



HEAVEN'S DOORS

Wider than you ever believed!

By George W. Sarris

“Bravo! George Sarris should be applauded for beginning this important conversation in a way that is . . . thoughtful, courageous and humble.”

Eric Metaxas—*New York Times* #1 Best Selling Author



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 Publishing
Grace Will Succeed



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Editor, Jack Linn
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“An amazing accomplishment . . . I’m really impressed . . . You don’t gloss over anything . . . One thing that’s most impressive about the book is that it is so easy to read and so clear . . . This is just so huge.”

Eric Metaxas – *New York Times* #1 Best Selling Author

“I really, really, really enjoyed your writing style. You communicate in a way that draws others into the subject, and your views don’t stomp on the considerations of others. It is engaging and friendly, and you use your real life circumstances and communications to illustrate your points. . . .”

Todd Hoyt – CEO, EChristian/Christianaudio.com

“EXCELLENT job. So well done. . . . this could be the breakthrough book among Evangelicals and conservative Catholics especially. . . . It is readable, clear, focused and free of red herrings and distracting baggage.”

Brian McLaren – Pastor, Author, Activist, Speaker

“George Sarris has performed a splendid service in tracing the Christian view of universal salvation, which has deep roots in the Bible and in the Church Fathers. . . . Sarris’ book is gracefully written, deeply thoughtful, and based on careful scholarship; it deserves the widest audience.”

David Konstan – Professor of Classics, New York University; Professor Emeritus of Classics and Comparative Literature, Brown University

“My view has changed. I find ultimate restoration as a reasonable position. . . . I thank you deeply for opening my mind on eternal punishment/ultimate restoration.”

Perry G. Phillips – Author and Lecturer; MA Institute in Holy Land Studies, MDiv Biblical Theological Seminary,

PhD Cornell University

“Your terminological analysis (of *Hades, Gehenna, Tartarus, Sheol, Aionios, and Kolasis*) is quite sound. The historical survey is also correct And you are absolutely right that the most ancient Creeds do not mention hell, let alone its eternity. They focus on the Good News!”

Ilaria Ramelli – Professor of Theology and Bishop Kevin Britt endowed Chair in Dogmatics/Christology at the Graduate School of Theology at Sacred Heart Major Seminary of the Thomas Aquinas University; Onassis Senior Visiting Professor of Greek Thought and Church History at Harvard and Boston University; and Visiting Research Fellow at Oxford University

“I know that if I had read this book earlier, I would have been going to church a lot more over the past 40 years!”

Fred Daunno – Designer/Illustrator, lapsed Catholic and ordinary person

For Suzan
My Darling Wife. My Dearest Friend.

Many women do noble things,
but you surpass them all!

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Preface

Every person . . . in every place . . . at every time in history has wanted to know the answer to one very important question.

What will happen to me and the people I love after we die?

For the first 500 years of the Christian Church, most Christians believed that God would ultimately redeem *all* of His creation. They believed Jesus Christ succeeded in His mission to seek and save the lost. The greatest story ever told was the greatest story that *could* ever be told!

Their answer to the question? You and all those you love will ultimately be in heaven.

Then, for the last 1,500 years, most of Christendom has been told that the majority of the billions of people who have lived on this earth will remain separated from the love and mercy of God for all eternity. The moms and dads, grandmas and grandpas, sons and

daughters, relatives and friends who have not exhibited the “right kind” of faith here in this life will be shut up in a place called hell to suffer forever.

But is that really true?

Will more people suffer in hell eternally than live in heaven?

Is the greatest story ever told – the story of the creation, fall and redemption of mankind – really a tragedy for the vast majority of people who have ever lived . . . including many who you know and love?

Will most of the people God created in His image never walk through heaven's doors?

No!

That is a myth that was forced on the Christian Church by a power-hungry Roman emperor. It was supported by a highly respected but misinformed cleric. And it has endured for centuries because it became the status quo.

And it's time to expose that myth.

It wasn't always this way

During the first five centuries after Christ, many of the most prominent Christian leaders believed that hell was real, but it had a positive purpose. And it didn't last forever!

These early Christians include the man who wrote the first system of Christian theology. He's considered by many to be the most important theologian and Biblical scholar of the early Greek Church, a man

named Origen.

Another man of great influence was Gregory of Nyssa, who was instrumental in defining the Christian doctrine of the Trinity that we still confess today. Gregory added the phrase *“I believe in the life of the world to come”* to the Nicene Creed, and was acknowledged in later centuries by the Church as “Father of the Fathers.”

They and others believed that God doesn’t defeat evil by shutting it up in a corner of His creation and leaving it there forever, like some kind of cosmic graveyard keeping sinners imprisoned for all eternity. Instead, they were convinced that God will destroy evil by transforming the hearts of evil-doers, ultimately making them into those who love goodness.

It was their understanding that at the end of time, God will actually get everyone He created into heaven.

Then, in the 6th century, the belief in hell as a place of never-ending, conscious torment was forced on the Church by the politically motivated Roman Emperor, Justinian I. He has often been called the “last Roman” because of his zeal to revive the empire’s greatness and his declaration that the Emperor’s will is law.

He was supported by the writings of one of the most revered and loved of all early theologians, the man known as St. Augustine. Unlike Origen, Gregory and others before him who read the New Testament in their native language, Augustine was unable to read Greek. He therefore based his belief in endless punishment on an incorrect Latin translation of the text instead of the original language.

In the centuries that followed, the belief that hell was punishment that would never end provided justification for those in the religious establishment to persecute and even torture any and all who disagreed with their views. Some had sincere but misguided motives. Others sought power, position and wealth.

For the past 1,500 years, most of Christendom has been told that history ultimately ends tragically. Many are saved. But most are lost forever.

Why has the myth persisted?

One of the most common responses I get when I tell this to people is,

“Why have I never heard this before? I’d certainly like to believe that what you’re saying is true. But I can’t believe that you would be the only person in the last 1,500 years to have discovered this!”

First of all, I’m not the only person in the last 1,500 years to “discover” this. The Eastern Church never lost sight of this truth. And in the Western Church there have been many individuals and groups throughout Church history who have been convinced that God will ultimately restore all.

William Law, a clergyman who influenced John Wesley and the evangelical revival in 18th century England, believed it. So did Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and co-founder of the Philadelphia Bible Society. Their voices, and those of many others over time, spoke the message. But

they were drowned out by louder voices. The truth was never lost. It was only hidden.

Second, the reason why most people have never heard this is really quite simple.

Intimidation led to fear, which resulted in ignorance in future generations.

When influential Church authorities declared that hell was never-ending misery for those who didn't follow their teaching, many began to believe what they were told.

Once that declaration was accompanied by action – persecution and torture in the days of the Inquisition, and the threat of excommunication or ostracism in later times – people became very wary of challenging what the authorities said. As fewer and fewer questioned the tradition, people began to assume it was true. They either ignored or were unaware of views that disagreed with what they had been told.

That intimidation and fear continue to exist in our world today.

When I began writing this book, I knew my beliefs would be controversial, even though they're based on extensive historical and Biblical research that's been endorsed by world-renowned scholars.

What I didn't know was that I would lose dear friends. I would lose business colleagues I had worked with for years. I would lose my job with a Christian ministry I had worked with for almost 10 years. And my family and I would lose our church where we had been active members for 20 years. All

because people found out I was writing a book about God's love for all mankind.

A pastor friend of mine made the mistake of letting officials in his denomination know of his belief that God will ultimately reconcile all of creation to Himself. He was tried, found guilty and defrocked.

Another friend who holds a leadership position in his denomination recently told me he thought he'd look into this issue when he retires in a few years – after he no longer has to worry about having to step down from his position.

I've had numerous email interactions with a person who believes strongly that God will ultimately restore all. To this day, he has never told me his name or where he lives because he's afraid people in his church might learn of it, and he and his family would have to leave.¹

People are very hesitant to question the traditional belief that's been handed down to them, even though they may feel uncomfortable with that belief. It's not that they've rejected a Biblical argument for ultimate restoration. They've never heard it!

What do you believe?

The God who created the world is all-powerful. He is all-wise. He is all-loving. And this Creator has specifically said He wants all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

So why should it be hard to believe that God will actually accomplish what He said He desires to do?

Jesus Christ did *not* fail in His mission to seek and save what was lost. He's the Savior of the world, not just the Savior of a small part of the world.

Have you wondered where you and those you love will go when you die?

Read the book, and ask yourself what you believe.

Heaven's doors really may be wider than you ever believed!

Chapter 1



How much are you worth?

The look in his eyes and the tone in his voice let my brother and me know that what our father was about to tell us was important. Really important. It was something we needed to know. It was something we wanted to hear.

I was seven. My brother was five. We were sitting on the front seat of our old blue Plymouth on the road from the small town where we lived in upstate New York to an even smaller town five miles away. There were no seat belts back then, but we knew that if the car stopped suddenly, Dad would automatically stretch out his arm – like he always did – to protect us from being thrown forward.

“Do you know how much I love you?” Dad asked.

“How much?” We answered.

How much are you worth?

*"All the way up to the sky and back again . . .
934,687,432 times . . . and more!"*

"Wow!"

Over the years, Dad would ask us that question over and over again. The specific number would change, but it would always include *and more*. That was the key. We had no idea how far away the sky was, or how big those numbers were. But the idea that our father's love for us was more than the greatest distance and the biggest number we had ever heard, made it clear that we were truly loved. Our father's love for us was unlimited!

I will always be grateful to God for the father He gave me. He wasn't perfect. He made many of the same mistakes that other fathers make. But he was a good man. I always knew he loved me. I always knew he wanted the best for me. And no matter how much I messed up, I always knew he would never give up on me or abandon me.

My father taught me how to be a dad. He taught me how to love my wife and children. He taught me, by his example, about God's unlimited, unconditional, never-ending love for all mankind.

This book is about our heavenly Father's love for His children. Not just for a few. For *all* His children. The God of the Bible will ultimately embrace the souls of all He created and open heaven's doors to everyone!

What's the big deal?

This is a book about hope. It's a book about truth. It's a book about unlimited power and unfailing love

working together to accomplish the greatest plan ever conceived. This is a book about God's plan to ultimately get each and every person into heaven!

But why is that such a big deal?

A lot of people live in this world. You live in it. I live in it. Your family, your friends, your neighbors, your coworkers, even those you don't like live in it. Some have the same skin and hair color that you have. Many do not. Some live in the same part of the world you live in. Many do not. Some eat the same foods you eat, wear the same kinds of clothes you wear, and believe the same things you believe. Many do not.

But every one of them was created by God and placed on this earth.

Right now the world population numbers about 7 billion. That's a lot of people! Of that number, about a third – or roughly 2.3 billion people – call themselves *Christians* in one way or another. That includes liberal and conservative Protestants, strict and not-so-strict Roman Catholics, members of a variety of Eastern Orthodox churches, and just about everyone you can think of who claims to follow Christ in some fashion.

But even if all those who say they are Christians really are true believers, that would mean that well over *4 billion people* are currently outside the faith – the vast majority of whom will never profess Christ in their lifetime. What's more astonishing is that more than *2 billion people* live in places where the name of Jesus Christ is completely unknown!

Are all those people destined to suffer in hell forever when they die?

An uncomfortable belief

Although most Christians today believe hell is unending misery for most people, it's something we don't like to talk about openly or even think about. Some of us are like a friend who told my wife that she'd always wondered about hell but was afraid to look into it too carefully because she thought she'd get discouraged.

Others think about it when they look at non-believers who are prospering in this world. Some are actually glad they believe in hell when someone's hurt them deeply or mocked them for their faith. In that case, they gain a degree of satisfaction in thinking that the godless will eventually "get what they deserve!"

But have you ever had to comfort someone who lost a dear family member or friend who died without ever making a profession of faith? Has someone very close to you died in that same way? What did you say? When that happens, about the only comforting thing you can say to your friend or yourself is that you don't really know what occurred in the final seconds of the loved one's life. Who knows? Maybe they made peace with God at that time.

I recently talked with a man who told me he stopped believing in God and going to church when he heard that most of his friends and a lot of people in other parts of the world who had never heard of Jesus were going to hell. He decided then that he just couldn't believe in a God who was that uncaring! He now professes to be a Buddhist.

Christians often talk of and sing praises about the wonderful, never-ending love of God in church services, Bible studies, and personal interaction with other believers.

But if we honestly believe what we've been told to believe, we'd have to admit that those songs and words are not entirely accurate. God doesn't really love with an everlasting love. His love is conditional. His love is limited. For those who haven't professed faith in Him here in this life, God's love and mercy end at the moment of death.

A controversial book

This is not a safe book.

People take their religious beliefs very seriously, as they should. And beliefs that have been held by people for 100s of years through generation after generation of influence by family members, friends and religious leaders are very hard to change, regardless of how those beliefs have been impacted by misinterpretation or manipulation – innocent or not.

Some people will love this book and want to tell all their friends about it. Some will hate it and try to keep others from reading it. Many will welcome an honest book that challenges the traditional teaching from a clear, Biblical and historical perspective. Others, including some who will never actually read it, will call it heresy.

So how should you approach what I have to say? Let me suggest two underlying thoughts that I've

found very helpful over the years in dealing with controversial issues.

The first is to remember that every book you will ever read about God and the Bible, including this one, has been written by a human being. And human beings are just that. They're human. Not everything they think or say is right. Many of the great theologians of the past and present were or are dedicated, brilliant individuals. But to err is human. Some of their ideas may be incorrect.

The second thing I try to keep in mind is that when two wise, godly individuals differ on an important issue, tread lightly. One of the two may be right and the other wrong. But it may also be true that both are right and both are wrong . . . and that a third alternative that neither has really considered may ultimately reconcile the two.

The focus of this book is what I would call the *third alternative*. It's a view, clearly based on history and the Bible, that most people today have never really considered.

Reading this book has the potential to change the way you look at people, especially those who ridicule or ignore you, or those whose lifestyles and values are offensive to you.

People are not the enemy. They are not individuals who need to be persuaded that you are right and they are wrong. They're not people whose lives may be important for a while, or even for a lifetime, but who are ultimately meant to be thrown away. People are created beings of inestimable worth who need to be

rescued by God from pursuing wasted, meaningless lives.

Reading this book also has the potential to change the way you look at God, especially if you've wondered how an all-powerful, all-wise Being whose love is everlasting, could cause or allow anyone to experience conscious, endless suffering with no hope for restoration.

God is *not* a tender-hearted but ultimately weak Being who created a universe that was *very good* in the beginning but ends up *almost very good* – or even worse, *not very good* in the end. God is *not* an all-powerful Despot who chooses some to live forever in luxury beyond description, while others are chosen to experience for all eternity a degree of degradation that is too horrendous for our finite minds to even conceive.

On the contrary . . . God is far greater, far more powerful, and far more wonderful than you or I have ever thought or imagined. He defeated sin and death completely and will one day see *all* those He created walk through heaven's doors.

Where are we going?

Is hell a place of conscious suffering that never ends, where billions of people will cry out for endless ages,

“Father of Mercies! Why from silent earth
Didst thou awake and curse me into birth!
Tear me from quiet, ravish me from night,
And make a thankless present of Thy light?”

How much are you worth?

Push into being a reverse of Thee,
And animate a clod with misery?"²

No! God does not give up on any of those He created. He is wise enough, loving enough and powerful enough to accomplish the full redemption of all His creatures!

Before you read further, let me answer some quick questions that you may be asking.

Does the book teach that hell does not exist? No! Hell does exist, but for a good purpose. And it doesn't last forever.

Does the book teach cheap grace? No again. No one gets a free ticket to heaven! Because punishment in hell is not endless, does not mean that God's judgments are not real. After-death punishment is both severe and intense for those who continue to resist God's grace.

Does the book teach that hell is really Purgatory, where works of penance are a substitute for the work of Christ? No. It's only because of the cross of Jesus Christ that anyone can be saved. Physical death doesn't mark the end of when God works in people's hearts. He continues to work even after we die.

Does the book teach that repentance and faith are unnecessary? No. All will eventually be saved because all will eventually repent and believe.

Does the book teach that everyone God has created will eventually be in heaven? Yes! Evil will not remain a part of God's creation forever. At the end of time, all those who God created will experience the peace and

joy of being in His presence.

If you're like most people I've talked to, much of the material in this book will be completely new to you. Some of it may seem a little technical at first, but it's important! It's information you need to know to come to an informed conclusion. I hope and pray all of it will be interesting and encouraging.

I've worked hard trying to take a big topic and communicate it in simple and easy to read language. For those of you who want more details, you'll find them in Endnotes at the back of this book. My only request is that you actually read the book before making any judgments.

You may be surprised to see how wide heaven's doors really are!

The real issue

How much are you worth?

I don't mean that in any financial sense such as, "What is your *net* worth?" I mean how much are you worth *as a person*? How much are you worth to those who love you? How much are you worth to God?

I posed that question over and over again to each of my children, starting when they were just old enough to talk. I wanted to instill in them a vital truth about their real value to me as their father – and to God as their heavenly Father. Just as my father taught me, I wanted to teach each of my children that they were of unlimited value.

"How much are you worth?" I would ask. The

How much are you worth?

answer from my children was always the same. *"I'm priceless!"*

That's not only how valuable my children are. That's how valuable *you* are. That's how valuable *every person who has ever lived* is to God.

You and they are priceless!

Chapter 2



What are we talking about anyway?

The family was sitting around their dinner table when the oldest son told everyone about a conversation he had earlier that day with his friend, Johnny. Johnny didn't go to church and said he didn't believe in God.

"I told him that if he didn't believe in God, he would go to hell!" the son had said.

That comment didn't sit well with his younger sister, and she quickly retorted,

"Daddy, that's a bad word, and you shouldn't let him say it!"

Children are often very careful to make sure their parents or their siblings don't do something they're not supposed to do.

"We definitely shouldn't use that word carelessly," the father answered. *"And it's probably not a good*

What are we talking about anyway?

idea to tell your friend that he's going to hell," he said to his son. "But do you know why?"

The children looked at each other cautiously, then back to their father. The oldest son, especially, had wanted to ask his dad about hell for a while but was afraid he'd get into trouble if he said something.

"Hell is a very serious subject with very serious implications," the father explained. "If what people say about it is true, it's worse than the worst thing you can think of."

His daughter whispered quietly, *"Jenny told me that hell is the place where bad people suffer forever and ever after they die. Is that true?"*

"That's a good question," her father answered. "In fact, it's a question everyone should ask before they tell someone else they're going to hell."

What do Christians believe?

Children often say profound things. And a pretty good definition for hell is the one given by Jenny. Hell is a place or condition of *conscious misery* that *never ends*.³

Interestingly, that's not how hell has always been understood. It may come as a surprise, but there have actually been three very different views held by sincere Christians through the ages about the nature and duration of hell.

The first view is Jenny's – the traditional view. Once people die, the final judgment takes place, and there is no hope for those who didn't repent and believe

during their lifetime on earth. Their punishment is never-ending.

A second view teaches that sometime after death, the bodies, souls and spirits of those in hell will be completely destroyed. They will become non-existent. It's called conditional immortality or annihilation.

The third view – and the one you'll read about in this book – is that hell is temporary and has a purpose other than inflicting pain. God will use it to bring people to a point where they acknowledge their need for Him and His saving grace in Jesus Christ. At some time in the future, perhaps the very distant future, those in hell will ultimately be restored to fellowship with God. This view has been called by various names – universalism, universal reconciliation, universal restoration, or the term that I prefer, ultimate restoration.

There are people today, as in the past, who hold to each of these positions. But Jenny's view is clearly dominant.⁴ By contrast, the belief in some kind of ultimate restoration is widely considered to be a pie-in-the-sky, weakly supported belief held primarily by people who may have good hearts, but who clearly don't base their beliefs on the Bible.⁵

Who goes to hell?

If you've ever attended a Bible study, Sunday school class or some other activity where people get together to discuss serious issues of faith, you may have heard a debate between those who believe that God *predestines* certain people to be saved, and others

What are we talking about anyway?

who believe that mankind has *free will*. I've participated in many of these discussions over the years, and sometimes the arguments can get quite heated. That's because it's a question about who actually decides who goes to heaven and who goes to hell.

Is it God . . . or is it me?

For those who see God as all-powerful, it's absolutely clear that nothing ultimately happens in this universe that He has not predetermined. So when it comes to salvation, God must be the One who decides. Those who have not been chosen by God for heaven will suffer forever in hell after they die.⁶

However, for those who see God as loving, it's just as clear that He does not show favoritism or partiality. Therefore, He offers the gift of salvation to all, but some decide they don't want it. If I reject His offer in this life, I will go to hell.

Just about everyone I've talked to or read on the subject agrees that never-ending, conscious suffering for anyone is the most dreadful event conceivable. However, they feel forced to their conclusion because of what they see as the clear teaching of the Bible, and especially because of the teachings of Jesus Christ on the matter. Most also maintain that it was the common opinion of the majority of those in the ancient church.

What do you think?

In my experience, most Christians today are very

hesitant about telling others what they believe about hell. That was not the case, however, with many of our predecessors. They did not mince words!

For example, consider the words of one of the best known preachers and theologians of Protestant church history, Jonathan Edwards. His sermons began the First Great Awakening in America in the 1730s and 40s, and he is widely considered to be one of the greatest thinkers America has produced.

“Do but consider what it is to suffer extreme torment forever, and ever to suffer it day and night, from one day to another, from one year to another, from one age to another, from one thousand ages to another, and so, adding age to age, and thousands to thousands, in pain, in wailing and lamenting, groaning and shrieking, and gnashing your teeth; with your souls full of dreadful grief and amazement, with your bodies and every member full of racking torture, without any possibility of getting ease; without any possibility of moving God to pity by your cries; without any possibility of hiding yourselves from him; without any possibility of diverting your thoughts from your pain; without any possibility of obtaining any manner of mitigation, or help, or change for the better any way....

“After you shall have worn out a thousand more such ages, yet you shall have no hope, but shall know that you are not one whit

What are we talking about anyway?

nearer to the end of your torments; but that still there are the same groans, the same shrieks, the same doleful cries, incessantly to be made by you . . . which will not have been at all shortened by what shall have been past.”⁷

Is that what you believe?

A little over a century later, another great preacher and theologian, Charles Spurgeon, challenged his audience with these words.

“There is a place, as much beneath imagination as heaven is above it; a place of murky darkness, where only lurid flames make darkness visible; a place where beds of flame are the fearful couches upon which spirits groan . . . there is a place where the only music is the mournful symphony of damned spirits; where howling, groaning, moaning, wailing and gnashing of teeth, make up the horrid concert. There is a place where demons fly, swift as air, with whips of knotted burning wire, torturing poor souls; where tongues, on fire with agony, burn the roofs of mouths that shriek for drops of water – that water all denied. . . .

“Ah! sinners, if you knew what hell meant, then might ye tell what it is to lose your own souls.”⁸

Spurgeon was the foremost preacher of his day and is still the most widely read preacher in history. In

1861, before the modern megachurches of today that seat thousands, Spurgeon's congregation built The Metropolitan Tabernacle which seated 4,700 people. In that same year, he preached at London's Crystal Palace to a congregation of 23,654 people without the aid of a microphone or any other means of amplification.

Do Spurgeon's words reflect the belief that exists in your heart?

Most people today, including many devout Christians, feel embarrassed when they read or hear such hellfire-and-brimstone preaching. We don't like to talk about hell, and when pressed by someone who questions it, we usually explain that it's not a place of literal fire and torment. We'd prefer to describe the suffering and pain more abstractly as a state of loss or separation from God. Many feel more comfortable saying that it may not be inflicted pain, but felt pain.

But any way you say it, it still requires the belief that billions of people will experience unending misery. And as the little girl's father pointed out, it's definitely a serious subject, with very serious implications, that if true is worse than the worst thing you can think of.

The end of the matter

Because endless punishment has been preached so fervently by so many people for so long a time, most Christians today consider the idea of ultimate restoration to be a great error held only by those who are, at best, motivated by tender but misguided feelings. At worst, they believe it to be false teaching

What are we talking about anyway?

that gives false hope to ignorant and unwary people, and therefore must be guarded against at all cost.

But are they correct?

Is the hope that God will ultimately restore all, a great evil that must be stamped out? Am I, along with others who hold to that position, a wicked person who is preaching a different gospel? Or are many, like the Pharisees of old, actually nullifying the Word of God by holding to the traditions of men?

Edward Beecher, noted 19th century theologian, pastor, and brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe, challenged his contemporaries over a century ago. He said punishing people endlessly *“would be an extreme of injustice and cruelty that would entirely transform the character of God.”*⁹

John Wenham, a well-respected 20th century evangelical scholar and preacher explained his concerns in these words.

“Unending torment speaks to me of sadism, not justice. It is a doctrine which I do not know how to preach without negating the loveliness and glory of God. From the days of Tertullian it has been the emphasis of fanatics. It is a doctrine that makes the Inquisition look reasonable. It all seems a flight from reality and common sense.”¹⁰

So, is belief in endless punishment the clear teaching of Scripture and a doctrine that must be strenuously argued for? Or is there support within the Bible and the teaching of Christians throughout history for a

belief in ultimate restoration?

Let's look and see.

One last thought

"Dad, Johnny's my best friend, and I like him a lot. We argue sometimes, and sometimes even get into fights. But I don't think I'd like to see him suffer forever. Do you think God can save Johnny, too?"

"Yes, I do, sweetheart."

"Dad? I never told you this. But Grampa told me once he didn't believe in God, either."



Endnotes

The historical and Biblical information provided in this book is well-documented. For those who would like a deeper understanding of the extensive research that helped form the beliefs expressed in *Heaven's Doors*, the following notes provide additional material, details and resources for your study.

Preface

¹ Long after I wrote this, the person came up to say hello to me at a conference. It turned out that “he” is a “she.”

Chapter 1 – How much are you worth?

² Edward Young, *Night Thoughts, the Last Day, Book III*, The Works of Edward Young, Vol. III, Printed for J. Dodsley, London, 1798, p. 30

Chapter 2 – What are we talking about anyway?

³ A similar definition was used in a survey conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. They reported that 92% of adult Americans believe in God, 74% believe in heaven,

but only 59% believe in hell, which they defined as the place *“where people who have led bad lives and die without being sorry are eternally punished.”*

<http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report2religious-landscape-study-key-findings.pdf>.

A book comprised of essays by scholars who were defending the traditional view of hell defined their belief as *“. . . everlasting conscious punishment away from the joyous presence of God.”* – Christopher W. Morgan, Robert A. Peterson, *Hell Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment*, Zondervan, 2004, p. 12

⁴ *“. . . the interpretation of hell as eternal conscious punishment is the one most widely attested by the Church . . . We also recognize that it represents the classic, mainstream evangelical position.”* – *The Nature of Hell: A Report by the Evangelical Alliance Commission on Unity and Truth Among Evangelicals*, Carlisle: Acute/Paternoster, 2000, p. 134

⁵ That belief was supported in a recent book with contributions from a number of highly respected scholars. Their assumption that any view other than Endless Punishment has little Biblical support was prevalent in several of the articles. Unfortunately, they did not deal with, or even seem to be aware of, most of the key Biblical issues related to the subject. – cf. Robert Yarbrough, “Jesus on Hell” in *Hell Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment*, edited by Christopher W. Morgan & Robert A. Peterson, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2004, pp. 67ff; and J.I. Packer, “Universalism” in the same volume, p. 174

⁶ It should be noted that the idea of “double-predestination” – ie. that God predestines some to evil – was specifically disavowed by the Christian Church in the Canons of the Council of Orange in AD 529. In its conclusion, the council states: *“We not only do not believe that any are foreordained to evil by the power of God, but even state with utter abhorrence that if there are those who want to believe so evil a thing, they are anathema.”* –

<https://www.ewtn.com/library/COUNCILS/ORANGE.HTM>

⁷ Jonathan Edwards, “The Eternity of Hell Torments” – 1750, <http://www.jonathan-edwards.org/Eternity.html>

⁸ Charles H. Spurgeon, "Profit and Loss" – a sermon (92) delivered on Sunday evening, July 6, 1856 at Exeter Hall, Strand, www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0092.htm

⁹ Edward Beecher, *History of Opinions on the Scriptural Doctrine of Retribution*, D. Appleton and Company, New York, 1878, p. 297

¹⁰ John Wenham, *Facing Hell: An Autobiography*, (London: Paternoster, 1998), 254