

*Hell Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment.* General editors Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Person. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004.

The present volume follows the very successful *Jesus Under Fire* by the same publisher a few years ago. The title is cleverly chosen, indicating that the doctrine of hell is “under fire” today, that is, increasingly questioned as people struggle with the question of how a loving God could confine people eternally to a place called “hell.” The contributors concur that Scripture teaches that the unsaved will suffer eternal, conscious punishment away from the joyous presence of God.

In the first chapter, “Modern Theology: The Disappearance of Hell,” R. Albert Mohler chronicles and laments the departure of many, including evangelicals, from the historic Christian teaching on hell. This is followed by four chapters discussing the biblical evidence. Each of the four authors is a first-rate scholar specializing in the portion of Scripture it is his assignment to discuss: Daniel I. Block writes on the Old Testament, Robert W. Yarbrough on Jesus, Douglas J. Moo on Paul, and Gregory K. Beale on the Book of Revelation.

The next four chapters, written by the co-editors and J. I. Packer respectively, deal with systematic issues pertaining to the doctrine of hell. Christopher Morgan investigates the implications of the three predominant images of hell as punishment, destruction, and banishment. Robert Peterson discusses implications concerning the Trinity, divine sovereignty, and human freedom. J. I. Packer examines universalism and finds it wanting as a speculative distortion of clear biblical teaching; and Morgan refutes the arguments for annihilationism.

The final chapter by Sinclair Ferguson provides a discussion of the implications of the doctrine of hell for the pastoral and preaching ministry. In their conclusion, the editor maintain the while hell is not a doctrine on which the church stands or falls, it is a doctrine that is inextricably linked to the doctrines of God, sin, and the atonement. God’s love must be seen in conjunction with his justice and holiness. The rebellious human act of choosing sin over God rightly deserves God’s just punishment.

Hell truly is a horrible reality that should make us shudder and break our hearts. It should motivate us to tell people about the love of God in Christ that led him to send his Son to die for us on the cross. Yet the problem is not hell, or God—it is our sin and lack of repentance. Those who refuse to accept Jesus’ payment for their sin on the cross will have to pay the penalty for their sin themselves. Thus hell is the consequence of people’s refusal to accept God’s offer of redemption in his beloved Son.

The present volume is by far the best overall treatment of hell I know. It is well conceived, edited and produced, and the editors have enlisted a first-rate cast of biblical scholars, systematicians, and homileticians to elucidate and defend the scriptural message on hell. The book provides a fitting culmination to previous publications such as Ajith Fernando’s *Crucial Questions about Hell* (1991), Larry Dixon’s *The Other Side of the Good News* (1992), and Robert Peterson’s *Hell On Trial* (1995). It comes highly recommended.

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