

Matthew 13:36-52
Hell: Final Judgment
God & Evil Part 6

Sermon

Hobart, July 2nd, 2011

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Launceston, July 17th, 2011

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Matthew 13:36-52

Parable of the Wheat and Weeds Explained

³⁶ Then, leaving the crowds outside, Jesus went into the house. His disciples said, “Please explain to us the story of the weeds in the field.”

³⁷ Jesus replied, “The Son of Man* is the farmer who plants the good seed. ³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed represents the people of the Kingdom. The weeds are the people who belong to the evil one. ³⁹ The enemy who planted the weeds among the wheat is the devil. The harvest is the end of the world,* and the harvesters are the angels.

⁴⁰ “Just as the weeds are sorted out and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the world. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will remove from his Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.

⁴² And the angels will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father’s Kingdom. Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand!

Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl

⁴⁴ “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field.

⁴⁵ “Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant on the lookout for choice pearls. ⁴⁶ When he discovered a pearl of great value, he sold everything he owned and bought it!

Parable of the Fishing Net

⁴⁷ “Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a fishing net that was thrown into the water and caught fish of every kind. ⁴⁸ When the net was full, they dragged it up onto the shore, sat down, and sorted the good fish into crates, but threw the bad ones away. ⁴⁹ That is the way it will be at the end of the world. The angels will come and separate the wicked people from the righteous, ⁵⁰ throwing the wicked into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁵¹ Do you understand all these things?”

“Yes,” they said, “we do.”

⁵² Then he added, “Every teacher of religious law who becomes a disciple in the Kingdom of Heaven is like a homeowner who brings from his storeroom new gems of truth as well as old.”¹

* “Son of Man” is a title Jesus used for himself.

* Or *the age*; also in 13:40, 49.

¹Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Mt 13:36-52). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

INTRODUCTION:

I. ONE OF THE MOST DRAMATIC AND CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS IN CHRISTIAN TEACHING IS THAT OF HELL

A. IT RECENTLY BECAME THE MOST POPULAR DISCUSSION TOPIC ON “TWITTER”

1. The popular social networking and communication service
2. There were more communications than any of the celebrity sports, music or movie star topics.

B. THE REASON WAS A NEW BOOK BY A POPULAR YOUNG US PASTOR, ROB BELL

1. With the catchy title, “Love Wins”
2. Even before the book was published people have been condemning Bell’s suggestion that God’s love would not allow him to throw people into an ever burning hell to suffer for ever

S.P.S:

A. TODAY WE ARE LOOKING AT THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER AND THE SEED

1. Focusing on where Jesus speaks about the weeds being thrown into the fiery furnace
2. And thinking about the topic of hell and final judgment
 - a) Seeing how it fits in with who God is, and his eternal plan

B. PRAYER

BODY:

Matthew 13:36-52

Parable of the Wheat and Weeds Explained

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³⁷ Jesus replied, “The Son of Man is the farmer who plants the good seed. ³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed represents the people of the Kingdom. The weeds are the people who belong to the evil one. ³⁹ The enemy who planted the weeds among the wheat is the devil. The harvest is the end of the world,* and the harvesters are the angels.

C. FIRST REMEMBER THIS IS A PARABLE

1. In this case, Jesus shows how to interpret it
2. It is a very basic overview of how the Son of Man will sort things out in the kingdom at the end of the age

⁴⁰ “Just as the weeds are sorted out and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the world. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will remove from his Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴² And the angels will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father’s Kingdom. Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand!

D. MANY PASSAGES ON HELL AND ETERNAL FIRE AND JUDGMENT

1. In this case the destiny is called the “fiery furnace”
 - a) In a number of other places the term “hell” is used to translate the original word “Gehenna”
2. *Gehenna* was the local Jerusalem rubbish dump where rubbish was thrown down into a valley area and burned

* Or *the age*; also in 13:40, 49.

3. So the picture here and in the other passages is of throwing out and totally getting rid of rubbish, including carcasses that pollute and degrade the community

⁴⁰ “Just as the weeds are sorted out and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the world [age]. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will remove from his Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.

E. THERE ARE MANY DIFFICULT QUESTIONS AND CONTROVERSIES OVER WHAT THIS MEANS, AND WHAT WILL HAPPEN

1. Is hell a place of everlasting punishment for all those who don't accept Jesus as Saviour before they die?
 - a) We will come back to that a bit more next week, but for now let's listen to what Jesus has made clear here;

F. THE KEY EFFECT IS THAT JESUS WILL REMOVE

1. “everything that causes sin”
2. “and all who do evil”

⁴² And the angels will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

3. It doesn't say how long this will last, but it is clearly unpleasant, with great anguish and grief the result
4. The result of sin and evil isn't pleasant
 - a) We see people throwing themselves into the fire of suffering and extreme pain and misery every day
5. God has given us the blessing of letting him be who he truly is, and do what he does; love us, rescue us through his Son, and restore us with his Spirit, and share his life with us
 - a) The more we walk away from his way of fellowship with him and selfless giving and service to one another, the more we move towards weeping and gnashing of teeth
6. One would assume that anything or anyone thrown into a fiery furnace is not going to last very long at all

a) In fact in a very hot furnace is the fastest way to destroy something, it can be instantaneous

(1) Other verses talk about everlasting fire, and everlasting punishment

7. The key thing in all the verses that relate to God's final judgment, is to see it in the context of *Who* God is in the core of his being, as revealed through Jesus and the written word

G. CLEARLY GOD, IS A GOD OF LOVE FIRST

1. Jesus said he came not to condemn, but to save

2. God made us all in his image, and he sent his Son as the second Adam to restore us, to redeem us

a) To take on Satan, evil, sin and death as one of us, and to defeat it once and for all through his crucifixion and resurrection

3. As the victorious King and judge, the great Shepherd

a) Jesus rescues his people from evil, including from the perpetrators of evil and injustice

b) As we read in here, and in Revelation and elsewhere, for the new restored world to be free from the consequences of sin, of living apart from God; all must be living with God, sharing in his life

(1) And therefore those who refuse, have to be stopped from creating evil, injustice, pain and division

(2) And must be removed, otherwise the present state of things, a mix of good and evil, life and death, will continue on

⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will remove from his Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.

4. Jesus continues to focus on the overall result

⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father's Kingdom. Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand!

H. THIS IS GOOD NEWS

1. The end result is freedom from all that hurts and harms and separates man from God

2. Jesus then goes on with three more parables about the kingdom, the *hidden treasure*, the *pearl* and the *net*

Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl

⁴⁴ “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field.

⁴⁵ “Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant on the lookout for choice pearls.

⁴⁶ When he discovered a pearl of great value, he sold everything he owned and bought it!

I. JESUS GAVE UP EVERYTHING TO POSSESS US AS HIS TREASURE

1. He gave up his position in heaven to come down to possess us, including giving up his life on the cross to purchase us as his treasured possession

Parable of the Fishing Net

⁴⁷ “Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a fishing net that was thrown into the water and caught fish of every kind. ⁴⁸ When the net was full, they dragged it up onto the shore, sat down, and sorted the good fish into crates, but threw the bad ones away.

⁴⁹ That is the way it will be at the end of the world. The angels will come and separate the wicked people from the righteous, ⁵⁰ throwing the wicked into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁵¹ Do you understand all these things?”

“Yes,” they said, “we do.”

⁵² Then he added, “Every teacher of religious law who becomes a disciple in the Kingdom of Heaven is like a homeowner who brings from his storeroom new gems of truth as well as old.”²

J. THIS FINAL PARABLE REINFORCES THE ONE ABOUT THE WEEDS

1. Jesus will judge, he will sort out evil from good
 - a) He will separate the two

²Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Mt 13:36-52). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

b) He will deal with all evil, and all that causes people to stumble and do evil so the good can exist and thrive

2. In the end,

⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father's Kingdom. Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand!

K. ONE OF THE KEY ISSUES IN DEBATES OVER ISSUES SUCH AS FINAL JUDGMENT, AND HELL

1. Is our understanding of God

a) In a review of Rob Bell's controversial book on the subject, "Love Wins", Kevin DeYoung says;

6. Gospel Problems

This review is too long already, but I really must say something about the two most grievous errors in the book: Bell's view of the cross and his view of God.

According to Bell, salvation is realizing you're already saved. We are all forgiven. We are all loved, equally and fully by God who has made peace with everyone. That work is done. Now we are invited to believe that story and live in it (172–73).

b) DeYoung a little bit later adds;.....

7. A Different God

At the very heart of this controversy, ... is that we really do have two different Gods. The stakes are that high.

... Both sides cannot be right. As much as some voices in evangelicalism will suggest that we should all get along and learn from each other and listen for the Spirit speaking in our midst, the fact is we have two irreconcilable views of God.³

L. THIS IS A SAD STATE OF AFFAIRS

1. God is both all-powerful and all loving

³ Kevin DeYoung, God is Still Holy and What You Learned in Sunday School is Still True: A Review of "Love Wins"; <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/files/2011/03/LoveWinsReview.pdf>

2. But the truth of the matter is, if we start with God being first and foremost almighty, omnipotent, omniscient, sovereign, and interpret all he does and our doctrine and practice from that perspective, we end up in a very different place than the alternate;

3. Which is to start with God as love, and whose omnipotence and sovereign power is always used in love and used to serve his loving purposes

a) Rather than having his love serve his omnipotence

M. ELMER COLYER SAID THE FOLLOWING IN A YOU'RE INCLUDED INTERVIEW ON THE TOPIC OF JUDGMENT AND HELL

The real problem with it is when you have this kind of view that God hates those in hell and loves those in heaven, the problem is you end up with what we call in theology a *Deus absconditus*, a dark inscrutable deity that we really don't understand, behind the back of what God had actually revealed in Jesus Christ. What tends to happen then is the love of God that you see in Christ gets only related to heaven, the wrath of God relates to those in hell, and that's simply not tenable. It's the same God. God's attributes finally cannot be divided.

...But the fundamental problem is these divergent doctrines of God, you know, a God of wrath on the one side, a God of love on the other. Fundamentally, when we talk about how we really know God, if we do it through Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection, what we see in the cross is that God's love and God's wrath are not finally separate. They're two aspects of a single attribute that is the fundamental character of God. The love of God in Christ is patently real on the cross, but we also see God's hatred toward sin. So it isn't that God loves the elect and hates the reprobate — God loves us all, but hates the sin in our life. Therefore I think we have to relate hell to the love of God.⁴

1. So when we come to areas such as final judgment and hell

a) Some will argue that God punishes in order to maintain his power and authority, and to rid the universe of all that opposes him

⁴ Elmer Colyer, You're Included

b) I personally feel that many chose this view because of their upbringing and temperament

(1) The predominance of men in areas of church leadership and doctrinal study may also have played a role in this

2. On the other hand, when we start with God as love, who created us in his image,

a) When we build our understanding of God through the revelation God has given of himself through Jesus

(1) Rather than building it on the sand of our own thoughts and logic

b) We see his sovereignty, authority, power and judgment as Jesus displayed, always used in love,

(1) Use to heal, to forgive, to restore, to redeem and save

c) We see Jesus as Judge, fisherman, landowner, merchant, shepherd, lamb of God, High Priest, and King;

(1) Seeking to save, not to condemn

(2) Seeking to sort things out, so that the weeds and bad fish are no longer around to contaminate his people

(3) Seeking to restore, to redeem, to make things good and right and glorious, and at one with God

d) As in the parables of the treasure in the field and the pearl;

(1) We see him laying down his life to possess and free his precious people and defeat the evil that afflicts and destroys them

e) We see him as the fisherman and the farmer sorting things out and setting things right

(1) using his power and authority to oppose those who hurt and harm his people

f) We see him sharing our life, and inviting us to share in his, so that he can lead us to abandon sin because it divides us from God and hurts us and others, leading to destruction, , to separation, to suffering, mourning and death

(1) We see him at the cross, take on all the sin and evil and the damage of separation from God, and all the power of death and hell, and rise victorious over it all

g) And at his return we see him using his power and authority to protect his people, to stop evil and injustice out of love

3. In talking about Revelation's picture of the final new world and kingdom on earth, Bell writes;

But the letter does not end with blood and violence.

It ends with two chapters describing a new city, a new creation, a new world that God makes, right here in the midst of this one. It is a buoyant, hopeful vision of a future in which the nations are healed and there is peace on earth and there are no more tears.

This vision we're given here in the final words of the Bible tells us all kinds of things about the big story, the one Jesus invites us in to, the one rooted in, driven by and permeated with God's love.

First, we read that there is no place in this new world for murder and destruction and deceit. There can't be because this new world is free from those evils, which means that it is free from those who would insist on continuing to perpetuate those evils.

This is important, because in speaking of the expansive, extraordinary, infinite love of God there is always the danger of neglecting the very real consequences of God's love, namely God's desire and intention to see things become everything they were always intended to be. For this to unfold, God must say about a number acts and to those who would continue to do them, "Not here you won't."⁵

N. ISN'T THIS WHAT JESUS IS TALKING ABOUT

⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will remove from his Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.

⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father's Kingdom. Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand!

O. THIS IS GOD'S FINAL JUDGMENT

1. His final dealing with all that goes against his love, and his plan to restore the creation to what he intended in the beginning
 - a) To free it from those things which separate it from himself, and make it less than what he wants it to be

⁵ Rob Bell, Love Wins, p. 112-113

CONCLUSION:

A. THIS SHOULD LEAD US TO LISTEN AND UNDERSTAND

1. And to let Jesus live and share his life with us
2. To lead us away from that opposes God, love and real life in his image, to be good seed growing in his good soil, not weeds
3. We don't know exactly how God will deal with those who refuse his love and salvation
 - a) We know he loves them, and will leave no stone unturned to bring them to restoration and redemption in Christ
 - b) We do know, that God will free his creation from sin and suffering by removing evil and those who persist in it
 - c) Death and suffering will be overcome and destroyed.
 - d) All that will remain will be God, his people and his new creation.

4. Joe Tkach wrote on the topic of hell some years back;

Unfortunately, humans don't have a very good handle on either justice or mercy. Humans are not qualified to judge, but Jesus Christ is. He will judge the world righteously (Psalm 9:8; John 5:22; Romans 2:6-11). We can trust his judgment, knowing he will be both righteous and merciful.

When it comes to hell, some parts of the Bible stress anguish and punishment and others use images of destruction and cessation. Rather than trying to make one description conform to the other, we let them both speak. When it comes to hell, we must trust God, not our imagination.⁶

B. THE WHOLE OF SCRIPTURE SHOWS GOD'S LOVING PATIENCE, HIS DILIGENT, LONG SUFFERING ENDEAVOUR TO MAKE US ONE WITH HIM

1. To assure us that we are his dearly loved, treasured, sort after children

⁶ Joseph Tkach, *Hell*, 2001

- a) That he has sent and sacrificed his son in order to make us his
- b) To include us in his Kingdom
- c) To rescue us from weeping and gnashing of teeth
- d) He wants to share himself with us, and to make sure we don't miss out on the priceless opportunity to be part of his glorious life and family

C. SO LET US HEED JESUS' WORDS

- 1. and listen and understand
- 2. and remember always
- 3. that God wants us to be righteous, to shine like the sun in our Father's kingdom
 - a) This is our hope
- 4. And this is the life we are blessed to be able to live in part today, living God's righteous way of love, of making a difference, letting him lead us to get rid of sin and injustice,
- 5. So in even now, we can start shining like the sun, reflecting the light of the Son of God, the Son of Man

D. PRAYER

II. LORD'S SUPPER:

Colossians 1:15-23

¹¹ We also pray that you will be strengthened with all his glorious power so you will have all the endurance and patience you need. May you be filled with joy,^{*} ¹² always thanking the Father. He has enabled you to share in the inheritance that belongs to his people, who live in the light. ¹³ For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, ¹⁴ who purchased our freedom^{*} and forgave our sins.

Christ Is Supreme

¹⁵ Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation,^{*}

¹⁶ for through him God created everything

in the heavenly realms and on earth.

He made the things we can see

and the things we can't see—

such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world.

Everything was created through him and for him.

¹⁷ He existed before anything else,

and he holds all creation together.

¹⁸ Christ is also the head of the church,

which is his body.

He is the beginning,

supreme over all who rise from the dead.^{*}

So he is first in everything.

¹⁹ For God in all his fullness

was pleased to live in Christ,

^{*} Or *all the patience and endurance you need with joy.*

^{*} Some manuscripts add *with his blood.*

^{*} Or *He is the firstborn of all creation.*

^{*} Or *the firstborn from the dead.*

²⁰ and through him God reconciled

everything to himself.

He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth

by means of Christ's blood on the cross.

²¹ This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. ²² Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault.⁷

A. WITH THESE THINGS IN MIND LET US PROCEED TO SHARE IN THE LORD'S SUPPER

1. Being reminded of who we are, because of who Jesus Christ is;

a). ²² Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body

B. BREAD:

1. We remember as we take the bread, how God has in Christ;

a) Existing before anything else, creating and holding all creation together

b) That he has created the church, and as its head holds us all together as his body,

c) Uniting us in himself, and through himself reconciling and uniting us with the Father

d) leading us to be the people we were created to be, living the way of peace and unity

C. WINE:

1. As we take the wine, we remember, and give thanks

a) That Christ is the one through whom God reconciled everything to himself

⁷Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Col 1:11-22). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

b) That God has made peace with everything in heaven and earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross

c) This is God's final judgment and determination upon us and what he invites all to recognise and accept

2. As we read in Colossians 1:21-22

²¹ This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. ²² Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault.⁸

⁸Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Col 1:21-22). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

NOTES

III. CHRISTIAN THOUGHT ON HELL

Christians have debated and struggled with the idea of hell and eternal judgment since the early centuries. Some of the early church fathers talked about the possibility that God would redeem the wicked after death, and some talked about the possibility that most in the end might be redeemed.

Others have taken a hard and fast line, insisting that unless people accept Christ in this life, they will suffer in hell forever.

One of the problems I think that is not addressed by many who hold this traditional line, is not facing up to the issue of the [immortal soul](#),

The immortality of the soul is a Greek concept, not a biblical one.

Jesus taught that immortality is a gift, Paul pointed out that the saved will be made immortal, and put on incorruption.

Another issue is the failure to include the consequences and ramifications of [Jesus' full defeat of death and the consequences of sin at the cross](#).

His descending into the grave, and taking on all of God's just anger and punishment of sin, and satisfying it and dealing with it for all mankind.

The whole stress on preaching hell and damnation in equal part along with God's love and forgiveness seems to be out of kilter with the gospel presented by Jesus and recorded in the NT.

As one theologian said;

“To create anxiety about death only in order to witness to Jesus Christ as Saviour from death is to do thoroughly objectionable theological business with death.”⁹

A. JOSEPH TKACH, 2001

Unfortunately, humans don't have a very good handle on either justice or mercy. Humans are not qualified to judge, but Jesus Christ is. He will judge the world righteously (Psalm 9:8; John 5:22; Romans 2:6-11). We can trust his judgment, knowing he will be both righteous and merciful.

When it comes to hell, some parts of the Bible stress anguish and punishment and others use images of destruction and cessation. Rather than trying to make one description conform to the other, we let them both speak. When it comes to hell, we must trust God, not our imagination.

B. ALAN TORRANCE

AT: When it comes to questions of the future destination of people, very often the people whom we've loved and who have died, I think we just say this — that the only God we know is a God who is all loving and who is all just and all forgiving, who would never do anything that is contrary to his love, to his justice, and to his forgiveness. Therefore we can joyfully commit those people to God and trust those people with God, given that God loves them more even than we do.

I think there's good news even despite the biblical warning about hell. In the dominical warnings, Jesus speaks about hell. Although it does raise a question sometimes whether Jesus in some sense speaks to that in and through the cross and resurrection, whether we need to go back to what Jesus said and interpret it in the light of what he has done, because he descended to hell for us.

⁹ Eberhard Jungel, quoted in Ray Anderson, *Death and Dying*

IV. DEALING WITH PASSAGES ON JUDGMENT AND HELL

When we come across passages on Judgment and Hell

Or any passage in Scripture, it is important that we read it in the context of all of Scripture

And that we remember that all of Scripture is an expression of God, his nature, his will and his plan

That it is there to equip us to know him, and to do the things he has created us to do

We need to avoid just taking a verse or phrase here and there from the Bible and using it like a piece of a jigsaw or a part of a legal contract or piece of legal legislation to justify or prove our particular case, or win and argument

The bible is a living document

We engage with it, not on its own as some legal document that sits inanimate as an authority in itself

But as a book that belongs to God, that he inspired to be created, and that he inspires us to learn from

A book that he inspired for us to learn about him, so we can understand who he is, and how he loves us

How he created us in his image, to live with him, and to be like him, and to the things he created us to do

1. Part of what Jesus did to make this solution possible was to defeat evil

By vicariously taking the place of every human being, in living in the image of God perfectly as the second Adam

And offering his perfect worship and faithfulness to God as ours

But along with this; he also vicariously took on all the disbelief, opposition, sin, hatred and evil actions that are all in the end against God

He allowed himself to be subject to it, to be victimised by it, and put to death by it

He descended into “hell”, took upon himself all the just punishment, including all the guilt, all the suffering that is brought about by sin, including death itself. The final separation from God.

But in he Resurrection he rose triumphant over death and hell.

B. T.F. TORRANCE

“The cross not only opposes the human will to isolate itself from God and so to reject God, but so takes that rejection, that sinful refusal by humanity upon himself ...in pure grace he gathers men and women in spite of their awful wickedness into fellowship with himself and refuses to let them go.... Therefore if a sinner is reprobated, if a sinner goes to hell, it is not because God rejected them, for God has only chosen to love them, and has only accepted them in Christ who died for them on the cross consummated the divine act of love in accepting them and in taking their rejection upon himself. If anyone goes to hell they go to hell, only because, inconceivably, they refuse the positive act of the divine acceptance of them, and refuse to acknowledge that God has taken their rejection of him upon himself... ..If therefore any person goes to hell, it is by downright refusal of the perfected work of reconciliation in which God in Christ has already chosen them in pure love and removed enmity between God and man entirely.” (Torrance, Atonement, p. 156-7)

(1) Defeat of evil

TF Torrance, says, “But in the cross, Jesus Christ descended into that awful *sheol* of human existence, into hell itself, and into that hell as it became hell to the utmost under the final judgement of God on the cross upon our sinful existence. By his atonement, he broke into it and broke it open, leading captivity captive, and how he holds the keys of death and hell in his power.” (TF Torrance, Atonement, p.131).

C. KARL BARTH

1. gives a wise caution about the debate over hell and final judgment.

One should at least be stimulated by the passage, Colossians 1:19, which admittedly states that God has determined through His Son as His image and as the first-born of the whole Creation to ‘reconcile all things to himself,’ to consider whether the concept [of universalism] could not perhaps have a good meaning. .
.This much is certain, that we have no theological right to set any sort of limits to the loving-kindness of God which as appeared in Jesus Christ¹⁰.

D. JURGEN MOLTMANN:

The coming judge is the one who was judged and put to death on the cross. The one who will come as judge of the world is the one ‘who bears the sins of the world’ and who has himself suffered the sufferings of the victims of injustice and violence. About him we can say with Paul: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory (the victory of life); Death where is thy sting? Hell where is thy victory?’ (I Cor. 15:55.). The divine justice which Christ will bring about for all human beings and for all things will not be the justice that establishes what is good and what is evil; nor will it be the retributive justice which rewards the good and punishes the wicked. It will be God’s creative justice which brings justice for the victims and puts the perpetrators right. The victims do not have to remain victims to all eternity, and the perpetrators do not have to remain perpetrators forever. The victims of sin and violence will receive justice. They will be raised up, put right, healed and brought into life. The perpetrators of sin and violence will receive a justice which transforms and rectifies. They will be already transformed inasmuch as they will be redeemed only together with their victims. They will be saved by the crucified Christ, who will encounter them together with their victims. They will ‘die’ to their misdeeds in order to be ‘born again’ together with their victims to a new, common life. Paul expresses this transforming grace with the image of fire: ‘If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire’ (I Cor. 3:15). The image of the end-time fire has nothing to do with the stake or with the apocalyptic destruction of the world through fire. It is an image for God’s love, which burns away everything which is contrary to God, so that the person whom God has created will be saved.

As the coming judge of the victims and perpetrators of sin, the risen Christ will bear the suffering of the one and the burden of the other, so as to bring both out of the rule of darkness into the light of God’s kingdom.

What is the purpose of Christ’s judgment?

When the victims are raised up and the perpetrators put right, the purpose is not the great reckoning, with reward and punishment; the intention is to bring about the victory of the creative divine righteousness and justice over everything godless in heaven, on earth, and beneath the earth. This victory of the divine righteousness does not lead to the separation of human beings into the saved and the damned, or to the end of the world; its purpose is to lead to God’s great day of reconciliation on this earth. On judgment day ‘every tear will be wiped from their eyes’, the tears of suffering as well as the rears of remorse, for ‘there will be no more mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more’ (Rev. 21.4). ‘Earth will be purified from the being of sin and death’. The shadows of sin disappear with the power of death. The powers of annihilation will be annihilated. So the last judgment is not the end of God’s works, nor is the last thing of all; it is not last but penultimate. It is only a first step in a transition from transience to nontransience. What is final is only the new, eternal creation, which will be brought into being on the foundation of righteousness. ... It is a creative righteousness related to this future, a righteousness which creates justice, heals and rectifies. The judgment is not at the service of sin and death, as if it were the great settling of an account. It serves the new creation. ... It was the fault of Christian tradition, in picture and concept, in piety and doctrine, to look only at the judgment on the past of this world, and not to perceive, thought and beyond that judgment, God’s new world, and in consequence of this omission it failed to believe in the new beginning in the end.¹¹

If judging in the final judgment is a social judging, then it is a *cosmic judging* too... All the disrupted conditions in creation must be put right so that the new creation can stand on the firm ground of righteousness and justice, and can endure to eternity. That means the relationships between human beings as well as relations between human beings and the world of the living in the earthly community of creation. Not least, it means the disruptions which make all created being, even apart from human beings, sigh and long for redemption.

¹⁰ Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, p 61-62

¹¹ Jurgen Moltmann, *Sun of Righteousness, Arise! –God’s Future for Humanity and the Earth*, 2010, Fortress Press, p. 136-138.

...God will dwell in everything and the 'present in all'. Paul's concern in I Corinthians 15 and Philipians 2 is *the universal glorification of God*. This embraces the *universal reconciliation* of human beings and the *bringing again of all things* into the new eternal creation. Otherwise God would not be God.

Nothingness will be annihilated, death will be slain, the power evil will be dissolved. What will be dispelled from all created beings is sin, the misery of separation from the living God; hell will be destroyed. It is only the negation of the negative which provides the foundation for the indestructible position of the positive. And this is the beginning of the kingdom of glory.

Because the resurrection of Christ opens up the vista of a world without death and without hell, the problem whether all will be redeemed, or only a few, solves itself of its own accord. The Christian idea of universal salvation is based on cosmic Christology, according to which 'death will be destroyed' (I Cor. 15:26) and hell annihilated.¹²

E. ROB BELL

Rob Bell, in his controversial book, *Love Wins*, which is subtitled; "A book about Heaven, Hell, and the fate of every person who ever lived; makes the point that if God loves us and has given his Son for us to save us, and not condemn us, then why would he condemn all those who have never had a chance to know him to suffer in agony in an ever-burning hell for eternity

'untold masses of people suffering forever doesn't bring God glory.
Restoration brings God glory; eternal torment doesn't. Reconciliation brings God glory; endless anguish doesn't. Renewal and return cause God's greatness to shine through the universe; never-ending punishment doesn't.'¹³

F. RAY ANDERSON

In the light of God's revelation of His intention to take his own wrath and judgment against sin upon Himself, do we really know about the final status of those who die and who are confronted with this God? We do not know of a God who dispenses eternal judgement who is not also the God who has taken this judgement upon Himself in Christ."¹⁴

I also think the way many read scripture, looking for legal like clauses and definitions to prove a particular view misses the mark, failing to see that Scripture is Spirit inspired to lead us to God, to know who he is, and who we are because of who he is as Father, Son, Spirit. It is more in the fuller picture of God's nature and will that we then find answers to questions regarding matters such as the cross, atonement, wrath and hell. This to me is where Trinitarian theology leads us to, the perfect love of God casting out fear of punishment, (in the context of this discussion, the fear of an everlasting punishment in hell fire that belies all that Scripture witnesses to about the God of love who has wrought salvation and wrathfully dealt with all that is anti God through the death of his Son). In contrast, too much reform theology, (notably Calvinism and many "noisy" modern American reformed theologians), leads us away from who God is, to long, lawyer like, intricate arguments based on here a little there a little (let's not let a loving God get in the way of a good skilful assemblage of texts). They end up missing clear and plain tree trunk (who God is, and his loving plan for all, in which through Christ all are rescued and redeemed from God's wrath against sin, and given new life in and with him). They end up caught up in a huge pile of branches they have painstakingly assembled (that is spiked with an out of balance view of judgement and condemnation that fails to take into account the true purpose and effect of the sacrifice of Jesus for all mankind).

There is a great ironical truth in a statement Jungel makes (quoted by Ray Anderson), "To create anxiety about death only in order to witness to Jesus Christ as Saviour from death is to do thoroughly objectionable theological business with death."

¹² Moltmann, p. 141-142

¹³ Rob Bell, *Love Wins*, p.108

¹⁴ Ray Anderson, *Theology, Death and Dying*, p.78-79

Anderson adds, “Jesus ‘emptied himself’ of all self-determination in order to follow the fate of his fellow humans into the deepest crevice of human estrangement. He was fully human, fully prepared to die, fully prepared to descend into hell. ...He assumed the form of humanity, under sentence of death, and took it straight to hell where the Father found him and brought him back to life and glory. ...I believe that Jesus Christ descended into hell following his death on the cross and there suffered the ‘eternal punishment’, including all of the torment of which the Bible speaks. Nothing should be taken away from the reality of the language used in the New Testament concerning hell and eternal punishment as a consequence of total estrangement from God. But, at the same time, nothing should be ‘left outside’ of the punishment which Christ assumed and endured on behalf of human beings. I believe Christ was not only raised from the grave but also raised from hell. This belief is grounded on the positive relationship which is assured to us by the Spirit of Christ which dwells in us, by which we are ‘rescued from the power of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of his beloved Son.’ (Col. 1:13). I believe that in the final judgment, Christ will himself decide the eternal destiny of all human beings.” (“Dancing With Wolves While Feeding the Sheep”, p.87-88).

“The ‘sting of death’ has been removed. The means by which death has been nullified in its power to bring condemnation has not been achieved by appealing to a motive of love in God more worthy of praise than His wrath; [which is what Galli seems to be saying about Bell] rather, His wrath has been felt totally and unmediated in the midst of His love. The love of God in Jesus Christ cannot be known without also coming near to the terrible judgment, and condemnation of God on the cross. This is the benchmark of a theology of death.” (Anderson, p.79-80).