

Reformed Theological Seminary

SEEING HELL:  
DO THE SAINTS IN HEAVEN BEHOLD THE SUFFERINGS OF THE DAMNED  
(AND HOW DO THEY RESPOND)

Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the  
Requirement for the  
Masters of Arts in Biblical Studies Degree

by

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May 2004

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## **INTRODUCTION:**

The saints will gaze upon the damned in hell? They will rejoice at this sight?  
What a strange idea!

It is this idea, however, that this thesis is concerned with. Do not dismiss this as preposterous and cruel without at first reading on. See for yourself how the bliss and the blessings of heaven may co-exist in a universe where the wicked are perpetually tormented, even within sight.

John MacArthur describes the fellowship of heaven as “the loving family of heaven,” where there will be “rich, unending fellowship.”<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Edwards speaks of heaven as a “world of love.”<sup>2</sup> Many writers even expand upon this theme of the saints’ fellowship in heaven.

A vast void exists, however. Little has been written concerning the fellowship of the saints with those outside of heaven. Not pursued is this: the relationship that the saints will have with the damned in hell.

What is the manner of the saints’ awareness of those in hell? What manner of contact will these two great throngs partake of? Are the saints aware of those in hell and in what manner? Can the saints witness their sufferings and still partake of heavenly felicity?

This thesis addresses this aspect of the eternal state. Do the righteous in heaven visually behold hell, and if so, to what end? Can the saints visually look upon the torments of hell; and to what effect?

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<sup>1</sup> John F. MacArthur, *The Glories of Heaven*. (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1996), 140.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Heaven is a World of Love*. (London: Yale University Press, 1999).

## **PROPOSITION STATEMENT**

This thesis will demonstrate two main truths:

First:

That those in heaven will, in fact, know of and probably even visually behold those in hell.

Second:

That this knowledge and sight of the condemned dead is not troubling to the saints, but rather gives more cause for praises.

## **STRUCTURE**

This thesis will be undertaken in the following manner:

First:

A review of relevant historical material will be given. It will ask what the voices of the past have spoken in regards to this topic?

Second:

Scripture will be applied. Historical sources are important; but incomplete without Biblical texts as the rightful authority.

Third:

Roadblocks to progress will be discussed. Admittedly, this thesis sobers the mind considerably. Many recoil instinctually at it. Many objections instantly spring to mind. Do these objections have valid rebuttals? An entire section will determine just that.

Fourth:

Positive arguments will be presented for this thesis.

Finally:

The practicality of this thesis and conclusions reached will be addressed.

**WHY WRITE ABOUT A SUBJECT SUCH AS THIS?**

Why advance the idea that the saints in heaven will visually behold the damned in hell?

First:

It is little discussed. There appears to be a dearth of literature concerning this area of doctrine. When writing of heaven, many tracts, sermons and systematic theology textbooks go into length concerning the blessedness of heaven. Heaven is devoid of any tears or sorrow. The saints in heaven even have knowledge and awareness towards one another and this awareness is sometimes mentioned in some writer's discourses on heaven. Details of "heavenly geography," such as the "streets of gold" and the "pearly gates" are also mentioned, but the relationship that the saints have towards the wicked in hell is a neglected subject. Rarely is found the saints' awareness of hell, much less their visual sight of the damned.

This is of particular relevance in the present era. Modernists shun the doctrine of hell, only approaching it with hesitation and pained attempts to qualify and soften their statements. Present day discomforts and reservations should not, however, stymie legitimate investigations into all aspects of the Christian faith.

Second:

That this proposition can either be seen or logically deduced from the witness of Scripture is cause enough to write about it. If it is revealed, it is legitimate to investigate.

If explicit evidence or implicit deductions can be drawn from Scripture then they should be drawn for the sake of imparting truth.

Finally:

This proposition is worthy to be written about due to its practicality. Many will object. Its practicality? What earthly good does this investigation accomplish? It is distasteful.

These criticisms do not stand! If it is revealed, then it should be researched. To state otherwise is to conclude that God reveals for naught. Though questions of soteriology have prime importance, questions of eschatology and the final state are important as well. These bolster faith and help believers walk circumspectly and glorify God by diligently seeking His ways.

**SECTION I:****HISTORICAL SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE**

The proposition of this thesis has been put forward. The structure and practicality of this topic has been given. Now, an historical overview of past writers concerning this question.

The Bible affirms: Scripture is not of private interpretation.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, as iron sharpens iron, the voices of the past may sharpen the present community of God. This thesis will give heed to those voices.

**Catholic and Early Church****Tertullian****Person:**

Born around 155 A.D., Tertullian not only helped to elevate Latin as the language of the Catholic Church, but also leveled many polemic attacks against the Gnostics.

**View:**

Of interest to this thesis are the words he wrote concerning hell. The following concern the sight of the wicked in hell by the saints:

How vast a spectacle then bursts upon the eye! What there excites my admiration? what my derision? Which sight gives me joy? which rouses me to exultation?-as I see so many illustrious monarchs, whose reception into the heavens was publicly announced, groaning now in the lowest darkness with great Jove himself, and those, too, who bore witness of their exultation; governors of provinces, too, who persecuted the Christian name, in fires more fierce than those with which in the days of their pride they raged against the followers of Christ.

What world's wise men besides, the very philosophers, in fact, who taught their followers that God had no concern in ought that is sublunary, and were wont to assure

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<sup>3</sup> The Protestant community may also affirm this, all the while holding to Sola Scriptura. After all, Peter affirms this.

them that either they had no souls, or that they would never return to the bodies which at death they had left, now covered with shame before the poor deluded ones, as one fire consumes them!

Poets also, trembling not before the judgment-seat of Rhadamanthus or Minos, but of the unexpected Christ! I shall have a better opportunity than of hearing the tragedians, louder-voiced in their own calamity; of viewing the play-actors, much more "dissolute" in the dissolving flame; of looking upon the charioteer, all glowing in his chariot of fire; of beholding the wrestlers, not in their gymnasia, but tossing in the fiery billows; unless even then I shall not care to attend to such ministers of sin, in my eager wish rather to fix a gaze insatiable on those whose fury vented itself against the Lord.<sup>4</sup>

It appears that Tertullian believed that the saints would see into hell. It even appears that Tertullian concluded that they would rejoice over such sights (though whether this conclusion was born out of systematic study or inflamed passions is not clear).<sup>5</sup>

### **Augustine of Hippo**

#### **Person:**

Augustine was one of the shining lights of the early church, greatly read by both Catholics and the early Reformers. His *Confessions* (written in 397) was arguably the first autobiography and *The City of God*, written later, arguably was the first philosophy of history.

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<sup>4</sup>Tertullian *De Spectaculus* xxx.

In response; Lyman Abbott et. al., 227:  
 "Rugged old Tertullian, in whose torrid veins the fire of his African deserts seems infused, revels with infernal glee over the contemplation of the sure damnation of the heathen."

Also, Bertrand Russell, *Unpopular Essays* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1950), 149:  
 "Consider the pleasures of Milton's Satan when he contemplates the harm that he could do man...his psychology is not so very different from that of Tertullian, exulting in the thought that he will be able to look out from heaven at the sufferings of the damned."

<sup>5</sup>From Tertullian's general tone it could be argued that he reached his conclusions merely through polemical passion and not reasoned study. Christian persecution was widespread during this time in history. Tertullian fails to distinguish between primary causes and secondary causes of this joy and he



View:

In his monumental work, *The City of God*, Augustine sets forth this description of the relationship between the righteous and the wicked in the eternal state:

[Commenting on Isaiah 66:24] But in what way shall the good go out to see the punishment of the wicked? Are they to leave their happy abodes by a bodily movement, and proceed to the places of punishment, so as to witness the torments of the wicked in their bodily presence? Certainly not; but they shall go out by knowledge...For those who shall be in torment shall not know what is going on within the joy of the Lord; but they who shall enter into that joy shall know what is going on outside in the outer darkness. Therefore it is said, "They shall go out," because they shall know what is done by those who are without. For if the prophets were able to know things that had not yet happened, by means of that indwelling of God in their minds, limited though it was, shall not the immortal saints know things that have already happened, when God shall be all in all?<sup>6</sup>

In this passage, Augustine denies any sight of heaven by the wicked, but he does speak of the saints "going out" and seeing the wicked in hell (if only by mental apprehension and not visual sight of the eye).<sup>7</sup> Augustine definitely affirms that the saints possess knowledge of hell in heaven.

Keenly mentioned is also the fact that if the prophets of old were able to know these things in limited manner; will not the immortal saints in heaven know these things once they have already happened? This truth will be important when discussing whether or not the Redeemed in heaven will know that there are those in hell.

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appears to joy in the pain for the pain's sake instead of the reasons annexed to it; namely the exultation of the righteousness of God.

<sup>6</sup>Augustine, *City of God*, Book XX, chapter 22.

## Thomas Aquinas

### Person:

Thomas Aquinas, born 1225-27, was a theologian, philosopher and “Doctor of the Catholic Church”. His prolific writings have formed the basis of official Roman Catholic dogma to such degree that in 1879 the Pope declared that, among all the scholastic doctors, Aquinas was “the chief and master of all towers.”<sup>8</sup>

### View:

#### The sight of the wicked and the response of the saints:

Aquinas is very relevant to this thesis topic. He writes much on the Last Judgment and heaven and hell. His is a stepwise and orderly style, and in the Summa Theologica Aquinas systematically unfolds his rigid Scholastic formulae concerning the relationship of the saints in heaven to the wicked in hell:

Nothing should be denied the blessed that belongs to the perfection of their beatitude...Wherefore in order that the happiness of the saints may be more delightful to them and that they may render more copious thanks to God for it, they are allowed to see perfectly the sufferings of the damned.<sup>9</sup>

And also, more succinctly:

That the saints may enjoy their beatitude more thoroughly, and give more abundant thanks for it to God, a perfect sight of the punishment of the damned is granted them.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Pope Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris: On The Restoration of Christian Philosophy*. Papal Encyclical promulgated on August 4, 1879. Pope Leo XIII also stated thus: “We exhort you, venerable brethren, in all earnestness to restore the golden wisdom of St. Thomas, and to spread it far and wide for the defense and beauty of the Catholic faith, for the good of society, and for the advantage of all the sciences.”

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, Supplementum Tertia Partis, Question 94, Article 1.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

In these two selections, Aquinas promulgates the major thoughts of many writers to follow. First, the saints are aware of hell, even seeing it. And second, this sight is not a cause for distress, but rejoicing. According to Aquinas, the Righteous in heaven will look down on hell and feel joy over this view of God's justice being vindicated. God's mercy and goodness are put on display and witnessed by the saints.

For Aquinas, heaven will consist of an illumining of the mind and senses. Nothing will be denied in these blessings to the saints in regards to good things. Knowledge, even including sight, is a blessing that will not be denied to the saints.

God will not make the saints ignorant of the damned. This would be a denial of the blessing of knowledge, a deficit even greater than the knowledge attained on earth. After all, even the saints on earth, in their lesser state of knowledge know of hell. Surely heaven, with its greater blessings, will contain greater knowledge. The saints will possess a greater knowledge, including a greater knowledge of hell – even seeing it.

Seeing the punishment of the wicked, the righteous have no pity:

Whoever pities another shares somewhat in his unhappiness. But the blessed cannot share in any unhappiness. Therefore they do not pity the afflictions of the damned.<sup>11</sup>

This knowledge and sight of hell does not detract, in any way, from the joys of heaven; rather, it even contributes to it. By this visual display of the end result of rebellion against God the saints are allowed to “enjoy their beatitude more thoroughly.”<sup>12</sup> This sight does not ruin heaven; it enhances it.

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, Supplementum Tertia Partis, Question 94, Article 2.

A distinction regarding the causes of joy in this sight:

Will the Redeemed in heaven be happy when they see damned souls in hell? Most assuredly, yes. Aquinas, however, does make several distinctions. He distinguishes between the primary and secondary causes of this joy in beholding hell.

Aquinas is careful not to emphasize that the saints will joy over the pain of the ungodly for pain's sake.<sup>13</sup> Instead, he asserts the direct causes of joy as (1) joy over deliverance from the ungodly and (2) joy over the vindication of divine justice.

The saints only gain joy indirectly from the punishment, their direct joy being their deliverance and the glorification of God's justice in it. Aquinas writes:

A thing may be a matter of rejoicing in two ways. First directly, when one rejoices in a thing as such: and thus the saints will not rejoice in the punishment of the wicked. Secondly, indirectly, by reason namely of something annexed to it: and in this way the saints will rejoice in the punishment of the wicked, by considering therein the order of Divine justice and their own deliverance, which will fill them with joy. And thus the Divine justice and their own deliverance will be the direct cause of the joy of the blessed: while the punishment of the damned will cause it indirectly.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, Supplementum Tertia Partis, Question 94, Article 2.

<sup>13</sup> A distinction that some, such as Tertullian, was not so careful to make.

## Views of Protestant Writers<sup>15</sup>

### Jeremy Taylor

#### Person:

Jeremy Taylor, born in 1613, was an English Bishop of the Church of England who wrote the (then) popular *Holy Living and Holy Dying*.

#### View:

Relevant to this study is a surviving sermon of Taylor's that paints a graphic scene, indicating that Taylor, too, believed that the saints will visualize the torments of hell:

Husbands shall see their wives, parents shall see their children tormented before their eyes...the bodies of the damned shall be crowded together in hell like grapes in a wine-press, which press on another till they burst...<sup>16</sup>

This selection appears to address eternal punishment and the ongoing witness of this by the saints. Though spoken passionately, it appears that Jeremy Taylor here did not speak solely for rhetorical effect, but was rather expressing his own views of reality.

### Jonathan Edwards

#### Person:

Jonathan Edwards, the "American Augustine,"<sup>17</sup> wrote much on the subjects of heaven and hell. To many, he is the epitome of the "Hellfire and brimstone" preacher. He

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<sup>14</sup> *Summa Theologica*, Question 92, Article 3.

<sup>15</sup>Note: Strict chronology is not followed in the sequencing of the authors; Edwards is put towards the front for emphasis while others, quoted less extensively, are put towards the back in general.

<sup>16</sup> Jeremy Taylor *Christ's Advent to Judgment*, sermon quoted in Lyman Abbot et. al., 227-8. Sermon also accessed, November 2003, <http://www.hippocampusextensions.com/gs/gstaylor.php>.

was certainly used of God to kindle fires in the souls of many during the Great Awakening, and his works are of particular relevance to this proposition.

View:

The view of Edwards is similar to that of Aquinas. The righteous will witness the torments of hell and rejoice in their punishment.

There is, however, a clearly discernible difference in the style and methodology of each of these writers. Whereas Aquinas addressed this in rigid Scholastic fashion, Edwards develops this in vivid and picturesque detail. But, despite their stylistic differences, the following quote by Edwards comes very close to the phraseology of Aquinas regarding the subject at hand:

Every time they look upon the damned, it will excite in them a lively and admiring sense of the grace of God...The view of the misery of the damned will double the ardor of the love and gratitude of the saints in heaven.<sup>18</sup>

Like Aquinas, Jonathan Edwards affirms the visual sight of hell by the saints and this sight is given so that the saints may, as Aquinas asserts, “enjoy their beatitude more thoroughly, and give more abundant thanks for it to God”.<sup>19</sup>

A persistent theme in the corpus of Edwards’ writings is that “God has created the whole world for his own glory; therefore he will glorify himself exceeding transcendently.”<sup>20</sup> All of creation is but a means for God’s own pleasure and glory. Even the disposition of all mankind:

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<sup>17</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, “The Anachronism of Jonathan Edwards.” Address given in Northampton, Massachusetts on March 9, 1958, the bicentennial of the death of Jonathan Edwards.

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “The Eternity of Hell Torments,” *The Wrath of Almighty God*. (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996), 356-7.

<sup>19</sup> Aquinas, question 94, Article 1. Note the striking similarity to Edwards.

<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellanies #106, Happiness,” *The Jonathan Edwards Reader*. (London: Yale University Press, 1995), 40.

The glory of God is the greatest good. It is that which is the chief end of the creation. It is of greater importance than anything else. But this one way wherein God will glorify himself, as in the eternal destruction of ungodly men, he will glorify his justice. Therein he will appear as a just governor of the world. The vindictive justice of God will appear strict, exact, awful, and terrible, and therefore glorious.<sup>21</sup>

After the Last Judgment, both the righteous and the wicked will glorify God: one in his mercy, the other in his justice. In these two opposite fates of mankind the entirety of God's holy attributes are put on display for the whole universe:<sup>22</sup>

It will be an occasion of their rejoicing, as the glory of God will appear in it. The glory of God appears in all his works: and therefore there is no work of God which the saints in glory shall behold and contemplate but what will be an occasion of rejoicing to them. God glorifies himself in the eternal damnation of the ungodly men. God glorifies himself in all that he doth; but he glorifies himself principally in his eternal disposal of his intelligent creatures: some are appointed to everlasting life, and others left to everlasting death.<sup>23</sup>

#### Style and distinctions between the causes of this joy for saints:

The style of Jonathan Edwards is much more vivid than the logical progression of Aquinas. Due to this manner of vivid portrayal of hell, it has been charged that Edwards was excessively harsh.

The following is characteristic of Edwards' style:<sup>24</sup>

When they [the saints in heaven] shall see the smoke of their torment [the damned], and the raging of the flames of their burning, and hear their dolorous shrieks and cries, and consider that they in the meantime are in the most blissful state, and shall surely be in it to all eternity; how will they rejoice!<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "The Eternity of Hell Torments," *The Wrath of Almighty God*. (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996), 356-7.

<sup>22</sup> This echoes Aquinas' comments concerning how God is glorified the more, "when contraries are placed beside each other." (*Summa Theologica*, Question 94, Article 1).

<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "The End of the Wicked Contemplated by the Righteous," *The Wrath of Almighty God*. (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1996), 373.

<sup>24</sup> Largely due to the differing reasons for their writings, Edwards crafted sermons in order to move sinners to Christ and warn them vividly, while Aquinas was attempting a comprehensive study of the Christian faith in the manner of the Scholastics.

The 6<sup>th</sup> grade history book taught to this writer, on covering the Great Awakening, stated that Edwards tried to "scare people into heaven", and illustrated this by the famous "spider over a pit" analogy to prove this point. Edwards was made to appear a zealous fanatic.

<sup>25</sup> Edwards, 373.

Despite stylistic differences, Edwards and Aquinas are both careful to elucidate the distinction between the direct and the indirect causes of joy in the saints' sight of hell:

And whereas the heavenly inhabitants are in the text [Revelation 18, concerning the fall of Babylon] called upon to rejoice over Babylon, because God had avenged them on her; it is not to be understood that they are to rejoice in having their revenge glutted, but to rejoice in seeing the justice of God executed, and in seeing his love to them in executing it on his enemies.<sup>26</sup>

The reciprocity of this sight (the damned shall see heaven):

Edwards differs with Aquinas on a closely related issue: the sight that the wicked will possess. Both state explicitly that the saints will visually behold hell and rejoice. Edwards states as well that, not only will the saints see hell, the damned shall see heaven.

Catholic writers, for the most part, have stated that the wicked will not see anything regarding heaven after the Last Judgment and will be confined to a very limited sight of their own torments in a black and lonely environment.<sup>27</sup>

Thomas Aquinas:

The damned, before the judgment day, will see the blessed in glory, in such a way as to know, not what the glory is like, but only that they are in a state of glory that surpasses all thought. This will trouble them, both because they will, through envy, grieve for their happiness, and because they have forfeited that glory. Hence it is written (wis. V. 2) concerning the wicked: *Seeing it they shall be troubled with terrible fear.* After the judgment day, however, they will be altogether deprived of seeing the blessed: nor will this lessen their punishment, but will increase it; because they will bear in remembrance the glory of the blessed which they saw at or before the judgment: and this will torment them. Moreover they will be tormented by finding themselves deemed unworthy even to see the glory which the saints merit to have [underlines added].<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "The End of the Wicked Contemplated," *The Wrath of Almighty God*. (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996), 376. Information in brackets added.



Note also the words of Peter Lombard:

Both the good shall see the wicked and the wicked the good until the judgment. After the judgment the good will indeed see the wicked but not the wicked the good...The elect will behold the torture of the impious and as they see them they will not grieve. Their minds will be sated with joy as they gaze on the unspeakable anguish of the impious, returning thanks for their own freedom.<sup>29</sup>

Alphonsus Liguori echoes the same:

You will see the elect triumph and exult with joy on their entrance into heaven, and yourself banished, like an unclean animal, from that blessed country, deprived forever of seeing the face of an infinitely amiable God, and separated from the company of Mary, of the angels and the saints.<sup>30</sup>

The damned will never see the blessed vision of heaven these writers assert. Edwards and many Puritans, however, “opened the eyes” of the wicked. They insisted that the damned, too, may see the “other side”. The wicked may see heaven and mourn its loss<sup>31</sup>:

We know not how far the two worlds, the world of happiness and the world of misery, may be within each other’s view. It seems as though the glorified in heaven should some way or other have an apprehension of the damned in hell and also the damned an apprehension of the glory of the saints in heaven as though they had a view of each other’s state.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Aquinas Summa Theologica, Supplementum Tertia Partis, Question 98, Article 9.

<sup>29</sup> Also, note Peter Lombard Sent. Lib. Iv., quoted in Lyman Abbott, et. al., *That Unknown Country* (Springfield, Massachusetts: C.A. Nichols & Co., Publishers, 1888), 48.

<sup>30</sup> Alphonsus Liguori, “Meditation on Hell: paragraph 3,” November 2003, <http://www.endofman.com> (n.d.).

<sup>31</sup> Albeit, they will see heaven and mourn with an unregenerate nature that still hates God. They desire heaven for its bliss and its escape from suffering, not due to the fellowship of the saints, and especially, not God.

<sup>32</sup> John H. Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell* (Morgan, Pennsylvania: Soli Deo Gloria Publishers, 1980), 71.

## **Samuel Hopkins**

### Person:

This student of Jonathan Edwards (1721-1803) expanded on the theology of Edwards and continued many of his main themes.

### View:

Not surprisingly, Hopkins echoes the belief of Edwards that the spectacle of eternal torment will be a source of delight to the saints:

It has already been observed and shown how well suited and necessary endless punishment is, to make a full and most glorious display of the divine character, in the view of the blessed...The smoke of their torment shall ascend in the sight of the blessed forever and ever, and serve as a most clear glass, always before their eyes, to give them a constant bright and most affecting view of all these. And all this display of the divine character and glory will be in favor of the redeemed, and most entertaining, and give the highest pleasure to all who love God, and raise their happiness to ineffable heights, whose felicity consists summarily in the knowledge and enjoyment of God.<sup>33</sup>

## **Reverend Nathaniel Emmons**

### Person:

Reverend Nathaniel Emmons was a Congregational pastor from New England (1745 to 1840).

### View:

This quote is very direct and clear as to his convictions:

The happiness of the elect will consist in part of witnessing the torments of the damned in hell, among whom may be their own children, parents, husbands,

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<sup>33</sup> Samuel Hopkins *Works* (p. 459), quoted in Lyman Abbott, et. al., *That Unknown Country* (Springfield Massachusetts: C.A. Nichols & Co., Publishers, 1888), 56. Note also this theme: The sight of hell is given to the saints as a gift of God to His saints, to show them Himself more fully.

wives and friends; ... but instead of taking the part of their miserable being, they will say 'Amen!', 'Hallelujah!', 'Praise the Lord!'<sup>34</sup>

## **John Gill**

### Person:

Born in the closing years of the 1600's, Gill is known for his systematic treatment of doctrine and his commentary on the Scriptures.

### View:

It appears that Gill agrees with Edwards' view that the torments of the wicked will be done in full view of God, the angels and men:

Of the company of angels and saints: they will be tormented in the presence of the angels, without receiving any benefit by them, or relief from them: they will be sensible of the happiness of the saints, which will aggravate their misery; they will not be able to come at them, and share with them in their bliss; nor have the least degree of consolation from them; the rich man saw Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham, but could not obtain one dip of the tip of his finger in water to cool his tongue...yea, they will not have the least pity shown them by God, angels or men; God will mock at their destruction; angels will applaud his righteous judgment; and the holy apostles and prophets, and all the saints, will rejoice over them, as they will over Babylon, and at her destruction, because of the justice of God being glorified by it.<sup>35</sup>

Gill, like these past authors, states that the saints will see hell and glory in this expression of God's justice. Gill also seems to hold the reciprocal view, writing that the damned "will be sensible of the happiness of the saints, which will aggravate their misery."<sup>36</sup> For many theologians (including Gill) the "Wall" between heaven and hell is transparent and this "great gulf fixed" is such that each side can see the other.

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<sup>34</sup> Nahigian, Kenneth, "How I walked Away", December 2003, [www.infidels.org](http://www.infidels.org),. Also found at: [www.geocities.com/missus\\_gumby/quote.htm](http://www.geocities.com/missus_gumby/quote.htm), and: [www.grovebaptist.freeserve.co.uk](http://www.grovebaptist.freeserve.co.uk).

<sup>35</sup> John Gills, *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1951), 682-3.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

**Richard Baxter:**Person:

Baxter (1615-1691) was a great mover for church reform in England.

View:

The damned shall see heaven and be punished directly by God Himself:

The *principal author* of hell-torments is God himself. As it was no less than God whom sinners had offended, so it is no less than God who will punish them for their offences. He hath prepared those torments for his enemies. His continued anger will still be devouring them. His breath of indignation will kindle the flames. His wrath will be an intolerable burden to their souls...Those eyes [of the damned] which were wont to be delighted with curious sights, must then see nothing but what shall terrify them! an angry God above them, with those saints whom they scorned enjoying the glory which they have lost; and about them will be only devils and damned souls.<sup>37</sup>

**Thomas Watson**Person:

This English Puritan (died 1689 or 1690) is popularly read even today from his *Body of Practical Divinity*.

View:

In Watson's writings *The Ten Commandments* is found the following concerning the ultimate fate of sinners:

The saints will not pity them. They persecuted them upon earth, therefore they will rejoice to see God's justice executed on them. 'The righteous shall rejoice when he sees the vengeance.' Psa 58: 10.<sup>38</sup>

Watson, it appears, would also agree that the saints will see God's judgment upon the wicked and rejoice over it (whether merely referring to the

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<sup>37</sup>Richard Baxter, *The Saint's Everlasting Rest* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, January 14, 2003) Chap. V.

<sup>38</sup>Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 196.

Last Judgment, the beginnings of these punishments, or the continuing torments that follow is not clear).

### **Isaac Watts**

#### Person:

This moving hymn writer (1674-1748) is well-known for his deep songs concerning God's love.

#### View:

This deep love was not contrary to the justice of God and its witness by the saints:

What bliss will fill the ransomed souls,  
When they in glory dwell,  
To see the sinner as he rolls,  
In quenchless flames of hell.<sup>39</sup>

### **John Bunyan:**

#### Person:

This nonconformist pastor (1628-1688) wrote the famous *Pilgrim's Progress*.

#### View:

Bunyan pens the view of heaven by hell (the corollary to Watts' poem):

Out of brazen bars they may  
The Saints in glory see;  
But this will not their grief allay,  
But to them torment be.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Isaac Watts, quoted by Edward T. Babinski, author of *Leaving the Fold* and contributor to various "Freethought" and "Atheist" publications, in a letter to *Christianity Today Magazine*, May 2002.

<sup>40</sup> G. Midgley (ed.), *Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan: Poems*. (Oxford: privately published, 1980), 93.

**Matthew Henry:**Person:

Matthew Henry (1662-1714) was a prolific writer best known for his monumental commentary of every book of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments.

View:

Though no specific sermon or writing exists on this subject in particular, Henry does seem to affirm the thesis proposition in his commentary.

Concerning Isaiah 66, he affirms that heaven and hell are within sight:

As it will aggravate the miseries of the damned to see others in the kingdom of heaven and themselves thrust out (Luke 13:28), so it will illustrate the joys and glories of the blessed to see what becomes of those that died in their transgression<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, the reasons for this reciprocal sight are for the praise of the saints and for the exhibition of God's glory:

It will elevate their praises to think that they were themselves as brands plucked out of that burning. To the honour of that free grace which thus distinguished them let the redeemed of the Lord with all humility, and not without a holy trembling, sing their triumphant songs.<sup>42</sup>

Again, the two-part assertion is clear: the sight of the damned is visible to the saints and they respond with joy. And again, this sight will serve to instill greater gratitude in the saints and display the glory of God.

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<sup>41</sup> Matthew Henry. *Isaiah, Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 1218.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

## **Robert Murray McCheyne:**

### Person:

This 19<sup>th</sup> Century Presbyterian minister died young (1813-1843) but left many remarkable writings. His desire to see the unsaved converted in this life was evident from both his correspondence and reliable biographers.

### View:

McCheyne stressed that in this life there is plenteous grace for sinners to come to Christ and the Redeemed of God should pray for precisely this – lost souls. Yet, after the opportunity for mercy has expired, the saints will rejoice over the sight of God’s justice being vindicated in hell:

However much the people of God weep over the wicked now, yet it can be shown that in heaven the torment of the wicked will be no matter of grief to the redeemed.<sup>43</sup>

Clearly McCheyne asserts that heaven and hell will be within sight of each other and the Saints will rejoice in all of God’s decisions, even the judgments of His wrath:

“...although we cannot tell how it is, that hell will be within sight of heaven, they will be tormented with fire and brimstone, in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. But, brethren, you know quite well that if the eternal misery of the damned was to be an occasion of sorrow to the redeemed, it would not be; for we are told, in one of the Psalms, 'In thy presence is fulness of joy, and at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore' (Psalm 16:11).<sup>44</sup>

It is of note that McCheyne’s sermon, “The Eternal Torments of the Wicked” follows very closely with the sermon of Jonathan Edwards, “The End of the Wicked Contemplated”. The same concepts appear; even with the same manner of polemical style.

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<sup>43</sup> Robert Murray McCheyne, “*The Eternal Torment of the Wicked – Matter of Eternal Song to the Redeemed*,” Feb 2004, <http://www.txdirect.net/~tgarner/mccheyne9.htm> (Dec 13, 1998).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

McCheyne, like Edwards, concludes the matter in this way:

It will not only be no grief, but will be matter of praise. We will sing, 'Hallelujah' when the smoke of their torment ascends up for ever and ever.<sup>45</sup>

## **CONTEMPORARY AUTHORS ON THE SUBJECT**

### **Dan Fortner:**

#### Person:

Dan Fortner is a contemporary Baptist pastor, Calvinistic in his soteriology, who publishes sermon outlines, many of which are pertinent to this topic.

#### View:

On the subject of the relationship between the righteous and the wicked after the judgment, Reverend Fortner takes a view (and a tone) reminiscent of several theologians mentioned previously, namely Edwards, Emmons and McCheyne:

Hell will be within the very sight of heaven! The wicked will be cast into hell before the eyes of the redeemed! In that awesome day pastors and congregations will stand face to face before the bar of God and witness one another's condemnation or acquittal. Children shall stand to witness the condemnation or acquittal of their parents. Husbands and wives shall witness one another's condemnation or acquittal. And it will be no matter of grief to the righteous to see the wicked condemned. Our tears will be over. Our sorrows will be past. We will see them condemned. We will see the terror on their faces. We will hear their screams and cries of agony. Yet, we will not shed a tear. (Rev. 21:4). Indeed, we will give our vote that you be condemned. And when you are cast into hell, we will shout "Amen! Alleluia!" (Ps. 91:7-8).<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Robert Murray McCheyne, "*The Eternal Torment of the Wicked – Matter of Eternal Song to the Redeemed*," Feb 2004, <http://www.txdirect.net/~tgarner/mccheyne9.htm> (Dec 13, 1998).

<sup>46</sup> Dan Fortner, "Sermon on Rev 19:1-6." Grace Church sermon, Danville, Kentucky, 20 December 1993, Typewritten.



Though the language is menacing to the recalcitrant sinner and sounds harsh and vindictive to modern ears, Fortner, like Aquinas and Edwards before him, is careful to distinguish the primary and secondary causes of this joy. The saints' joy regarding the sight of the wicked is due to deliverance, and vindication of God's justice, not primarily because of the torments witnessed. The saints will merely be affirming God's verdict with joy (not in others' pain but in praise of God's decisions and their own safety).

Below is another example of the great joy that will overcome the saints when God finally unleashes his unmitigated wrath against His foes:

**The destruction of Babylon will be a cause for great joy!** (v. 20). But why are God's saints called upon to rejoice when the wicked are damned? This joy is not at all a vindictive joy over the torments of personal enemies. It is a righteous agreement with God. It is God's saints taking sides with God, vindicating him in his justice, and saying, "Amen," to all that he does, because of their hearts' agreement with him (Psa. 139:21-22). God's saints will rejoice when God's enemies are destroyed, because God's name and honor will then be vindicated.<sup>47</sup>

### **J.I. Packer:**

The well respected contemporary theologian J.I. Packer defends the Biblical doctrine of hell, affirming the joys of the saints despite their awareness of hell.

#### **View:**

When addressed with the question, "Won't heaven's joy be spoiled by our awareness of unsaved loved ones in hell?" Packer responds:

Significantly, this is not a Bible problem; instead, Scripture rules out all thought of it ever becoming anyone's problem...God will be doing the right thing, vindicating himself at last against all who have defied him....<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Dan Fortner, "Sermon on Rev 18:1-26." Grace Church sermon, Danville, Kentucky, 1993, Typewritten. Boldface is in the original.

<sup>48</sup> *Christianity Today* (April 22, 2002), "Hell's Final Enigma: Won't heaven's joy be spoiled by our awareness of unsaved loved ones in hell"?

After God's just judgments are defended, Packer writes that all of God's verdicts will be praised:

“God will judge justly, and all angels, saints, and martyrs will praise him for it. So it seems inescapable that we shall, with them, approve the judgment of persons—rebels—whom we have known and loved.”<sup>49</sup>

Packer, like many others, affirms that the saints will know of the judgments on the wicked. Additionally, not only will they have joy despite the verdict of the wicked, but this joy is due to these verdicts (the “angels, saints and martyrs will praise him for it,” not despite it).

Packer does not explicitly state that the saints will see this punishment, nor does he state anywhere that the wicked will see heaven. He does, however, affirm that the saints will possess a positive awareness of the existence of hell and he records the response to this knowledge as one of satisfaction in the verdicts of God.

### **John MacArthur**

#### Person:

John MacArthur, popularly read for his many practical insights into the Scriptures, has written considerably on many subjects, including the subject of heaven.

#### View:

Does MacArthur ever broach this subject at hand? Yes. In the following selection he not only affirms that the saints will worship God in all his judgments (even if severe), but these judgments will not detract from any of the bliss of heaven:

We will see and understand better the perfect justice of God, and we shall glorify Him for every detail of the outworking of His eternal plan—including His dealings with the wicked. The final verses of Isaiah's prophecy indicate that the destruction of the

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<sup>49</sup> *Christianity Today* (April 22, 2002), “Hell's Final Enigma: Won't heaven's joy be spoiled by our awareness of unsaved loved ones in hell”?

wicked will ultimately be something for which we will worship God (Isa. 66:22-24). The existence of hell will not dim the glory of heaven or taint its bliss in the least.<sup>50</sup>

MacArthur's style is, in general, more irenic than the style of others covered thus far. The fiery declarations of Jonathan Edwards are replaced by softer appeals and more tender descriptions, but MacArthur still asserts that, "the destruction of the wicked will ultimately be something for which we will worship God."<sup>51</sup>

### **DISSENTING VIEWS:**

It is little surprise that some dislike these assertions. Now it is time to hear these voices of dissent.

It should be stated at the outset that their weight will, no doubt, be under-represented. Though difficult as it is to find writers who affirm this proposition, it is considerably more difficult to find writers who have written rebuttals to this assertion.

Why the silence? This is based on the following factors:

#### First:

Many who oppose this narrowly focused thesis proposition oppose the broader concept of hell altogether. Why object to a small sub-point of a broad doctrine when one opposes its entirety?

#### Second:

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<sup>50</sup> MacArthur, 98.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

Those who do mention these doctrines are often not Christians at all, nor are they interested in a full discussion of the possible truth of this assertion. Atheists and “free thinkers” often use these quotes above as levers to open a polemical gate in their siege against Christianity. Meeting their charges head-on and unapologetically has many merits.

Third:

Even among Christian theologians this narrow topic is not often mentioned. The energy of many faithful theologians has been expended fighting other trends regarding the doctrine of hell and this area has been left virtually untouched. The denial of hell, whether through universalism or annihilationism, has been the main focal point to which the theologians have trained their arrows of thought. This thesis question, by necessity, has taken a backseat to the broader subject of hell itself.

Finally:

The rise of Decisional theology provides another reason why this question is not dwelt upon in many modern theological circles. Arminian theology has been ascendant up until the last few decades and has put forward what it believes is a “kinder” view of God.

How does Arminian theology affect the doctrine of hell? Many contemporary theologians sacrifice God’s sovereignty in order to make Him appear more loving. He stands at the door and knocks, and yet is powerless to compel man to enter if man does not desire so to do. This makes hell to be an everlasting monument to the failure of God.

It is true that God does, indeed, exercise a general call to all and grants all a certain degree of common grace. If there is only a universal call without an effectual call

which empowers dead men then God, it appears, reaches forth to all and loves all the same. The distinguishing feature that makes men go to hell is how they then respond to this offer in their own strength.

How does this limit the theological investigations into this topic? If God loves all the same and wills that all should go to heaven, hell is a testament to the failure of God. If God truly ordained to save all in His sovereign power, would not all then be saved?

No? Why - due to sin? Then God is thwarted in His purposes. If hell is a testimony to God's failure in His mission to bring men to Himself, then hell could bring no glory to God. Hell would be an everlasting monument to God's own defeat. Every individual lost in hell would be one small battle lost. Hell's inhabitants, though punished terribly, would be succeeding in inflicting a Pyrrhic victory over God for eternity. God and the heavenly host (including the Redeemed) could not find satisfaction in the outpouring of divine wrath if it meant glorying in the failure of God's desires.

### **Selections from Dissenting Writers:**

Having stated the reasons for the paucity of writings in specific opposition to heaven and hell being within sight of the redeemed, below are opposing viewpoints.

### **Thomas Thayer:**

#### **Person:**

Thomas Thayer was an universalist who wrote, in 1855, that the Christian doctrine of hell originated from pagan myths of the Afterlife.

View:

Thayer states that the doctrine of hell justifies cruel impulses already innate in man. Hell allows the outwardly religious to delight in cruelty. Thayer quotes Tertullian (examined earlier) to strengthen his argument:

Without doubt, Tertullian was of a fierce and bitter spirit, independently of his religious faith; but this fiery ebullition of hate and ferocity serves to show how perfectly fitted that faith was to add fuel to the flame, and what an ample field and congenial scenes it furnished for his savage nature to revel in. Under the influence of such a belief, his wild temper gathered new vigor, his revengeful feelings were cultivated and strengthened to a frightful degree, till at last he comes to rejoice and exult in the agonies of the damned with a relish that a devil might envy.<sup>52</sup>

**Ludwig Feuerbach:**Person:

Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) subsumed religion under the category of psychology, stating that mankind creates religion to assuage psychological anxieties, such as the fear of death (his ideas preceded Freud's and were their impetus). Religion is an illusory concoction, actually centering upon the concern of man rather than God (He is merely the "fix" given to quiet the fear of death).

View:

Feuerbach contrasted the traditional view of faith with what he took to be the real essence of faith. First, his account of the traditional view of faith:

Faith at first appears to be only an unprejudiced separation of believers from unbelievers...The believer has God for him, the unbeliever, against him...But that which has God against it is worthless, rejected, reprobate; for that which has God against it is itself against God. To believe, is synonymous with goodness; not to believe,

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<sup>52</sup> Thomas B. Thayer, *Origen and History of the Doctrine of Endless Punishment* (Boston: Universalist Publishing House, 1995).

with wickedness. Faith, narrow and prejudiced, refers all unbelief to the moral disposition. In its view the unbeliever is an enemy to Christ out of obduracy, out of wickedness.<sup>53</sup>

Because of this view of faith Feuerbach must conclude that the world is broken up into two conflicting camps. And because of this struggle between believers and unbelievers, heaven is a place for victorious rejoicing over the final destruction of the unbeliever:

Hell sweetens the joys of happy believers. “The elect will come forth to behold the torments of the ungodly, and at this spectacle they will not be smitten with sorrow; on the contrary, while they see the unspeakable sufferings of the ungodly, they, intoxicated with joy, will thank God for their own salvation.” [Petrus L. 1. iv. dist. 50, c. 4.]

But this passage is by no means a declaration of Peter Lombard himself. He is far too modest, timid, and dependent on the authorities of Christianity to have ventured to advance such a tenet on his own account. No! This position is a universal declaration, a characteristic expression of Christian, of believing love. The doctrine of some Fathers of the Church, e.g., of Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, that the punishment of the damned would have an end, sprung not out of Christian or Church doctrine, but out of Platonism. Hence the doctrine that the punishment of hell is finite, was rejected not only by the Catholic but also by the Protestant church. (*Augsb. Confess.* art. 17).<sup>54</sup>

It is very ironic that Feuerbach agrees with the thesis proposition that heaven sees hell. He argues, however, from the insight that the Scriptures lead to such a conclusion that the Scriptures must be wrong. In other words, Feuerbach read the Scriptures and came to the same conclusion as this present writer, which led to his rejection of traditional faith. Feuerbach, after he concludes that the Bible must teach such a thing, sees no need for further comment. It is taken out-of-hand that Christianity is false due to its cruelty, and Feuerbach merely moves on to his next conclusion that “faith is opposite of love”. This is certainly a case of man judging God’s ethics by his own standard of morality.

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<sup>53</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (part II). (New York: Prometheus Books, 1989), chapter xxxvi.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

**Bertrand Russel:****Person:**

Bertrand Russel (1872 to 1970) was an outspoken critic of Christianity. Due to this antipathy he seemed to have read enough of Scripture in order to give him fuel for ammunition in his antagonism against it.

**View:**

In the course of his criticisms, Russel uses the idea of heaven beholding hell to launch an attack upon the Christian doctrine of love. He attacks this doctrine and the broader concept of hell through it:

Gloomy saints who abstained from all pleasures of sense, who lived in solitude in the desert, denying themselves meat and wine and the society of women, were, nonetheless, not obliged to abstain from all pleasures. The pleasures of the mind were considered to be superior to those of the body, and a high place among the pleasures of the mind were assigned to the contemplation of the eternal tortures to which the pagans and heretics would hereafter be subjected.<sup>55</sup>

**Summary of section:**

The groundwork now has been laid and the mood set. Voices from the past have sounded their views and shaped the discussion thus far. Now, the Scriptures will be applied.



**SECTION II:****BIBLICAL TEXTS RELATED TO THESIS****INTRODUCTION:**

In this section, Biblical evidences will be presented concerning whether or not the saints behold hell. This section will employ relevant passages of Scripture in order to see if the historical writers of the previous section were warranted in their assertions.

**Isaiah 14: 15,16:**

<sup>15</sup> Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.

<sup>16</sup> They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms?

**Comment:**

Here is a very curious prophecy of one that is wicked and will be “brought down to hell” for others to “narrowly look upon.” If this verse refers to Satan, it may point only to the fact that the Devil shall be tormented in the presence of the saints. But if this verse refers to a man in hell, then the thesis assertion may be strengthened.

Many writers do point to an earthly personage spoken of in Isaiah 14 instead of a mere allegory of the fate of Satan:

- This prophecy is addressed as a proverb against “the king of Babylon” (verse 4).

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<sup>55</sup> Bertrand Russel, *Unpopular Essays* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1950), 149.

- Historical context shows that this verse refers to an historical man in that the prior chapter of Isaiah addresses a prophecy against Babylon itself before now addressing a prophecy against her king.<sup>56</sup>
- This personage is spoken of as “a man” in verse 16.
- This personage will be covered with worms in verse 11 and not the fires of hell (a fate more befitting a man than a fallen angel unable to be buried beneath physical sod).

One may argue for many points concerning this text, but due to the non-literal mood and use of figures of speech in the surrounding context there is an inherent difficulty in proving any doctrine here (except that the downfall of a tyrant is prophesied).

Non-literalness and hyperbolic sarcasm thickly covers these verses and they are not to be taken to describe literal truths. John Calvin on verses 8-16:

As he had formerly attributed gladness to the trees, so now, by a similar figure, he attributes speech to the dead. He arouses them, as it were, from their graves, to mock at the pride of this tyrant. The whole passage is ironical, and full of keen sarcasm. At the approach of kings, the people tremble, and come forth to meet and receive them with pompous display. The Prophet makes a fictitious representation, that when this tyrant shall die and go down to the grave, the dead will go forth to meet and honor him, but with such honor as he deserves. As if he had said, Not only the living, but also the dead will rejoice at his death. The dead also will treat him respectfully according to his deserts.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Of course, historical fulfillment does not necessarily rule out a greater spiritual fulfillment (c.f. Isaiah 7:14).

<sup>57</sup>John Calvin, “The Book Of The Prophet Isaiah,” *Calvin’s Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), Vol. 4.

**Isaiah 66:24:**

And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.

**Comment:**

Does Isaiah 66:24 strengthen this thesis? This verse occurs in the last chapter of the book of Isaiah and is considered by most scholars as an eschatological passage. It appears to describe final judgment and hell. Since hell is described, the visual sight of hell by the saints must be considered for they shall go forth and “look” upon all those for whom the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched.

Some writers, however, interpret this prophecy only to have a near fulfillment, already complete. Others speak of this verse being fulfilled on some future juncture, but only on earth (temporally).<sup>58</sup> Most theologians, however, speak of this verse as referring to the eschatological judgment upon the wicked in hell.

Some interpret this passage as eschatological, but only as pertaining to the earth under Dispensational lines of thought. Dispensational teacher R.G. Wallace comments accordingly concerning Isaiah 66:24:

At the beginning of the Millennium, there will be a very dramatic teaching aid that God leaves for the people that will last for seven years. After the battle of Armageddon, the corpses of the dead Northern army will be scattered along the Mediterranean coastline (Ezekiel 39:9-16; Joel 2:20).<sup>59</sup>

Thus, the worm dieth not – for only seven years.

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<sup>59</sup> R.G. Wallace, “Commentary on Isaiah,” December 2003, <http://www.biblefragrances.com>

Matthew Henry considers that this prophecy not only speaks of a local and historical fulfillment, but also a spiritual and eternal fulfillment:

Now this [judgment on the wicked] is sometimes accomplished in temporal judgments, and perhaps never nearer the letter than in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation by the Romans...It may refer likewise to the spiritual judgments that came upon the unbelieving Jews...But our Saviour applies it to the everlasting misery and torment of impenitent sinners in the future state, where their worm dies not, and their fire is not quenched (Mark 9:44)...<sup>60</sup>

After this, Henry makes a point relevant to this thesis, affirming that the righteous shall behold the wicked in hell:

It will illustrate the joys and glories of the blessed to see what becomes of those that died in their transgression, and it will elevate their praises to think that they were themselves as brands plucked out of that burning.<sup>61</sup>

This view is also echoed in John Gill's commentary:

For their worm shall not die ...and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh; the true worshippers of God, Isaiah 66:23 to whom their carcasses will be loathsome, when they look upon them; and their souls abominable, because of their wicked actions; and who cannot but applaud the justice of God in their condemnation; and admire distinguishing grace and mercy, that has preserved them from the like ruin and destruction. [underline added]<sup>62</sup>

### **Objections:**

Does Isaiah teach that the saints will look upon the damned? Many raise objections. The simplest objection regarding the relevance of this verse is that this verse is fulfilled in some other way besides hellfire. Those who deny that Isaiah 66:24 refers to eternal punishment (and the righteous going out to gaze upon the bodies of the wicked) usually state two main objections.

They assert that this verse is figurative. Calvin, for instance, states the following:

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<sup>60</sup> Henry, 1218.

And shall see the dead bodies of men. He does not mean that this slaughter shall take place in the assembly of believers; for this would greatly diminish the happiness of the Church, in which God displays all testimonies of joy and gladness...<sup>63</sup>

They will also assert that Isaiah 66 pictures the saints looking at the bodies of the dead and not their never-dying souls in hell. Thus, because Isaiah refers to “bodies” and not “souls,” one should not apply this passage in reference to souls in hell. Therefore, Isaiah 66:24 cannot be used to strengthen any assertion that the saints will view the wicked dead.

**Reply - Christ uses Isaiah 66 to teach concerning hell:**

What is the reply to these objections? It is to merely to point to the manner in which Christ referenced these passages. Christ utilized Isaiah’s imagery and applied it to the pains that souls will suffer in hellfire. He used this passage to teach an everlasting hell. All others may do the same.

Christ utilizes Isaiah 66:24 three times in Mark 9:43-48: “The worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched,” and applies this phrase each time to the eternal state of hell. Christ interprets Isaiah 66 as being a reference to a literal, everlasting hellfire (To ignore the Saviour’s own application of this text is not wise). As well, why cut off a literal hand and foot rather than burn in a metaphorical fire? Christ’s application strengthens the assertion presented in this study. Christ interprets Isaiah 66:24 as literally referring to the state of the damned. This state includes the visual sight of their punishment.

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<sup>61</sup>Henry, 1218. Granted, it may be that by the use of the phrase “to see” Henry may have possibly meant “to know.” Henry, however uses the word “see” just as the text itself uses the word “look.”

<sup>62</sup>Gill, Isaiah 66:24.

<sup>63</sup>Calvin’s Commentary on Isa 66:24.

Compare other references of eternal judgment used in the New Testament to this one. Isaiah 66:15 refers to the Lord coming with fire and “flames of fire,” language similar to Paul’s words in II Thessalonians 1:8 concerning the return of Christ: “In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God.” As well, the Apostle Paul’s prophecy of the wicked being “...punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” also contains phraseology similar to Isaiah 66. It appears that both Christ and the Apostle Paul hearken back to this imagery in Isaiah 66 in describing the final judgment and hell. Literal hellfire is described --making a strong case that the Redeemed of God will go forth and look upon those who have transgressed God.

**Luke 13:28:**

There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.

**Comment:**

This passage appears to be the reciprocal of the saints beholding heaven: the wicked beholding the saints sitting in fellowship while they are cast out. It strengthens the conviction that “heaven and hell are within sight of one another”. The unsaved, being in a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, gaze upon the joy of the saints.

Heaven can be likened to a situation akin to winter on a cold night. The wicked who have rejected the great feast now stand without, gazing through the windows at the feast. The joys of heaven will be within their sight and they will only grow the more miserable due to their rejection.

The assertion may be made that this passage merely teaches the general truth that the Jewish religious leaders, who flaunted their kinship to Abraham, will be surprised when Gentiles from the East and the West sit down instead of them, now rejected by God. They had assumed a “ticket to the feast” based upon national or ethnic identity instead of vital faith. Now they are sorely surprised to find others taking their place at the feast.

The above summary is valid and instructive. The conclusion that this is all that is taught in the passage, however, does not follow. Being “thrust out” into a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth goes beyond a mere temporal rejection. It is the very description of hell!

This verse appears to go further than merely “shutting the door in the face of the wicked.” It describes those shut out as also gazing upon the realm of God, even as the saints enjoy God’s fellowship. That there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth shows the relationship of this passage to other passages concerning hell. The wicked shall see this fellowship even as they are cast out. The phrase “all the prophets” includes those prophets long deceased.

The afterlife is spoken of here. A final and eternal separation is spoken of here, and one in which the damned shall gaze from the outer darkness at the warm fellowship of the saints and their reward.

### **Luke 16:19-31 (The Rich Man and Lazarus)**

And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.

### **Comment:**

This verse tells much regarding hell, if taken literally. It speaks of heaven and hell being within sight. It tells of the heavenly comfort of Lazarus, who, together with Abraham, both possess a sight of the damned and a remembrance regarding events in their own lives.<sup>64</sup>

If, however, this passage is a parable and to be taken figuratively, then the truths gained from it will be limited. The following are arguments for such a view:

### **Argument 1; Luke 16 describes souls as if they were real bodies**

Luke 16 (if taken literally) would imply that the persons characterized possessed bodies. How else was the Rich Man tormented, except in body? How can a soul dip his finger into water? If taken literally, Luke 16 teaches the bodily presence of the Rich Man in hell and would be contrary to the vast majority of the Biblical evidence that teaches that bodies stay in the grave and only souls go into a state of reward or punishment – at least until the Last Judgment.



Reference the Westminster Shorter Catechism:

The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection...At the resurrection, believers being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity.<sup>65</sup>

Until the Resurrection, the dead are disembodied spirits in a sense. Luke 16, however, appears to teach a state of affairs prior to the resurrection where souls thirst, dip physical fingers into water and are burned with real flames.

Reply:

It appears that departed souls are active, in whatever state they reside, before Resurrection Day. They may even be tormented and said to thirst, despite their present disunion of body and spirit. On at least one other occasion in Scripture souls are described as performing activities.

Moses and Elijah appeared and were recognizable in some form at the Mount of Transfiguration. The souls of the martyrs are said to be performing activities in heaven prior to the Resurrection<sup>66</sup>, and the departed Samuel appeared before the witch of Endor in the Old Testament.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Depicting the unchanged nature of the damned, even in death, the rich man not only prays to Abraham instead of God; but also beckons Lazarus to do bidding for him as a servant, just as in life...“*Send Lazarus.*”

<sup>65</sup> Westminster Shorter Catechism, Free Presbyterian Publications, *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Bell and Bain Ltd., 1995), questions 37-38, 297-8.

<sup>66</sup> Revelation 6:9-10. The church triumphant even now sees and prays for the church militant upon the earth. This may be objectionable to some Protestant ears, who reject any possibility of the prayers of the saints in heaven going forth for the benefit of the church upon the earth. It is not suggested, however, that prayers should go forth to these saints for their mediatorship, Christ being the only mediator between God and man.

<sup>67</sup> This is, admittedly, a matter of some debate. The text does state, however, that it was Samuel who appeared.

Lest it be said that these are “special occurrences” and are not normative, consider the following:

- There are three such “special occurrences.” Biblical consideration must be made for even one such occurrence.
- There are other instances where departed saints are said to be active and conscious from the moment of death. Paul’s instruction in II Corinthians 5:8 was that “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.” The Lord’s own statement in Luke 23, to the thief on the cross, was that he would be with him that very day in Paradise.

### **Argument 2; Historic context and the very nature of parable deny a literal reading**

A very positive strength of the figurative approach is its relevance to the historic situation. The rich man represented Jewish leaders who had many divine favors and many temporal blessings. These Jewish leaders had “fared sumptuously” on God’s favors. Lower class Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles were outside the gate and starving for crumbs. Thus, instead of individual persons, the Rich Man and Lazarus are representatives of classes of people, namely the Jewish leaders and the “outcasts.” There are differences of opinion concerning the exact identity of the classes for whom both Lazarus and Dives represent, but these details are unneeded to grasp the main points of the argument. Christ, as He did in many other places contrasted the outwardly righteous “favored” Jews with the “sinners.”

An ironic reversal will occur. Christ announced that the “meek” shall inherit the earth and the Gospel will go into the world and bless those who were previously

outsiders. God exalts the lowly and outcast and this parable reflects this truth in Israel's historic context. Christ told this story as a parable to demonstrate this singular truth and it is not likely that he was rehearsing an historic event.

This interpretation fits into both Luke's interest towards the poor and downtrodden and also matches the historical situation concerning the arrival of salvation to the Publicans, Harlots, Samaritans and Gentiles and general rejection of the Jewish nation.

Consider all the teachings of Christ that speak of the final rejection of the Jews and the acceptance of the "outcasts." Christ spoke many parables concerning this truth that the treasures of God will be taken from Israel as a whole and given to those bearing forth fruit.<sup>68</sup> The fig tree was withered and those that begged outside the gate would at last be richly fed. Regarding this parable, some even extrapolate that the "great gulf fixed" is symbolic of Jewish unbelief even unto this day.<sup>69</sup>

This interpretation agrees with the Bible's own words concerning the purpose of parables:

And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive.<sup>70</sup>

Parables were not only to enlighten and teach. For the Pharisees, the very purpose of parables, as evidenced by the above passage, was to deafen and blind them! After all,

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<sup>68</sup> However, many allow for the possibility of future grace upon Israel as a whole.

<sup>69</sup> Any anti-semitism resulting from these doctrines ought to be rejected vehemently; for one is saved solely by grace. And, if a Gentile, one is only, after all, simply a graft upon the tree of salvation.

<sup>70</sup> Mark 4:11,14, 34.

who was it that could not understand these parables? It was the majority of the Jewish leaders who, by and large, remained recalcitrant. Thus, the nature of parables was figurative and meant to convey a general truth to a selected audience, enabled by God to understand. In ironic reversal, it was the educated priests who could not comprehend Christ's words.

Reply:

Can only one solitary truth be drawn from this "parable" despite the vivid descriptions given? Is it even properly called a parable? Is Luke 16 unsuited to draw any other teachings from outside this main point of the ironic reversal?

If only a parable, it is unique among parables. Jesus utilizes the term "parable" 17 times in Matthew, 13 times in Mark and 18 times in Luke. This passage, however, is not referred to as a parable. Christ, furthermore, not only begins with the words, "There was a certain rich man...and there was a certain beggar [underlines added]," He even utilizes a proper name; no other parable does so in the New Testament (such usage of proper names and detailed descriptions do not easily read as entirely figurative).<sup>71</sup>

John Calvin writes, "Some look upon it as a simple parable; but, as the name Lazarus occurs in it, I rather consider it to be the narrative of an actual fact."<sup>72</sup>

The writer G. Morgan Campbell states, "Jesus did not call it a parable. Luke does not call it a parable...It may be a parable. If so, at least it is striking that it is the only parable of Jesus in which a name is given to a person."<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>A counter-rebuttal: The accounts of the Good Samaritan, the mustard seed and leaven, and the banquet (located between Luke chapters 10 and 15) are not called parables either.

<sup>72</sup>John Calvin *Harmony of the Evangelists*, Pringle, *Calvin's Commentaries*, volume 2, cols. 184-7.

These proper names were symbolic

Some will counter that “Lazarus,” the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Eleazar, means “Whom God helps.” Lazarus is thus not a proper name, but a parabolic title referring to the social class pictured in the parable.

John Lightfoot asserts such in dripping disdain for those who take this passage literally:

Whoever believes this not to be a parable, but a true story, let him believe also those little friars, whose trade it is to shew the monuments at Jerusalem to pilgrims, and point exactly to the place where the house of the 'rich glutton' stood. Most accurate keepers of antiquity indeed! who, after so many hundreds of years, such overthrows of Jerusalem, such devastations and changes, can rake out of the rubbish the place of so private a house, and such a one too as never had any being, but merely in parable. And that it was a parable, not only the consent of all expositors may assure us, but the thing itself speaks it...there could hardly be invented a more convenient name for a poor beggar than *Lazar*, which signifies *the help of God*, when he stands in so much need of the help of men.<sup>74</sup>

This is a poor argument. Many Biblical names had meanings in Hebrew. The name “Jesus” denoted that “God saves” and yet Jesus Christ was no less historical for it. It is common for Hebrew names to have meanings associated with them.

What is uncommon, however, is for parables to have common names indicated. This never occurs in Scripture, unless Luke 16:19-31 is the lone exception. This strengthens the view that, “The rich man and Lazarus were actual characters, possibly known to Christ, and their history both in this world and the world to come is solemnly traced by Jesus for the moral profit of men everywhere.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Luke* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1931), 190-191.

<sup>74</sup> John Lightfoot, *Exercitations upon the Gospel of St. Luke*, A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1979), 165.

<sup>75</sup> Herbert Lockyer, *All the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1963), 292.

Also C.I. Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1909), 1098, quoted in Jeffrey Koo, “The reality and eternity of hell: Luke 16:19-31 as proof,” *Stulos*

Existent folklore demonstrates the source of Christ's tale

Some will counter that Christ's words very much resembled folklore of his day.<sup>76</sup>

Christ was merely taking a story that circulated in his own time and using it to illustrate his main point.

Jeffrey Koo responds to this argument:

It has been pointed out by certain scholars that the story originated from Egyptian folklore. Although one may not deny the existence of such fables in the time of Jesus, it is impossible to prove that Jesus did rely on them. It is also extremely difficult to prove that the New Testament readers at that time were all familiar with such heathen myths. One may even question the wisdom of using them since this would most certainly soften the threatening intent of the story. It is highly unlikely that Jesus needed to use an Egyptian tale to explain the afterlife. Moreover, if the story is fictitious, then Jesus would be defeating His own purpose in His effort to present a powerful warning on human responsibility in this present life. It has to be underscored that the content of the account in no way contradicts the general tenor of biblical teaching concerning life after death (cf Matt 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; Acts 2:27,31; Rev 1:18, 6:8, 20:13-14).<sup>77</sup>

Just as the Epic of Gilgamesh does not negate the truth of a literal Flood upon the earth, so too, in this case, prior existent folklore concerning hell do not negate the literal truth of Christ's words.

**Other miscellaneous arguments**

Luke 16 proves too much if literal

Another argument against the literal view of Luke 16 is that it proves too much. If used to prove the visual awareness of hell by the saints, it may be used to prove that the deceased not only see one another but speak as well. Not only this, but a literal reading

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*Theological Journal*, 6 (May-November 1998), 68: "Rich men and beggars are common: there is no reason why Jesus may not have had in mind a particular case. In no parable is an individual named."

<sup>76</sup>Jeremias Joachim, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), 183; Charles A. Ray, Jr., "The Rich Man and Lazarus," *The Theological Educator*, 56 (Fall 1997), 80.

<sup>77</sup>Jeffrey Koo, "The reality and eternity of hell: Luke 16:19-31 as proof," *Stulos Theological Journal*, 6 (May-November 1998), 68.

of Luke 16 demonstrates the ability of the damned to speak to heaven across this “great gulf fixed.”<sup>78</sup>

### Luke 16 is not relevant if a different reality exists after the Judgment

Timing of an event is always important. What of the timing of this parable? After the Judgment, will the same truths hold true?

If these were real persons in Luke 16, then this event occurred prior to the Last Judgment. What if, after the Last Judgment, this location no longer exists? Some think that the location where Luke 16 takes place will disappear. It was an intermediate state before the End of the World, a temporary holding cell of the dead, and will be needed no more after the Last Judgment.

Tertullian is representative of this view when he writes that:

This region, therefore, I call Abraham’s bosom. Although it is not in heaven, it is yet higher than hell, and is appointed to afford an interval of rest to the souls of the righteous, until the consummation of all things shall complete the resurrection of all men with the "full recompense of their reward."<sup>79</sup>

Two compartments exist in this temporary state of the dead prior to the Judgment. Since these compartments will cease to be after the Last Judgment, no permanent applications concerning heaven can be had from this passage of Scripture. The conditions of “heaven” and “hell” prior to the Work of Christ or the Resurrection<sup>80</sup> will be different from “heaven” and “hell” after these temporary abodes have been abolished.

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<sup>78</sup> In reply, Dives spoke only to Abraham, not Lazarus. There was no direct interchange between the parties, the Rich Man only seeing Lazarus from afar off.

<sup>79</sup> Tertullian *Against Marcion* 4.34, ANF 3:406.

**Reply:**

This interpretation is unsatisfactory. Caution should be used in dividing up the afterlife into temporary holding cells. Theological inventions should not be the answer to difficult questions.<sup>81</sup> The words of the Westminster Confession of Faith provide a framework to avoid error in this regard:

The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection...At the resurrection, believers being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity.<sup>82</sup>

A.A. Hodge also affirms that the souls of believers are made perfect and usher into the presence of God at death. Beyond this, Hodge cautions, “As to the location of the place where the redeemed are now gathered, absolutely nothing is revealed.”<sup>83</sup>

Concerning the wicked prior to the resurrection, Hodge further cautions:

But where these places are situated, and whether the locality of torment now is identical with the locality of torment after the judgment, no man can tell, because God has not revealed it.<sup>84</sup>

The objection that Luke 16 refers to a temporary state is based upon evidences that are tenuous at best.

<sup>80</sup> When these realities change is disputed. Some writers assert differing historic events which change these realities, whether it by the work of Christ or the Final Judgment.

<sup>81</sup> The doctrines of Limbo (both of infants and of the Fathers, and purgatory as well) comes to mind; Roman Catholicism fabricated these doctrines in order to explain hard passages.

<sup>82</sup> WCF, questions 37-39.

<sup>83</sup> A.A. Hodge, “*The Confession of Faith*” (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), 37-9.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.



### **Conclusion:**

Is Luke 16 parabolic or literal? The difficulties of either position may cause reservations and any desire to build a positive theology of hell based exclusively on Luke 16 will be inadequate.

Those that stress the figurative aspect of Luke 16 are correct in asserting that the main emphasis is this ironic reversal at the end. The crux of the passage was that the one who was favored on earth with temporal blessings was punished in hell for not using those blessings in a godly way. The one who was poor and downtrodden on earth was exalted in heaven. The historic situation of the Jewish leaders and the common people may also fit this ironic reversal.

### **A parabolic interpretation does not negate heaven and hell being within sight:**

There is a relevant question to be asked. Even if the parabolic view of this passage is granted, can nothing concerning hell except its mere reality, be ascertained? Can even its mere reality be ascertained?

The subject of the afterlife was an important area of doctrine and Christ thought it important enough to correct the Pharisees on a number of occasions.<sup>85</sup> Would He incorporate false elements into this doctrine in order to stress His main points? Though not Jesus' primary concern to describe hell in detail, it is "unlikely that he would mislead us on this subject."<sup>86</sup> Christ would not speak untruths concerning hell in order to make His main point; even if Luke 16 did not involve literal persons, Christ would not distort

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<sup>85</sup> This area of doctrine was important enough for Christ to say, for instance, that one is not married, nor given in marriage, in this state (Matthew 22:30). Also, Jesus gave some other details of the resurrection and the afterlife as well (Matthew 22:31; John 14).

<sup>86</sup> Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1983), 1177.

others' perceptions of the afterlife when he corrected their false assumptions concerning this state.

A parable is, by its very purpose, a method utilized to teach a higher truth from a known or commonplace truth; the teacher basing the "higher teaching" on some more basic and factual truth. Would Christ misrepresent the afterlife for the sake of a parabolic tale of reversal between the social classes of that time?

John L. Dagg summarized this well and with this, the examination ends:

This discourse of our Saviour concerning the rich man and Lazarus, was designed to give us knowledge of the future world. It is not called a parable, but if we regard it as such, it should be remembered, that the parables of Jesus were not like the fables of Æsop, in which beasts and birds spoke and reasoned, but were representations drawn from nature, and conformed to the existing properties of things. In this view, though we are not obliged to regard the account of the rich man and Lazarus, as the actual history of two individuals, it is such a representation as our divine teacher was pleased to employ, to give us some knowledge of the unseen world.<sup>87</sup>

It is likely that Luke 16's portrayal of the afterlife is trustworthy concerning many aspects of heaven and hell, and this aspect of saints and sinners within sight of one another is worthy of serious consideration.

### **Romans 9:21-22:**

Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?

<sup>22</sup> What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction...

### **Comment:**

This verse speaks of the glory of God being revealed in the vessels of wrath. In reference to this point, several writers have emphasized God's "shewing" his wrath in a

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<sup>87</sup> John L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1857), Book 8, chapter 1.

visual way. One of the ways that God “shows” His wrath may be in a visual display of His judgment upon the wicked. This occurs in time (the temporal sight of the evils that befall the wicked) and in eternity as well. It may be that these vessels of wrath will be put on display throughout eternity.

Can this be drawn in any way from the above passage? It is of note that just a few verses earlier in Romans 9 mention is made of God “shewing” His wrath in the example of Pharaoh. Pharaoh was one in whom God displayed His wrath visually to the saints, who rejoiced over it. Moses and the people rose up and sang as they looked upon the carcasses of Pharaoh and those that had transgressed God. Romans 9:22 speaks of a “showing” of God’s wrath and this example given is the visual display of this wrath, which brought joy to the saints.<sup>88</sup>

### **I Corinthians 3:21-23:**

Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are your's;

<sup>22</sup> Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are your's;

<sup>23</sup> And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.

### **Comment:**

All things belong to the saints of God. Since this “all things” includes both life and death, it may be deduced that the sight of hell may be included. Jonathan Edwards

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<sup>88</sup>Later, in the Book of Revelation, the sight of the destruction of Babylon is similarly rejoiced over.

concludes just that in his writings concerning this verse. This sight of the damned in hell is given to the saints as part of I Corinthians 3:21-23.

This sight of the damned is a gift given by God, to “double the ardour of the love and gratitude of the saints of heaven.”<sup>89</sup> In this way, both life and death, this world and the world to come belongs to the saints. It is a gift! A gift not of God to Himself, but a gift to His Son and His Son’s bride, the church:

Since God cannot be made happier, being ever and infinitely blessed, hell was made, not for him but for heaven.<sup>90</sup>

The saints will reign with Christ<sup>91</sup> and judge both angels and the world and will see their victory in God’s victory over the damned.<sup>92</sup> They will see God’s enemies put under their feet and may see the evidence of this victory visually, and, as a gift. God gifts His saints by showing them Himself more fully, in all His attributes, and also by showing them from what they have been saved (both their own sin and wrath and the enmity of those who have continued in such a state). All things are theirs.

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<sup>89</sup> Miscellanies # 279, as quoted on page 42 of the *Jonathan Edward’s Reader*.

<sup>90</sup> Gerstner, p. 34.

<sup>91</sup> Revelation 20:5-6.

<sup>92</sup> Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30; I Cor. 6:2-3; Daniel 7:22.

## **II Thessalonians 1:8-9:**

<sup>8</sup> In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

<sup>9</sup> Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;

### **Comment:**

In this verse under consideration, what does it mean to be punished “from the presence of the Lord” (ἐκ τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ κυρίου)?

- FIRST READING: Some translate this to mean “away from” the presence of the Lord.<sup>93</sup>
- SECOND READING: Others translate this to mean “because of” or “out of” the presence of the Lord, meaning that God is the source of this punishment.<sup>94</sup>

### **Sinners cast out of God’s presence?**

There are many who hold that this verse states that the wicked will be cast out of the presence of God.

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<sup>93</sup>Most noticeably, the NIV and NASB translators.

<sup>94</sup>Quarles (Quarles, “The APO of 2 Thessalonians 1:9 and the nature of eternal punishment,” *Westminster Theological Journal* (#59 1997): 202.) states in his footnote:

*Of the commentators accessible to him, Lunemann listed Grotius, Harduin, Benson, Bengel, Moldenhauer, Flatt, Pelt, de Wette, Baumgarten-Crusius, Ewald, and Hoffmann as supporting the causal interpretation of ἐκ τῆς παρουσίας. This argument was also sustained by William Stevens, “Thessalonians,” in *An American Commentary on the New Testament* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1880) 3:78-79; Joseph H. Thayer, *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.; Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1901) 59; A.H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell, 1907) 1034; and more recently by Ronald Ward, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Waco: Word, 1973) 147-48).*

- The NIV reads that “They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power”.<sup>95</sup>
- The NASB states that they will be punished, “away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power”.<sup>96</sup>

These two translations make a case for the first explanation above, that “from” means “away from”.

### Sinners punished due to the presence of the Lord?

Others disagree. Some state that  $\text{ἐκ τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ κυρίου}$  refers to sinners being punished “by” the presence of the Lord. John Chrysostom:

From the face of the Lord, he says. What is this? He here wishes to say how easily it might be. For since they were then much puffed up, there is no need, he says, of much trouble; it is enough that God comes and is seen.<sup>97</sup>

The Greek allows for either meaning, but the latter is preferred.<sup>98</sup> Since destruction ( $\text{καταστροφή}$ ) is the effect of this punishment, the causal function for  $\text{ἐκ τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ κυρίου}$  is likely.<sup>99</sup> In fact, when comparing II Thessalonians 1:8-9 with Acts 3:19, the view that the wicked are punished “by” or “due to” the presence of the Lord is strengthened considerably.

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<sup>95</sup>*New International Version (NIV)* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997).

<sup>96</sup>*New American Standard Bible (NASB)* (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1973), II Thessalonians 1:8-9.

<sup>97</sup>John Chrysostom *Homilies on Thessalonians Homily 3 on 2 Thessalonians*, Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. XIII.

<sup>98</sup>The Greek  $\text{ἐκ τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ κυρίου}$  contains both uses in its 671 occurrences.

Other Scriptures strengthen this reading:

Acts 3:19-20:

Acts 3:19-20, utilizing the same phrase,

ἵνα ἴδῃτε ἰσχυροὺς καὶ ἁγίους χρόνους ἀναπαύσεως ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου, speaks of “times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord”. The Lord is clearly the reason for these times of refreshing mentioned. These times of refreshing are “from” Him who is the causative source of them.

In like manner, it appears that the Lord is the cause of this punishment of flaming fire in II Thessalonians 1:8-9. The wicked are not punished by being away from God’s presence so much as they are punished by His presence and will be unable to escape Him.<sup>100</sup>

Cross-reference Revelation 14:9-11: “He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the lamb.” God is the efficient cause of these torments, and these torments occur in and due to His presence.

Isaiah 2:10-21:

An additional strength of this latter view is that II Thessalonians 1:8-9 is taken from Isaiah 2:10-21 (Septuagint), which reads in the King James as the following:

<sup>10</sup> Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty.

<sup>11</sup> The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day...

<sup>19</sup> And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth.

<sup>20</sup> In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they

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<sup>99</sup> Quarles, “The APO of 2 Thessalonians 1:9 and the nature of eternal punishment,” *Westminster Theological Journal* (#59 1997): 203.

<sup>100</sup> “The face of the Lord is against them that do evil”, Psalm 34:16.

made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats;

<sup>21</sup> To go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth.

In this light, particularly verses 10,19 and 21, it appears that this destruction is spoken of as coming “from the Lord” in the sense of “coming from His very presence.”<sup>101</sup> After all, to hide from the face of God is the intention of the idol worshippers in the above verses. They desire to be away from His presence.

Examine also the prophet Jeremiah 4:26: “I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the LORD, and by his fierce anger.”

Even the Jewish Pseudopigrapha yields evidences that this reading is consistent with the mood and tone of Scripture. 1 Enoch 48:9: “I will give them over into the hands of my elect ones: As stubble in the fire so shall they burn before the face of the holy...”<sup>102</sup> Also, 1 Enoch 53:2: “Sinners shall be destroyed before the face of the Lord of Spirits.”<sup>103</sup>

#### The unsound conclusions necessitated by the first reading of II Thessalonians 1:8-9:

If sinners will be “shut out from the presence of God” (the second reading of this text), it leads to an unsound conclusion concerning the next thing mentioned in this verse, “the glory of His power”. If sinners are shut out from the presence of the Lord, then they are also shut out from the glory of His power.

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<sup>101</sup> G. H. Moore. Pastor Bible Baptist Church Maplewood, Missouri, interview by author, Missouri, 13 October, 2003.

<sup>102</sup> Black, *Apocalypsis Henochi Graece*, p. 35.

<sup>103</sup> Charles, “1 Enoch,” *Apocrypha and Pseudopigrapha of the Old Testament*, 2:220.



This will not be! In hell, God's power is infinitely glorified. God's "glory in His power" is precisely revealed in hell. It will be ever apparent to those who are suffering under it. Instead of the sinner being cast out of God's presence due to God's punishment the very source of this punishment will be God Himself.

Matthew Henry's conclusion is similar:

This destruction shall come from the presence of the Lord, that is, immediately from God himself. Here God punishes sinners by creatures, by instruments; but then he will take the work into his own hands. It will be destruction from the Almighty, more terrible than the consuming fire which consumed Nadab and Abihu, which came from before the Lord. (5.) It shall come from the glory of his power, or from his glorious power. Not only the justice of God, but this almighty power, will be glorified in the destruction of sinners; and who knows the power of his anger?<sup>104</sup>

#### Summary of Paul's use of ☩☐☐☐

In summary, ☩☐ here speaks of source rather than separation; eternal destruction "does not consist of the Lord's evacuation but in his confrontation with the unrepentant sinner."<sup>105</sup> In hell, there will be a "punishment of loss" (*poena damni*) in that the wicked will be separated from God's grace. But, in hell there is also the "punishment of sense" (*poena sensus*) in which God is present and active in the infliction of punishment upon the damned.

For further discussion on this topic, see Appendix C.

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<sup>104</sup> Matthew Henry, 2346.

<sup>105</sup> Quarles, "The APO of 2 Thessalonians 1:9 and the nature of eternal punishment," *Westminster Theological Journal* (#59 1997): 211.

**Revelation 14:10:**

<sup>10</sup> The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:

**The wicked are punished in the presence of heaven:**

The imagery invoked here is one of the angels and Christ Himself presiding over and witnessing the punishment of the wicked. The damned had denied the Lamb, now they must acknowledge Him as they are being punished before Him.<sup>106</sup> Grant Osborne states:

In Luke 12:9 Jesus says, He who disowns me before people will be disowned before the angels of God. Both in Luke and here there is the Jewish idea of angels at the heavenly court participating not only in worship but also in judgment...this also parallels the frequent theme in Jewish writings that the wicked in hell would be able to see the joy and glory of the righteous (1 Enoch 48.9; 108.14-15; 2 Esdr. [4 Ezra] 7:36-38; 2 Bar. 30.4; 51.5-6; Wis.5:1-5), a punishment that would make their torment all the worse.<sup>107</sup>

Where the angels and the Holy Lamb are located, there also will reside the saints. If not executing this punishment, the saints will at least witness it and participate in the worship of triumph over it. Osborne continues:

Of course, the idea of the saints present at this judgment is not mentioned here, but the participation of the saints is emphasized in Rev. 2:27; 17:14; 20:4.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup>G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1999), 760.

<sup>107</sup> Grant Osborne, *Revelation*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2002), 541. Concerning the place of angels in the execution of God's wrath, 1<sup>st</sup> Enoch 62:1 states: "In those days the kings who possess the earth shall be punished by the angels of his wrath."

<sup>108</sup> Osborne, 541. Also stated: "It is difficult to know why the "holy angels" are mentioned before the Lamb. The lamb is placed last for emphasis, "as if the most poignant factor in the pain of the wicked would be the sight of the triumph of the Lamb, against whom as worshippers of the Beast they had made war." For further details concerning the presence of God in hell, see Appendix C.

Revelation 14:10 and Jewish Apocryphal writings:

John's words concerning heaven's inhabitants attending the spectacle of the punishment of the damned is not a new doctrine. He was merely expressing a doctrine in close accord with Jewish apocalyptic writings. John, by the inclusion of his words into canonical writ, gives credence to this belief that the saints will behold hell.

G.K. Beale outlines these Jewish writings. The wicked see the reward of the righteous, while being punished in their presence:

So I En. 108:14-15; Wis. 5:1-5; 2 Bar. 51:5-6; 4 Ezra 7:85; Midr. Pss. 23.7; Misr. Rb. Lev. 32.1; Midr. Rab. Eccl. 7.14. The apocalyptic belief was that the wicked would be punished, often by fire, in the presence of the righteous (I En. 48:9; 62:12; 108:14-15; Wis. 5:1-14; 4 Ezra 7:93; Targ. Isa. 33:17) forever (Isa. 66:22-24; I En. 27:2-3; cf. I En. 21). Even this belief did not underscore gleeful revenge but drew attention to the truth formerly denied by the unrighteous.<sup>109</sup>

Revelation 14:10 compared to Isaiah 34:8-10:

Not only are John's words consistent with Jewish apocalyptic writings, but also with both the Old and New Testaments as well. The events depicted in Revelation 14:10 follow closely with Isaiah's prophecy concerning Edom, which states:

For it is the day of the LORD's vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion.

<sup>9</sup> And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch.

<sup>10</sup> It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever.

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<sup>109</sup> G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1999), 760.

Revelation 14:10 contrasted with Revelation 3:5:

Revelation 3:5 gives the image of the righteous before the throne of God. Here, the words of Jesus state: “I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.”

What happens then to the wicked? The reciprocal of this image is presented in Revelation 14:10, the wicked are punished before the presence of the angels and the Son.

Robert L. Thomas summarizes the scene as follows:

The holy environment of the holy angels and the Lamb enhances the misery of punishment for the wicked, just as the public prosecution of the faithful before their fellow men increased their humiliation (cf. Luke 12:8-9). The opposite case is that of the overcomer who will receive open recognition in the presence of the Father and His angels (3:5).<sup>110</sup>

This sight will not be merely temporary:

Some assert that this sight of the wicked being punished will only be temporary. After all, Edom was destroyed totally and only the smoke remained for a time. The smoke of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:28), though seen visibly for a time across the plain, did die down as well. And though the smoke of the burning of Babylon the Great will ascend “forever,” the sight of their punishment will not so continue, but will also end eventually.

Robert L. Thomas asserts the following:

The holy environment of the holy angels and the Lamb enhances the misery of punishment for the wicked...A question of the appropriateness of this anguish in such a holy presence (Ford) has its answer in recognizing this is only temporary. Eventually those in endless misery will have no place in these surroundings...[though] A constant

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<sup>110</sup> Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1995), 211. Thomas, however, differs from this author in that he writes on the same page, “this is only temporary.”

reminder of the permanence of their misery is the endless trail of smoke that keeps on ascending...<sup>111</sup>

The above assertion, however, lacks weight. The angels and the Lamb (as well as the saints who will be with the Lamb) witness this spectacle (Rev. 14:11). If the spectacle itself is for eternity, why not the witnessing of it? There is nothing that indicates that this visual sight will cease. Instead, the following is stated: “And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever.” Since the punishment of the wicked is both a witnessed punishment and an eternal punishment, this witness of the punishment is also eternal.

Thomas logically errs above when he asserts that the “appropriateness of this anguish” is answered in its temporary nature. Its “appropriateness” has nothing to do with the length of time that it is displayed. Would God be inappropriate to put this spectacle on display forever? Forever is the allotted duration of the punishment, why is it not then the allotted time of the witnessing of this punishment? Just as there is nothing in the text which would indicate a transition concerning the state of the damned, there is nothing in the text which would indicate a transition for the saints.

If God is pleased to display the punishment of the wicked for a time, then why not for eternity? If their smoke will be displayed forever, why is not the very sight of their punishment appropriate to be displayed forever to the saints?

If only the smoke of hell were able to be seen forever from heaven this would entail a deficit of knowledge and a deficit of sight. The inhabitants of heaven, by their sight of the damned, will be granted a good, namely an intimate sight and knowledge of a

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<sup>111</sup> Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1995), 211.

reality that denotes absolute victory. This good gift, however, which would increase their praises of God, would then be taken away after a temporary period of time passes. This blessed gift which brought happiness to the saints would thus be diminished, therefore diminishing the happiness of the saints.

George Eldon Ladd, with whom the discussion of this passage will end, indicates that both the punishment and the sight of this punishment will be forever on display to heaven:

**And he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb** [boldface in the original]. Here is the ultimate meaning of the cup of God's wrath. The lake of fire and brimstone is pictured as the final place of punishment of the beast and the false prophet, as well as all whose names are not found written in the Lamb's book of life... We cannot understand all that is meant in the statement that the wicked will be punished "in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb." Jesus himself had said that those who deny him would be denied before the presence of God and the angels (Mark 8:38; Luke 12:9). Jewish apocalyptic contains a note that is lacking in the Revelation, that the wicked will be punished in the presence of the saints (Enoch 48:9).<sup>112</sup>

Ladd ties the final state of punishment for the damned together with their condition of being in the presence of the inhabitants of heaven. There is no indication of any change in this arrangement. The witnessing of this punishment appears as equally ongoing as the duration of the punishment.

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<sup>112</sup>George Eldon Ladd. *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 197.

**Revelation 18:20; 19:3:**

Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her....And again they said, Alleluia And her smoke rose up for ever and ever.

**Comment:**

It seems that the saints see this smoke rising up forever. And in response, they praise God and say “Alleluia” at its sight. Heaven will rejoice over evil’s downfall. This is indisputable from the above passages and is congruous with the rest of Scripture. This smoke rises up forever, causing rejoicing in heaven as eternal testimony of what occurs to sinners. As the smoke persists forever as an eternal sign, so too the eternal joy at the sight of it by the Redeemed.

There is some similarity in these passages and the account in the Old Testament of Moses and the Redeemed from Egypt rejoicing at the sight of Pharaoh’s destruction at the Red Sea. Just as the earthly manifestation of judgment was visual, the eternal manifestation of judgment will be likewise.

Robert Murray McCheyne comments upon this similarity:

When Israel stood upon the shore, and saw the dead bodies of the Egyptians washed upon it, they burst forth in a song of praise to God. And in like manner, when the redeemed will stand upon the sea of glass, they will sing the same song — the song of Moses, the servant of God, and of the Lamb. And what occasioned the song of Moses? It was because the Egyptians were drowned in the Red Sea. So, in like manner, it will be with the redeemed when they see the wicked cast upon the shores of the burning lake. They will sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb (Revelation 15:3).<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Robert Murray McCheyne, “*The Eternal Torment of the Wicked – Matter of Eternal Song to the Redeemed*,” Feb 2004, <http://www.txdirect.net/~tgarner/mccheyne9.htm> (Dec 13, 1998).

**Additional Scripture related to this theme:**

**Job 34: 20-26:**

- <sup>20</sup> In a moment shall they die, and the people shall be troubled at midnight, and pass away: and the mighty shall be taken away without hand.
- <sup>21</sup> For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings.
- <sup>22</sup> There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.
- <sup>23</sup> For he will not lay upon man more than right; that he should enter into judgment with God.
- <sup>24</sup> He shall break in pieces mighty men without number, and set others in their stead.
- <sup>25</sup> Therefore he knoweth their works, and he overturneth them in the night, so that they are destroyed.
- <sup>26</sup> He striketh them as wicked men in the open sight of others.

**Psalm 9:3:**

When mine enemies are turned back, they shall fall and perish at thy presence.

**Psalm 91:8:**

Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked.

**Psalm 37:34:**

Wait on the LORD, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it.

**Psalm 58:10:**

The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked.

**Psalm 112: 9-10:**

He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever; his horn shall be exalted with honour. The wicked shall see it, and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth, and melt away: the desire of the wicked shall perish.

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**SECTION III:****OBJECTIONS TO THE POSSIBILITY OF THE SAINTS VISUALLY****BEHOLDING HELL:**

Is it possible that the Redeemed in heaven see hell?

Before a long journey is begun it is often the practice of cautious travelers to research impediments that may cripple the journey. The cautious traveler, before looking into a probable route, first looks into the possibility of completing the journey. If there is a bridge that is washed away or some obstacle that would make travel impossible, it is of no use even to begin.

This section scouts for such roadblocks. Before asking whether or not the saints probably behold hell visually, it is first wise to inquire as to whether or not this is even a possibility.

Are there any theological roadblocks? Are there any unsurpassable rivers that would halt the forward movement of this thesis?

The possibility of a thing is prerequisite for the probability of that thing. After studying the notes of past travelers (in the first section) and the map of Scripture (in the second) this section looks for any insurmountable obstacles that may prompt a cancellation of the trip before its completion.

**HEAVEN'S AWARENESS OF HELL:****OBJECTION:<sup>114</sup> The awareness of hell would trouble the saints**

The first possible roadblock is this. It appears very contrary that the saints may see hell and yet be joyful. It is a fearsome thought merely to imagine gazing upon hell. To possess the knowledge of families and friends being absent from heaven and still possess joy unmixed with sorrow is a hard thing to grasp. How can any being possess such knowledge and such joy?

**REPLY: The awareness of Hell does not trouble God's eternal joy**

Consider God. If the saints cannot possess both a knowledge and a sight of hell, while residing in holy joy, what then can one say concerning God? Before applying this difficulty to the saints, how does this application fit with regards to God, who is infinitely more holy than the saints?

**God possesses goodness and joy while remaining aware of the suffering of creatures****God is omniscient:**

God is all knowing, ignorant of nothing. God has never had a new thought. There is no thought that was not, from all eternity, always in the mind of God. God, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordained whatsoever has come to pass.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>The objections asserted in this section are drawn largely from objections mentioned in the sermons of Edwards and McCheyne, as well as the *Summa* of Aquinas.

Lorraine Boettner details this further:

It is unthinkable that a God of infinite wisdom and power would create a world without a definite plan for that world. And because God is thus infinite His plan must extend to every detail of the world's existence. If we could see the world in all its relations, past, present, and future, we would see that it is following a predetermined course with exact precision. Among created things we may search where we will, as far as the microscope and the telescope will enable the eye to see, we find organization everywhere. Large forms resolve themselves into parts, and these parts in their turn are but organized of other parts down as far as we can see into infinity.<sup>116</sup>

God declares, in Isaiah 46: 9-10: “I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.”

God is perfectly aware of every pain of every soul suffering in hell. God knows more fully than any being all that the concept of eternal hell entails better than any human could ever comprehend. God’s knowledge is greater than any awareness of the saints in heaven.

God can see the souls in hell in greater detail and with greater awareness than any human, for He can see their suffering stretched to all eternity. He is aware, at each instant, of each individual pain and of every single person throughout all eternity.

Jonathan Edwards describes this:

But surely the all-seeing God knows as well as any of the dead, what the present sufferings of the damned are. He is everywhere present with his all-seeing eye. He is in heaven and in hell, and in and through every part of the creation.. He is where every devil is; and where every damned soul is, he is present by his knowledge and his essence. He not only knows as well as those in heaven, who see at a distance; but he knows as perfectly as those who feel the misery. He seeth into the innermost recesses of the hearts of those miserable spirits. He seeth all the sorrow and anguish that are there;

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<sup>115</sup>Paraphrase of Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter III.

<sup>116</sup>Lorraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1932), 20.

for he upholds them in being. They and all the powers of their spirits, whereby they are capable of either happiness or misery, are in his hands.<sup>117</sup>

### God is most blessed:

God resides in eternal joy and is the most blessed Being in the universe. God is spoken of as the “blessed and only potentate.”<sup>118</sup> The term *makarios*, “blessed”, used in the New Testament referring to God, implies a lasting and permanent joy or satisfaction. God has the joy of One who is eternally self-sufficient, free of external compulsion and free of imperfection.

The being of God is holiness and goodness. He is infinite and therefore has an infinite capacity for the enjoyment of Himself, the fount of all good.<sup>119</sup> He is never unsatisfied in his wishes. He cannot wish for anything that is not good; and, “all that the Lord pleases, He does.”<sup>120</sup> He never longs for something that He hasn’t the power to fulfill. All He wills is good; and all He wills is achieved.

As Thomas Aquinas explained: “Therefore He cannot wish to have what He has not: therefore He has whatever He wishes; and He wishes nothing.”<sup>121</sup>

God has knowledge and awareness far above all other minds and knows in greater depth the torments of hell. He knows about hell in even greater detail than the damned. Despite this heightened knowledge of the agonies that are inflicted in this state, God is still the happiest Being in the entire universe. God is aware of Hell, sees it, and possesses

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<sup>117</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Warnings of Scripture Are In the Best Manners Adapted To the Awakening And Conversion of Sinners*, The Jonathan Edwards Memorial Library, Alethia In Heart Software, 2003.

<sup>118</sup> I Timothy, also see Matthew 25:23, “Enter into the joy of your master”.

<sup>119</sup> And He must joy in Himself supremely, for joy in anything else would be a lesser joy and an inferior state of being.

<sup>120</sup> Psalm 135: 6; see also Isaiah 46:9-10.

total control over it. Yet God's nature is one of pure goodness and willful control of all His works; and He takes pleasure in the same.

**The existence of hell does not demand that God sacrifice any of His attributes**

God knows of hell and is still blessed, *makarios*, the "happy God", full of joy in the fellowship of His Being and satisfaction in His works. How this fullness of joy resides in the same Divine Being that knows of and has permitted (and ordained) hell can never be comprehended, but it is Biblical and must be affirmed.

If God cannot tolerate the knowledge or sight of eternal pain, neither can He tolerate lesser pains:

Think on this. If God's knowledge of eternal miseries for His creatures was truly incompatible with God's nature of goodness and joy, then all knowledge of any misery of any creature is inconsistent with God's nature of goodness and joy. As Norman Giesler succinctly writes, "If God's mercy cannot bear eternal misery, then neither can it bear lesser amounts."<sup>122</sup>

If God cannot be absolutely good and blessed while knowing the eternal pain of any of His creatures, He cannot be absolutely good and blessed while perceiving any pain in any of His creatures. If there is a dilemma between God's nature and hell, then there is also a more basic dilemma between God's nature and anything at all that falls below perfect bliss for any of His creatures.

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<sup>121</sup> Aquinas, *Of God and His Creatures* 1.100.

<sup>122</sup> Norman Giesler, "Hell," *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1999), 314.

Once this latter point is granted (that God's nature is compatible with any situation that falls below absolute bliss), then the former point (the compatibility between God's nature and the existence of an eternal hell) must be accepted.

**OBJECTION: What about the goodness and mercy of God, the angels and the Redeemed of God?**

Another objection is as follows:

In human affairs, greater knowledge enables a greater sympathy of another's condition. If a witness sees the injury of a victim, the witness can imagine the pain of the victim. But this imagining is not always vivid. If, however, the witness is in close proximity and sees, for example, the scraped knee of the victim, then sympathy will be easier. The witness can more vividly imagine the other's pain and may recall later how, their "heart went out to the victim". The witness may even be able to feel similar pain in one's own knee. Their state of happiness would thus be dissolved at the sight of the pain of another.

If one were to witness greater increments of pain evidenced by the victim, such as protracted agonies and screams, this heightened awareness would cause heightened unease and heightened mental agony for the witness (as well as the victim, of course). A highly compassionate witness would be troubled all the more.

How is it then, that God, His angels and His Saints, presumably highly compassionate beings, can view hell and not be moved by the sight?

### **REPLY: Mercy is a defect if holiness is ignored**

Before stating “how” this is so, this truth will be declared first for what it is. It is clearly a teaching that is Biblically sound.

God does, in fact, see, hear, and is present in His omnipresence as a witness to hell. Scripture undeniably states: “Mine eye shall not spare thee, neither will I have pity.”<sup>123</sup>

God is aware of suffering to an infinitely greater degree than any man could ever be, and yet God is not disturbed in His blessedness. God is more compassionate than any of His creatures and is the very giver of any compassion that exists among His creatures, yet the Bible teaches the continued joy of God even in the midst of His perfect knowledge concerning the multiplied torments of many.

Here it is necessary to define what the “goodness” of God consists of. What does it entail for God to be “good”?

#### God’s goodness distinguished externally and internally:

##### External goodness

God is “good.” But goodness is often referred to in more than one way. It has a two-fold aspect. In this dual aspect of the word “good” there may be some illumination. To understand God’s “goodness” one must, by necessity, look at both of these aspects. James Boyce, historic Baptist theologian, explains the first definition of the “goodness of God”:

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<sup>123</sup> A word search of the phrase “*mine eye will not spare*”, “*Neither shall I pity*”, “*no pity*”, or like phrases will return many verses that stress this aspect of God (His wrath due to His justice). Among these verses are the following: Num. 25:4; Dt. 7:6; Lam. 2:2,17; 3:43; Jer. 13:14; 16:3-7; Ezek. 7:4,9; 9:5-6.

The goodness of God may be spoken of as kindness, benevolence, or beneficence towards others, in which it is seen to terminate outside of himself. Thus we speak of him, as being very good to us. Thus the Psalmist says: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." Ps. 23: 6.<sup>124</sup>

This definition speaks of God's goodness "outside" of Himself in relation to His creatures. Since creatures are changeable and in a state of flux, this goodness is exercised in particular instances and is, as well, changeable. This "changeableness" of God's "goodness" may occur towards His creatures as either a change in manner or a change in degree. In short: God's unchanging goodness manifests itself in varying ways, depending on the objects and the circumstances.

### Internal goodness

There is an internal goodness of God as well. God in His Being, towards Himself alone, is "good." As Boyce says, of the second definition, "This is the goodness which terminates in God himself."<sup>125</sup> This second definition, unlike the first, is immutable, since God is immutable.

This "goodness" of God is God's unchangeable pattern of holiness, which is not merely an isolated attribute of God, but is indicative of all of God's attributes, both individually and collectively. Holiness, then, is the "sum of all excellence and the combination of all the attributes which constitute perfection of character."<sup>126</sup> Therefore, all attributes abide by God's standard of holiness.

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<sup>124</sup> James Petigru Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1899), 91-92.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.



Some may present the difficulty of Psalm 145:9: “The Lord is good to all; and His tender mercies are over all His works.” The difficulty is this: how can “all His works” include hell?

Two answers may be given. First, God IS good to all in this life. Though some men are not given all good, namely eternal life, all men are given some good. All have been given a great measure of common grace in this life. Second, God’s tender mercies primarily concern His saints and not the wicked. See Psalm 136:15,18-19: “But [God] overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea: for his mercy endureth forever...And slew famous kings: for his mercy endureth forever.”

God is good. A different manner or lesser degree of goodness towards His creatures does not constitute a changed manner or lesser degree of goodness in God’s Being. To lack a degree of mercy towards a creature is not to lack “goodness” in one’s being, since mercy “may be in a person in two ways: first by way of passion, secondly, by way of choice.”<sup>127</sup> The anthropomorphisms referring to God’s anger or His being “moved” in His relations with His creatures, are expressions of God’s perfect will towards His creatures, forever and at all points joined to the fixed character of His holy Being.

God need not act “good” and benevolent towards His creatures in every instance possible to be “good” and benevolent in nature. God’s invariable ontological goodness allows for variations in His external goodnesses towards His creatures<sup>128</sup>.

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<sup>127</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Question 94, article 2, objection 1.

<sup>128</sup> A further thought: Perhaps, the emphasis should not concern the changeability of God’s goodness so much as it concerns the wrong assumptions of what this goodness “should” look like when measured by man’s expectations.

More simply, if God withholds His goodness so that a creature is struck ill and dies, this is not evidence of a lack of internal goodness on God's part. Internal goodness does not change when external "goodnesses" wax and wane.

In fact, in some instances (such as hell) this "goodness," benevolence, or pity, towards creatures would not be "good" at all, but a violation of God's holy standards which cohere in all His attributes. As Giesler writes, "God's mercy is not a passion or emotion that over-comes his justice."<sup>129</sup>

Mercy defined as a passion (instead of a determination of will) would be a defect in God.<sup>130</sup> Mercy exercised in this way, as an emotive impulse, is not a "good" thing at all, but a travesty of justice reflecting a change not only in God's goodness in regards to His creatures, but a change within His Holy being as well. In this case God's "external goodness" (definition one) would then cause a change and defect in God's "internal goodness" (definition two).

This, however, cannot be. God's "goodnesses" cannot be pitted against each other. External goodness cannot be bought at the expense of His internal goodness.

#### The elimination of hell would eliminate God's mercy?

Some would assert that God's mercy is damaged due to the existence of hell. No! Rather, it is established! Mercy itself contains in it the prerogative to either give it or withhold it. To demand it would not be to establish it, but to eliminate it. Therefore, the phrase "sovereign mercy" is redundant, for what other kind of mercy is there? To

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<sup>129</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Question 94, article 2, objection 1.

<sup>130</sup> Giesler, 3.

eliminate hell, would then eliminate the quality of mercy contained in God. Jonathan Edwards reasons:

In fact, by obligating God not to punish according to justice, men in reality show a profound contempt for God because they put God under greater restraints than they do themselves. They will allow themselves the right to freely dispose of what they own, but they will not allow God the right to freely dispose of what he owns: his own mercy.<sup>131</sup>

### Summary

In conclusion, God's character is compatible with hell. In fact, God's character demands it. God's felicity remains untroubled by the pains caused by the wrongdoings of sinners. God's mercy is strengthened by His freedom to exercise it or not to exercise it.

The saints of God, made compatible to Him, will likewise remain untroubled. Their joy in heaven will be unhindered in much the same manner as that of one who can sit down to dine happily while "knowing others are starving, if we have tried to feed them but they have refused the food."<sup>132</sup>

### **OBJECTION: What about Ezekiel 18:32?**

Ezekiel 18:32 states, "For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye".

The Bible says that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. This thesis seems to contend otherwise. How is this? Either God has pleasure or displeasure in the death of the wicked in hell.

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<sup>131</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Works* 2.109-110, quoted in Bruce W. Davidson, "Reasonable Damnation: How Jonathan Edwards Argued For The Rationality of Hell," *JETS*, March 1995, 49.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

**REPLY: The depth of God's nature is complex**

It is not entirely clear in the Scripture how God can be both pleased and displeased in His judgments, but this is clearly the case from Scripture. There is a complexity in the Being of God. His Word reveals that He is both pleased and displeased when sin is punished and evildoers are destroyed.

God is said to take no pleasure in the death of the wicked. God is said also, however, to take delight in bringing about destruction upon the wicked (Deuteronomy 28:63). All of heaven is said to rejoice over every sinner that repents (Luke 15). Yet God is pleased in the display of His power over sinners (Romans 9: 17, 22-23).

Perhaps an illustration will be of use. When a judge passes a sentence upon a criminal, there may also be dual feelings within his own breast. There may be displeasure in the sentence handed down due to its harshness (though necessary), and yet, this feeling is overshadowed by the satisfaction that justice was done. Relating this to others later, this same judge may reflect upon how he is glad for having a job such as his, and that he could not happily cease to be a judge despite his displeasure at having to judge harshly at times.

God exalts highly in the truth and in the glory of His justice. Though the death of the wicked in itself is not a pleasurable act, God has ordained all things such that there is occasion for these judgments to be made. This is for the higher pleasure of the exultation of His justice, holiness and truth. God tolerates these necessary lesser judgments for the greater display of His glory and is pleased in this display.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>133</sup>To advance this argument yet further: God not only "tolerates" these lesser judgments for His greater glory, but this universe (where these lesser judgments are ordained) is actually preferable to a universe without these judgments being ordained. God's glory would not be displayed as fully.

There is another aspect to consider as well. If God were only displeased by the death of the wicked without taking any amount of holy satisfaction and pleasure in all His judgments then there exists a state in which the wicked can “get one over on God.” Those that hate God could then take some satisfaction in causing His dissatisfaction in their deaths.

Think about it! If this were the case, then the sinner could, in effect, damn himself out of hatred towards God. Do you hate God and want to cause His dissatisfaction? Just go to hell. You would actually be winning a great victory (Pyrrhic victory that it is) over God! Every sinner in hell would then, in effect, (even in their torments) be winning a costly victory over the desires of God. Though small consolation this could be in hell, it would, nonetheless, be victory over God. The wicked could then say, “God, I hate you so much that I am going to hell just to spite you and cause you some measure of unhappiness, and this measure of unhappiness will then be a measure of victory for me”.

God, however, will not be forced into a corner by His own attributes. He possesses a righteous pleasure in all that He does, even in executing His justice.

John Piper handles this proposed dilemma deftly:

Those who have rebelled against the Lord and moved beyond repentance will not be able to gloat that they have made the Almighty miserable. God is not defeated in the triumphs of his righteous judgment. Quite the contrary...they will unwittingly provide an occasion for God to rejoice in the demonstration of his justice and his power and the infinite worth of his glory<sup>134</sup>

(For a further perspective upon this issue of how the Being of God relates to suffering, see Appendix A.)

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<sup>134</sup> John Piper, *The Pleasures of God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2000), 337.

**OBJECTION: Those in hell are not useful to God since man’s chief end is to “Glorify God and enjoy Him forever.”**

If man is created to give glory to God and enjoy Him forever, then the wicked prove useless to God. Therefore, if God tolerates anyone going to hell for eternity then He is defeated in His quest for glory from at least some of His creatures. He can inflict punishment on them, but cannot squeeze any glory out of them.

**REPLY: This objection only assumes that God can gain glory through man’s “enjoying Him forever”. God finds glory, however, in both mercy and justice**

By the awesome exhibition of power upon the wicked, God reclaims the glory which the wicked attempt to steal from Him. Wicked men are useless in the same manner that dead trees are not useless for beauty, though they be useful for fuel for the fire. Hell not only satisfies God’s judgment, but glorifies it exceedingly as well.

Summarizing Jonathan Edwards’ sermon “The Wicked Useful in their Destruction Only,” Stephen Holmes states:

The ‘end of their being’ is to glorify God; if this cannot be attained by living for him, then in eternal death they can bring glory to God: God’s majesty is glorified in that the greatness of it is seen by the awfulness of offending against it; God’s justice is glorified in that he does not shrink from delivering the wicked to what they deserve; and God’s love and mercy are glorified in that the saints are given a sense – and a sight – of what they have been saved from by the mere grace of God. The usefulness of hell, and hence the existence of hell depends on this overarching teleological theme: God glorifies himself in every part of creation.<sup>135</sup>

The wicked are useful, in part, because God displays them to the inhabitants of heaven! They are useful as “portraits of God’s personality,” given to the saints by God, by which He shows Himself in all His aspects as the supreme God.

**OBJECTION: To “see heaven” is the reward of the righteous (John 3:3). If heaven and hell are within sight, then the exclusive privilege of the Beatific Vision will not be exclusive. This sight is a blessing; how can it be seen by the damned?**

The Redeemed of God, upon reaching heaven, will have as their chief blessing the beatific vision, the blessed sight of God and fellowship with Him. The righteous shall see God and this is spoken of as the reward of the blessed, as in John 3:3. Yet, if heaven and hell are within sight, the wicked will see this vision as well.

It seems that one must be born again to “see” heaven. This breathtaking vision is a great blessing. Without holiness (Hebrews 12:14) no man shall “see the Lord.” How can heaven and hell be within sight of one another if this situation allows this blessed vision to be accessible to the damned also?

**REPLY: Some visions of God are far from blessed**

The objection above can be answered in two ways.

First, it is not necessary for the wicked to see heaven, for the saints to see hell. Catholic doctrine holds precisely to this point, that the saints will see hell and rejoice, but the wicked will be cut off in isolation from the vision of God and from any sight except for their immediate surroundings of gloom and torment.<sup>136</sup> Just because two groups may be within sight of one another does not mean that both may see one another.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup>Stephen R. Holmes, “The Justice of Hell and the Display of God’s Glory in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards” *Pro Ecclesia* Vol. IX, No. 4 (n.d.): 393-4.

<sup>136</sup>In fact, Aquinas even asserts that the wicked will not even think of God in hell (Question 98, article 8), “*Man’s most perfect thoughts are those about God: whereas the damned will be in a state of the greatest imperfection. Therefore they will not think of God*”. This writer disagrees and asserts that the wicked will hate God, and in order to hate a thing or Person one must think about it or Him actually. To forget about God would be to forget about their object of hatred.

<sup>137</sup>Even everyday objects, such as one-way mirrors, tinted windows, and night vision goggles illustrate this. If one replies that these illustrations are weak (hell is not comparable to one-way mirrors and

Even if the wicked are denied any sight of heaven, it does not follow that the saints are denied any sight of hell.

Second, the wicked will be aware of God, even in hell, and probably they will even see heaven. But this is by no means to their blessing (Dives was aware of, and saw, both Lazarus and Abraham across the great gulf fixed but it brought him no pleasure to see their state of bliss). Luke asserts, of the wicked, that, “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.” If the wicked are tortured in the presence of God and His holy angels as Scripture also records, all of these individual weights of Scripture (Luke 16:19-31; Luke 13:28; Revelation 14:10) work together to provide a logical deduction that that wicked will see God - but not in peace! All visions of God are not beatific!

As Gerstner states:

But what they see is God’s essence as a consuming fire...As the Redeemed see God as the source of every blessing that heaven affords, the impentitent see God as the source of every curse of hell...For the saint, heaven is God. For the wicked, hell is God.<sup>138</sup>

Truly, one cannot escape God’s presence, in heaven or hell (Psalm 139). Just as God’s eye looks downward (and will not spare) the eyes of the wicked will be turned upward, as Dives was, in torment.<sup>139</sup>

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other items in this world) then it can be seen why this author believes that, because heaven and hell seem to be within sight of one another, then the inhabitants of both can look across the gulf.

<sup>138</sup> Gerstner, 91.

<sup>139</sup> See also the following verses to investigate this theme of God being the source of hellfire; Lev. 10:1-6; Ezek. 22:31; Psalm 50:3-5; Isa. 33:10-16; Deut. 4:24; Heb. 12:29; II Thess. 2:8,9.



**OBJECTION: What about the fact that the Saints will be like Jesus in Heaven and Jesus loved sinners?**

**REPLY: The Redeemed of God in heaven will be like Jesus**

Believers will be as Jesus in heaven in many ways. God sees the wicked in their suffering and retains His qualities of goodness and joy. The saints, glorified in heaven, will be of the same manner of mind as Christ, the perfect image of God. Therefore, the saints will be untroubled by the sight of the wicked suffering in hell, just as Christ is untroubled.<sup>140</sup>

The goal of every Christian believer is to be “conformed to the image of His Son”. Christians strive to be ever closer to God in holiness in this life. At their death they will be freed from sin. At their death they will possess heightened awareness. They will be enabled to love God and holiness to even a greater degree. They will not reach the absolute perfection of infinite godhead, but they will enjoy a perfection of moral purity without any sin or instability in their righteous standing. All that they do will be holy.

Will this heightened state of moral purity cause the saints to pity the damned? No, there will be no charity for the wicked in hell. Charity is a principle of pity when someone wishes for the cessation of someone else’s unhappiness. But how can the saints desire this for the damned?

They cannot. This pity would, in itself, be contrary to Divine Justice. The Redeemed in heaven can reside in a holy joy of the same manner as their blessed God, despite the awareness of hell.

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<sup>140</sup> It is interesting to note that Christ did not heal every sick person in Israel during His ministry, nor did He raise all the dead. Should He be regarded then as either unable, or unmerciful? God forbid!

God is knowledgeable and aware of those in hell, and yet happy. So too will be the saints. God is all-good, and yet is aware of those in hell simultaneously. It will be possible for the saints to be likewise. This “will not be because the saints in heaven are the subjects of any ill disposition, but, on the contrary, this rejoicing of theirs will be the fruit of an amiable and excellent disposition.”<sup>141</sup> To not joy over the sight of hell will be, in light of God’s holy verdicts carried out, a most dreadful sin that will never mar the beauty of heaven!

**OBJECTION: Won’t the saints be rejoicing at evil if they rejoice over the pain of the wicked in hell?**

Many will charge, “What a cruel God this God is, and how evil the saints must be if they rejoice over hell. What kind of person rejoices over another’s pain?”

**REPLY: The pain resulting from punishment is not in itself pleasant, but is part of the satisfying fulfillment of justice - which, in its entirety, will be cause for joy in heaven**

Even in earthly affairs this principle holds true. Most do not render it as evil to rejoice over the death of evil regimes, despite the brutality of their deaths. Much rejoicing occurred at the end of World War II at the death of Hitler and the downfall of the Nazi Third Reich. Mussolini’s bloated corpse, strung up with piano wire, was not only a testimony to the fate of brutal dictators once they are ousted but also the cause for many tears of joy. This rejoicing, however, was at the cost of much suffering to at least one party. Was this rejoicing evil?

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<sup>141</sup>Edwards,

If Nazi Germany was a threat to the civilized world in a temporal aspect, how much more reprehensible are recalcitrant sinners to a pure heavenly realm? If the Allies rejoiced at the fall of the Nazi empire, how much more joyous will be the fall of this present world system?

Aquinas asserted that a thing may be rejoiced over in two ways, for the sake of itself, or for the sake of reasons annexed to it. This can be applied to the above objection. The saints do not rejoice over the sufferings of hell as such, but “by reason namely of something annexed to it,” namely, the justice of God.<sup>142</sup> It is joy, indeed, but it is not for the sake of suffering, but for the reasons for which the suffering occurs.

This argument has been proved by logic, now it will be proved by Scripture.

In the New Testament Epistle of James, the following is stated: “Count it all joy when you fall into different sorts of temptations”<sup>143</sup>. What is the command saying, but to be happy over being tempted? This joy that James speaks of is not in the temptation itself, but by reason of that to which it was annexed (the good resulting from the temptation). Some may assert that “temptations” spoken of here refers to “trials” and not the modern connotations of the word (i.e. sensual enticements or the offer of something evil). So what? The principle still stands.

I Peter 4:12 states: Rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings...If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye...” This rejoicing is certainly not in the persecution due to the persecution itself, but in the persecution due to the results. This joy is due to the secondary causes involved.

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<sup>142</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, question 92, article 3.

<sup>143</sup> Paraphrase of James 1:2.

The above selections from James and Peter speak of the joy even amidst sin due to the secondary blessings involved. How much more joy the saints will possess when they see hell. It is not a joy despite something, but a joy due to something – the display of God’s judgment. It is not a joy derived despite sinful actions, for the punishment of sinners by God is holy, just and good. The rejoicing over the sight of hell is a joy over God’s good works. The joy of the saints is actually increased by this sight, which is a gift of God to the Elect!

**OBJECTION: But we are supposed to love the unsaved on earth. We have a duty in this life to pray for the lost. How is it that this changes so quickly at death?**

**REPLY: A lot of things change quickly at death**

The answer to this objection is simple and is contained in the objection itself, “We have the duty in this life to pray for the lost...” This duty only remains in this life while there is chance of repentance.

**OBJECTION: What about Paul’s ‘heaviness of heart’ in the Roman Epistle?**

**Cannot we take him as an example?**

Paul grieved in Romans 9, and had constant sorrow and heaviness of heart towards his unbelieving countrymen. If Paul, a sinful man not yet glorified, could wish that he would be accursed to hell for the sake of others, what about the glorified saints who will be cleansed from all sin? In heaven, how much more will this love be that

desires to be accursed rather than see others perish in hell? Selflessness is a Christian virtue. What is more Christian than this extreme example of selflessness?

**REPLY: In this life opportunity has not yet expired. In the ages to come, however, the Redeemed of God will say “Amen” to all of God’s verdicts in praise**

In this life one may grieve bitterly, pray for sinners and even be moved to wish one’s own self accursed rather than see others perish in hellfire. In heaven, however, one will know for certain God’s answers concerning these desires. One guesses at God’s will and prays for God’s grace on certain people while in this life, and yet some of these will not be saved.

After the Judgment it will become clear what God has designed. To continue such prayers in heaven then would not be the “Christian” thing to do at all, but rather an evil. To pray such in heaven, and to grow discontent and weep over the lost (after Judgment), would be to express discontent and dissatisfaction over the will of God. It would be tantamount to disagreeing with God’s final verdict.

As Edwards states, “We ought now to seek and be concerned for the salvation of wicked men, because now they are capable subjects of it.”<sup>144</sup>

One knows not for sure who comprises the Elect in this life, and many prayers are said concerning this matter. One day, however, when all is revealed:

It becomes the saints fully and perfectly to consent to what God does without any reluctance or opposition of spirit; yea, it becomes them to rejoice in everything that God sees fit to be done.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “The End of the Wicked Contemplated,” *The Wrath of Almighty God*. (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996), 378.

**OBJECTION: But the perfection of the vision of the blessed will consist of the perfection of the visible objects seen by the saints; and the sight of the damned is not a perfection of visible objects seen by the saints**<sup>146</sup>

Simply put: If beautiful sights await the saints, how can hell be one of them? This questions how the saints will have a perfection of their vision if the sight of the damned can be seen as well. The beatific vision is the reward of the righteous, the sight of the beauty of the gloried Christ. To see the beatific vision as well as the base and awful sights of hell appears incongruous.

**REPLY: Again, God is both perfect and possesses perfect vision and is not troubled**

Once again, this objection cannot account for the case of God, for He has a perfection of vision and still yet beholds the wicked. God is perfect and His vision is not made imperfect by the visible objects He beholds. God, who sees all things and has all perfect knowledge, “sees all things beautiful and deformed.”<sup>147</sup> God, however, who sees all “ugliness” in the universe, cannot be denied His own beatific vision!

The Redeemed in heaven, likewise, will thus be able to behold the beatific vision and the state of perdition without either losing their blessedness or disturbing their peace. The imperfection of a sight (external) does not necessitate the deformity of the faculty of sight (internal), nor does it necessitate the deformity of the seer (“the images of things the

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<sup>145</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “The End of the Wicked Contemplated,” *The Wrath of Almighty God*. (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996), 377.

<sup>146</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, question 94, article 1.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

soul knows are not themselves contrary”).<sup>148</sup> This sight, therefore, of the deformity of hell will not deform the vision nor mar the happiness of the saints.<sup>149</sup>

**OBJECTION: But hell is a fearful thing for the Saved upon the earth. To even think about it (much less view it) is dreadful. How can the Saved in heaven behold it without trembling?**

**REPLY: A lion is a fearful thing as well until it is captured in a cage and rendered harmless**

The Redeemed of heaven will not fear hell at all, for they have been delivered from it and are put in dominion over it through Jesus Christ. In fact, the sight of it is even given to them as a gift. On earth, even a lion behind strong bars may still present some danger, but this is not true of hell at all; the Redeemed look upon it in perfect safety and in perfect confidence of this safety.

**OBJECTION: What about the forgetfulness of “former things” often mentioned in association with heaven?**

Discussed in greater detail in the next section, this objection takes its source from Isaiah 65:17, “For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.”

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<sup>148</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, question 94, article 1.

<sup>149</sup> Variations of the same objections do occur, since some are not satisfied to have their objections answered in a broad rebuttal. Individual aspects of these objections are answered repeatedly since a cogent argument, shown repeatedly from different perspectives, often settles objections.

Some take this to mean that the trials of life and the awareness of hell are blocked from the minds of the saints entirely so that they may enjoy their eternal felicity. A full or partial forgetfulness thus safeguards the happiness of the saints. The previous verse, (16) strengthens this objection by stating, "...because the former troubles are forgotten, and because they are hid from mine eyes."

**REPLY: Forgetfulness of former troubles does not necessitate forgetfulness of the events which caused these troubles**

While the sorrow of a thing may be hid from the eyes of the saints, the thing itself may not be hid. It cannot be denied that the saints will retain memory and knowledge of at least some events of earthly existence, though any pain caused by this knowledge will be absent.

Isaiah 65 cannot be paraphrased as, "The saints will not remember anything of the earth". Instead, this is taken in the same light as Jeremiah 31:34, which speaks of God remembering sins no longer. Omniscient God will retain knowledge of every individual sin of every person who has ever existed, yet, for the sake of Christ, the "bite" and "sting" will be taken from that knowledge. God puts these things "out of his consciousness" and His wrath is not ever focused on these things.<sup>150</sup>

The same will be true of the saints. The memories may persist, but the "sting" will be removed. The Redeemed will see Christ on the throne of heaven even with the wounds of His Passion<sup>151</sup>, and they will be aware of the dreadful pain experienced and the evil

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<sup>150</sup> By necessity, many anthropomorphisms are used in this discussion.

<sup>151</sup> He makes His wounds His glory and displays them in His body (Luke 24:40; John 20:27). The wounds of the cross are His credentials for His crown, which He shall display for eternity. At His Second



performed towards Christ. All memories and knowledge will be, however, redeemed from all pain and God will reveal how all things (even tragedy) glorify Him. The Redeemed will “remember the former troubles” (cognitively) regarding many events, and yet will no longer remember the “former troubles” (emotionally).

In heaven, loved ones known in this life will be known and recognized.<sup>152</sup> The Redeemed will be rewarded in differing degrees in relation to their works on earth, and these crowns will be constant reminders as to their service on earth.<sup>153</sup> The martyrs of the book of Revelation, likewise, are aware that they were slain for the Word and for the testimony they held.<sup>154</sup> Regarding hell, her smoke will “rise up forever and ever,” in the awareness and sight of the saved.<sup>155</sup> The saints will take a great deal of knowledge with them out of this world to the next, which will be further expanded and purified still. There will be no “heavenly amnesia.”<sup>156</sup>

Augustine’s rebuttal is an appropriate one with which to end this section:

The soul, then, shall have an intellectual remembrance of its past ills; but, so far as regards sensible experience, they shall be quite forgotten. For a skillful physician knows, indeed, professionally almost all diseases; but experimentally he is ignorant of a great number which he himself has never suffered from. As, therefore, there are two ways of knowing evil things -- one by mental insight, the other by sensible experience, for it is one thing to understand all vices by the wisdom of a cultivated mind, another to understand them by the foolishness of an abandoned life -- so also there are two ways of forgetting evils.

For a well-instructed and learned man forgets them one way, and he who has experimentally suffered from them forgets them another -- the former by neglecting what he has learned, the latter by escaping what he has suffered. And in this latter way

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Coming, “we shall see him as he is” (I John 3:2). See also Zechariah 12:10: “They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn...”

<sup>152</sup> I Thess. 4:14-18, among other places. Persons will retain their identities in heaven. All the prerequisites are present. There is recognition of others (a prerequisite for fellowship), and there is also memory (another prerequisite for recognition).

<sup>153</sup> From Revelation 4:10, it is clear that these crowns will be cast before the throne and not become objects of self-congratulation.

<sup>154</sup> Revelation 6:9-11.

<sup>155</sup> Revelation 19:3

<sup>156</sup> I Corinthians 13:12: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”

the saints shall forget their past ills, for they shall have so thoroughly escaped them all, that they shall be quite blotted out of their experience. But their intellectual knowledge, which shall be great, shall keep them acquainted not only with their own past woes, but with the eternal sufferings of the lost. For if they were not to know that they had been miserable, how could they, as the Psalmist says, for ever sing the mercies of God?<sup>157</sup>

**Logical conclusions of the above objections:**

The objections put forward are understandable and stem from a seeming incongruity in that the inhabitants of heaven are both holy and blessed in eternal joy and yet visually behold hell. The dilemma is that the saints in heaven (seeing hell) will experience, by necessity, one of two actions: (1), either they will be troubled, or (2), they will remain joyful in heaven despite the sight of misery.

These objections are meant as safeguards to preserve both the goodness and joy in the saints and the very Being of God. However, in trying to “protect God,” many dishonor His Word and His holy attributes.

It has been shown that God is blessed despite His omniscient knowledge of both sin and pain. God is merciful despite discomfort in His creatures. God even gains a satisfaction of His justice through the just condemnation of sinners in hell and God is even further glorified because of this condemnation.

It has also been shown that the saints, to fully enjoy heavenly felicity, need not be shielded from this aspect of God’s attributes – His eternal wrath upon sinners. The saints will not be ignorant of this, nor will they be troubled. Shocking to some is this conclusion: that the saints will actually enjoy all that God gives to them, including the sight of hell.

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<sup>157</sup> Augustine *City of God* 22.30. Underline added.

**SECTION IV:****THE PROBABILITY OF THE SAINTS BEHOLDING HELL (AND ITS EFFECT ON THEM)**

Return to the analogy of a long journey again. The previous section scouted for obstacles. It observed the horizon for impassible roadblocks. Now, in this section, positive assertions will be made. This section will complete the journey and arrive at its desired destination.

**THE SAINTS ARE AWARE OF THOSE IN HEAVEN**

Heaven is not a place of blissful ignorance or isolation, but rather of community and fellowship, and this “society of the saints among themselves will be no small part of heaven’s happiness.”<sup>158</sup> Fellowship entails awareness of distinct personalities and the Christian faith teaches that individuals retain their individuality even in death. Memory and knowledge are both prerequisites to identification and fellowship with others. The saints in heaven will possess both of these traits.

**“Gathered to his people”**

At various times in the Old Testament when individuals died, they were described as having been “gathered to his people.”<sup>159</sup> This paints a picture of not only a massive throng of saints in heaven, but also one to which individuals are “added” or “gathered”

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<sup>158</sup> Thomas Boston, “The Kingdom of Heaven,” *Human Nature in its Fourfold State* (Lafayette, Indiana: Sovereign Grace Trust Fund, 2000), 214-235.

<sup>159</sup> Gen 25:8; 35:29; 49:29; Num. 20:24; Jud. 2:10.

throughout history. The intimacy of this gathering is evidenced in the fact that it is not merely “the people,” but “his people” - a possessive. The saints that belong there are welcomed and fit in as perfectly as stones in the temple, their individual names being “written” in heaven.<sup>160</sup>

II Samuel’s account of David’s infant son (chapter 12), states: “Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.” David would never see his son again in this life, but his hope, and the hope of the Scriptures is one of future mutual fellowship with God and all those He has redeemed.<sup>161</sup>

Moses and Elijah appeared with Christ upon the Mount of Transfiguration<sup>162</sup> and were recognized by the Apostles present as individual identifiable personages.<sup>163</sup>

A myriad of other passages speak to the same truth. Heaven is a place where not only a community exists, a great throng of saints, but this great fellowship is a body of individual sanctified souls which will know and love one another, free from sin.

Louis Berkhof truly asserts that in heaven there “will be recognition and social intercourse on an elevated plane.”<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Philippians 4 and Revelation 3 are examples. Luke 10:20 states, “...*Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven*”.

<sup>161</sup> II Samuel 12:23. Some have asserted that “*I shall go to him*”, merely asserts that David will one day join him in death, but this interpretation hardly matches the comforting tone of this remark. What consolation is there to know that one would merely share in being eaten by worms alongside others at death?

<sup>162</sup> Matthew 17.

<sup>163</sup> MacArthur, 139: “*Moreover, Peter and James, and John evidently recognized them (v. 4) – which implies that we will somehow be able to recognize people we’ve never seen before.*” Also, Moses and Elijah recognized each other as well as they appeared together on the Mount (and had centuries of fellowship).

<sup>164</sup> Louis Berkhoff, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdman’s Publishing Company, 1996), 737.

**This awareness of other persons in heaven includes the awareness of their lives, which necessitates an awareness of the grace worked out in their lives**

The righteous do not enter a heavenly solipsism at death, but can see and fellowship with other saints. To know these other saints will be to know of their lives, their personal histories and how God has worked through their lives.

How did Jesus describe the fellowship of heaven? Jesus said, "...many shall come from the east and the west, and recline at the table with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven." To know who Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are entails familiarity with their lives on earth – even their trials. When the saints "recline at the table" in intimate fellowship with these persons they will recognize the outworkings of grace in the earthly lives of these Patriarchs, even their shortcomings evidencing to God's grace!

Again, concerning his child, David asserted that he would go to his son in heaven. Will he not then remain knowledgeable of the pain and early death of this child, and even of his own sin for which this death was a temporal judgment? When he and his child were reunited, was this memory "wiped clean" on account of its pain or was it rather seen from its perspective as being a further outworking of God's good plan?

**The example of Christ:**

The promise to believers (I John 3:2) is that they shall see Christ "as he is." This example makes it undeniable that the saints will be aware of past earthly pain while in heaven. The sufferings of Christ's earthly pain will be part of the glory of heaven. Just as Thomas saw Christ with His wounds, traditional Christianity has maintained that Christ

on the throne will be a Christ still bearing His marks from the cross. Believers will be aware of His suffering and pain and remember these every time they gaze upon Him.

To know other saints in heaven necessitates awareness of identity and awareness of their earthly lives. Some memory of what it was like to live in a fallen world with sin, pain and death will exist - even in heaven. It is obvious that the Redeemed in heaven will know (cognitively) of pain and sin, despite never knowing (emotionally) pain and sin anymore!

Abraham, in Luke 16, urged the rich man in hell to, “remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things...”<sup>165</sup> It seems he was still expected to know these things. If sinners in hell retain this knowledge, why not the saints?

**The Redeemed, knowing one another’s identities and lives, will also be knowledgeable of past sins**

From the example above, it can be asserted that the saints will see Christ’s wounds and reflect on His sufferings. They will also know that these sufferings came about at the hands of sinful men. The Redeemed will thus be aware of sin, even in heaven.<sup>166</sup>

This awareness of sin may include their sinful past or the sinful past of fellow believers. To know Moses is to know of the works of grace upon his life. To sit down with Abraham is to know the grace that called him out of idol worship. To glory in the grace of God in the life of Paul is to marvel at the state from which he was delivered.

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<sup>165</sup> Luke 16:25.

<sup>166</sup>The further objection may appear that asks how the saints can think of sins, such as murder and adultery committed on earth while being in a place of purity and holiness. The answer: they think on these

To assert that the Redeemed in heaven (knowledgeable of Scripture in their earthly lives) would forget the sins of the patriarchs is to assert that those on earth know Scripture better than the glorified saints. It would imply that Moses, for example, had forgotten the words in which he recorded his own slaying of the Egyptian foreman. It would imply that Paul would forget about his own zeal in persecuting the church, which zeal is also recorded by his own hand. Will these writers of Scripture forget their very own writings? Those in heaven must therefore have an extensive knowledge of pain, sin, suffering and death while residing in a state of joy with God.

**THE SAINTS ARE AWARE OF THOSE IN HELL:**

If the sins of the Redeemed of God are known in heaven, it appears reasonable that the sins of unbelievers may also be known.

The identities of believers are known as well as their personal histories. Some knowledge of pain and sin is known, which furthers the evidences of God's grace to unworthy saints. Further, the Redeemed in heaven must be knowledgeable of at least some of the sins of unbelievers as well.

If Moses is known in heaven, will the saints not remember the deeds of Pharaoh? One can hardly be aware of the grace towards Moses without knowing of the overthrow and death of Pharaoh.

Likewise, if Stephen is known, then his martyrdom is also known (as well as those who wrought his death by casting stones). Regarding the death of Christ, it is very

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things but do not desire them. They are knowledgeable of these sins without any compromise in purity just as God is knowledgeable of sins without any compromise in His purity.

probable that reflecting upon it may call to mind all the cruelties done to him and the shameful conduct of the Jews and the Romans present, and of Pontius Pilate specifically. Saints in heaven will, by necessity, reflect upon the lives of individual sinners and the individual sins they have wrought. Concerning Judas, it was said that it would have been better for him had he never been born (Matthew 26:24; Mark 14:21). He is in hell (even as this sentence is read) and has been suffering under its weight for two millennia now.

If Abraham is known personally, then God's deliverance of Abraham out of idol worship is known (as well as the knowledge that multitudes of idol worshippers were left in that city, passed over by God's grace). If the saints know of Pharaoh and Pilate and of others recorded in Scriptures who disobeyed God, then will they not know where these men are now? Where is Pharaoh now? Or Pilate?<sup>167</sup>

If the sins of unbelievers are known it appears that the fate of unbelievers will be known in heaven as well:

The Redeemed in heaven will, by necessity, contemplate sinners in hell. It appears logical and Biblical to conclude that those in heaven are aware of many things; among those things known by the saints is that many souls now reside in hell. To deny such would be to affirm that the saints will forget Scripture once glorified.

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<sup>167</sup>Many living Christians, who know this answer while in their weak flesh, would deny that the glorified saints know this same answer.



The Teachings on the Last Judgment reinforce this:

It is clear from Scripture that every human being will appear before God's judgment seat.<sup>168</sup> All persons who have lived upon earth "shall appear before the tribunal of Christ..."<sup>169</sup>

When this separation of the wheat and the tares occurs, will not the wheat be aware of the fate of the tares? When the sheep and the goats are made known, will not the sheep visually behold the beginnings of the punishments of the goats? God's wrath will begin in the sentencing of sinners and the saints will be the witnesses to this pronouncement.<sup>170</sup> At the end of the world the angels will come forth and "sever the wicked from among the just" and the Righteous will see this spectacle, clear and awful with their own eyes.<sup>171</sup>

Will not this visual image be remembered by the saints in heaven? It will be the final memory of the earth in its former state. Further, this separation at the Last Judgment involves not just a faceless mass, but individual souls. The saints will see the faces of those who are not in God's favor as the verdict is pronounced and will personally know some of those condemned to hell at the Final Judgment.

Robert Murray McCheyne describes this truth as follows:

There can be no doubt but that ministers and people will stand together, and be witnesses to one another's acquittal or condemnation - that parents shall stand and be witnesses to the acquittal or condemnation of their children -that children shall stand and be witnesses to the acquittal or condemnation of their parents - that husbands shall stand and be witnesses to the acquittal or condemnation of their wives, and that wives shall stand and be witnesses to the acquittal or condemnation of their husbands. Then, dear brethren, it follows immediately from this, that it will be no grief to the righteous to see the wicked condemned. Their tears will be over, their sorrows will be past, and

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<sup>168</sup> I Cor. 6:3; I Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Matthew 8:29.

<sup>169</sup> Free Presbyterian Publications, WCF, chapter 33, paragraph 1.

<sup>170</sup> Romans 2:5

<sup>171</sup> Matthew 13:49.

yet they will see them condemned, they will hear their agonizing cry — they will see their sad countenances, and yet they will not shed a tear.<sup>172</sup>

If this is true concerning the Last Judgment, then all objections vanish regarding the eternal joy of the redeemed amidst knowledge of individual souls in hell. If there is awareness of souls in hell, it is not contrary to Scripture or reason to consider that an abiding sight of hell is granted to the saints (and this sight in no way disturbs their heavenly felicity).

Summary:

Ignorance is inferior to knowledge. The greater blessings given to the redeemed in heaven, therefore, argue for their increased knowledge, not their ignorance.

How can one speak of the increases of joys and blessings in heaven if one possesses an inferiority of knowledge when compared to unglorified believers on earth? Believers on earth, despite their still sinful natures, are aware of souls in hell. Will the souls of “just men made perfect”<sup>173</sup> not have this awareness and sight which sinners on earth possess?

On earth, the saints are aware of the justice of God in an imperfect manner. In heaven there will be an even greater awareness of those in hell. On earth, the mind is clouded with sin and its effects, reason is fallen and the body grows decrepit. In heaven, clarity of mind, right perspective of history and perfect sight of all of God’s work will bless saints.

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<sup>172</sup> McCheyne, “*The Eternal Torments of the Wicked*”.

<sup>173</sup> Hebrews 12:22-23.

**THIS KNOWLEDGE IS DESIRABLE TO THE SAINTS:**

If the Redeemed in heaven are aware of hell, even seeing it, how will they respond? Joy! This knowledge will be contributory to their blessings rather than as a blight upon their joy. It is a good rather than an evil, a blessing instead of a curse, a gift of God, given through the Son, to His bride.

**Why is this knowledge and sight desirable to the Redeemed?**

The harmony of opposites makes the knowledge and sight of hell desirable to the saints:

The beauty of a song is the result of both continuity of like cords as well as discontinuity. Most songs consist of structure containing both continuity and discontinuity. A pattern is established and some element of discontinuity is introduced so that the soul longs for that return to continuity in the final stanza. The tension introduced is relieved by repetition of familiar strains. This tension in music heightens its effect.

The harmony of opposites, in many areas of life, heightens and deepens a thing's glory. In literature, the value of a novel is a plot containing a conflict to be resolved. Opposing forces add to the overall glory of the resolution at the end. In art, the black hues bring out more distinctly the hues of light on the canvas.

In art, literature or music, a display or theme is never more effective than when dissimilar and contrasting elements are juxtaposed to bring out the totality of the theme in greater beauty.

In like manner, theologians have described evil by this analogy of the harmony of opposites. There is a divine beauty and harmony in the doctrine of hell. The contrasting mosaic of good and evil glorifies God even more. Thomas Aquinas summarizes:

Nothing should be denied the blessed that belongs to the perfection of their beatitude. Now everything is known the more for being compared with its contrary, because when contraries are placed beside one another they become more conspicuous. Wherefore in order that the happiness of the saints may be more delightful to them and that they may render more copious thanks to God for it, they are allowed to see perfectly the sufferings of the damned.<sup>174</sup>

The saints do not merely endure this sight. They enjoy it! Rather than merely enduring this sight of the damned as a spectacle that they must tolerate, “the misery of the damned in hell is one of those great things that the saints in their blessed and joyful state in heaven shall behold and take notice of.”<sup>175</sup> Their gratitude over the mercy and grace of God towards them is heightened by the display of God’s disposition towards the unsaved.

God created the universe for His own glory. The eternal and sovereign God, for His own glory, wills all that comes about for the greater display of that glory.<sup>176</sup> The existence of evil and hell as part of this universe displays God’s glory greater than a

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<sup>174</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, question 94, article 1.

<sup>175</sup> Jonathan Edwards *Sermon on Isaiah 66:23*, preached June 1742, quoted in Gerstner, 34.

<sup>176</sup> Was the Fall of Man ordained? Yes. Boettner explains:

*“Even the fall of Adam, and through him the fall of the race, was not by chance or accident, but was so ordained in the secret counsels of God. We are told that Christ was “foreknown indeed (as sacrifice for sin) before the foundation of the world,” I Peter 1:20. Paul speaks of “the eternal purpose” which was purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord, Eph. 3:11. The writer of Hebrews refers to “the blood of an eternal covenant,” 13:20. And since the plan of redemption is thus traced back into eternity, the plan to permit man to fall into sin from which he was thus to be redeemed must also extend back into eternity; otherwise there would have been no occasion for redemption. In fact the plan for the whole course of the world’s events, including the fall, redemption, and all other events, was before God in its completeness before He ever brought the creation into existence; and He deliberately ordered it that this series of events, and not some other series, should become actual.”* Boettner, 234.

universe without sin and without hell.<sup>177</sup> Since God can do no thing better than He already does, it can be asserted that He created the best of all possible worlds.<sup>178</sup>

God expresses His glory and makes known His attributes. God is expressive of His attributes and displays His glory for the whole universe. Without this existence of evil in the world, God's attributes would never be displayed in all their fullness. God's will included evil for the purpose of more perfectly displaying His being in the universe.

Examine God's attribute of mercy. How would God's mercy ever be known, except that sin exist in the world? Mercy would be eternally unexpressed if evil had not been allowed into the world.

God's justice, likewise, would never be expressed except that His will included the entrance of evil into creation. God's justice is displayed in its most glorious manifestation in the death of Christ, but God's justice is also glorious in hell.

God's power, which is displayed in creation, is greatly expressed in redemption and judgment. Creation out of nothing is glorious; recreation out of sin is even more glorious (the champion who prevails despite opposition is honored all the more).

God's holiness, like the sun, is more brightly shown by its contrast with the darkness of sin. Its purity is glorified greater by the existence of impurity. Hell is a testament to God's holiness (in all of these attributes of glory, justice, mercy, power, wrath), bound together by the silken thread of righteousness. Hell is the ultimate punishment for attacking the glory and pre-eminence of God in all things.

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<sup>177</sup> One must stress that God was not the author of evil; and yet, the entrance of evil into the world was in accord with His will and power.

<sup>178</sup> This theory of "*optimism*" will be asserted even despite Voltaire's past cynical ridicule of Leibniz for like thoughts; which criticism occurred in *Candide*, proving nothing intellectually.

God ordains all things for His own glory. Romans 9:22 speaks of this as Paul asserts, “What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?” Likewise, Proverbs 16:4 states, “The Lord hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.” As strange as it may be from a human perspective, a world where evil has entered is more glorifying to God than a world where evil never appeared.

God is often much maligned concerning hell, but He ought to be praised for it, as one writer contends:

God is the most precious, valuable being in the universe. Therefore, He must delight in and value Himself above anything else. From this it follows that if God did not seek to display His honor and perfections above all else, He would not be placing infinite worth on what is infinitely valuable. He would be putting something before Himself, which would mean putting something less valuable before the more valuable... Put simply, we wouldn't know God as well if He did not display who He is to the fullest possible extent.<sup>179</sup>

The greatest display of all of God's attributes is to be desired, and the saints who desire God's glory will see His majesty in hell's displays. Truly, “if God's majesty were not infinite and his displeasure were not infinitely dreadful he would be less glorious.”<sup>180</sup>

If the assertion put forward by this thesis were viewed in this way, it might be said that if the saints did not view hell visually, they would desire such a sight. They would be deprived of a glorious gift.

The popular writer, Randy Alcorn, reasons:

Recalling the reality of such troubles and sorrows and sins would set a sharp contrast to the glories of heaven, as darkness does to light, as hell does to heaven. This

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<sup>179</sup> Matt Perman, “*The Glory of God in the Problem of Evil*”, January 11, 2003, <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Delphi/8449/prob.html> (n.d.). Underlines added. The outline of the argument above echoes some of Perman's writings, which themselves echo the arguments of Jonathan Edwards.

<sup>180</sup> Gerstner, page 79, quoting Edwards on Psalm 90:11.

contrast would be lost if the sense of what sorrow is was entirely forgotten. (If we ever forget we were desperate sinners, how could we appreciate the depth and meaning of Christ's glorious work for us?) It is even possible that an awareness of the perfect justice of hell will enhance the depth of gratitude to God of those in heaven.<sup>181</sup>

Praise God for hell!

The sight of hell makes the saints more joyful over heaven:

The sight of hell appears not only desirable for the righteous due to the full expression of God's attributes, but also for its effect as a reminder of God's mercy to them.

All of God's glories will appear marvelous to the saints. The ability to view the sufferings of hell are especially relevant in that they eternally display the message to the saints that God, in His sovereign mercy, has delivered them from a like fate.

Another writer, Matthew McMahon contends:

Hell makes heaven more sweet for the saint. How sweet is the prospect of heaven to you? Those in heaven gaze over to that place of wrath and torment and they rejoice over the lamb of God all the more.<sup>182</sup>

The words of Samuel Hopkins again, for emphasis:

The smoke of their torment shall ascend up in the sight of the blessed...This display of the divine character will be most entertaining to all who love God...Should the fire of this eternal punishment cease, it would in a great measure obscure the light of heaven, and put an end to a great part of the happiness and glory of the blessed.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Alcorn, "Awareness in Heaven of Events on Earth?" December 2003, .http:// [www.epm.org](http://www.epm.org).

<sup>182</sup> Matthew McMahon, "Hell's Terror," Feb. 2004, <http://www.apuritansmind.com> (n.d.).

<sup>183</sup> *Works of Samuel Hopkins, D.D.*, pages 457-8, quoted in Lymann Abott, et. al, 229.

The struggle of the godly with the ungodly throughout history makes the visual sight of hell desirable to the saints:

It appears that the sight of the damned is desirable to the saints due to the historical conflict between the godly and the ungodly. The saints have long been oppressed by the wicked and now they are finally and totally safe. The sight of hell will glorify God as the Great Deliverer of the saints from their earthly enemies.

The pleasure that the Redeemed will possess will not be due to their own vengeance on the wicked. It will be over God's decree. He will punish evildoers in His vengeance – the only Being to whom vengeance belongs.

When did this cosmic struggle begin? When sin entered the world. Referred to as the “Fall,” man did not merely “slip.” It was not a passive action, but rebellion against the sovereignty of God (It was treason within the ranks).

God promised a Deliverer from the first in Genesis 3:15 in what has been called the “Proto-Evangelion,” the “first Gospel promise” or the “first prophecy of Messiah.”<sup>184</sup> In this first of all Biblical prophecies, God Himself pronounces “enmity” between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman.

In essence, God foretells the two lines of mankind (the righteous and the wicked, those who are of Christ, the women's “seed” and those who are the spiritual lineage of Satan) and the opposing destinies of each.

The Bible does not speak of neutrality among men. Christ declared: “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.”<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Despite Calvin's disappointing exegesis of this passage.

<sup>185</sup> Matthew 12:30



Ontologically, mankind is either one or the other: in Christ or outside of Christ, a sheep or a goat, the Seed of the woman or the Serpent's seed.

It is significant that Christ called false Jewish religious leaders "a generation of vipers" and stated that they were of "their father, the devil". Paul, in contrast, speaks of Christ as the "One seed" and describes Christians as God's "Children."

Everywhere in Scripture this age old struggle between good and evil is expressed:

- In the early part of Genesis there is the account of the development of the alternate seedlines of mankind, the sons of Cain and the sons of Seth, and the line of Seth is corrupted by intermarriage with "the daughters of men".
- God eliminates all corrupted mankind to start the line again with Noah and his seed.
- In Egypt, the seed is oppressed by, and eventually delivered from, the seed of the serpent.
- The books of Judges and Kings comprise a chronological record of the enmity between the seedlines during the early national history of Israel.
- The Psalms cry out for the protection of the seed of the woman and the elimination of the seed of the serpent.
- The New Testament Gospels tell the Good News that the Promised Seed has arrived.
  - Christ speaks of building His church. The gates of hell will strive with enmity against it but will not prevail.
  - Christ also speaks of a final separation of the "sheep" from the "goats."

- Acts tells of the expansion of the godly seedline throughout the world.
- Revelation tells of the final separation of the two seeds and the destruction of the Seed of the Serpent once and for all.

The picture of unbelievers in Scripture is one of willful rebels who possess enmity towards Christ and His “seed”. The seed of the woman has always been persecuted but there is an end to this struggle and a final separation that carries over into eternity.

The unsaved, however, will not have their natures regenerated in hell and so will hate Christ and His believers even amidst their torments. Every knee will bow and every tongue will be made to confess the Lordship of Jesus Christ (Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11; Phil. 2:10), though such confession in itself is not evidence of a regenerate nature (c.f. Luke 4:34). Bow they will, however. They will be subdued and will no more be empowered to oppress the righteous or continue this ages-long war. The redeemed will praise God at their sight for this very reason: for the vindication of His righteous justice and the end of the ages-long oppression.

The church militant (persecuted and struggling) will be at last the church triumphant. Just as liberated peoples and triumphant armies have their monuments, the saints will look upon hell as a monument to their freedom and the triumph of their Deliverer.

In Revelation 18:20 this rejoicing may even be said to be a command. “Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.” It is not a weakness for heaven to rejoice over the downfall of the wicked; it is here commanded!

**Summary of this section**

In this section, the positive arguments for this thesis topic have been pressed forward. Travelling down the logical road towards its desired end, this section has asserted to the reader not only that the saints will know of hell, but probably will see it as well. Seeing it, they will rejoice over it as God's good verdict.

What of this conclusion? What good does it do? The next section will discuss precisely that: the practical implications of the sight of hell by the saints.

**SECTION V:****PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THIS DOCTRINE:**

Theology should not merely touch the mind but also the soul. Doctrine should not be cold and abstract but warmed by implantation into the very being of a person and demonstrated in lives of grace.

What about this area of doctrine? Is it merely an intellectual exercise of little profit to the life of the soul?

First, this must be remembered: Anything revealed in the Scriptures is useful and practical and of benefit to a godly life. All things revealed in Scripture are of use to the Christian.<sup>186</sup> On a subject so near to soteriology, that of heaven and hell, further investigation, as deeply as possible, is warranted.

As the *Westminster Confession of Faith* states:

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture.<sup>187</sup>

The explicit doctrines of Scripture, and those that can be deduced by good and necessary consequence, are both worthy areas of study.

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<sup>186</sup> Though, admittedly, there are things that are of greater or lesser use. John 3:16 and Numbers 1:10 are both inspired, yet of differing value.

### **The practical benefits of this investigation**

#### **This doctrine makes one ponder the terrors of hell**

First, this thesis assertion may further strike fear into the sinner's heart of what is in store for them. When hell stays a dim, ambiguous place it may be easier not to fear it. When its details become real and vivid, then sinners must make a greater mental effort to diminish their fears and downplay this fear in their heart.

To quote Edwards, "Is it not a reasonable thing to fright a person out of a house on fire?"<sup>188</sup> Many critics have denounced efforts to paint hell into graphic and terrible scenes but the most vivid and terrible portraits of hell fall pathetically short. There is no way to paint it too ghastly. A true misfortune would not be "overdoing it," but would rather be downplaying hell to the eternal hurt of many.

An analogy: It would be very bad to starve. To starve, however, because one refused the bread<sup>189</sup> would be worse. Still worse, however, would be to starve due to one's own refusal, even while sitting directly outside the feast hall and gazing at those who recline in joy.

#### **There will be no pity for those in hell:**

This investigation reveals the terror of hell and may induce sinners to attempt to avoid it by showing how little pity there will be extended to those in that eternal state.

There will be no pity it seems from any party. There will be none from God, the angels, fellow man and even those whom the sinner has known and loved in life. Will all

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<sup>187</sup> Free Presbyterian Publications, *WCF*, chapter I section 6, 22.

<sup>188</sup> Gerstner, p.85, quotes Edwards's comments on Hosea 5:15, that it is "*God's manner to make men sensible of their misery and unworthiness before he appears in his mercy and love to them.*"

<sup>189</sup>The Bread of Life, Jesus Christ, freely offered to sinners through the Gospel.

delight in the justice inflicted upon the sinner? Yes. The wicked will have none to look to. They will be alone as never before – totally and utterly alone. Only by fully bringing out the depths of horror that this entails can a faithful pastor motivate hearts to love the One who can prevent this dreadful fate.

This thesis reinforces the utter wrong of sin:

The doctrine of hell and the doctrine of human sin are closely related. When the doctrines of hell are developed Biblically, it is more likely for one to understand the wrong of sin more fully. To belittle hell is to belittle sin, and vice versa. When people forget the terror of hell there is a tendency to downplay sin towards the holy disposition of God. The teaching of what sin is cannot be upheld when the doctrine of hell is laid aside.

These two areas of doctrine stand or fall side by side. If sin is merely a “slip up” and not rebellion and enmity against God,<sup>190</sup> then an eternal hell of torment does, indeed, seem cruel. If sin, however, is rebellion against a perfectly holy God, then a perfectly awful (and perfectly eternal) hell is necessitated for their punishment.

There are no “naturally innocent”, “neutral” or “indifferent” men. Christ stated that all those not for Him were against Him. An unconverted human nature is in a continual state of rebellion and sedition. Many scoffers minimize hell’s intense torments because they fundamentally doubt their own state of guilt.

A positive affirmation of the questions explored by this thesis will provide a corrective. The thought of seeing these terrible torments visited upon the wicked or in

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<sup>190</sup> *Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be – Romans 8:7.*

being tormented one's self, prompts one to ask, "How bad is mankind that they should deserve all this?" As well: "How great our deliverance must be if we are to rejoice at such a terrible sight." The answer is the Biblical doctrine of total depravity and the utter sinfulness of sin.

This doctrine stresses the attribute of God's justice, in both its infinite weight and infinite length:

This doctrine brings one face to face with the attributes of God. This includes the infinite weight of the justice of God, for which the crushing weight of the terror of hell is necessary.

If someone were to assault his neighbor, there might be a civil fine. If he were to assault his congressman, there might be some time spent in jail. Attack a potentate and death might be the result due to the status of the one assaulted.

An assault upon the sovereignty of God, which is what every sin is, deserves something higher than death. Every transgression is an infinitely guilty transgression against the Infinite God – and an infinite penalty must be paid.

The infinite eternity of hell is also necessary.<sup>191</sup> The sinner can never pay the last farthing for he is finite and must pay an infinite debt.<sup>192</sup> To cut hell short would be to cut God short of His justice. Both hell's infinite weight and its infinite duration are necessary. Hell must be both terrible and everlasting for God to be God.

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<sup>191</sup> At the risk of redundancy, this phrase is necessary in order to stress even a glimpse into the endless duration of this state.

<sup>192</sup> As well, the nature of the damned goes unchanged in hellfire and the damned soul desires not to pay the debt at all, only to escape the punishment; which guilt of recalcitrance and unbelief only adds to the debt accrued (increasing the torments throughout all eternity).

The sight of this punishment for eternity will, therefore, be a constant expression of God's attribute of justice on display to all.

The terrible nature of hell exalts Christ's sacrifice for sin:

If hell is so exceedingly awful, then the One who can deliver from hell must indeed be great! If sin and hell were light matters for God to excuse, would it have needed the sacrifice of the Second Person of the Trinity to excuse sinners (while safeguarding the holy nature of God)? Hell excites the saint's mind in praise of Christ and His work of redemption all the more. What love the Saviour manifested, what pains He endured, in order to substitute Himself in the stead of sinners.

This guilt of sin must either be paid through the blood of Christ, who suffered hell in a moment (intensively) to pay this infinite guilt. Or it must be paid by sinners, who never can pay this last farthing, though they wear out heaven and earth (suffering hell extensively) in the just penalty of their guilt. Thank God for Christ the Substitute for sinners.

This doctrine more fully displays God's mercy to the saints and makes the saints more thankful for their deliverance:

The visual sight of hell in the ages to come will be a testament to the gracious mercy of God to the saints, increasing their thanks for the grace bestowed upon them.

Stephen Holmes further explains:

So God is glorifying himself in the punishment of the wicked – particularly his justice, power and majesty – and the saints rejoice in the sight because they see there the display of God's glory. They will also have a greater sense of God's love and



mercy when they see what they have been saved from, and so this will further display the glory of God's grace to them and hence excite them to further praise. This is not any deficiency on the part of the saints, in that they love only what God loves and God has no love or pity for the damned.<sup>193</sup>

Finally, the contemplation of hell is a source of comfort to the saint in this life:

The saints even in this age are benefited by this knowledge, for it draws attention to the magnitude of grace bestowed upon all who have been regenerated in this life (this thankfulness being magnified exponentially when the saved are finally delivered to that estate of glory).

This knowledge makes the present pains of this world easier to bear. John Chrysostom drives this point home:

Would that it were possible at our dinner, and our supper, and our baths, and everywhere, to be discoursing about hell. For we should not then feel the pain at the evils in this world, nor the pleasure of its good things. For what would you tell me was an evil? Poverty? Disease? Captivity? Maiming of the body? Why all these things are sport compared to the punishment there, even should you speak of those who are tormented with famine all their life long; or those who are maimed from their earliest days and beg their food too, and that in addition to the former evils. Let us then certainly employ ourselves with talking about these things. For to remember hell prevents us from falling into hell.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Holmes, 393.

**SECTION VI:****CONCLUSION:**

This thesis affirms that the saints in heaven will be aware of hell and know a great deal concerning it. It is probable that they will see it. They will look into hell, see its ferocity and rejoice over it as an immensely glorifying spectacle to the glory of God given to them for their eternal benefit.

This assertion is consistent with the nature of heaven, heaven's Creator and the saint's glorified state. It is both consistent with Scripture and logically deduced from Scripture. It is consistent with honored theologians who have drawn similar conclusions. This conclusion is of practical benefit for the comfort of the saints. An honest reflection concerning its assertions may yet be of eternal benefit to some reader.

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<sup>194</sup> John Chrysostom *Hom. xxxi, ad Rom.*, quoted in Lyman Abott, et. al., *That Unknown Country* (Springfield, Massachusetts: C.A. Nichols & Co., Publishers, 1888), 46.

## **APPENDIX A: ON THE SUFFERING OF GOD:**

Does God suffer due to the pains of His creatures? If so, does He pity those in hell?

### An Historical Excursis Concerning the suffering of God

Historic Christianity has largely upheld that God is immutable and is not affected by the suffering of His creatures.

Aquinas, in *Of God and His Creatures*, under the heading, “That there are no passions in God”:

PASSION is not in the intellectual appetite, but only in the sensitive. But in God there is no sensitive appetite, as there is no sensible knowledge. Every passion involves some bodily alteration, a thing impossible in the incorporeal Deity. In every passion the subject is more or less drawn out of his essential condition or connatural disposition: which is not possible in the unchangeable God... Thus every passion, generically as such, is removed from God.<sup>195</sup>

The *Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England*, in 1571 assert that God the Father is “but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions.”<sup>196</sup> The *Westminster Confession of Faith* likewise affirms that God is “without body, parts, or passions.”<sup>197</sup>

Richard Creel, a contemporary writer, seconds these historic formulations when he writes the following;

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<sup>195</sup> Aquinas *Of God and his Creatures* 1.89.

<sup>196</sup> Mark A. Noll (ed.), *Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1995), 214.

<sup>197</sup> Free Presbyterian Publications, *WCF*, chapter 2 section 1, 25.

There is nothing in the nature of omniscience which requires that God be caused suffering or joy in his own life by virtue of knowing the suffering and joys of others.<sup>198</sup>

God cannot be “moved” for being “moved” is to have one’s emotions affected by external conditions and made possible to change. The immutable God, who has joy in Himself, cannot be made to have a decrease in joy due to the sufferings of His creatures.

Yet, God was “grieved” on a number of occasions in Scripture and He was “wroth” as well. The Father was “well-pleased” by His Son. And the saints enter into the “joy” of their Lord.<sup>199</sup>

In the same *Westminster Confession of Faith* that describes God as “without passions,” it is said that God is “gracious, merciful, long-suffering...” attributes which bring to mind emotive aspects.<sup>200</sup>

What of the Cross? Did it pain the Father to cause the Son to suffer? Was the Father a “co-sufferer” at the Crucifixion or is this the ancient heresy of patri-passianism? Some may respond that it actually “pleased the Father to bruise His Son” (Isaiah 53:10). The question may be more accurately asked, “Was the Father moved, in any way, by the death of Christ?”

The distinction must be maintained between God in Himself and God’s will and disposition towards His creatures. This distinction is sometimes difficult and beyond man’s ability to comprehend; there is a limit to what can be apprehended (much less comprehended) concerning the “emotional life of God.” The modern emotion-laden view of God as an impotent, scorned lover who pleads for fidelity to no avail is wrong; but also

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<sup>198</sup> Richard E. Creel, *Divine Impassibility: An essay in philosophical theology* (Cambridge: University Press, 1986) page 13.

<sup>199</sup> It is unnecessary to place here the numerous Scriptural evidences; any concordance will satisfy the curious that this is so.

wrong is the cold Aristotelian view of God as the “unmoved mover,” separate and distant from His creation.

Despite these difficulties, it is not necessary to conclude that God must pity those in hell. For this pity in itself would seem contrary with His will to decree justice upon them.

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<sup>200</sup> Free Presbyterian Press, *WCF*, 25.

**APPENDIX B: ON THE DAMNED'S GNASHING OF THEIR TEETH:**

One terrifying aspect of hell is this: the weeping and the gnashing of teeth. Though terrifying enough as it is, this is not merely the clenching of one's own teeth in pain or remorse. It is also illustrative of the actions of the still unregenerate nature of the damned in hell.

Many interpret this phrase, "weeping and gnashing of teeth" to refer to the pain of remorse and regret. This is an assumption. Others state that this refers primarily to the pain of hell. There may be truth in this.

The Biblical usage, however, of this imagery is one primarily of anger and seething hatred. It is never used to describe anyone but the wicked and, while it does signify sorrow and pain at times, the prevailing theme seems to be one of rage and enmity.

As a cottonmouth snake may foam and bite when stirred, so the picture of the wicked seems similar:

**Lamentations 2:16:**

All thine enemies have opened their mouth against thee: they hiss and gnash the teeth: they say, We have swallowed her up: certainly this is the day that we looked for; we have found, we have seen it.

**Job 16:9:**

He teareth me in his wrath, who hateth me: he gnasheth upon me with his teeth; mine enemy sharpeneth his eyes upon me.

Psalm 35:16:

With hypocritical mockers in feasts, they gnashed upon me with their teeth.

Psalm 37:12:

The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth.

Psalm 112:10:

The wicked shall see it, and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth, and melt away: the desire of the wicked shall perish.

Matthew 24:51:

And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Mark 9:18:

And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not.

Acts 7:54-55, Stephen:

<sup>54</sup> When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.

<sup>55</sup> But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,

Spurgeon illustrates this as follows:

What is it that the lost are doing? They are "weeping and gnashing their teeth." Do you gnash you teeth now? You would not do it except you were in pain and agony. Well, in hell there is always gnashing of teeth. And do you know why? There is one gnashing his teeth at his companion, and mutters, "I was led into hell by you; you led me astray, you taught me to drink the first time." And the other gnashes his teeth and says, "What if I did? You made me worse than I should have been in after times." There is a child who looks at her mother, and says, "Mother, you trained me up to vice." And the mother gnashes her teeth again at the child, and says, "I have no pity for you, for you excelled me in it, and led me into deeper sin." Fathers gnash their teeth at their sons, and sons at their fathers. And, methinks, if there are any who will have to gnash their teeth more than others, it will be seducers, when they see those whom they have

led from the paths of virtue, and hear them saying, "Ah! we are glad you are in hell with us, you deserve it, for you led us here."<sup>201</sup>

### **An Objection:**

But the above interpretation of this “gnashing of teeth” would mean that the wicked have no concern for one another at all in hell. Luke 16:19-21 seems to contradict this. What about the rich man who sought to prevent his brothers from entering hell?

### **A Reply:**

But for what reason did the rich man attempt to warn his brothers? The Rich Man sought his brothers, not for their sake, but for his own. As one ember heats another, the souls in hell will contribute to one another’s misery.

John Bunyan:

I do believe there is scarce so much love in any of the damned in hell as really to desire the salvation of any. But in that there is any desire in them that are damned, that their friends and relations should not come into that place of torment, it appears to me to be rather for their own ease than for their neighbour's good.<sup>202</sup>

### **Application to this life:**

The wicked gnash their teeth at God and one another in the next life. They do the same, however, in this life. The actions of the mouth display the tendency of the soul.<sup>203</sup>

All the more reason to restrain one’s tongue in this life.

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<sup>201</sup> A sermon delivered in a field, King Edward’s Road, Hackney, England. Handwritten, September 4<sup>th</sup>, 1855. Charles H. Spurgeon, “Heaven and Hell,” *Spurgeon’s Sermons Volume 1 (1855)*. Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, August 2002.

<sup>202</sup> John Bunyan, “A Few Sighs from Hell,” (London: Ralph Wood, for M. Wright, 1658; reprint, Bunyan Ministries at [www.johnbunyan.org](http://www.johnbunyan.org), n.d.), 40.



## **APPENDIX C: ON THE IMPRECATIONS OF SCRIPTURE**

### Introduction

If the heavenly saints are aware of the wicked in hell, see them and rejoice over their punishments, it appears that these are no longer persons to be grieved over and prayed about but instead, are enemies. The saints are to be glad at God's disposal of the wicked in His justice and may rightly rejoice due to their disposal.

In Scripture, there are instances of God's people praying to God for just such a disposal. These are called "imprecations," referring to the calling down of curses upon one's enemies (imprecations are, in fact, a practice that occurs numerous times in the Scriptures among the saints of God).

### Imprecations in the Torah

From the Old to the New Testament examples of imprecations can be found. The People of God throughout the Scriptures do not merely joy when God causes them to escape their enemies; there is also a joy over God's destruction of the enemy. The joy is not one of mere escape of self from trouble – but satisfaction in their source of trouble being eliminated, which serves to magnify the glory of God.

An example of this can be found in the Song of Moses (Exodus 15: 1-6):

I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea...Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea: his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red sea. The depths have covered them: they sank into the bottom as a stone. Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy.

Moses rejoiced, not only their escape, but the destruction of Pharaoh.

Moses did not merely vent his personal anger against the enemy. This song was

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<sup>203</sup> What sin reflects the farthest sinking of a culture into the depravity of sin except for the literal

blessed by the Lord and taught to God's people. It was worthy of being memorized and sung aloud by all the people of Israel.

A similar song will be sung at the end of time (Revelation 15: 1-4):

And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God. And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.

It is of interest to note the following congruous point. Just as Pharaoh and his army were thrown into the Sea, the devil and his minions in the Book of Revelation are thrown into the Lake of Fire. Both audiences consist of God's people. In the Song of Moses, the Israelites rejoiced. In the book of Revelation, "those who had gotten victory," presumably the Elect, rejoice. McCheyne comments:

When Israel stood upon the shore, and saw the dead bodies of the Egyptians washed upon it, they burst forth in a song of praise to God. And in like manner, when the redeemed will stand upon the sea of glass, they will sing the same song — the song of Moses, the servant of God, and of the Lamb. And what occasioned the song of Moses? It was because the Egyptians were drowned in the Red Sea. So, in like manner, it will be with the redeemed when they see the wicked cast upon the shores of the burning lake. They will sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb. (Revelation 15:3)<sup>204</sup>

Jonathan Edwards likewise comments:

The power of God is sometimes spoken of as very glorious, as appearing in the temporal destruction of his enemies; Exod. xv. 6. Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power; thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. But how much more glorious will it appear in his triumphing over, and dashing in pieces at once

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outworking of this principle – cannibalism! Tribes who have long lived without the Gospel often have fallen to these depths which mirror the torments of hell, even in this life.

<sup>204</sup> Robert Murray McCheyne, "The Eternal Torment of the Wicked – Matter of Eternal Song to the Redeemed," Feb 2004, <http://www.txdirect.net/~tgarner/mccheyne9.htm> (Dec 13, 1998).

all his enemies, wicked men and devils together, all his haughty foes! The power of God will gloriously appear in dashing to pieces his enemies as a potter's vessel. Moses rejoiced and sang when he saw God glorify his power in the destruction of Pharaoh and his host at the Red sea. But how much more will the saints in glory rejoice, when they shall see God gloriously triumphing over all his enemies in their eternal ruin.<sup>205</sup>

### **Deuteronomy 27: God's curses become his people's "Amen's"**

Not only the Song of Moses, but other Scriptures also present this general theme. Those who defy God will be sentenced by God, and all of God's people will shout a hearty "amen."

According to Deuteronomy 27:15-26:

Cursed be the man that maketh any graven or molten image, an abomination unto the LORD, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and putteth it in a secret place. And all the people shall answer and say, Amen. Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark. And all the people shall say, Amen. [And finally] Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen.

If this occurs in an earthly setting, (while there still a chance to repent), it does not seem incongruent that it will also occur in heaven. In heaven, there will be shouting of "Amen's" over these "Cursed be's" that God proclaims in judgment. In heaven, the saints will praise all of God's judgments.

### **New Testament Examples**

#### **Galatians 1:9**

As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

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<sup>205</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "The End of the Wicked Contemplated," *The Wrath of Almighty God*. (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996), 375.

In this passage, Paul sternly announces the sentence of God upon all that preach another Gospel beside that which was received and preached by Paul. It is no less than “Let him be accursed.”

If this is inspired writ and without error and authoritative for faith and practice, then Paul and all his readers must dispose their minds in agreement to this pronouncement.

### **Imprecations found in John’s Revelation**

Chapter 16 of John’s Revelation displays a great scene of judgment and the portrayal of the pouring out of God’s wrath (verses 1-7). There is a contrast here between the wicked who respond to God’s display of wrath with blasphemy and unrepentance, and the angels who praise God and speak of His goodness:

And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth. And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image...And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy. And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.

McCheyne comments:

Here you will observe that the holy angels praise God for pouring out his vial upon the wicked. The same thing is taught in the 18th chapter, 20th verse: 'Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.' Compare this with the text: 'And again they said Alleluia, and her smoke rose up for ever and ever.' My dear brethren, from all these passages it is put beyond a doubt, that the condemnation of the wicked will be matter of joy to the redeemed, and not only at the first, but throughout eternity; for, 'Again, they said Alleluia, and her smoke rose up for ever and ever.'

## Revelation 14

The destruction of Babylon is portrayed:

...Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.

<sup>8</sup> And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication...

Following this: “And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever”.

The imagery employed is echoed closely in Revelation 19:3: “And again they said, Alleluia, and her smoke rose up for ever and ever.”

In both cases, destruction elicits praise in heaven. The disasters befalling the wicked cause awe over God’s goodness and justice. The shout of “Give glory to God” is followed very quickly with, “His judgment is come.” The punishment is deserved, is visible, and rejoiced over by all who love God.

## **God’s Kingdom and its enemies**

The Lord’s prayer, in an indirect sense, may be viewed as imprecatory:

- When believers pray "Thy kingdom come," they pray for the advancement of God’s domain.
- This advancement must come at the retreat of sin.
- When believers pray for God’s kingdom to advance they are, of necessity, praying for the elimination of God’s enemies.
- In this life Christians may pray for this elimination by means of conversion.
- Once conversion is impossible, these prayers will be answered by eternal destruction upon all God’s enemies.

- Regardless of the means, conversion or destruction, the prayer “Thy kingdom come,” will be fulfilled.
- Believers, having their prayers answered, will not be mournful over having their prayers answered! Even if they are answered by the doctrine of eternal hell (and this is all with God’s righteous approval).

### **Argument from earthly experience**

Finally, presented below is a last argument defending the Scriptural imprecations. This is drawn from experiences in one’s own life.

People rejoice when they see the downfall of an evil king or dictator. Even Christians can rightly rejoice over the death of oppressive dictators. The Song of Moses is an example. The Old Testament song at the deliverance of Pelug is another. In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the death of Hitler brought many tears of happiness.

The saints of God are gifted by the sight of evil’s final downfall and in their joy are agreeing with God’s verdict

If God rejoices at justice being done and the wicked being punished and Christians are to have the mind of Christ, then they will rejoice in that which God rejoices - namely, the destruction of the wicked in hell.

Jonathan Edwards, in his sermon, “The End of the Wicked Contemplated,” summarizes this point with the following:

The saints in heaven possess all things as their Own, and therefore all things contribute to their joy and happiness. The Scriptures teach that the saints in glory inherit all things. This God said in John's hearing, when he had the vision of the New Jerusalem ; Rev. xxi. 7. And the Scriptures teach us to understand this absolutely of all the works of creation and providence. I Cor. iii. 21, 22. All things are yours, whether

Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or thing, present, or things to come; all are yours. Here the apostle teaches, that all things in the world to come, or in the future and eternal world, are the saints'; not only life but death; men, and angels, and devils, heaven and hell, are theirs, to contribute to their joy and happiness. Therefore the damned and their misery, their sufferings and the wrath of God poured out upon them, will be an occasion of joy to them. If there were anything whatsoever that did not contribute to their joy, but caused grief, then there would be something which would not be theirs.<sup>206</sup>

The Redeemed will have all things for their pleasure. This pleasure will never be as in this world, divorced from what is the will of God and His divine will is to punish evildoers, which will bring pleasure to the Redeemed.

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<sup>206</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "The End of the Wicked Contemplated," *The Wrath of Almighty God* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996), 370-1.

## **APPENDIX D: GOD IS HELL FOR THE SINNER**

Hell is often spoken of as the absence of God's loving presence. The absence of God, however, is not what primarily makes hell what it is.

It is, instead, the presence of God that makes hell terrible. If one makes his bed in hell, God is there.<sup>207</sup> Sinners cannot escape God's presence.<sup>208</sup> God is "far from the wicked,"<sup>209</sup> in that His pleasure has no part in them, and He has "hid his face"<sup>210</sup> from them in the same sense. He is, however, still present in His wrath to those in hell and "will be the hell of one and the heaven of the other".<sup>211</sup>

### **This wrath will begin at Christ's return and will be a result of His presence**

In flaming fire God will take vengeance on those who know Him not, and these will be punished by (and because of) the presence of the Lord.<sup>212</sup>

If the soldiers at the tomb of Christ fell down as if dead from the brightness of an angel, how terrible it will be when Christ returns and destroys sinners with the "brightness of his coming!"<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Psalm 139.

<sup>208</sup> Amos 9:2.

<sup>209</sup> Proverbs 15:29.

<sup>210</sup> Isaiah 59:2.

<sup>211</sup> Jonathan Edwards: "*There is such a thing as eternity*", sermon over II Corinthians 4:18, page 1, preached April 1742, quoted in Gerstner, 57.

<sup>212</sup> See discussion on II Thessalonians 1:8-9.

<sup>213</sup> See Matthew 28:2-4 and II Thessalonians 2:8,9



### **God kindles this fire and is the essence of this fire**

Not only will flaming fire accompany Christ at his return; not only will the anger of God correspond with hellfire after the Judgment: but in truth, the very flames themselves will proceed out of God's anger (God in his anger acting to kindle these flames by His Divine Person).

Tertullian writes:

He comes to inflict punishment, He must require "the flaming fire." Thus on this consideration too we must...conclude that Christ belongs to a God who kindles the flames (of vengeance).<sup>214</sup>

### **Scriptural evidences that the fires of judgment proceed from the being of God<sup>215</sup>**

#### Leviticus 10

<sup>1</sup> And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not.

<sup>2</sup> And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.

#### Deuteronomy 4

<sup>24</sup> For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God

#### Deuteronomy 32:22-24

<sup>22</sup> For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains.

#### Psalm 9:3

When mine enemies are turned back, they shall fall and perish at thy presence.

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<sup>214</sup> Tertullian *Against Marcion* 5:16, ANF 3.463.

<sup>215</sup> Underlines added to the quotes which follow.

Psalm 50

<sup>3</sup> Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him.

Psalm 68:1-2

Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him.  
<sup>2</sup> As smoke is driven away, so drive them away: as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God.

Isaiah 33

<sup>10</sup> Now will I rise, saith the LORD; now will I be exalted; now will I lift up myself.  
<sup>11</sup> Ye shall conceive chaff, ye shall bring forth stubble: your breath, as fire, shall devour you.  
<sup>12</sup> And the people shall be as the burnings of lime: as thorns cut up shall they be burned in the fire.

Daniel 7

<sup>9</sup> I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.  
<sup>10</sup> A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.

Ezekiel 22

<sup>31</sup> Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord GOD.

Amos 5:6

Seek the LORD, and ye shall live; lest he break out like fire.

Nahum

<sup>5</sup> The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein.  
<sup>6</sup> Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him.

Hebrews 12

<sup>29</sup> For our God is a consuming fire.

**Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudopigrapha:**1 Enoch 48:9

I will give them over into the hands of my elect ones: As stubble in the fire so shall they burn before the face of the holy...<sup>216</sup>

1 Enoch 53:2

Sinners shall be destroyed before the face of the Lord of Spirits.<sup>217</sup>

Psalms of Solomon 15:4-5

The flame of fire and anger against the unrighteous shall not touch him when it goes out from the Lord's presence against sinners to destroy the sinner's every assurance.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Black, *Apocalypsis Henochi Graece*, p. 35.

<sup>217</sup> Charles, "1 Enoch," *Apocrypha and Pseudopigrapha of the Old Testament*, 2:220.

<sup>218</sup> Swete, Henry B., *The Psalms of Solomon with the Greek Fragments of the Book of Enoch*. Cambridge: University Press, 1899.

**APPENDIX E: THE THEME OF THIS THESIS IN THE OTHER  
MONOTHEISTIC RELIGIONS<sup>219</sup>**

**Jewish:**

**1<sup>st</sup> Enoch 27:3**

Here shall they be gathered together, and here shall be their place of judgment. In the last days there shall be upon them the spectacle of righteous judgment in the presence of the righteous for ever: here shall the merciful bless the Lord of glory, the Eternal King.

**1<sup>st</sup> Enoch, chapter 48**

<sup>9</sup>I will cast them like hay into the fire, and like lead into the water. Thus shall they burn in the presence of the righteous, and sink in the presence of the holy; nor shall a tenth part of them be found.

<sup>10</sup>But in the day of their trouble, the world shall obtain tranquillity.

<sup>11</sup>In his presence shall they fall, and not be raised up again; nor shall there be any one to take them out of his hands, and to lift them up: for they have denied the Lord of spirits, and his Messiah. The name of the Lord of spirits shall be blessed.

**Wisdom 5:1-5**

[1] Then shall the righteous man stand in great boldness before the face of such as have afflicted him, and made no account of his labours.

[2] When they see it, they shall be troubled with terrible fear, and shall be amazed at the strangeness of his salvation, so far beyond all that they looked for.

[3] And they repenting and groaning for anguish of spirit shall say within themselves, This was he, whom we had sometimes in derision, and a proverb of reproach:

[4] We fools accounted his life madness, and his end to be without honour:

[5] How is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints!

**Rabbinical Writings:**

**Pesikta Rabbati 52:3**

Why did the Holy Blessed One create Gehenna (Hell) and the Garden of Eden? So that one can behold the other. How much space is between them? R. Yohanan said; The breadth of a wall. R. Hanina said; The breadth of a hand. But the Rabbis said; The two are right up against each other.

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<sup>219</sup>Underlines added to the following quotes.

**Islamic:****Hadith:****Sahih of Bukhari: Vol 1, Book 8, #345**

(Prophet Muhammad speaking to Angel Gabriel in Heaven): “Who is he?’ Gabriel replied, ‘He is Adam and the people on his right and left are the souls of his offspring. Those on his right are the people of Paradise and those on his left are the people of Hell and when he looks towards his right he laughs and when he looks towards his left he weeps.”

Also in Bukhari:

The angel Gabriel will hold up an enormous scale, half of it covering Paradise, the other half covering Hell. Every person’s deeds will be weighed, and exact justice will be done. To each person will be given a book, the record of her or his life. Those whose books are placed in their right hands are blessed, while those whose books are placed in their left hands are damned. They await sentencing in shoes of fire, their skulls boiling like pots. At last, Allah passes sentence upon the righteous and the wicked.

Now all the souls must cross the Bridge of Sirat, which spans the distance from Earth to Paradise, passing directly over Hell. Although this bridge is hair-thin and razor-sharp, it will broaden out beneath the steps of the faithful. Infidels will lose their balance and topple into the abyss.

Hell has seven levels. The first and mildest is for sinners among the true believers, who will enter Paradise after purification. The second is for Jews, the third for Christians, the fourth for Sabians, the fifth for Magians, the sixth for abandoned idolators, and the seventh and worst for hypocrites of all religions. In Hell the damned will suffer various tortures. True believers, lying on couches in Paradise, will see the damned suffer and laugh at them scornfully.

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