

## Heaven, Hell, and the Resurrection

(Greg Boyd and Paul Eddy)

### PRESENTATIONS:

**Introduction (Shawna Boren):** We're gonna pray, and then we're gonna get going, OK? Thank you guys again for being here. Thank you for you people watching live online, we're really excited and we think it's gonna be a good time...very informative too, so, let's pray. God I thank you for an opportunity to come here tonight just to thank and to hear and to process and to learn. Father I thank you for those of us who have had questions about these topics, uh, for some of us years, some of us just a few days or months or whatever. I thank you for a place to come and just kind of get some of those answers that we've been seeking. Lord I pray your wisdom would fill this place. I pray that your presence would be felt in this place and I pray that your spirit of love would be embraced in this place tonight, oh God. I thank you for Paul, I thank you for Greg. I thank you for, um, the being here and sharing what they have studied, what they have learned, what they are bringing to us. I just, I'm so thankful for a place where we can just come and really dialogue about some of the tough things and things that we have questions about. Lord I thank you so much for every person here. We pray that they would be bold to ask what they want to ask and everyone would just go away feeling like they've got a little bit better understanding about this whole topic. So we thank you for these things and we praise you, and we just give you glory tonight in Jesus name, amen.

**Greg:** Amen.

**Paul:** Amen. [Pause. Paul walks to the podium] Good evening. "Heaven, hell and the resurrection." What brought us to this topic, how do we, how did we get here tonight? Well, in a sense, the story starts with a book [holds up Rob Bell's book, "Love Wins"]. A book; Rob Bell's book. Actually, the story starts before Rob Bell's book hit the shelves. A few weeks before Rob's book came out, rumors were circulating on what it might contain. And a blogger, one of the people surmising what might be in the book gave his thoughts and that sent a cavalcade of tweets all over the world, apparently. [Looks to Greg] What was it like the most tweeted topic for...?

**Greg:** It was in the top ten.

**Paul:** Top ten that day.

**Greg:** That day. And that was right after the Oscars, or whatever.

**Paul:** OK, that says a lot.

**Greg:** Lot of competition.

**Paul:** When theological controversy hits top ten... Um, so yeah, the Twitter thing and then finally the book came out and within a month, uh, the controversy had hit the cover of Time magazine. And you had "What if There is No Hell?" [Shows cover of Time magazine] as the cover story on Time for the end of April. This controversy went everywhere. It sent Rob's book to the New York Times bestseller list, it put it in the top ten of Amazon, of course, maybe still is there. I don't know, but one thing you can almost always be certain of: any time theological controversy hits the shores of America, you can be certain that one guy will always turn up. [Picture of Greg Boyd goes up on the screen, posed with his pinky to his mouth, audience laughs] And he did. Greg was there. Greg was there in a number of ways. Two people were asked to do written endorsements of the book, one of them was Greg. So Greg, from the moment this came out, was involved. But even before it came out Greg was involved because, because he had done an endorsement, he was actually one of the few people who had read an actual copy of the book before it got out and so Greg did a blog in response to some of this Tweet craziness that was going on. And so Greg was attached to this controversy pretty quickly. Greg, ah, he just loves controversy. Probably not a lot of you have had the privilege of seeing Greg in his home office. It's a sight: books wall to wall, his chair, sort of like a throne, sits in the room, and computers and just "smart stuff" all over the place. And he, when a controversy comes up, he really gets into it. I mean, very little sleep, he will admit that, during these times. Sometimes he gets so into it...

**Greg:** Are we getting a little off topic here? [Laughs]

**Paul:** No! This is dead center! [Audience laughs] He has costumes that he puts on sometimes just to kind of get in the mood. [Audience laughs] [To Greg] Deny it. I'd like to see you deny it...

**Greg:** I deny it!

**Paul:** Do you really?!

**Greg:** Yeah!

**Paul:** Come on.

**Greg:** What are you talking about?

**Paul:** Dude! That time I came in you were wearing that big hat, remember? You...

**Greg:** Wha...you were looking in the mirror or something, I don't...

**Paul:** I took a picture because I knew you would deny it. [A picture pops up on screen of Greg wearing a large Pope hat, audience laughs] Big official hats, lot of things...

**Greg:** I got a big hat.

**Paul:** Big official hats; a lot of things to get you in the mood of theology.

**Greg:** Welcome to Paul's world.

**Paul:** In any case, this is why we're here tonight and we're going to explore some interesting topics. Heaven, hell, and resurrection is the topic for tonight, and that means it's a broad range of issues that theologians usually package under the label of "eschatology"; a long, multi-syllable word that simply means "a study of what happens when we die". The afterlife. Greg and I are going to take a few minutes of teaching time right now and we're gonna focus on a small section of eschatology, namely, the doctrine of hell. Because that's where this controversy is sort of really...really centered around. But, when we come to the Q&A [Question and Answer] time, feel free to let your questions range widely over any issues regarding the afterlife and the topics that are in the title, there.

With regard to hell, though, kind of the center of this current controversy...You know, hell has been an interesting topic for Christians for two millennia. Within a few years of the Biblical text being written, we know that early Christians were beginning to speculate about the nature of this place that turns up in the Bible fairly frequently, this place that we call "hell". Early Christians, actually in the second and third centuries produced a number of texts that basically take people on a tour of hell, what you'd see if you were there. And thing get pretty graphic, pretty frightening, quite honest, with some of these early imaginations of what hell might be like.

By the time of the Middle Ages, of course, if anything this had grown. "Dante's Inferno" did a lot to ignite that, a famous book. And, that book ever since has ignited western imagination about what hell might be like. What I found most fascinating as I was kind of looking through, taking a history of hell over the last week or so, was what's happened in America with regard to hell in the last few years. There have been a number of polls for several decades asking questions like: 1) Do you believe in hell? 2) If you do, what do you think it's like?...these sorts of questions. In 1952 a poll was taken;

58 percent of Americans polled that year said they believed in hell. In 1965 that had dropped to 54 percent. By 1981, the number of people believing in hell had dropped to 53 percent, so hovering just over half. You might think the tendency toward decline would keep up but that's not quite at all what happened. One decade later in 1991, US News and World put out a story called "The Rekindling of Hell" because they were surprised to find that in the last ten years, between '81 and '91, the whole thing had reversed. By 1991, the numbers were back up past 1952. In 1991, 60 percent of Americans said they believed in hell. Ten years later, 2000, uh, US New and World did another cover story on hell, this one proclaiming that now the numbers were up to 64 percent [Cover of US News and World shown, article entitled "Hell: A new vision of the netherworld"]. What they also noted, was while numbers were rising in the belief in hell, so were numbers rising in the diversity of how people were imaging hell to be. So, while belief is up, so is debate as to what this thing and this place is really like. The last poll I was able to get my hands on was 2008 Baylor Religion Survey which was one of the most widely canvassing polls on religion that American had ever done. And in this poll, according to the Baylor Survey team, people who said they were either *certain* there was a hell, or at least that it was highly likely, turned out to be 73 percent of the population, almost  $\frac{3}{4}$ . And so, interestingly, today far more people in American seem to believe in hell than in the 1950s. It's been a topic that has continued to garner interest.

What does the Bible say about hell? And a lot of, in a sense...that is a lot of what tonight is about; trying to get a Biblical sense of what is up with this concept of hell. I'm just gonna say a couple of words about that up front to sort of set the stage for our conversation. When you find the English word "hell" in the Bible, it's either, it's translating one of a couple of Hebrew or Greek words. The Greek word...the *Hebrew* word in the Old Testament, it's typically translating as "sheol", which really just means "place of the dead". And what we know from the Old Testament is that there is not a very detailed understanding of the afterlife, either heaven or hell in the Old Testament. It just isn't there. It's sort of a, uh, murky topic in the Old Testament. When the New Testament comes, we've had a lot more revelation by that time. The word "hell" in English translates at least three Greek words in the New Testament. One of those words is "hades"; and that word, taken from the Greek context, is very similar to the word "sheol" in Hebrew, and it means "place of the dead". Once in the New Testament, in one of Peter's letters, the word "tartarus" is used, again, referring to "place of the dead". But the most interesting word, I think, that gets translated into "hell" in English is "gehenna", the Greek word "gehenna". Twelve times the word "gehenna" is used in the New Testament. And "gehenna" literally means "Valley of Hinnom" and it referred to the valley just southwest of Jerusalem; the valley that by the time of Jesus' day had been turned into the city garbage dump. It's a place of refuse [rubbish, garbage], a

place where criminals were buried. It's a place that literally burned with fire 24/7 because the garbage of Jerusalem kept being thrown into it and it just kept burning all the time. And so it was an apt image to use in Jerusalem in Jesus' day because everyone knew what the garbage dump looked like, it was, as it was burning, constantly. And so, not surprisingly, as this word "gehenna" is used for "hell", these sorts of words describe it: furnace of fire, a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. As one scholar says, "Of course gnashing of teeth would be going on in a garbage dump because wild dogs and animals would be there literally fighting over scraps of food." Gnashing of teeth would be a very apt analogy there. Uh, "outer darkness" is also a descriptor commonly used. Furnace of fire, outer darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth, these three seem to be the most common images the New Testament offers of this place called hell.

For two thousand years, Christians have tried to make sense out of not just "what is this place like", but "what is the purpose of it?" "What is the logic of hell?" Why would God have a place like this? I'm just gonna end my little section here by running through the four main views, that through church history, Christians have posed as to "what is up with hell?"

The **Traditional View** is that hell *is* a place of eternal fire, where people burn and suffer forever, traditional view. They take the passages very literally in the New Testament about a place and furnace of fire. Through centuries, uh, Christians, some Christians have held to this view. Jonathan Edwards may be one of the most famous in American history. His sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" clearly expresses the terror and horror of this sort of place. In another document, Jonathan Edwards makes clear why there is a hell, and he says this, "When the people in heaven shall look upon the people in hell, it will serve to give them a greater sense of their own happiness. What a great sense this would give them of the wonderful grace of God to them." And so, people in heaven will be all the more thankful for the grace that has come to them when they see the torment of the people in hell. Some people have not appreciated that view so much.

Another view, we could call the **Modified Traditional View** take very seriously the notion of an eternal hell, that there will be people suffering forever. But it gets modified in this way, "Hell is imagined as a place, or state of being, where people eternally suffer the torment of being separated from God and everything that is good." It's not like you need a fire to be tormented, or demons tormenting you. All you need to do is choose *not* God and God allows you to have your choice. And that, itself, is ultimate torment. C.S. Lewis, probably more than anyone else, has made this view famous in his little novel, "The Great Divorce" when he imagines that hell is literally a

place of extreme torment about the loneliness and isolation and pain of having a broken relationship from God and everyone else. You are left with yourself and that is hell. In his book, "The Problem of Pain" where he explores this, Lewis says, "hell is locked on the inside, not the outside." God doesn't lock you in hell, you've locked yourself in hell. A Modified Traditional View.

Another view, known as the **Annihilationist View** is pretty different from the first two. It says that hell brings about the complete annihilation of a person so that they no longer exist. Hell is eternal in the sense that you don't exist forever, but you don't consciously suffer pain forever since you no longer exist. You literally are burned up in the process of being in hell. People who hold this view point to a number of passages in the New Testament that talk about the body being destroyed in hell (Matthew 10:28) or II Thessalonians 9 where Paul says that "these will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction". And they take that word "destruction" very literally, that people will be destroyed in hell, nothing left to suffer. And John Stott would be one example of someone who holds that view. John Stott is a British Evangelical and some have likened him unto the Billy Graham of Britain. He's a leading Evangelical theologian.

Final view: the **Universalist View**. This view, again, is very different from the other three. This view says hell is temporary and remedial. Hell is used to teach people to love God and others, and eventually it will be emptied and all people will eventually be saved. Some have said that this is a purely liberal view, kind of a modern notion. But the fact is this view has been entertained by Christians since the second and third centuries. People like Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, some of the early church fathers entertained the possibility that God might save everybody because God's love was just that big. So, this isn't just a modern view. One common person in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, George MacDonald, is well known for this view in the modern world. Uh, this person if you're not aware of him is a Scottish writer and C.S. Lewis referred to MacDonald as his master; great literary inspiration for Lewis. One person; one example of someone who holds to a Universalist View.

Four views that Christians to this day continue to wrestle with on "what is the nature of hell". Greg?

**Greg:** Thank you, great! Thanks for coming, you guys. [Audience applause] Appreciate you being here tonight; appreciate all those who are tuning in on live stream. Important issue. I tweeted this as I was getting ready to come over here that here we're talking about hell, and some other things, but when I was leaving they said it was 103 degrees. And this is *Minnesota*! Hottest day on record for this day. Now do you think that's just a coincidence, huh? Come on. [Audience laughs] Well, here's the thing, on this topic, as

on several other topics, I used to be really confident in what I believed. I was just pretty sure that um, of course I had only one perspective on it. It's easy to be pretty confident on what you believe when you are only aware of one perspective.

As I've kind of evolved on my thinking on this issue, and that continues to happen to me, I've become convinced that the most important aspect of this discussion, as I think in every theological discussion, is that your life is rooted in Jesus Christ not in the certainty that you have the right opinions about this. And whatever views you have, and of course if you have them you think they're right, but it shouldn't add to our security that we think we're right on this. I could be very wrong and it's not gonna affect my well being, it's not gonna affect who I am, my worth, my sense of security. In fact, the second most important question, maybe this is the most important question about hell is this: trust God and live in a way that you don't have to worry about this. That really, when it's all said and done, that's where the rubber hits the road. I find, and I've studied this, I can really see how Godly and intelligent and educated and sincere people believe every one of those four views that Paul just delineated, because there's passages that support each one of them. I just gotta honestly acknowledge that. There are verses that are certainly more easily read to support the Traditional View. So you have Jesus' famous saying in Matthew 25,

“They will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

That's pretty clear, there it is. End of discussion. Although, we'll come back to the word “eternal” here in a little bit. Uh, you've got passages that strongly support Annihilationism; in fact, my own opinion is that this has the strongest weight in scripture. For example, Paul says,

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

So the contrast is between life and death, or life and destruction, or life and perishing. For God so loved the world He gave His only begotten son that those who believe in Him would not *perish*. And so you've got a lot of verses that seem to support Annihilationism. *And* you have, and this is the value of, I think, Rob Bell's book, he forces readers to come to grips with it or at least wrestle with them. And I like...the reason I endorsed the book was not that I agree with everything Rob Bell holds to, although he wasn't very definitive in the book at all, he likes to sort of...that's kind of Rob, he likes to push the button and explore possibilities and invite readers in on a dialogue, which is, I think, a real positive thing. But there are a lot of verses that a Universalist have always appealed to. They didn't make this up because they think hell's

unpleasant and they don't want to believe it. No! There are passages that support this. So, in Romans 5 Paul says,

"Just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act (referring to Jesus Christ's death on the cross) resulted in justification and life for all."

"All" in Adam, "all" in Christ. And then Paul says in I Corinthians 15,

"For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."

And if those were the only passages you had to go on, well then you'd be a Universalist. And so, see, there's support for all these views. We don't have to question someone's sincerity for holding their view because they've got some scriptural support behind it. The question is how do we put this together? How do we make sense out of all this and put it together? What I want to do here in the next eight minutes, or so, is to say three things: I'll make two principles that guide me in my thinking on this, and I'll make one observation that I think is important to this discussion.

First of all, the two principles that I...that guide my thinking on this. Number one is, I believe, the foundation for everything is the revelation of God in Christ. And that's the revelation that 'God is Love' (I John 4:8). In his very essence, God *is* love. It's the most radical, most simple, most beautiful, most foundational revelation in the whole New Testament. God looks like Jesus Christ dying on the cross for the very people who crucified Him. The Bible defines love; the New Testament defines love by pointing us to Jesus. This is the kind of love that God is. John says in I John 3:16,

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for one another."

That's how you know what love is! It sacrifices for the other. It chooses to give yourself up on behalf of the other. It ascribes worth to the other at cost to yourself. And so, here's the heart of God. This is what God really looks like. In Hebrews 1:3, Jesus reveals the very essence of God, the face of God's character, the radiance of His glory. And so the cross tells us what God's heart is. Um, He's self sacrificial, He's the kind of God who's hoping, as He's dying on the cross, with His last breath He prays for the forgiveness of those who are crucifying Him, "Father forgive them, they don't know what they're doing."

So what does this say about hell? It says this is something I read the other day as I was reflecting on this Q&A session. *The cross reveals that God would rather experience hell* (because He dies a God forsaken hellish death on the cross) *out of love for his*

*enemies than to send them there.* And so, as we think about hell, and every other topic, I think the forefront has gotta be the character of God. One of the things I loved about Rob Bell's book, even if you don't agree with the direction he's thinking in, he nails the character of God. The God who looks like Jesus Christ, "If you see me, you've seen the Father" (John 14). And so, whatever else we think, if love is God's essence, then it's not just one of the attributes, so you can contrast it with other attributes of God. It is the *essence* of all the attributes! So really we shouldn't say, people are saying, "Well, love *and* justice" as though we have to kind of contrast the two. But it really should be "love *as* justice", "love *as* God's wrath". Everything God does is done out of a motive of love and love looks like Jesus Christ. So we gotta filter that in, uh, to our thinking about God.

Number two. Having said that, hell *is* TERRIBLE! Jesus warned a lot about hell. There's some hyperbole in these statements, sure, but He says it's better to pluck your eye out than it is to go to hell. It's better to cut your hand off than it is to go to hell. It's better to have a millstone tied to your neck and drown in the sea than it is to go to hell. And He's warning people about "gehenna". He's always talking about, and this is very graphic to them, they all know about that dump and He's saying that to reject the Good News and to reject God's love is to put yourself in a garbage dump like that. And there's a warning component there and you find that throughout the New Testament. It is one of, and this is not very popular today, but it's one of the things that Jesus uses to motivate people. "Repent!" Repent means you turn around. And He's not afraid to say the reason, one reason why you might want to turn around, repent, is because the direction you're going is a garbage dump. To set yourself at odds with the Creator is to invite into your life horrific consequences. That is hell. And so, Evangelicals have been rightly concerned with any teaching that might water that down. And we live in a culture, the whole western hemisphere really, is in this kind of morass of nonsense when it comes to thinking about things that....I don't mean to be insulting, but it is [Paul laughs]....No! "All roads lead to the same place", "Everything is OK", you know, and it's kind of this "fluffiness" and people actually use comfort as a criteria for truth. "Well, that doesn't make me feel comfortable, I don't think that's true", as though reality would ever conform to our wishes. And so, people who take the Bible seriously, who regard this as God's inspired Word, have rightly said, "Look, there's a warning here, and any teaching that would undermine that warning...there's something very wrong with that." And so we have to hold that out there.

Now, one of the things that helps me as I'm thinking about this is this: we in the western world tend to, and this is kind of a whole tradition here, we tend to, and I've talked a lot about this in messages, we see everything in sort of juristic terms, a "court of law" analogy. Where God's the judge and we're the defendant and things like that.

We tend to frame all issues in legal terms. And so we tend to view hell as a prison. And God throws us into prison and locks us up. And so you have these images of hell with people saying, "Oh! I'm sorry! I want to get out!" But, no, God's not gonna let us out because He's locked it, you know, and then there's torturing and all that kind of stuff. There is legal language used in the Bible when it comes to punishment for sin, but the dominant way of thinking, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament is much more organic, where the punishment for sin is built into the nature of the sin. Now it's still the wrath of God because God's the Creator and he hard-wired it into creation, such that certain ways of living bring about "shalom", wholeness, and salvation. Other ways of living bring about destruction, and perishing, and wrath, and that is the wrath of God. But it's intrinsic; it's the law of cause and effect. We bring it upon ourselves. So, for example, you have this verse, this is just sort of one example of this, but in Psalms it says,

"Those who are pregnant with evil (look at the imagery here) conceive trouble and give birth to disillusionment (it's a natural cause and effect). Those who dig a hole and scoop it out fall into the pit they have made (you dig the hole, you fall in it). The trouble they cause recoils on them; their violence comes down on their own heads." (Psalm 7: 14-16)

There's a kind of ricochet effect. And it's a natural cause and effect. And so in that sense God's judgment is just a matter of saying, as Paul was saying earlier in representing Lewis' view, God lets us go our own way, I think with a grieving heart. Jesus weeps as He's talking about the destruction of Jerusalem, but if you push God away here's the natural law of cause and effect working in motion. So, God is love, looks like Jesus Christ dying on the cross and to reject Him is terrible. The consequences are nightmarish.

Third, however, is this: "Aionios", which is the Greek word that's translated very often as "eternal", is, I believe, an ambiguous word. It's the adjective of "aion", which is the word for "age". So, it literally means "pertaining to an age", or "an indefinite span of time". And Rob talks about this quite a bit in his book. There are a number of other books that have really gone into this in depth in terms of doing lexicographical work and how the word was used in its cultural context. "Aionios" can mean "endless", it can mean that. Sometimes it certainly means that, when it's the adjective associated with a noun that is eternal like "God", it means that, "the age of God is endless. But it doesn't *have* to mean that. And sometimes it certainly does NOT mean that. For example in Romans 16, Paul says,

“Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages (that’s the word “aionios”) past, but now revealed...”

So look, “aionios” came to an end. And so it means an indefinite period of time and it was hidden, but *now* that period of time is done with because it’s been revealed. So, also, in II Timothy 1, it says:

“This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning (“aionios” is the word he uses there) of time but it has now been revealed...”

So, it was an indefinite period of time but it wasn’t literally “endless”.

Last point, and that is that even if “aionios” is interpreted as eternal or everlasting when it’s associated with hell, and there’s debate about that, but even if it is translated “eternal” it doesn’t necessarily mean that hell is experienced *eternally*. And Paul brought this up when he talked about Annihilationism. You could have hell as “eternal duration” and mean by that, and this is the more traditional view, “an endless experience of punishment”. You endure it forever. But it could also mean that hell is eternal in its consequence. In other words, the punishment is “irreversible”. And that’s what the Annihilation View holds, that God *justly* but also *mercifully* puts people out of existence when they come to a state of hopelessness. God would not torture people in a hopeless state for the sheer sake of inflicting pain! If they get to be hopeless, this view holds, that God mercifully and justly “euthanizes” then, so to speak; puts them out of existence. So it could be eternal in a bad sense. You find it that way used in Hebrews 9, he says,

“He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal (aionios) redemption.”

I don’t think anyone thinks that we’re going to be eternally in the process of experiencing redemption as though we were always sinning and always in need of being redeemed. What the author is saying is that he redeemed us once and for all, it’s irreversible and so it’s an eternal redemption. So, also, hell could be eternal in that sense.

So, in summary, I encourage you to trust that God looks like Jesus Christ, whatever view you have, it’s gotta be compatible with the God who chose to experience hell rather than send people there. At the same time, we have to always hold to the Biblical truth that people need to be warned, that the consequences of living without God and making resolute, rebellious decision against Him are terrible. And the final

thing is to be aware of that. That there's a legitimate debate about whether hell is endless or not and even if it is endless, is it endless in experience or just in duration.

Well, let's think about it. Let's talk about it. Write out your questions.