ignore or to dismiss it. Human failure to hear this call may be the result of our not wanting to hear it on God's terms of unselfish love. We typically prefer, for

¹¹⁸ Enzo Pace, *Religion as Communication: God's Talk* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), 28.

¹¹⁹ Bradford E. Hinze and Dabney, D. Lyle, *Advents of the Spirit: An Introduction to the Current Study of Pneumatology* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001), 280.

instance, not to have to forgive or to love our enemies in the way God does and demands.¹²⁰

The voice of the Holy Spirit is critical in winning the battle against an eternity in hell. The Spirit has a vital role to perform, assisting humanity to avoid eternal punishment. Advocating, leading, guiding, comforting, helping, interceding, and teaching are all works that the Holy Spirit performs through communication. The personable Holy Spirit of God transmits exactly what He hears from God to guide humans in all truth (John 16:13). As the Spirit of God speaks into humanity's hearts, it convicts of sin and causes a desire for righteousness. It leads one to the Scriptures to know what God expects from humans to avoid an eternity in hell: "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Listen! The LORD is calling to the city-- and to fear your name is wisdom—"Heed the rod and the One who appointed it." (Mic 6:8-9).

Although the Spirit of God is seen throughout the entire Bible, Jesus knew that once He left the earth after His resurrection, the Holy Spirit would come in a more intimate way – living on the inside of believers. Jesus told the disciples that it was beneficial for Him to leave them because He was sending a comforter that would take over and lead them: "But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7). Jesus knew that the Holy Spirit was essential to carrying out the work He performed and securing salvation for those who would receive it. To be sure, the Holy Spirit is vital to God's plan of salvation and limiting the number of humans in an eternal lake of fire.

¹²⁰ Moser, Paul K, *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 195.

God Promulgates Through Ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ

Similar to how He used the Old Testament prophets, God continues to speak today through ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel message is central to the Bible, and God has promulgated this saving message for thousands of years. "This Gospel sets forth Jesus Christ as the living Savior, Master, Life, and Hope of all who put their trust in him. It tells us that the eternal destiny of all people depends on whether they are savingly related to Jesus Christ."¹²¹ The Gospel is critical to the eternal salvation from hell for humans. This good news offers assurance to all who accept Christ as their savior and believing Jesus was raised from the dead; they are saved.

The heart of the Gospel is that our holy, loving Creator, confronted with human hostility and rebellion, has chosen in his own freedom and faithfulness to become our holy, loving Redeemer and Restorer. The Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world (1 John 4:14): it is through his one and only Son that God's one and only plan of salvation is implemented. So Peter announced: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). And Christ himself taught: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).¹²²

Ministers of the Gospel have been called to promulgate to the world about accepting Jesus Christ and His salvation gift. Disseminating the Gospel of Christ crucified and resurrected is the best news that the unsaved could ever receive. While also offering evidence of the resurrection, the apostle Paul clarifies that humans can be saved by accepting this Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the Gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this Gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third

¹²¹ "The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration." *Christianity Today* 43, no. 7 (1999): 51.

¹²² *Ibid.*

day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep (1Cor15:1-6).

God is not ignorant of the sinful deeds of humanity. He sees all of the ugliness in the world, yet He chose ministers to actively communicate His message of love, hope, and repentance seeking to keep them from hell's fiery lake. Jesus says:

You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? Therefore I am sending you prophets and sages and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar (Matt 23:33-35).

The three prominent attributes of God that the Divine Promulgation View of Hell affirms is a reflection of God's communicative actions concerning humans can be identified in this passage. God's love is made apparent through the rebuking of sin, because whom God loves He chastises (Heb 12:6). God's mercy is evident because, despite the brandished sin and rejection, Jesus will still send ministers to teach God's message of salvation. Thirdly, God's sovereignty is visible in that Jesus already knows how some will respond to the ministers and outright reject the words that are being relayed to them.

God can have a greater reach to the unsaved by using human beings to communicate His salvific message in various ministerial capacities. Using people from all backgrounds, ethnicities, and economic statuses', God can penetrate the hearts of a diverse nation leading them to a heavenly eternity by sharing the Gospel.

Christian teachers and guides come in different shapes and sizes. Some are "evangelists" or proclaimers of the Gospel, whose primary task is to explain our faith to outsiders and urge them to consider Christ's claim on their lives. Others are preachers whose main role is the building up of God's people, so that they will be more settled in their beliefs and better witnesses to the wider world. Then there are teachers, whose duty it is to develop

the deeper implications of our faith and provide resources to preachers and evangelists so that they can fulfill their own callings more effectively.¹²³

The Bible is the primary tool that ministers use to spread the Gospel. Ministers must study the Word of God in depth and seek the divine revelation of its truth in order to teach and transform lives correctly. The authoritative message that ministers of the Gospel spread are based on what the prophets taught and the insurmountable evidence of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Bible is truly God's complete moral and doctrinal instruction for the church. Whether the minister needs to teach the truth, rebuke sinners, call people to repentance, or train the saints in spiritual growth, the Word of God contains the full wisdom that he needs. And it presents that wisdom in a variety of forms adapted for teaching, rebuke, correction, and training in righteousness.¹²⁴

The Bible provides the content of the Gospel message and its primary elements. First, Jesus died for the sins of humanity. All humans have sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Rom 3:23), and the sinner must acknowledge this fact in order to recognize that they need salvation. Second, Jesus's death paid the penalty for sin, and those covered by His sacrifice will inherit the kingdom of God instead of an eternity in hell. Third, the Gospel clarifies that the salvation Jesus offers is a free gift and cannot be earned. The Gospel of Jesus Christ has been safeguarded and proclaimed from the time of the Old Testament prophets to the ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ today.

Conclusion

God did not leave humans to wander aimlessly through life, leaving them to their own logic tainted with sin. God has promulgated His salvific message to humans and can relate to

¹²³ Gerald Bray, *God Is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 19.

¹²⁴ Joel Beeke, and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology: Volume 1: Revelation and God*, 309.

them in their nomenclatures. While there are other ways that God can promulgate information to humanity to save them from hellfire, this treatise has focused on some of the primary methods. Since the fall of man, God has not stopped reaching out to humanity and communicating His plans to divert them from the dreadful punishment of the lake of fire. The saving power that humanity needs comes from the sovereign God through Jesus Christ because of His love; all other power sources fail. What God has spoken to humanity about hell is more important than anything a spokesperson can relay or debate on the topic. God has the utmost data and the only escape from this horrible eternal destination. God's paramount knowledge that He has promulgated in various ways over thousands of years is summed up in the Psalms: "God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power *belongeth* unto God. Also unto thee, O Lord, *belongeth* mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work" (Ps 62:11-12, KJV).

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Divine Promulgation View of Hell on Some Objections

Several moral objections have been posed against the hellish doctrine that the Divine Promulgation View of Hell seeks to respond. DPV offers a moral defense to the problem of hell and its objections. The doctrine of hell has stirred many emotions among humanity, causing some to question God's morality and even accusing Him of being a cosmic child abuser. DPV will prove that God is not immoral when it comes to the reality of *hell* but is sovereignly loving and merciful. God has taken measures to prevent humans from an eternity in *hell*. Not only has He promulgated critical information in various ways to humanity, but He gave His only begotten Son to atone for the sins of all who will accept Christ's sacrificial payment.

How can God send good people to Hell?

In order to define good, God has to exist necessarily as He is the standard of good. Jesus clarified this truth when He said, "No one is good except God alone" (Mark 10:18). Because God is good, He is the only One who can determine what is good. If a human being says that they are good, they are putting themselves equal to God, which cannot be accurate as humans are sinful, and they are only speaking according to their own strength. Despite God promulgating His moral code to humanity, many humans behave against what they naturally know to be right due to the fall. "First, that human beings, all over the earth, have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way, and cannot really get rid of it. Secondly, that they do not in fact behave in that way. They know the Law of Nature; they break it. The two facts are the foundation of all clear thinking about ourselves and the universe we live in."¹²⁵ When humans think of someone being

¹²⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1980), 8.

good, they usually mean that person is helpful, nice, or friendly; it rarely means that they have lived a life full of righteousness and therefore are not deserving of ‘hell.’ Goodness is grounded in God's transcendent nature and will and is seasoned by His sovereignty, love, and mercy. Anything that transgresses against God’s good nature and will is considered evil and is a perversion of goodness. The Bible explains that it is not good people that will spend an eternity in the lake of fire, but the wicked. Understanding the divine meaning of good makes it clear that humanity lacks this goodness, and *hell* will be empty of good people.

How can God send people who do not know Him or have not heard of Him to Hell?

The Divine Promulgation View of Hell says that God has communicated information about Himself to all of humanity, including infants, children, and those with severe mental handicaps. Psalm 139:13 states, “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.” God created the innermost consciousness of all humans in the womb; therefore, He is able to communicate directly to those inner parts even before they are born. In the book of Hebrews, God promised to promulgate knowledge of who He is to all people, from the smallest to the greatest. “No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest” (Heb 8:11). In light of this promise, if an unborn infant or a severely disabled person dies, they know who God is because He made it so. Both can receive promulgation from God because His knowledge is within, while in the womb, and not dependent on external forces. Also, while it is often thought that young children are incapable of accepting Christ, Jesus made it clear that they are the models adults should follow to enter heaven: “He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 18:2-3). Human age or disabilities do not

have the power to overcome or interfere with God's divine methods of promulgation. While unborn infants or mentally impaired individuals may not be able to accept Christ outwardly, it logically follows that they are also not able to reject Him; therefore, they are not at risk of being consigned to *hell*. Scripture teaches that it is the rejection of Christ that brings condemnation (John 12:48).

Specific to non-believers, God has cleverly made it possible for all humans to know that He exists; through creation. "Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse" (Rom 1:20). Knowledge through creation is sufficient to know that God exists and opens the door for further promulgation that leads to salvation. God's sustaining power and sovereignty are seen in the works His hands made and allowed humans to enjoy. No human can look at the earth, breathe the fresh air, and not know that a loving creator intentionally created earth suitable for humanity. The Divine Promulgation View of Hell states that God's fingerprint is on the creation, and humans can gain a wealth of knowledge about God and the depth of His nature by merely observing His creation. The creation eliminates the excuse that one does not know that a Creator exists, but it is up to the person to allow that knowledge to lead to accepting Jesus Christ.

Secondly, God has promulgated His moral code to humanity, specifically to those who claim not to know Him or outright reject Him. Unbelievers can still make decisions according to God's law despite never hearing or learning it; He promulgates His law to the consciousness of all He created. "Even Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it. They demonstrate that God's law

is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right” (Rom 2:14-15, NLT). By divinely promulgating to all of humanity, God has placed a longing in the hearts of those unaware of Him, a longing that can only be filled with His presence. “He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end” (Eccl 3:11).

Thirdly, Jesus promised that the end would not come until the gospel is preached in all the world; this would be true for those who do not currently have the Scripture in their language. Since the end has not come, although it may be close, the gospel is still going forth, in different languages, promulgating God’s salvific message to those who do not know Christ. At the second coming of Christ, the Bible says, “He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2 Thess 1:8). The word ‘know’ in this Scripture, according to Strong’s, is *eidosin*, which means to remember or appreciate. This not knowing does not mean never heard of Him before or not having the opportunity to come into His presence; it means not knowing Him because of not appreciating Him or taking notice of Him; basically, these are nonbelievers. “For believers, Christ’s return is the presence of One they know and have an eternal relationship with. They know Him as revealed in the Old Testament prophecies, the New Testament gospel records of His life, and the elucidation of His life, death, and resurrection in the epistles.”¹²⁶ Not knowing God is an outright rejection of His eternal loving nature; this is an unrepentant sin. God does not send people to *hell* because they are ignorant of Him; He made it possible for all to know He exists. Some people will be sentenced to *hell* because of their sinful

¹²⁶ John MacArthur, *1 and 2 Thessalonians MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2002) 219.

rejection of God and refusal to accept His anecdote for sin, Jesus. Hell will be void of people who can positively claim not to know Christ.

Hell is hell not because of where it is, but because of whom it rejected. It is hell because God is missing; the absence of the Infinite Good is the greatest absence of all. Satan has been intruded in his place. But God is the only good that can satisfy the longing of our hearts. Without him, we are left unfulfilled, aching for more. Without the possibility of seeing him, we have no chance of happiness or human completeness. That is why the gates of hell (as seen in canto 3) tell all who approach them: “Abandon all hope you who enter here.”¹²⁷

How can God punish everyone the same for different sins?

According to the Divine Promulgation View of Hell, the Bible shows that humanity is judged according to the sins they commit. The Bible says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10). According to what is justified, some humans will be in the lake of fire together with Satan and his demons. However, humans will not receive the same punishment; God metes out punishment justly. “The punishment is not the same for everyone in hell, just as the reward is not the same for everyone in heaven. Jesus talked about greater commandments, greater judgments, and the fact that to whom much is given, much will be required. The opposite is true as well. Those who have less light will not be judged as severely as those who have more light.”¹²⁸ Scripture conveys that punishment can be intensified due to compounding evil deeds storing up or increasing God’s wrath. The Bible states: “But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against

¹²⁷ Paul Pearson, *Spiritual Direction from Dante: Avoiding the Inferno* (Ashland: St. Benedict Press LLC, 2019), 199.

¹²⁸ Frank Turek, *Stealing from God: Why Atheists Need God to Make Their Case* (Colorado Springs: NavPress Publishing Group, 2015), 187.

yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed” (Rom 2:5). The Bible teaches that punishment will be equal to the crime and that everyone in *hell* will not receive the same chastisement.

How can God send people to Hell for eternity for finite sins?

All sin is against God and His eternal nature. This fact is substantiated in the Psalms when David committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband, Uriah. Clearly, David’s sin included other human beings, but He acknowledged that his sins offended and severely breached more than the earthly realm; David realized that he sinned against the eternal God. “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge” (Ps 51:4). It did not matter the length of time it took for David to commit adultery or how long to plan Uriah's death; it was the gravity and intensity of his sins that put him in contention with God. God considers the seriousness of the sin, not how long it took to commit it when deliberating eternal consequences. DPV supports that the time it takes to commit a sin has less impact on eternal consequences than the severity of the sin. “The severity of the crime dictates the length of the punishment, not the time it took to commit the crime. A murder might take three seconds to commit, but the punishment should certainly be longer than three seconds! Crimes against the infinite, eternal Being are the most severe and may demand eternal punishment.”¹²⁹ Fortunately for David, he was a man after God’s heart, and he repented of his finite sins, which allowed him to escape an infinite penalty.

Jesus went further to address this particular objection by telling the parable of Lazarus and the Rich man. To make it understood that the only people in *hell* would be those who are deserving of it, Jesus allowed a glimpse into *hades* for confirmation.

¹²⁹ Frank Turek, *Stealing from God: Why Atheists Need God to Make Their Case*, 187.

The Rich Man and Lazarus Luke 16:19-31

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' "No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

This detailed passage of Scripture shows one's behavior in eternal agony due to his sins during a finite lifetime on earth. Notice the rich man never repented for his sins, and he never pleaded with God for release from this terrible place. Surprisingly, the rich man continued his privileged behavior of giving orders for self-satisfaction, even while in a hellish state. Clearly, his treatment and image of Lazarus as a beggar had not changed, despite their roles now being reversed. Somehow, the rich man still thought Lazarus was someone that should do his bidding. The rich man chose not to show mercy to Lazarus while on earth, so he did not receive mercy. While the rich man appeared to concede that his punishment was just, he knew his brothers were in danger of the same fate; they most likely treated Lazarus the same demeaning way. In this way, some good came out of the rich man's suffering in that he thought of his brothers and wanted better for them, but unexpectedly not himself. The rich man most likely recalled what God had promulgated to him and his brothers through Moses and the prophets regarding eternal punishment; he did not listen or take heed to the warnings.

The juxtaposition of the rich man dressed in fine garments of purple, who ate lavishly every day, with the poor, diseased Lazarus, who was laid at his gate, longing for the crumbs that fell from the man's table, is impossible to ignore. Equally vivid is the reversal of fortune of the two characters that happens after death. The rich man, who had rejoiced in life, was now tormented in flames; Lazarus, whose only companions were dogs that licked his sores, was now comforted in a place of honor in Abraham's bosom. From his vantage point across the chasm that separated the two men, the Patriarch, it is assumed, succinctly explains the moral of the parable: "Child, remember that you received your good things during your life, and Lazarus likewise (received) bad things; but now he is comforted and you are in anguish" (Luke 16:25). The parable, then, is about the reversal of fortune in the afterlife, echoing the blessings and woes of Luke 6:20–26, with an emphasis on obedience to Moses and the Prophets.¹³⁰

God promulgates specific information that alleviates finite sin from being eternally punished. Humans are accountable for the information they receive and how they make decisions based on that information. These two examples alone show how repentance removes the dangers of finite sin being punished eternally, and unrepentance does not. While it is not an easy concept for the finite mind to comprehend, sin is destructive, has infinite implications, and has seriously impeded humanity and offended the infinite God. An offense to an infinite God is deserving of infinite punishment as all sin is directly against God and violates His holy nature. David confirmed this sentiment when praying to God after committing sinful acts: "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge" (Ps 51:4). Continuing to reject God and His offer of salvation has dire eternal consequences. He did the hard work, leaving only a small part for humans to do, namely, to accept what He has done.

¹³⁰ Josh Stigall, "They have Moses and the Prophets": The Enduring Demand of the Law and Prophets in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus," *Review and Expositor* 112, no. 4 (2015): 542-554.

If God is omnipotent, omniscient, and all-loving, why would He send anyone to *hell*?

It is not God's will that any should perish; He is patiently waiting for people to repent (2 Pet 3:9). However, the sovereign God is fully aware that not everyone will repent and may outright reject Him. In response to human rejection, the Omni-God promulgated the necessary knowledge in various ways to assist humanity in avoiding *hell* altogether. Because of His great love and respect for human autonomy, God has taken action to give His image-bearers the tools they need to achieve an eternity in heaven, at their choosing. While the all-knowing God is fully aware of who will reject and accept His offer of salvation, He promulgated to all without prejudice. If an employee read the company's handbook that described their goals, ethics, and policies, they are responsible for their knowledge. Suppose the employee sexually harasses several other employees on the job, despite reading the handbook that such behavior is cause for immediate termination. In that case, they will be held responsible for their actions and ultimately fired from that job.

Similarly, God has communicated salvific information to His creation, but He has gone further than the company in the example. God gave His only begotten Son Jesus as a sacrifice to atone for humanity's sins. Those who accept Jesus' sacrifice will not spend an eternity in *hell*; those who reject this gift of salvation will be in danger of the lake of fire. "Without trusting God and accepting his means of salvation, one cannot escape hell altogether. Regardless of how moderate or severe the punishment, none of it will be pleasant, none will escape it, and it will never end."¹³¹ The sovereign God has not only communicated to humans in a finite realm, but He has also propitiated in an infinite way to offer humanity a safe route away from *hell*. Because of

¹³¹ John S. Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems and the Problems of Evil* (Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2004), 140.

God's actions to protect humans from eternal fire, He is not morally responsible for humans in *hell*. God takes *hell* seriously and has taken salvific actions to assist humans in avoiding such a terrible fate. While many argue that He has not done enough, the Divine Promulgation View of Hell demonstrates that He has done more than enough. From promulgating vital information in various ways to giving His only begotten Son as a sacrifice for the sins of all, God has taken drastic measures to prevent humans from hell's fire. God has provided a lasting solution to the problem of hell; He did the hard work, leaving only a small part for humans to do, accept what He has done.

Conclusion

The doctrine of hell is straightforward to God but highly complex to humans. Many philosophical theologians have tried to take the sting out of this intricate doctrine, but most cannot deny that the reality of hell is true. While some wrangle over various hellish doctrine characteristics, each must concede to some view, light or strong, of eternal punishment. A common notion most theologians who have tackled the doctrine of hell will always convey is that God is loving.

This treatise began by introducing the problem of hell and how it is driving more people away from God while putting themselves at risk of hellfire in this secular society. It is difficult to understand how an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God can institute eternal punishment when He has the means to save everyone from it. The problem of hell is the most unfathomable element of the already difficult problem of evil. “In addition to the evils that are commonly experienced, in many such traditions a different kind of evil is said to be true of our world. That special kind of evil regards the afterlife, in which some humans are with God forever and some are in hell, which is an excruciatingly bad thing; according to the standard traditions, being in hell is the worst thing that could ever happen to anyone.”¹³² The problem of hell is merely irreconcilable to many as they attempt to marry a loving God with eternal punishment.

This problem of hell has been expressed in terms of a set of incompatible statements:

1. An omnipotent God could create a world in which all moral agents freely choose life with God.
2. An omnibenevolent God would not create a world with the foreknowledge that some (perhaps a significant proportion) of God’s creatures would end up in hell.
3. An omniscient God would know which people will end up in hell.
4. Some people will end up forever in hell.¹³³

¹³² Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3.

¹³³ Ramon Baker, *Issuant Views of Hell in Contemporary Anglo-American Theology* (Turku: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2014), 191.

In light of the methodological considerations taken, this work provides a careful review of the various views of hell circulating and how theologians are tackling the traditional view in hopes of creating a more pleasing appetite for this doctrine. Annihilationism promotes a short stay in *hell* versus an eternity like the traditional view based on Greek and Hebrew translations or eternal related words. Conditionalism upholds humans only gain immortality in the afterlife based on right standing with God. Universalism encourages that no one will go to *hell*, and everyone will eventually be saved after a brief purifying punishment in preparation for heaven.

Historically, words have been mistranslated and mistransliterated as *hell*, causing confusion and misunderstanding of Scripture. Chapter three of this treatise conducts a word study on words like *Sheol*, *Hades*, *Gehenna*, and *Tartarus*, allowing one to correctly understand the true definition of *hell* and help eliminate incorrect teachings.

Chapter four provides the introductory perspective, Divine Promulgation View of Hell, that seeks to solve the moral dilemma of hell by recounting God's methods of communicating to humans, assisting them in escaping a horrible end. While this view does not claim to resolve the entire moral predicament, it offers a path to the right direction in doing so. It is easy to point out what God can and should do to save all humanity, but should the onus be one hundred percent on Him? Should humans have some responsibility in their own fate? Apologist and theologian C.S. Lewis contributed significantly to the problem of hell and clarifying that human responsibility is the culprit for landing some in 'hell.' "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "Thy will be done." All that are in Hell, choose it."¹³⁴

¹³⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2002), 73.

Divine Promulgation allows one to take a step back and evaluate all God has done to benefit humanity. God can promulgate in such a way to not force His thoughts and ways onto humans but allow them to choose and have a say in their futures. Promulgating His salvific message into the hearts and minds of humanity by way of creation, Scripture, the prophets, apostles, Jesus, and both general and divine revelation are several of the many ways God has instructed humans on avoiding ‘hell.’

Chapter six helps shed light on God’s attributes and highlights three that the Divine Promulgation View states issues God’s communication to humanity: love, sovereignty, and mercy. While other attributes of God may also explain why He promulgates to His creation, these three are prominent to this view. God communicates with humans because of His love for them. God’s sovereignty decrees His spoken truths will not return empty and will accomplish what it set out to do. God promulgates from His mercy, seeking to offer additional opportunities for repentance. God’s attributes caused Him to act and promulgate to humanity all of the information necessary to save them from hellish fires.

The Divine Promulgation View of Hell responds to some objections in chapter eight. Any view worth its salt must be able to confront strenuous objections soundly and reasonably; the doctrine of hell is no different. This chapter is critical because it addresses core issues that many are struggling with related to hellish doctrine. God is not a moral monster, and His love for humanity is still intact.

The main question on which this thesis concentrates is: Who is morally responsible for consigning humans to *hell*? This work’s entirety takes on the challenge of answering this question with support from Scripture and other scholarly sources. The intent of this exposition is not to downplay the seriousness of hell; that would be irresponsible. God went to extreme

lengths to save humanity from this terrible fate by giving His only begotten Son to redeem humanity with the shedding of His blood. Employing the Divine Promulgation View of Hell provides adequate evidence that God has promulgated necessary information, in various ways, to prevent humans from an eternity in hell; therefore, He is not a moral monster. God takes hell seriously and has taken action to limit human exposure to it. While humans may think God has not done enough, it is time to recognize that He has done a great deal. God has passed the baton to humans to finish the race; it is time to run and not in the direction of *hell*.

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