

# HELL



*Medieval superstition? Embarrassment to the church?*

David Snoke, City Reformed Church, April 2012

## *The intrinsic problem for evangelicals*

We are evangelistic.

Therefore we want to be winsome.

Therefore we want to present a “positive” message.

Therefore we tend to downplay or remove “difficult” doctrines.

But what are we winning people over for?

Is our primary goal to make them temporarily happy or to save their lives?

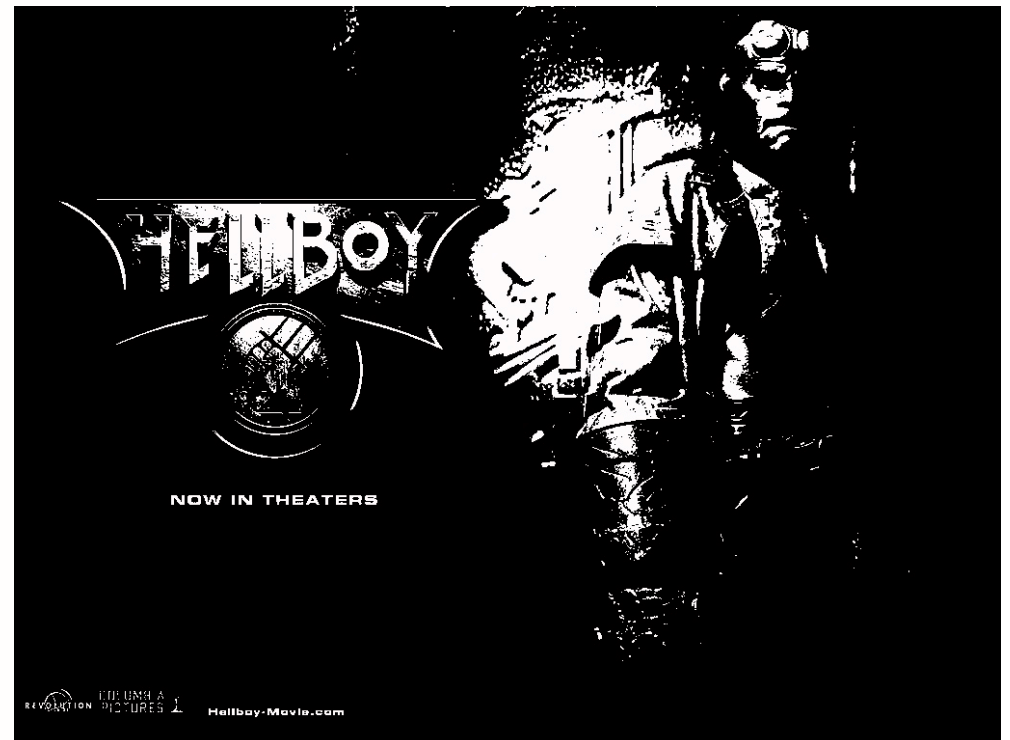
If hell is, in fact, real, then we need to make it known.

Some emergent leaders such as Rob Bell have openly attacked doctrine of hell.

Saying we don't go to hell and others do sounds proud.

Our general attitude is one of humility.

Eternal punishment seems unjust to many people.



## ***The Problem of Justice***

Kant's argument of justice:

1. We cannot believe in good or evil without a concept of justice:

If good does not bring about good consequences, and there are no bad consequences to bad deeds, then calling something "good" or "evil" amounts to saying "I like this" and "I don't like that." (Mach)

(Despite many attempts to define good in absence of justice, most find them unsatisfying—as witnessed by continual new attempts.)

2. Clearly there is no justice in this world.

The Bible states this directly in many places— it is honest about the world.

## ***The Problem of Justice***

3. Therefore if we believe in justice, we must believe in an ultimate future judgment.

Final justice gives meaning to doing good at a cost in this life.

## ***The Problem of Justice***

4. A future judgment demands a judge who is all-knowing, all-just, able to raise the dead, and able to overcome any opposition. Otherwise justice could be thwarted.

We could reject the concept of justice altogether, but *can we?*

## ***Hell and the dignity of people: the dilemma of modern man***

Final judgment says that everything we do is *extremely significant*, and will be remembered forever.



R.C. Sproul: “Right now counts forever.”

(No one judges a worm.)

Removing final judgment removes significance: right and wrong deeds do not ultimately matter.

If we hope in this life only, all is “vanity”. (Ecclesiastes, Job)

“Stuff happens and then you die.”



Final Justice and eternal accounting for our deeds is therefore good news to our society:

You matter, and your deeds matter, eternally! You are not a mere meat puppet!





## ***Principles of Justice***

Many people see hell as a terrible punishment given to basically good people.

They see evangelicals as saying that people escape hell on basis of a little ritual of saying they believe in Jesus.

Two injustices: too hard a punishment, and too easy an escape.

Our starting premise must be God's *perfect justice*:

No sin will be punished too much– or too little.

Crimes against each person will be recompensed. Truly good deeds will be rewarded.

## ***Principles of Justice***

Our evangelism should not present God as unjust, overpunishing, but bring about consciousness of sin: How would I fare if I was judged perfectly justly?

We usually can't answer that question for another person (we don't know their heart) and don't want to because it offends.

But I can say for myself whether I can rest on my good outweighing my evil.

The issue is do I think of myself as basically good, or basically evil?

Hell is unjust if basically good people are sent there.

## ***Principles of Justice***

*Point 1. No one is condemned for being “imperfect.” People are condemned for being evil.*



One “mistake” does not condemn us, but one truly evil act does.

“Perfectionists” are unjust, because they expect perfection from people of limited ability. Finiteness is not a sin.

## ***Principles of Justice***

*Point 2. No one is condemned for not hearing about Jesus. Jesus came to save sinners who were already under judgment.*

(But we can add to our sin by rejecting Jesus.)



## ***Principles of Justice***

*Point 3. Justice is perfectly proportional. We “heap up” punishment.*

### ***Are There Degrees of Sin?***

Any sin is evil and can lead to separation from God; but not all sins the same.  
To say otherwise is to deny reality.

If not, why not go ahead and do much more sin?

# *Principles of Justice*

## **Westminster Larger Catechism**

Q. 150. Are all transgressions of the law of God equally heinous in themselves, and in the sight of God?

A. All transgressions of the law of God are not equally heinous; but some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others.



## ***Principles of Justice***

*Point 4. We will be judged by the standards we know in our own conscience, not by laws we have never heard of.*



Mitigating factor? “Others caused me to do it!”

Yes!

And by this standard, you are condemned for everything evil others do, that you caused.





Our response to a clear look at justice should be to cry woe because we deserve wrath, not to accuse God of injustice.



## ***Principles of Grace***

The difficult problem the Bible wrestles with is not, why do bad things happen to good people, but how can God be just and acquit evil people?

Grace is not based on a ritual, but on *covenant*.

We “belong” to Jesus, and so all that he has belongs to us.

### **Heidelberg Catechism**

Q1. What is thy only comfort in life and death?

A: That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ; who, with his precious blood, has fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by his Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto him.

## *Principles of Grace*

Grace is just and legal if our union with Christ is real.

Why is faith crucial for this union?

We cast ourselves on him “body and soul”.



## ***Images of our Union with Christ***

He is “in us”

We are ingrafted in him who is the Vine

We are “in him”

We have his life in us

We are his adopted children

We eat him and drink him

We are his Bride

We have his fountain of living water in us

We are “united” to him

We are his Body

We are “co-planted” with him

We are living stones built into his Temple

We have the “divine seed” in us

We are slaves bought by him

We have the Holy Spirit in us

We are covenanted to him

The Father and Son make their home in us

We are “yoked” to him

We are citizens of his kingdom, not aliens

We are “baptized into” him

We “put on” Christ as clothing

## ***Creative alternatives to hell***

*Universalism*: Hell exists in principle but no one actually goes there.  
(Variation: people only go there temporarily, as a sort of purgatory.)

If we know God forgives all people, will not some evil people presume on that?

Heinrich Heine: "*Dieu me pardonnera. C'est son métier.*"  
("God will forgive me. It's his job.")



## ***Creative alternatives to hell***

*Annihilationism*: Hell is temporary, and then we are annihilated.

Justice issue: Can we say “It was worth it” for any finite punishment?

Spiritual issue: people are intrinsically eternal.

Without eternity we still have problem of meaninglessness/no dignity.

## ***Creative alternatives to hell***

*“Separation from God”*: It isn’t really so bad, just a bit lonely.

Why would Jesus use so many analogies of fire and suffering?  
(Almost all we know of hell is from Jesus.)

Perfect justice is not satisfied by merely a “resting place.”

*“Valhalla”*: We live eternally but there is never a judgment.

The evil win forever!



## **A Final Word:**

Humility in Bible is not saying “maybe those apart from Christ go to heaven.”

It is saying “maybe I am not in Christ myself.”



# **“Assurance”**

## **Westminster Confession of Faith**

This faith is different in degrees, weak or strong; may be often and many ways assailed, and weakened, but gets the victory: growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance, through Christ, who is both the author and finisher of our faith.

As there is no sin so small, but it deserves damnation; so there is no sin so great, that it can bring damnation upon those, who truly repent.

Our normal state should not be constantly twisting in doubt about our fate.

Assurance is not based of works (though these increase assurance) but on the basis of faith.

Have I “cast myself on him”?

## Westminster Confession of Faith

ALTHOUGH hypocrites and other unregenerate men may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favor of God,...yet such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love Him in sincerity, endeavouring to walk in all good conscience before Him, may, in this life, be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace....

This certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion grounded upon a fallible hope; but an infallible assurance of faith founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God, which Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption.

True believers may have the assurance of their salvation in diverse ways shaken, diminished, and intermitted...yet are they never utterly destitute of that seed of God, and life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren, that sincerity of heart, and conscience of duty, out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may, in due time, be revived, and by which, in the mean time, they are supported from utter despair.

Evangelical belief is not a glib assurance of our pardon while condemning others.

It is a sober, heartfelt realization that we are possibly more evil than others, and deserve condemnation, and casting ourselves body and soul on the one who can save us.

From this God lifts us up to dignity and joy, as his children and Bride, beyond a mere pardon.

We invite others who also are convicted of their sins to join us.

“One beggar showing others where to find food.”



