

LIBERTY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

FOUR VIEWS OF HELL CRITIQUE

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THEO 530

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY II

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## **I. Introduction**

The book *Four Views on Hell* will be critiqued discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the four contributors. Each contributor has an apparent view on the view of hell; this analysis will show where each author has their apparent strengths and where their ideals do not align with scripture from the Bible. Each view has weaknesses and they will be exploited in this paper.

## **II. Brief Summary**

These views are valid views in our present culture, but in two of the views there are fatal flaws which could lead to ones destruction of their soul eternally. These contributors may appear to construct and validate their views with aplomb, but the summaries from each clearly suffer from the lack of forming their ideas more fully and intentionally. Contribution from the writers clearly change or use words to define their view on what hell is or may possibly be as determined in their minds by how they read or interpret scripture. Each view on hell differs to some degree with the Literal and Metaphorical views following scripture the closest. The Purgatorial and Conditional views take some substantial detours from scripture or at least considerably different interpretations from scripture.

The views on hell appear to maintain that there is a Bible and scripture is important when seeking to explain their particular views on hell. The Literal view obviously takes scripture to the extent to which it is used and described when speaking of hell. Metaphorical view describes

scripture as being used literally and figuratively which translates into the possibility of the literal meaning describing something horrible, but probably not the literal meaning of the words used when describing hell. The Purgatorial view approaches some scripture to use to defend this view but appears to rely heavily on past historical writings and reasoning for this view of belief of hell. Lastly, the Conditional view uses some scripture to defend the view of annihilationism which again relies heavily upon historical data and personal interpretation in lieu of scripture.

Each view delineates itself as the best or appropriate view on hell in place of the other views. These views should be read with a critical eye as each view has its appeal to the reader while each also has obvious weaknesses once compared to scripture used to defend their views. Each view has been provided concisely so there is much more each contributor could say about each view, apparent by the critiques at the end by the other contributors, but has been kept succinct to sway the reader to choose for himself.

### **III. Critical interaction with author's work**

Walvoord's Literal view of hell is the most realistic definition of hell specifically due to the fact that he uses scripture to support his view. This view is not popular among many preachers and pastors because it sounds so negative and sadistic. If the reader of this work is a believing Christian sincere in faith this understanding of Hell being eternal is the only correct view per the Bible. Multiple references are found in scripture to hells eternality but one is found in Matthew

where stated, “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:’”<sup>1</sup> Walvoord goes on to reiterate from

Revelation that hell is an eternal place without end. Walvoord explains:

The ultimate convincing argument for eternal punishment is found in Revelation 20:10-15, in the context of how eternity will change things in time. In this passage, as has been previously pointed out, the beast and the false prophet, cast into the lake of fire at the beginning of the millennium (19:20), are still there a thousand years later and are declared to join with Satan in the torment which will continue “day and night for ever and ever” (20:10).<sup>2</sup>

This view is the most convincing and realistic for a genuine Christian believer as it relates to scripture. The larger problem is how this view is perceived by other Christians and theologians as Walvoord expresses in his discussion about harmonizing eternal punishment. Fortunately, Walvoord sums this up succinctly and effortlessly, “If the slightest sin is infinite in its significance, then it also demands infinite punishment as a divine judgment.”<sup>3</sup>

The Metaphorical view proposed by Crockett makes an interesting argument for scripture being metaphorically since elsewhere in the scriptures this style is used. However, this is as far as Crockett can make a connection. Crockett’s summation of the Metaphorical view lacks substantial reference to scripture and its validity to his persuasiveness. Crockett uses historical references and current evangelist Billy Graham to drive home a point about hell which does not

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<sup>1</sup> MacArthur, John, ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc. 1997), 1442.

<sup>2</sup> Crockett, William and Stanley N. Gundry, ed., *Four Views on Hell* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 26.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

align with God's Word. Crockett tries to reiterate his persuasion by stating that hell is spoken of in scripture with fire and then darkness and states that both cannot be simultaneously as we know it presently. Crockett must remember that God's Word has predestination and free will. If both can coexist, but cause such a problem in the human mind then fire and darkness can surely exist in God's eternal punishment called hell.

As for Hayes' Purgatorial view of hell it is more of a Roman Catholic proposition for the reader to believe in something possibly alluded to in scripture. Hayes explains his thoughts on this, "But the Jewish names for the places in the other world, such as *sheol* and *gehenna*, are not identical with the Christian concept of an interim period."<sup>4</sup> This reasoning is faulty at best; if we are to use this logic then all words that are not identical for the Lord would or could possibly mean that there are multiple gods in heaven not one Father. Just because a word is not identical does not mean it defines two separate places, but even if Hayes is accurate in his wording this does not explain a purgatory just a place of torment prior to judgment and then eternal hell or lake of fire. Hayes writing is practically blasphemous where he states, "But not everyone seems 'bad enough' to be consigned to an eternal hell. And most do not seem 'good enough' to be candidates for heaven."<sup>5</sup> This statement is only Hayes opinion about persons without referring or even acknowledging the Bible. Even Isaiah refers to hell as an eternity, "The sinners in Zion are

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<sup>4</sup> Crockett, William and Stanley N. Gundry, ed., *Four Views on Hell* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 93.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 99.

afraid; fearfulness has seized the hypocrites: ‘Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire?

Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?’<sup>6</sup>

Last, the Conditional view is Pinnock’s meager attempt to express hell is only temporary.

Granted, even the Purgatorial view also expresses hell as a temporary place to an extent, but the

Conditional view grants a pardon from sin so it where with complete removal of the soul.

Pinnock states, “I contend that God does not grant immortality to the wicked to inflict endless

pain upon them but will allow them finally to perish.”<sup>7</sup> If this is an accurate depiction we can

view hell as a temporary punishment for someone wanting to live a sinful life on earth and then

being completely erased from body and soul. Again, if this were true why would anyone want

to become a Christian? G. K. Chesterton’s quote would suffice, “The Christian ideal has not

been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried,”<sup>8</sup> and if this is true then

why would anyone spend a life trying to live righteously for a God who only punishes

temporarily? Obviously, this view is reprehensible to a Christian otherwise Christ’s death on

the cross would have been in vain. Christ would not have needed to save humans from a

temporary hell; this would have only been a short-term punishment. This Conditional view of

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<sup>6</sup> MacArthur, John, ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc. 1997), 1004.

<sup>7</sup> Crockett, William and Stanley N. Gundry, ed., *Four Views on Hell* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 142-143.

<sup>8</sup> Fallible Blogma, “Fallible Blogma, In Peaceful Pursuit of the True, the Good, and the Beautiful, <http://www.fallibleblogma.com/index.php/found-difficult-and-left-untried/> (accessed December 2, 2010).

hell belittles what Christ did for humanity if hell is only a short-lived torment or diminutive duration of punishment.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Each view on hell is an enlightening read, but should definitely not be read by someone who does not have a firm grasp on scripture. This could sway someone to a blasphemous belief in hell and eternity as literalists know it presently. Granted, even the Metaphorical view is somewhat stretching on its support for its view, but could be understood by a Bible-believing Christian. As for Purgatorial and Conditional views being valid for a scriptural believing Christian these have no substantiation in a Christian's life. Each contributor had a concise well-written point and the rebuttals were amusing to read, but overall this book is best left for students in seminary.



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