

On the Contributions of Chris Morgan in Hell Under Fire

By: Steve Scianni

A few months ago after reading Dr. Chris Morgan's Jonathan Edwards & Hell (Christian Focus Publications, March 2004), I was asked by the author, via e-mail, to read another book: Hell Under Fire (Zondervan, December 2004); a book he co-edited and contributed to, and claimed "more comprehensively critiques annihilationism and presents the biblical data on hell." I responded that I would do so, but that I would also write a review as I went along. Fast-forwarding to the present (May 2007), time did not allow a review of the entire book, so I limited the scope of examination to the two chapters that Dr. Morgan authored.

What follows intends to summarize and critique his contribution from the standpoint of one who formerly believed as he does, but is now persuaded this is a mistake. That is, the persistent language of the Bible informs us that the fate of the unredeemed is *not* endless conscious torment, but that they will die, perish, and be destroyed instead – those words understood as a termination of their existence.

As time and space did not permit a full critique of the entire book, neither will it allow stopping to explain in detail every nuance in the controversy, nor to praise Morgan for valuable points he does make. At the risk then of resonating wholly negative tones, the major faults and problems of these two chapters must be the focus.

Chapter 6, p. 135, Biblical Theology: Three Pictures of Hell, is Morgan's endeavor to (1) summarize the teaching on hell by each New Testament author, (2) explain that three pictures of hell emerge in the NT – punishment, destruction and banishment; and (3) offer proposals for interpreting these pictures.

- (A) To begin, the first and most fundamental problem with the chapter is that Morgan does not biblically define Hell, fails to identify it as *Gebenna* (the Greek word under consideration) and mistakenly equates it with *Final Punishment*, "Each New Testament author addresses the concept of future judgment/hell" (p.136). This is unjustified because these concepts are not equivalents, and it is not true that 'each New Testament author addresses the concept of *hell*.'

- a. All NT authors speak on *final punishment*, but not every author speaks about *Gebenna*. It is, at best, an infrequent and rarely used NT theme that does not appear in the writings of John, Paul or Peter, and it is not found in Acts, Hebrews or Jude. The word is used 12 times total, once in James and eleven times in only four different contexts in the synoptic gospels.
- b. So Morgan's survey of the NT books on 'hell' must sound like this: "The doctrine of hell does not play a prominent role in the Gospel of Mark...Luke does not employ it as a central theme....The word 'hell' does not occur in the writings of Paul....The doctrine of future punishment emerges in two passages in Hebrews....The letter of James does not put much stress on the doctrine of hell....There is no clear teaching about hell in 1 Peter....The doctrine of Hell emerges infrequently in John's Gospel....no clear references to hell emerge in the three letters of John..." (pp.136-141). He mentions the book of Acts once in passing, apparently not being needed to conclude that, "This brief overview clearly demonstrates that the future punishment of the wicked in hell is a significant theme in the New Testament" (p.142). That statement is startling, for it is completely at variance with, not only the facts themselves, but with the facts as *he* states them.
- c. The fact is that *final punishment* is a significant theme in the NT, *not* 'hell.' Morgan, therefore, misguides the reader to think that the NT frequently talks of *hell*, when it does not, and this allows for all the Anglo-Saxon and medieval baggage that comes with that word to pass unchecked into the NT.

(B) Consequently, he inverts the imagery and makes *punishment* a picture of *Hell*, when the New Testament uses *Hell* as a picture of *punishment*. If he would have correctly recognized *Hell* to begin with he would have avoided the problem, and would have realized that *Gebenna*, as noted above, is itself only *one of various pictures* the NT authors use to describe what *future punishment* will be like. Thus, the title ought to have read, "New Testament Pictures of Final Punishment," and it should have been followed by something like this for example: "Final punishment is *like Gebenna*...Final Punishment is *like being excluded from a celebratory banquet*...Final punishment is *like the*

burning up of chaff and fruitless trees...Final punishment will be like the days of Lot and Noah...etc., etc.”

(C) Further, his New Testament survey itself must be deemed inaccurate and misrepresentative. Although it is supposed to be a brief pursuit of what the NT is actually saying, it amounts to only a recital about what the previous authors *said* the NT is saying. Morgan disclaims, “there is no need to supply a thorough exegesis of the major New Testament passages on this topic because” Yarborough, Moo, and Beale “have already provided that in their chapters” (p.136). So Morgan takes their conclusions for granted and on top of them attempts to build the whole ‘pictures of hell’ thesis. But such a ‘hell,’ as we’ve seen, was already prefabricated for the fit in the first place and that is why the NT survey does not have to be “thorough.” The thesis has already been established and now the “NT Survey” is added as an ornament to make it look like there is some Scriptural justification. But it is a façade and specific examples should expose this. Let it be noted that I am not faulting Morgan for *not going into depth*, I am faulting him for an *inaccurate* treatment of the NT and for *misrepresenting* it to the reader – as well as lacking detail when it was necessary to provide. That is to say, all of these examples exist *not* because Morgan failed to ‘thoroughly exegete’ each passage, they exist because he was careless and biased with the data.

- a. Matthew chapters 3 and 7 never use the word *hell*, though one wouldn’t know this by reading the following: “[Jesus] contrasts the kingdom of heaven with the horrors of *hell*...Jesus cautions that *hell* is a place of destruction, depicted as the end of a broad road (7:13). He also contrasts *hell* with life...those devoid of good fruit...will be ‘cut down and thrown into the fire’ and warns that *hell* awaits everyone who does not enter the kingdom of heaven. Because of this, *hell* is a danger for some who profess to know Christ...” (Pp.137-38, emphasis mine). Since ‘hell’ does not appear a single time in the 3rd and 7th chapters of Matthew, why did Morgan write as though it were there? As pointed out, he needs it there to make his thesis work, and since his thesis was established long before he “surveyed” the NT, he took the presupposition and then imposed it on the text.

- b. On a side, Morgan does not offer any explanation of how “cut down trees being thrown into a fire” bear any resemblance to his notion of ‘endless torment.’
- c. With Matthew 3:12, there is a subtlety that needs comment. Morgan chooses to say ‘burned’ and not ‘burn up’ as the NIV reads (p.137, and he repeats this on p.144, the NIV is the translation Morgan is using). He selectively quotes the verse so he can use his verb (burn) instead of the one the text uses (burn up). He has no recourse to a Greek nuance for this, as though the verb could bear this truncated meaning in the context of what will happen to chaff when it is put in fire - as though you could burn it *without* burning it *up*. Thus he attempts to evade the entire agricultural picture of *consumption* in order to avoid the obvious meaning of what an ‘unquenchable fire’ is and does.
- d. Matthew 10:28 is glossed over and no explanation is even attempted for how a person can be eternal when they are in danger of being destroyed, soul and body. This is all the more inexplicable since Yarborough never comes close to a “thorough exegesis” of it in his chapter (see Pp.72-73, 80-81). But the reader can decide whether a general distortion of Jesus’ words (p.80) and a particular distortion of the word ‘destruction’ to mean ‘permanent calamity’ or ‘unending misery,’ is a “thorough exegesis.”
- e. Morgan’s presentation of Luke 16:19-31, pg.139, as a “future” and “final” punishment and a “separation from heaven” is also troubling. He does not bother to let the reader know that *Hades*, not *Gebenna*, is the word for ‘hell’ here (he notes *Hades* on p.147 but it is in passing and it is too late). He fails to mention that *Hades* indicates the intermediate state between death and resurrection, *not* final punishment; he also equates ‘Abraham’s bosom,’ to ‘heaven’ though that is an error. In other words there is no description of heaven, *Gebenna*, eschatological or final punishment, or anything of the sorts in the whole parable. Morgan is aware of this, but his thesis would not allow him to publish accurate material in this instance.
- f. His analysis of Paul’s teaching on Hell is equally imprecise. Given that Paul never mentions the word “hell” once, it is curious that Morgan can state with

confidence that “...it would be too cumbersome to highlight all that Paul relates about hell” (p. 139).

- g. This ‘cumbersome’ project is even more suspect when he goes on to cite II Thessalonians 1:9. If Paul is so full of data on ‘hell,’ to the point of being ‘cumbersome,’ why is it that all Traditionalists always and *only* use this passage as their primary evidence for endless torment? Could it be that it is the *only* verse that gives them even the slightest hope of finding their dogma in the writings of Paul? Absolutely, and as Morgan affirms, it is “...Paul’s most explicit and thorough teaching on hell” (p.139). That is to say, Paul did no better a job anywhere else at describing *endless torment* than to call it an *eternal destruction!* Aside from making a mute and illiterate fool out of the apostle, the fact is that an ‘eternal’ (or better, ‘permanent’) ‘destruction’ is just one more way Paul ceaselessly describes the fate of the unrighteous in terms of ‘death,’ ‘perishing,’ ‘corruptible’ and ‘destruction’ – they are all synonymous and in harmony with each other, and not one of them has anything to do with the word *hell* or Morgan’s concept of it.
- h. Consequently, Morgan’s handling of II Thessalonians 1:9 is bothersome as he quotes the NIV. This version interprets (not translates) the Greek preposition, *apo* (‘from’), as ‘shut out from.’ Morgan neglects to inform the reader of this, and so makes it appear that that is what the Greek indisputably says. Douglas Moo, who he is relying on here for this sense of ‘separation,’ does point that out to the reader, but pays no attention to the context of 2 Thessalonians 1:9, its relation to 1 Thessalonians 5:3; or its relation to the ‘day of the Lord,’ for his treatment to be anything other than partial and superficial (see pp.106-108). The Greek allows and the context *demand*s that the destruction is coming *from* the person and strength of Christ, not as a separation away from these – which, to be frank, is absurd. Paul would never threaten as a punishment, a separation from the Lord’s strength as if that is supposed to be desired or that would make any sense at all. Paul would, however, declare that the destruction would be brought about *by* the strength of Christ – a point Moo and Morgan did not find necessary to discuss.

- i. Morgan makes no attempt to grapple with the fact that Paul's talk of 'wrath' and 'distress' in Romans, ends in *destruction and death*, see his own point #4 of pp.139-40.
- j. To illustrate the 'hell' point once more, we observe on page 140, the heading: "Hell in Hebrews." But since 'hell' does not appear anywhere in the epistle, his opening line has to read as this, "The doctrine of future punishment emerges in two passages...." Well that will not do. If you are going to write 'Hell in Hebrews,' make sure that 'hell' really is in Hebrews first.
- k. Moo's disclaimer on pg. 92 that this is not a book about the word 'hell' but about the doctrine of 'hell' is not a free pass and will not help here. You cannot have a *doctrine* about 'hell' without first establishing what you mean by the *word* 'hell.' He just assumes that "If that doctrine is defined as teaching about the ultimate destiny of the wicked..." then we can proceed. But this says nothing definitive at all and is the very same problem pointed out above. It no more tells us about 'hell' than it would tell us about 'Sodom' if we substituted the word - *both* teach about the ultimate destiny of the wicked, but the question is *what* these words teach. Moo and Morgan need 'hell' and 'final punishment' to be equivalents for their structure to work, but the simple fact is that they *are not* equivalents – anymore than 'Sodom' and 'Final Punishment' are. So square one, since the word 'hell' notoriously carries extra-biblical connotations, it was improper and careless for Morgan to use it so generally and ubiquitously. And it is only an admission of negligence on Moo's part to state that he is not interested in the word itself, for *that* is the very first thing to settle. The bottom line is that a 'doctrine of hell' is already in place, it is not going to be changed, and it must be squeezed into all the books of the NT to make it look legitimate – that is what Moo's disclaimer means.
- l. So all statements like, "Peter's second letter...is filled with references to the future punishment of the wicked in hell" and "John also pictures hell as destruction and exclusion" (p.141) are simply misleading. Anyone can open their Bibles and read this for themselves. Both authors certainly say a lot about future punishment as destruction and perishing, but nothing ever

about “hell” (2 Peter 2:4 is not an exception, the Greek word mistranslated there is *Tartarus*). It is a shame that such an easily-remedied confusion is perpetuated.

(D) Beyond the survey now, the reader views the emergence of Morgan’s “three pictures of hell” or more accurately, “three pictures of *future judgment*.” The first thing to note, and this is perhaps to strain gnats, is that these “pictures” are not pictures at all, but three words used to describe the event. A picture is something like *trees being cut down and thrown into a fire* – that is not really going to happen on the day of judgment, but it is a ‘picture’ of what it will be like. So words like punishment, banishment and destruction are not symbols of what final punishment will be *like*, they are what final punishment will *be*.

(E) Morgan’s word choices of “punishment,” “banishment” and “destruction,” are adequate but not perfect. I would suggest instead of ‘punishment,’ words like ‘retribution’ or ‘infliction,’ are preferred because they capture an *active* nature of punishment better (see page 147 where Morgan makes that point). Instead of ‘banishment,’ the words ‘exclusion’ or ‘deprivation’ fit more suitably because they communicate better the negative or deprivative nature of punishment. Sinners are being deprived of and excluded from something – not just ‘banished’ which connotes a concept of being kicked out to go wander somewhere and does not accent the sense of loss near as well. Instead of ‘destruction,’ which to my mind is perfectly descriptive enough, substitutes include ‘disintegration,’ (Morgan quotes John Benton in a footnote on page 143 who opts for this word *disintegration*) ‘extermination’ or ‘extinction.’ These are superior because the word “destruction” is distorted so unjustly by Traditionalists. They clamor for it to carry a sense of ‘ruin’ or ‘loss of usefulness’ in order to evade its natural meaning – but not even this escape route meets with any success.

a. One quotation from Douglas Moo will suffice in showing what nuances are involved in this disagreement, and just how unnecessarily hard the Traditionalist works to promote their dogma, only to have it backfire. He states, “In other words, these key [Greek] terms appear to be used in general much like we use the word ‘destroy’ in the sentence, “The tornado destroyed

the house.’ The component parts of that house did not cease to exist, but the entity ‘house,’ a structure that provides shelter for human beings, ceased to exist.” Well that is all the Annihilationist has ever said or asked for! Let’s substitute biblical words into his sentence: “God destroyed the sinner” and now use his commentary, “The component parts of that sinner did not cease to exist, but the entity ‘sinner,’ a person rebellious to the laws of God, ceased to exist.” So if the Greek words communicate disintegrating something to the point of non-existence, as Moo admits, what is left to argue about? Note further, how (i) Moo tries to veil the conclusion that the house ceased to exist, by putting quotes around it, calling it an ‘entity,’ and adding a unnecessary definition – all to mitigate the force of his own deduction: After being *destroyed*, the *house* ceased to exist. (ii) There is also a common Straw Man to point out. No Annihilationist has ever contended that the ‘component parts’ of the sinning person would ‘cease to exist’ – that is irrelevant to the argument and the fate of the sinner. Conditionalists claim that the *person* will cease to exist, not their atoms or parts. So whatever molecules or ashes are left of the sinner is insignificant, the point is that the *sinner*, like the *house*, is no more. So without attempting to, Moo concedes the entire point and grants the definition of ‘destroy’ that Annihilationists use. His own definitions, his own example and his own conclusions cannot help but illustrate and prove the natural meaning of the word: that whatever is literally *destroyed* ceases to exist.

- (F) In the final section, “Interpreting the Three Pictures of Hell,” all that is left at this point for Morgan is to rehash the errors of the previous sections. His ‘doctrine of hell’ is reimposed on NT passages, verses are again cited without regard for context or accuracy, and *his* words to describe *his* hell are of course “found” again in carefully selected proof-texts (p.149). What is new is that Morgan takes his conclusions – his axioms which have shown to be errors, and applies them to other areas of theology, including God, heaven, atonement, and salvation. What the reader ought to realize by now is that Morgan is just passing precut blocks through precut holes, and then showing us how nicely they all fit. Such a method could “prove” anything.

(G) Further, Morgan does not attempt to harmonize the three “pictures” and warns that “great caution should be taken when trying to systematize these three pictures...” (p.149) – they are left to “stand on their own” satisfied by Harmon’s assurance that the “different images” point “towards a single eschatological truth.” That may sound nice, but it does not communicate anything meaningful. The question is *what* is that one single truth? Morgan cannot tell us, because he cannot harmonize the images. He cannot do that because it would disprove orthodoxy, forcing him to say something meaningful about *destruction* and give it its proper place. But he cannot afford to do this – the reader saw what happened when Moo tried to do so. Instead we are just cautioned to “make sure we are not stretching the destruction theme beyond what Scripture actually teaches” – which is to say, beyond what Tradition actually teaches. That one, single eschatological truth not disclosed to the reader is that *final punishment* excludes people from life and the Kingdom of God; it does that by inflicting retribution that culminates in death and destruction.

Chapter 9, p. 195, *Annihilationism: Will the Unserved be Punished Forever?* This is Dr. Morgan’s second and final chapter in the book and is (1) a brief history and summary of Annihilationism, and (2) a response to Conditionalist objections in a question/answer format.

(A) There is little in the way of fault of Morgan’s historical summary of Annihilationism – he tends to do an accurate job of it and nothing significant would be accomplished in reviewing it.

(B) Similar things can be said of his *summary* of the position, although he tends to color Annihilationists as rejecting the “historic position of endless punishment because of their beliefs concerning God’s love, justice, and victory” he mentions that “no one can doubt that these scholars...genuinely believe that they offer the better interpretation of the biblical teaching on hell” (Pp.201-202). Morgan does make it sound like exegesis takes a back seat to moral arguments – and in so far as he does this, so far is he in error. But there is no real need to press the point.

(C) The first problem in the chapter arises very early. “Annihilationism is the belief that those who die apart from saving faith in Jesus Christ will be ultimately destroyed”

(p.95). The linguistic double standard ought to strike the reader immediately. Notice how Morgan, in English, will equate *destroyed* with *Annihilation*, but not when the Bible uses the word *destroyed*. Why not? The same English word the translators used is the same English word Morgan uses. If Morgan in common, everyday speech says Annihilationists teach that the sinner will ultimately be destroyed, why doesn't the Bible teach Annihilation when *it* says the sinner will be destroyed?

(D) On page 202, we find a discussion of the word 'eternal' and two arguments Conditionalists use with it. The first argument can be ignored for now, because it is not as significant. The second, however, is key. Although Morgan spends two lengthy paragraphs on summarizing the argument, he dismisses it with three sentences on the top of page 203. His entire rebuttal is this, "The conditionalist's second argument from *aionios*, that it can connote an eternal result of punishment rather than the continual process of punishing, is also not cogent. The biblical portrait of the punishment of the wicked is often connected to their expulsion from the glorious presence of God (2 Thess. 1:5-10). Both punishment and separation from God require conscious existence." In reply, (1) Morgan lists four key texts used by Conditionalists to illustrate their second argument (Hebrews 5:9, 6:2, 9:12 and Mark 3:29) and proceeds to deal with none of them. Since they clearly carry the sense of *permanence in result* that must have been the reason why. (2) Morgan finds himself completely at odds with Douglas Moo who discusses this argument on page 106. Moo says, "There is some point to this claim: In other New Testament passages where 'eternal' describes a noun of action, it is sometimes the results of the action that are indicated." He then goes on to list five passages that support this. Strange that an argument labeled 'not cogent,' can be demonstrated as somewhat forceful by an opponent of Conditionalism. (3) Morgan repeats his mistake of 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 in order to make an equally erroneous claim: "Both punishment and separation from God require conscious existence" (p.203). Who says so? This is clearly a mistake: putting to *death* is a punishment that *ends* consciousness and existence, and just as easily separates one from God (in fact, it seems is the only punishment that could separate one from an omnipresent being). So the very argument of *destruction* that Annihilationists contend for is the very punishment that refutes Morgan's claim.

- (E) The word ‘destruction’ on page 203 is next to be discussed and after Morgan summarizes the argument and states that ‘destruction’ is a “central motif” in the New Testament, he relies on an excerpt by Moo to refute the argument. I am not going to repeat the critique of Moo’s use of ‘destroy’ (see above section E.a.), but I will add to it. This common evasion, that *destroy* does not have to mean the termination of existence, but can mean *the loss of use and function* ignores the relationship between function and existence. Whatever ceases to function, sooner or later ceases to exist – the former causing the latter. The ‘wasted ointment’ is destroyed, spilled onto the ground, serving no purpose, soon to dry up and be gone forever. The ruined wineskins are destroyed and unable to function any longer. They are trash and will soon be burnt to molecules or decay naturally into the same. In either case, the wineskins, having been ruined, will be non-existent. The same holds for a ‘lost son’ and a ‘lost coin.’ Both are absent and missing, and both are *as if* they did not exist. Should the boy remain lost, he will die and *literally* exist no more. Should the coin never be found, it will be useless all the way to its own extinction (although much slower than a man). The point then is that, whether organic or inorganic, slowly or quickly, anything said to be lost, ruined or wasted, is to describe the cause for its fate of literal extinction.
- (F) And when Moo states that “In fact, leaving aside for the moment judgment texts, none of the key terms usually has this meaning [of extinction] in the Old and New Testaments” we are left to wonder how he would explain the following: *Matthew 2:39; 5:29, Mark 3:6; 9:41; 11:18; 12:9, Luke 17:27, 29, 21:18, John 10:10, I Corinthians 1:19; 15:18, Hebrews 1:10-11, James 1:10-11, and Revelation 18:14*, for example. That such a statement from a distinguished theologian could be so perfectly false is bewildering.
- (G) Next, on pages 204-206 Morgan discusses the question, “Isn’t an Endless Hell Based on a Greek View of the Soul?” Now this question, so worded, does not get to the heart of the matter very quickly. The Conditionalist when invoking Plato and Grecian influence to the subject is simply offering to explain *where* the Church got the dogma of endless torment from, since according to them, it does *not* come from the Bible. That is all they are attempting to do. Certainly, in agreement with Morgan, early interpreters did not depend on Plato himself to help them develop

doctrine, instead the Platonism of the Hellenized culture and thought they were raised with was unconsciously influencing their writings and their *understanding* of what certain passages may have been saying. Where a Hebrew says one thing, a Greek understands another.

- a. Robert Yarborough in his chapter, which Morgan cites as “ably addressing this” question, admits that “...it is inevitable that Greek thought suffuses their writings – many wrote in Greek, and some were converted out of Hellenistic paganism,” (p.85) and he goes on to assert that although the Fathers held many anti-Platonic doctrines, “this is not to deny that by the second-century Christian thinkers (and indeed writers from the first century) were being influenced by Hellenistic ideas. How could they not be, writing in Greek in the Greco-Roman world?” (p.86). Both sides agree, then, that early Church Fathers were Hellenized thinkers and writers.
- b. Yarborough goes on to inadvertently prove a Conditionalist’s point when he quotes Tatian as “summarizing the gospel promise in these words: ‘We who are now easily susceptible to death, will afterwards receive immortality with either enjoyment or with pain’” (p.84,85). Where did Tatian get this idea from since such a concept of universal immortality is not only missing, but expressly denied in the Bible? Note how he juxtaposes “death” with “immortality” (a natural enough meaning of the words) and that *all* are to receive “immortality” – some enjoy it, others will agonize from it. The logic and language leads then to only one conclusion: if all are “immortal,” none will “die.” This is *prima facie* evidence that Greek thought must have influenced Tatian when it came to the dogma of endless torment because no such language is found in Scripture. The sinner *will* “die” and thus *not* have any immortal existence at all. Only the righteous receive “immortality” and it is an eternity of “life” – the word the Bible chooses to use is “life,” not “enjoyment” as Tatian deviates.
- c. There can be no question, then, that such an influence must be responsible for the Christian doctrine of the Immortality of *all* Souls, and more importantly *the consistent and historic lack of emphasis on the Resurrection of the Body*. For the Bible writers *this alone* was their hope, but Christians have

notoriously neglected that essential doctrine and have never given it its due place and importance. Instead, it is about the separate existence of the soul in some ghostly existence in Heaven. The doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body is given lip service in Christian circles – an “Oh by the way, we get new bodies” type of treatment.

- d. The real questions, then, for Morgan to address are these (1) The Bible never mentions, not a single time, that *all* men are immortal, or to live forever, why? (2) What is meant when the Bible explicitly affirms that *only* the righteous are to be made immortal, deathless and incorruptible? (3) If “eternal life” connotes “immortality” as Morgan himself states (p.205), then will not the wicked receive “eternal life” also if they are immortal? (4) Is it not the least bit striking that the very words directly opposite of “immortality” (*die, perish, corrupt, etc.*) are promised to the sinner, yet the Church continues to call them “immortal?” (5) How come the Church does not properly emphasize and stress the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body to the extent Paul does in I Corinthians 15, Romans 8:23, II Corinthians 5:2, Philippians 3:10-11, 20-21, I Thessalonians 4:13-18? (6) Why does Paul tell the Thessalonians to “Comfort each other with these words” of the Resurrection, if the bodiless and blissful existence of a soul were true? (7) Could it be that Greek thought and culture, which classically exuded such teachings, and so found the doctrine of a bodily resurrection totally unnecessary, perhaps even juvenile (see Acts 17:32 for example), are responsible for such a shift in emphasis? These are the real questions concerning the Greeks, the Immortality of the Soul and their influence on Orthodox dogma.

(H) Pages 207-213 find Morgan addressing the question, “Wouldn’t an Endless Hell Be Unjust?” He breaks it down into two questions, (a) “Is it really true that endless punishment would serve no purpose?” and (b) “Is there really a disparity between sins executed in time and everlasting punishment?”

- a. As for the first question, the initial thing to note is that it is worded euphemistically so that Morgan can avoid the force of the objection, and in so doing never actually addresses the protest. What he calls “endless

punishment” he means “endless torment” – *that* is what he was asked to justify. Instead, what he does is to assume the Bible teaches *endless torment* and then quotes Biblical passages that say God is just to punish the wicked as though this somehow proves *his* “torment thesis.” But this is to beg the very point at hand...no one disagrees with those texts – not one Conditionalist has said that it would be unjust for God to punish and exact a penalty for evil behavior. The objection is that it would be unjust for God to *torment* the perpetrator infinitely and forever without end – *that* was the argument. So it will not do for Morgan to cite texts which teach that God will judge and punish justly, he was supposed to explain how *endless torment* is a righteous penalty. Slipping it through the back door by equating it to just *any* punishment does not come close to showing that *endless torment* serves any purpose.

- b. In regard to the second question, the opening lines on page 209 strike the reader as puzzling – bordering incredible. Morgan cites Conditionalists who argue “the Bible commands us to punish in accordance with the offense (e.g., ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’),” and immediately comments, “Although at first glance this objection seems substantial, it actually flows primarily from a misunderstanding of the nature of sin and a sentimental view of God’s justice.” How does a Conditionalist get accused of this when they quote the very words of the Bible? It was Jehovah himself who established this standard of justice, and the Conditionalists are simply appealing to it. So contrary to the presumptuous claims of Morgan, this objection to *eternal torment* “flows” from God himself and ascribing “misunderstanding of sin” and “sentimentalism” to his opponents is plainly dishonest and disheartening. Note further, that Morgan never returns to the “eye for an eye” text to deal with it squarely and head on, instead, he runs to Jonathan Edwards to make *extra-biblical* arguments. They include,
 - i. “the annihilationists’ view of divine justice...would not only be incompatible with an endless hell, but also would ultimately lead them to deny many realities of evil in existence today (e.g. deranged mothers taking unwanted babies and throwing them into a garbage

can to be killed)” (p.209). What has this to do with an “eye for an eye” or with anything for that matter? The finite crimes and tragedies of this world do not bear on the *nature* of God’s *eschatological* justice; nor do they somehow annul the already established standards that God has given us for judging what is and what is not Just in a punishment. In addition, an *endless torment* does not solve or fix a *single evil* from this world; instead it takes the finite horrors of this life and turns them into an infinite catastrophe for the next. How is the temporary pain of this life cured by inflicting everlasting pain in the next one? These are the questions Morgan was supposed to answer, not dance around pretending that an endless Hell somehow repairs anything.

- ii. Another: “So often the contemporary conditionalists minimize the biblical teaching concerning retributive punishment...and replace it with a human-centered view” (p.210). This is fallacious, not to mention almost slanderous. *All* Conditionalists teach a “retributive punishment” and *all of them* use the language of the Bible to do it. Morgan does not substantiate this assault with any quotes or any proof, just assumes that since his opponents disagree with *him* then they must be anti-biblical. In other words, since Conditionalists did not find it biblically or judicially necessary to fabricate an infinitely painful punishment, they must be “human-centered.”
- iii. Continuing, “Yet the Bible is clear: Sin is inherently *against* God, who is infinite....Thus, sin is an infinite evil and merits endless punishment.” Where are the chapters and verses? Morgan does not advance any biblical proof for this old argument. The standard was already set with an “eye for an eye” and ignoring that, Morgan has to appeal to an *extra-biblical* argument for his case – an argument, when examined is shown to be mistaken on nearly every level. Briefly, let me state what is wrong with this reasoning: (1) the language of the Bible *never* connects the infinite nature of God as having anything to do with the degree of man's culpability, (2) no sin is *directly* against

God in the first place, as if when a man strikes another man, he is literally striking the person of God, (3) proper jurisprudence *always* takes into account the *nature* and *circumstances* of the offending party, not *just the offended*; thus the complexities of every crime are first examined before assigning the correct amount of guilt, and a child who slaps the King gets punished less severely than an adult who takes the same action; (4) the theory cannot make any meaning of *degrees of guilt* as it ignores the *nature of the offense*. If one sin is worth infinite punishment, what are two sins worth? (5) It is at variance with the very conscience that God gave us with no explicit knowledge to the contrary. That to break this or that law means one must be eternally tormented is unknown, and undefined, and to impose it on the unsuspecting is unusually cruel. Righteous judges take into account whether or not the offending party knew of the law, and knew of the penalty *before* they assign the proportionate amount of guilt. Compare this to Romans 1:32 where Paul says humans “knew the ordinance of God” that wickedness was worthy of *death*. (6) Further, this theodicy ends with too small a god and too large a man – humans can affect God so severely so as to set him off into infinite wrath. That God is so drastically impinged upon by his own creation is certainly mankind getting too much credit – it is an anthropocentric fiction. (7) But after all this, Conditionalists are immune to any of this infinite punishment argumentation because they *posit* an eternal punishment themselves. Defined as being a deprivation of an infinite life – a capital and eternal execution, the Traditionalist’s real battle is to establish *their* version of “infinite punishment” in particular.

- iv. Morgan’s argument continues to show weakness when he cites the 6th chapter of Isaiah (p.210) which is supposed to show the “awfulness” and the “extent of sin” compared in light of the “holiness of God.” But read Isaiah 6 and see for yourself if such a view of God – one that views him as a being that would torment a human forever, exists

in that passage. God forgives and cleanses Isaiah's sins in one act of touching a "hot coal" to his "unclean lips" (vv. 6,7). Are we to conclude that such a God who so readily and easily forgives iniquity is going to be an eternal and wrathful tormenter? Of note is the fact that the Bible does not use the phrase "eternal wrath" – not one single time. Not only that, it expressly and explicitly denies the concept: "For I will not contend forever, neither will I always be angry" (Isaiah 56:16). "The LORD is compassionate and gracious; slow to anger and abounding in loving-kindness. He will not always strive with us, nor will he keep his anger forever" (Psalm 103:8,9). "Who is God like you, who pardons iniquity...He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in unchanging love" (Micah 7:18). But back to Isaiah 6 and again, note the penalties God warns of. He threatens the land with devastation and desolation, burned and left with a fraction of its proper population – it is compared to a great oak tree cut down to a stump (vv. 11-13). There is not the smallest utterance of any posthumous, endless tormenting; why would God not mention that in such a context if it were true? Or anywhere else in the Old Testament for that matter?

- v. Morgan then gives up the whole argument when he tries to justify endless tormenting with "total depravity" (pp.210-11). In essence, this "sin against an infinite God" *qualitative* standard is not holding, so he attempts a completely new *quantitative* justification with, "The extent of the penalty due sin might also be better understood when the perpetual sinning of sinners is realized...If all of us continually break the two highest commands, then our guilt must be enormous – especially if we add to the equation the guilt of every other sin we have ever committed (Rom. 2:5)." So first, we deserve infinite torment because the *quality* of sin is infinite, now we deserve it because the number of sins we have committed is vast and the guilt is "enormous." Well he can't have it both ways, and apparently Morgan does not realize that no matter how many sins a person may

commit, that number of sins is infinitely short of infinity. The amount of sin is limited and finite, so it is not clear how this argument is supposed to prove infinite torment. Indeed, “enormous” guilt deserves “enormous” punishment, but that is an infinite distance from *endless tormenting*. Incidentally, Morgan should have cited the rest of Romans 2 where Paul clearly states that Immortality and eternal life go only to the righteous (v.7) and the “wrath” of verse 5 ends in “perishing” (v.12).

- vi. Morgan next attempts to show that the Bible regards sin with “inestimable seriousness” (p.211) but this is an obvious overstatement of the case to make *endless torment* sound reasonable. What does “inestimable” mean and where does it appear in these texts he cites? Quoting passages out of context to somehow support a vague assertion is not proper exegesis, but more importantly, simply showing that the Bible takes sin seriously, is not showing that the Bible says the penalty for it is infinite torment. Morgan continues to miss this burden of proof – his task is to justify *infinite torment*, not show that the Bible regards sin as a serious affront to God; a point that is not even contended.
- vii. The next phase of argumentation finds an extended quote of Robert Peterson showing that God punished people with death for seemingly minor offenses. What this is supposed to prove for endless torment is not clear. In fact, Morgan prefaces the quote with, “acknowledging that none of his examples directly address eternal punishment, Peterson skillfully exposes the gravity of sin....” Well this is the whole point – if the “gravity of sin” is shown by putting someone to “death,” what is left to argue about? Curious that every single, biblical example, from Lot’s wife to Uzzah, that Peterson cites, ends in *death* – and this somehow shows *eternal torment* to be fair? He wants to show that God can punish beyond what we might deem reasonable or just, and so legitimize the tormenting of someone forever, but these are impossible leaps in logic. The difference

between executing someone and tormenting them forever is an absolute infinity – the two cannot be compared qualitatively, yet Peterson wants us to believe that the two are somehow only degrees apart. The fact is that they are different in *kind* and that God should caution us of an *endless torment* with examples of *capital punishment* is too absurd to take seriously. A god that would warn of *death* but really mean infinite life in pain after this event is a moral and judicial criminal. And all Peterson proves, besides the desperation of the common dogma, is what the Conditionalists have been urging: that the wages of sin is death and that the Bible defines the meaning of that word with perfectly clear historical illustrations.

- viii. Moving along, “Sin is an infinite and cosmic treason. Sin is a horrible crime because it screams ‘I hate you,’ to the true and living God, who deserves and demands our total love. In sin, human beings turn their back on the end for which God has created them and become worthless (Rom. 3:12)” (p.212). More words of men that lack strength in reasoning and persuasion. “Cosmic treason” and “I hate you” are not good arguments, and if Morgan would just take his premises all the way to their proper conclusions we would have no disagreement. The only scripture he cites, if taken to its logical end would show that destroying something is the proper end of something that has become “worthless.” Nobody torments a useless object; it is disposed of and extirpated. If Morgan would follow Paul’s line of reasoning to Romans 9 he would see what becomes of useless objects: like worthless clay pots, they are going to be destroyed (9:22). Incidentally, Morgan *cannot* conclude that sinners become “worthless” because their tormenting serves the useful purpose of glorifying God by making known his justice. Isn’t this what he argues for on pages 207-209?
- ix. The next statements are similar to point v. above; perhaps rewording the same argument makes it look like a new one: Torment must be forever because people will continue to sin forever, or as D.A.

Carson puts it, “What is hard to prove, but seems to me probable, is that one reason why the conscious punishment of hell is ongoing is because sin is ongoing” (p.212). And suppose sin ceases – then what? Does the sinner get restored to *everlasting happiness*? If one can say a person will continue to sin, another person can assert that people will cease to sin – and given the fact that they are being tormented, I suspect the great majority will not continue to do that which causes them so much agony. This involves the Traditionalist in the problem of Universalism/Restorationism. But even before this, the argument is no good at the outset, for it makes the penalty for sin, *sin* itself. That is, the sinner is punished for sins in this life by being banished to a place to sin in the next life, effectively making God punish a sinner for sins they have *not yet committed*. In essence, God is guaranteeing that they will commit sins, and then punishing in *anticipation* for them. But how is any of this equitable and right? How does any of this get off the ground in the first place? There is only *one* judgment for the deeds done in the body, so how can we postulate that God will punish sins in Hell *without a formal* judgment? Or if there will be, when does the trial take place and wouldn’t there have to be infinite trials to account for the infinite sins? The whole system is purely *ad hoc* that finds no support in the Bible or from basic judicial principles. Not least, it is also an admission that sins in this present life *do not merit* infinite suffering in the next.

- x. Morgan ends the section with a quote from David Wells that put simply, is in error from the first syllable to the last. The opening line is a *non sequitur*. Wells does not explain how God’s goodness, immortal nature and purity of character have anything to do with sin being “infinitely unpardonable” – he just asserts it. Where is the biblical proof that sin is “infinitely unpardonable” and how can this square with the entire testimony of Scripture which reports from cover to cover that God is a forgiving and pardoning ruler? But Wells’ point is entirely reversed: it is precisely God’s love and

goodness that pardons sin in the first place. Further, the argument is a *straw-man*. No Conditionalist says that God leaves sin unpunished or that it's "momentarily mischievous." This is to color Annihilationism with biased language and Wells' implication is that a "finished" or "finite" response is somehow inadequate – as though a sinner must be infinitely tormented or God has failed himself. Where are the verses? Where is the proof? Contrary to Wells, and Biblically speaking, God deals with sin completely and perfectly and when he does exact the penalty for it, it is always *death* at its harshest. God takes no pleasure in the *death* of the wicked, and he is not willing that *any should perish*, but his justice demands that he punish those who persist in wickedness.

- xi. Wells continues and attempts to take the Atonement of Christ and connect it to this fabricated "infinite response" of God. This argument is just a bad conclusion built on bad premises. For one, Wells does not define "infinite response," does not prove that such a thing (whatever it is) even exists, and he fails to connect it to the guilt of sin. He then looks for anything to connect it to and finds Traditional Christology to bridge the gap. But before this, let's examine the first error, "Christ stood in the place of those whom he represented, and bore their punishment. In doing so, was he annihilated? Of course not." Another *straw-man*. Conditionalists do not postulate that the wages of sin is Annihilation, but that it is "death." Consequently, they have no need for Jesus to be annihilated and thus they never argue for this. Instead, Jesus did in fact illustrate and bear the punishment that sinners would have to endure – a period of agony leading to an execution and loss of life. Turning it around on Wells: was Jesus *endlessly tormented*? Of course not. He is not being tormented now, nor will he be in the future. The Traditionalist's penalty for sin, then, bears no resemblance in either duration or nature to the penalty endured by Jesus. Wells' only escape route is to say that because Jesus is an infinite being, he

endured an infinite torment. But this sort of reasoning is just plainly poor - why then did Jesus have to *die at all*? Or why did he have to endure protracted agony? One lash from the Roman whip would have been sufficient, because Wells' point, recall, involves neither the duration nor nature of the punishment, but merely and solely the nature of the person the punishment was enacted upon. If you strike an infinite being once, goes the logic, it is equivalent to an infinite punishment, therefore, there was no need for Jesus to endure any more, let alone actually expire on the cross. Not only is this nonsensical, it is clearly not the line of reasoning the Bible takes. Scripture reports the passion and death of Jesus in terms of being the literal fulfillment of the sacrificial system; the substance of the Levitical shadows. That is, like the animals of old, Jesus actually and literally *died* and that is *a precise picture* of what will happen to the sinner should he or she have to pay for his or her own sins.

- xii. Wells continues in what appears to be a self-contradiction, “[Christ] did not bear a punishment merely like that which sinners deserved, one that was merely analogous to theirs.” He just finished saying prior to that, “Christ stood in the place of those whom he represented, and bore their punishment...what we see is Christ bearing their actual punishment.” But, according to Wells this can't be, because Christ is really infinite, so it is not “actually their punishment” at all, nor is it “analogous.” According to Wells, Jesus bore a punishment that bears little to no likeness to the punishment sinners will receive, because he is infinite and we are finite. No proof is given, no texts cited, no explanation given to the scripture that asserts the exact opposite: that Jesus bore the *very* punishment (analogous and similar) the sinner would have to endure – that is *death* (Romans 5:8, I Corinthians 15:3, Galatians 3:13, I Peter 3:18, Hebrews 7:27, 9:28, etc.). What then makes more sense of Jesus' death illustrating the penalty for sin? That the penalty for sin is a

death like that suffered by Jesus, or the penalty for sin is *endless torment*, a penalty that Christ did not and is not now enduring?

- xiii. Wells continues, “A gospel that trades on a diminished view of sin, a modified notion of divine righteousness, and a restructured Atonement is not one that is more appealing...but one that is less” (p.213). At this point, all that is left to say is that Wells has proven none of these statements; he, like everyone else before him, assumes his view of endless torment and then imposes it upon the Biblical text. To borrow from him: a gospel that ignores the Biblical view of sin and it’s “eye for an eye” standard; an insulting and incongruous notion of divine righteousness, and an *ad hoc* abuse of the Atonement is not a compelling case – it only serves to highlight to what degree of error people will go to defend a tradition.

- (I) Moving on to the next question Morgan addresses: “Wouldn’t an Endless Hell Be Unloving?” Again he breaks it into two questions, (a) “Is Jesus’ teaching about God’s love incompatible with the historic view of hell?” and (b) “Is God too merciful to punish sinners eternally?” This discussion is found on pages 213-216 and begins with Morgan stating that God’s love is “one of the weakest conditionalist objections” (p.213). After reading that, I assumed we were going to have an excellent response given the weakness of the objection, but one reads in vain to find it. In fact, let the reader judge, from pages 213-215, whether or not I am correct to conclude that Morgan never even attempts an answer, let alone providing an “excellent one.”

- a. To begin with question (a) Morgan spends an entire paragraph to remind us that “all the Scriptures are God’s self-revelation, unveiling his nature and attributes” so we should take caution against just using Jesus as reflecting God’s love. Every serious Conditionalist knows this and does this – taking the entire testimony of scripture to establish the nature of God’s person in general and his love in particular. Morgan continues and *properly* restates the Conditionalist case that “one’s view of God’s love must be consistent with that revealed by Jesus. If so, no one disagrees with that” (p.214). Excellent, now that everyone is on the same page, Morgan can get on with

the objection, except he continues with a *red herring* to end the paragraph that doesn't apply to anyone, at least not to significant Biblical Annihilationists.

- b. What follows is simply discouraging as in a backhanded way, Morgan implies that Nigel Wright has his own "Jesus" who "lays stress on love and justice, even promoting the sense of love and justice and its potential for imaging god. And Wright's Christlike God is not hidden or inscrutable" (p.214). But this is just an unfair treatment of Wright and when Morgan says "Wright's Jesus..." he is plainly implying to the reader that Wright has a Jesus different from the proper one – it is Wright's *version of Jesus*, if you will. But I will not spend much time on this inequity. Wright is not addressing the question of the inscrutableness of God, it is not a topic contained anywhere in the relevant quote. How does Morgan know what Wright thinks about the 'hiddenness' of God? Wright has simply made the point that Jesus reveals to us what God's love and justice are like, and no matter what aspects of God *are* unfathomable, we are confident God's love and justice are *not dissimilar* to Jesus'. That is Wright's point, and Morgan never addresses it.
- c. Listen to this dealing of Wright's objection, "Does this hold up to Scripture? At best, it shows only part of the picture of God. At worst, it could be a sentimental, democratic and humanitarian view of God masquerading as a Christlike picture." But Wright is not discussing every aspect of God, he is attempting to determine what God's love is like, so of course it's "only part of the picture of God." In fact, Wright even includes the Justice of God in this quote which shows that he is not taking a purely "sentimental" view of things but is also considering the relationship of Christ's love to his justice. But here is Morgan in an attempt to respond to Wright ending up in a plain tautology: "Scripture no doubt presents God as loving and seeking justice. But in addition to revealing God as loving, compassionate, merciful and good, the Scriptures also portray God as holy, just, Lord, Judge, King, Lawgiver, sovereign, wrathful upon sin and sinners, and yes even inscrutable." So according to Morgan, Scripture presents

God as loving and just (as Wright stated), but Scripture also presents God as just in addition to loving (?). This is clearly redundant and fails to amount to a response. Wright has already said Jesus reveals God's love *and* justice – he doesn't need to be reminded that Scripture speaks on both of these things as though he missed it; he is the one who *first said it*. Wright wants to know how God's love can be harmonized with *endless torment* and Morgan *again* does not properly deal with this point.

- d. Morgan goes on to cite Romans 11:33-36 without context or interpretation as though Wright would ignore this passage or has never seen it, or that this verse somehow has anything to do with *final punishment* or justifies God tormenting people forever. Morgan's only hope has thus been reduced to: "well if we don't understand all that God does, then maybe endless torment is one of those things, and it ends up being just or loving in the end." But what is this but an admission that the very dogma under consideration is actually unjust and unloving; and the only way to explain it is by appealing to the inability of man to fully understand God. The same logic works for the Annihilationist who runs into this objection: How can God destroy a sinner forever, isn't that unjust and unloving? If Morgan were an Annihilationist he would say, "God's ways are not our ways, his thoughts are not our thoughts; he is inscrutable and hidden and what we perceive as unfair, in reality is actually loving and just." And what has he proved? Nothing – he just asserts that God is going to do *this and that*, and *this and that* is just and loving because God is just and loving. If ever a circular argument that begged the question existed, this is it.
- e. He continues this line of reasoning in the same paragraph by referencing Jesus' *anger* as though Annihilationists cannot account for it. But again, what is the relationship between Jesus' anger and his love? And what does his anger with the Pharisees have to do with *endless torment* being compatible with his love? Morgan continues to dodge the objection and so far from being the "weakest" it is quickly becoming quite strong – having no answer for it.

- f. He then list texts of Jesus' teaching on Hell, only to presuppose his interpretation of them again, and again he does not attempt to harmonize *endless torment* with Jesus' love – which should have been the whole purpose of his response. He ends the inquiry with quotes from D.A. Carson and Leon Morris (pp. 214, 215) which end up concluding a perfect non-answer to the objection. Let me repeat, Dr. Morgan's job was to explain *how* endless torment squares with God's love? Instead, he just tells us that the Bible teaches about Hell as if anyone denied this or as if this was even the point under consideration. It is, therefore, irrelevant how Jesus spoke about Gehenna, and whether or not he gave graphic depictions of hell – Annihilationists wanted to know *how* Morgan's *interpretation* of hell can be reconciled with God's love.
- g. Question (b) on p.215 wants to know if God is too merciful to punish sinners eternally, and the first thing to note is the way the question is worded – it is designed to elicit a “no” answer. The appropriate wording is asking how *eternal torment can be reconciled with the attribute of mercy*. How do we view God as a merciful being if he is never to take pity on those in agony? But this is of course the whole objection and when worded properly, the incompatibility of *endless torment* and *mercifulness* shows clearly. The two notions are mutually exclusive and both cannot exist at the same time – for the very definition of “mercy” entails compassion and forbearance toward an opponent. It also carries the sense of pardoning or mitigating the punishment of an offender. Endless torment is not any of these things – in fact it is patently antithetical to it. But these are preliminary remarks and Morgan's treatment of the issue ought to be surveyed.
- i. In the last full sentence of page 215, the reader finds this: “... [Conditionalists] often fail to balance God's mercy with his holiness, justice, and wrath.” On what does Morgan ground this accusation? Nothing. It is just a bold declaration that amounts to nothing more than a misrepresentation of his opponent's position. They teach that God will put to death the unrepentant via an execution that will be

more or less painful, depending on the sinfulness of the condemned – how is that not upholding the holiness, justice and wrath of God? Why should God have to torture people forever to qualify as holy and just? God is wrathful toward the wicked demanding their death; Justice is being served when He convicts and punishes sinners; and his holiness demands that sin and sinners are removed from His Creation, destroyed forever. We are hard-pressed to concoct a more holy and just scenario than this.

1. And the irony in all this is that Morgan is actually the one who has the problem balancing the attributes of God. Morgan's thesis has little, if any place for the mercy, love, compassion and patience of God. Unfortunate that Morgan can stretch the wrath of God to all eternity, without anyone accusing him of imbalance. If Morgan faults the Annihilationist for undervaluing the wrath of God, he is guilty of overemphasizing it – he does so to the negation of God's other attributes. A doctrine therefore that does not seek this balance is seriously flawed, not to mention self-refuting for imagining that a benevolent and merciful being will torment his creatures forever in eternal anger and wrath.
- ii. Morgan proceeds to quote Jonathan Edwards and John Frame (p.216) for which there is no disagreement with either man in these lines. Every Annihilationist agrees with Edwards that God should not be viewed as so merciful that he cannot execute penal justice. None of Morgan's Conditionalist opponents are affected by this because they teach that God *will* execute such penal justice. Furthermore, no one in the debate is going to disagree with John Frame who reminds us that "whatever they...may think about the relative importance of love, they are nevertheless responsible to do full justice to everything else that the Bible says about God." Suffice it to say the Annihilationist holds the very same principal. That is why they asked Morgan to harmonize the attributes of God's mercy

and love with the dogma of endless torment. Recall, that the Conditionalists raised this objection first, so if they didn't care about *everything* the Bible said of God, they would not have raised this challenge. Ironically then, the Conditionalist asks the Traditionalist to harmonize *all* the attributes of God, and in response they get a reminder to pay attention to *all* the attributes. So like I said in the beginning, Morgan never once attempts to address the question head on – there is not a single attempt to show that endless torment is congruent to God's mercy and love.

iii. Instead, at the very end, the reader finds that viewing God from many perspectives is according to Morgan, "...much wiser because it balances our doctrine of God according to the whole of Scripture. It also demonstrates that God's mercy is not inconsistent with endless punishment." Well that is what he was supposed to be showing, but again there was nothing to demonstrate this. To the question: "Isn't the mercy of God incompatible with eternal torment?" Morgan responds, "No, the mercy of God is not incompatible with endless torment." I suppose this sort of reasoning will satisfy very few.

(j) Closing out the chapter, on pages 216-218, the question entertained is: "Wouldn't an Endless Hell Diminish God's Victory over Evil?" Morgan begins with two quotes from Clark Pinnock and John Stott who represent the Conditionalist objection. I quote the highlights of those passages, first from Pinnock: "History ends so badly under the old scenario. In what is supposed to be the victory of Christ, evil and rebellion continue in hell under the conditions of burning and torturing. In what is supposed to be a resolution, heaven and hell go on existing alongside each other forever....Victory means that evil is removed and nothing remains but light and love." And Stott, "But [these Universalism passages] do lead me to ask how God can in any meaningful sense be called 'everything to everybody' while an unspecified number of people still continue in rebellion against him and under his judgment. It would be easier to hold together the awful reality of hell and the universal reign of god if hell means destruction and the impenitent are no more."

- a. Morgan's initial response is to state that "at first glance, this argument seems persuasive. The ultimate eradication of the wicked seems to be a better victory than endless punishment" (p.217). I agree, it does seem this way; it is now time to determine whether it not only *seems* to be such, but actually *is*.
- b. Morgan next states that "Stott falls into the same trap by presupposing a certain understanding of what God's being 'all in all' means" (p.217). It is not this simple. Determining what Paul meant by God being "all in all" is more involved than just understanding those three words. Included in this assessment of what they mean is the *context* of 1 Corinthians 15 and other passages related to the "restoration of all things" (Acts 3:21). Contextually speaking, Paul begins by telling his readers that the end will come when Christ hands the kingdom over to God, after *abolishing all contrary* rule, authority and power, and that Christ will subject all his enemies to his authority including a victory over death itself (15:24-26, 54-57). Even Christ himself is subject to the authority of the Father (v.28) so that nothing is out of order, no authority contrary to the supreme ruler is active, and God is everything to everything. Now certainly, Morgan would contend that this "subjection" does not necessitate extermination, and I agree, however he would need to argue the point that tormenting his enemies forever is the subordination that Paul had in mind – a point he would have difficulty making considering Paul clearly understands *death's subjection* to be a literal extermination.
- c. He is in deeper water, however, when he needs to argue that God will *have* enemies forever. This is a main point in the objection: did Paul envision God having enemies *forever*, only rendering their powers inactive? Paul teaches that the creation will be 'set free from its slavery to corruption' (Romans 8:19-22), that all things in creation will bow to the lordship of Christ (Philippians 2:9,10), that at the appropriate time God will 'sum up' all things in the heavens and earth in Christ (Ephesians 1:10), that God will reconcile all things to Himself, whether things in the heavens or on earth (Colossians 1:20). None of this remotely sounds like Paul imagined the

new order of things to include vast numbers of unrighteous beings. How can Morgan conclude that all creation submitting to the lordship of Christ or that summing up and reconciling all things to God could possibly mean that God will still have enemies he is punishing and tormenting forever? He does not address this, nor consider these texts of the apostle before determining what “all in all” might mean.

- d. Further, Morgan is in equally dangerous waters when he has to explain how God could possibly be “everything” to the sinner he is tormenting forever. He makes no attempt. He does not explain how God could be considered loving, compassionate, merciful or kind to the agonizing sinner. Nor does he explain how the sinner has love, care, kindness, and devotion toward God. But this is the whole objection. How is God “everything to everybody” if he is *not* all these things to all his creation. Moreover, the phrase “all in all” implies reciprocation. Everything in creation is as dedicated and faithful to the being that is “everything” to them. This alone excludes the possibility of there being anything in creation that is not loyal to God.
- e. Furthermore, the phrase “all in all” connotes only *positive* and *benevolent* qualities being reciprocated. That excludes God being angry, wrathful, critical and punishing. None of those things make up what it means to be “everything in everyone” otherwise God would have to be wrathful toward the redeemed, but this is impossible. None of this is considered, argued, pointed out or addressed by Morgan. He only charges Stott with “presupposing a certain understanding of what God’s being ‘all in all’ means” (p.217), and does not spend a single word on deciding what it *does* mean.
- f. His last resort is to quote the standard proof-texts of Revelation 20:10 and Matthew 25:41, 46 to show that irregardless of what the phrase “all in all” means, it must allow *endless torment* since these verse so clearly teach it. But this is to miss the point entirely and does not address the objection. Morgan was asked to reconcile the biblical vision of a renewed creation with *his* interpretation of these passages; or in other words, he needs to

- square the “victory of God” *with* “endless torment” and not just *assume* that they are in harmony. So his answer to the objection amounts to this: (1) assume his interpretation of these passages are accurate, (2) neglect the meaning of the phrase “all in all,” (3) neglect the other passages of Paul on the Eschatological Restoration, and (4) assume, not prove, endless tormenting of God’s enemies is compatible with the final victory of God.
- g. Here is not the place to reproduce an interpretation of Matthew 25:46 and Revelation 20:10, but I (along with many others) have written about them in detail elsewhere. Anyone interested can contact me personally and read for themselves if they are not adequate: sscianni@hotmail.com
- h. Briefly in connection with those verses, Morgan writes, “...it is unmistakable that at least Satan, the beast, and the false prophet will be in hell forever” (p.217). What Morgan fails to introduce to the reader is that the devil is viewed as a “dragon” (20:2), that the “beast” and “false prophet” are symbols for institutions (or at least that there is considerable debate over what they stand for), and he does not mention that this whole description is taken from apocalyptic visions filled with allegory and hyperbole. Further, they are not in “hell” but are thrown in the “lake of fire,” which is symbolic for the “second death” (20:14, 21:8), and is the same place “death and Hades” are thrown (20:14). So contrary to being “unmistakable,” there exist more traps and obstacles to a *mistake-free* interpretation in the Revelation than in any other book of the Bible. What bewilders me is why it does not occur to Morgan, strange or unsound, to use ambiguous and symbolic passages in apocalyptic literature to interpret the rest of the Bible. More *clear* and more *unmistakable* are Paul’s writings of God being “all in all” and reconciling all creation. It is by the light of *those* writings that we should interpret the book of Revelation. So not only does Morgan fail to answer the objection and justify eternal torment, his answer causes him to make a fundamental mistake in hermeneutics.
- i. The mistake is completed when he concludes in the next sentence, “It seems hard to imagine a more graphic way of teaching the endless punishment of these evil enemies than the apostle John’s expression,

“tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Pp.217-218). The fact is that is *not* the point of the language which, incidentally, does not tell us who or what these “evil enemies” actually are. Of course we would expect to have graphic expressions like this when John’s vision endeavors to show the worst of God’s enemies enduring the worst of penalties. The problem then is that these “enemies” are personifications and Morgan’s wooden, literal interpretation completely disregards the genre of literature we are dealing with. The punishment is allegorical because the punished are allegorical – personified punishment to fit personified characters. We know the “devil,” “beast” and “false prophet” are symbolic, and they are being punished in a symbolic “lake of fire.” Recall, the devil is actually seen as a “dragon” and the other two are viewed as “wild animals” composed of various animal parts. None of this has any literal correspondence to reality. Satan is not *really* a fire-breathing, red, flying reptile; Rome is not *really* a wild animal with bear paws and ten horns; Caesar is not *really* a wild animal that comes out of the ground with lamb’s horns; and the fire of God’s final judgment is not *really* contained in a “lake.” This is the very essence, nuance and beauty of the literature, and John does a similar thing in Revelation 18:4-19:3 as he depicts *personal* suffering for an *impersonal* entity – the city of Babylon. Given these facts, it is hard to imagine a more clumsy way for God to teach the doctrine of endless torment than by using the phrase “tormented day and night to the ages of the ages” one, single time in the whole canon of scripture – and that toward *symbols* within a *symbolic lake* found in an apocalyptic vision! What Morgan should really imagine is why this “graphic” phrase is not found anywhere else in the whole Bible. Why is it not in the calmest prose, the most legal, didactic language, thousands of times from cover to cover? The only answer is because no author from cover to cover believed it.

j. Continuing, Morgan says, “Certainly, heaven is a place where only light, love, and holiness exist – uncontaminated by sin, suffering, death, or evil. Heaven is marked by the manifest glory of God and newness of creation. Revelation 21 and 22 make that clear....But hell will also continue forever”

(p.218). This is plainly an error. Revelation 21 and 22, do not speak about “heaven” in this manner, it talks about *all of creation – the new heavens and new earth*. All of creation is to be renewed, God makes ALL things new, and the former order of evil, pain, suffering, crying, death is to *pass away* (Revelation 21:4,5). It is not exclusive to some *part of creation* called “heaven,” this is the vision of the *whole creation* – the “new heavens and the new earth wherein righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13). It is therefore inaccurate to say “heaven is marked” by God’s glory alone, and set up this duality with hell – a modern concept that does not exist in the Revelation or any other part of the Bible for that matter.

- k. When Morgan says, “But hell will also continue forever” and in the next paragraph, “But the coexistence of heaven and hell does not hinder the glorious victory of God or the utter happiness of the redeemed. Through punishing non-Christians eternally in hell, God will vindicate his majesty, display his power, glorify his justice and indirectly magnify his grace” (p.218) is to just assert without argument, the very thing to be proved. Yes, we know that Morgan *thinks* endless torment does all these wonderful things, but we wanted to know *how* it is supposed to do them. The Conditionalists want to know *how* this is majestic, gracious, perfect or just or how this could possibly be called a victoriously, renewed creation? What country would boast of such renewal and perfection with half of its inhabitants incarcerated in prison undergoing torment? Morgan’s “new creation” is an equivalent, and he has not provided any arguments to the contrary. Nor has he explained how his vision of eternity is better, more biblical or more coherent than one in which God has *no* enemies, and where there is literally no more evil, suffering or rebellion anywhere throughout the Cosmos.
- l. The final paragraph of the chapter begins, “Through the Final Judgment and hell, God will set the record straight. No evil will go unpunished. All who have trampled God’s grace and holiness will pay the due penalty of their sin.” Every Conditionalist agrees. Morgan restates what no one is disputing when he was supposed to be showing that “eternal torment”

actually “sets the record straight.” Continuing, “This is not some sort of cosmological dualism as the conditionalists allege. How could there be dualism when God reigns supreme and all his enemies are vanquished?” If he used the proper word “tormented” instead of “vanquished” he would have his answer. God is forever angry with, forever tormenting and thus forever conquering his countless enemies, and if he let up for a moment what would happen? God is *active* in the punishing of his enemies forever without an end, just as he is *active* in blessing the righteous. Such states of *good* and *evil* are to exist as long as God lives. This is the *dualism* that Morgan was supposed to address, not just pretend they didn’t exist, or simply assert, “No, there will be no hint of dualism” (p.218).

- m. In closing, the reader is assured, “...God’s victory will be glorious, his reign will be absolute, and justice will prevail” (p.218). Again, that is nicely worded but Morgan never proved this conclusion. He never argued that “endless torment” is in fact a “victory,” that it “will be glorious,” or that it is in fact “justice.” But this ends the chapter, so the reader is left to take it on faith and assertion that the orthodox dogma is all of these things. But now since an alternative exists, what would prevent the reader from believing a far more credible assertion: God will have no more enemies and there will never be anymore evil in the renewed creation? It seems nothing but tradition would prevent it.

In summary, as this has not been the only publication of its kind that I have read, it has been my experience, that theologians, who on most occasions produce learned and competent material, find it a much more difficult task to publish a similar quality when defending the traditional notion of hell. Dr. Chris Morgan, as shown, is no exception to this trend and the fault is primarily due, not to the intelligence of the author, but to the inherent weakness of the case to be defended.

As for Dr. Morgan himself, I do not know him personally and have nothing against him, hoping that nothing I wrote would unfairly attack him. I am sure he is a kind and amiable man with a high degree of sharpness from whom I’m certain I would learn much if

we spent any amount of time together. It is simply this issue where he has just not been persuasive.

Further, in any doctrinal discussion, the issue always runs deeper than just what is clear or unclear; what is true and false, or what is right and wrong. There are innumerable social and psychological factors that play a part in determining where one man ends up on any side of a theological question. The point is that the facts are there for everyone to read and see for themselves – accepting them is another matter. It has thus been my endeavor to help make them plainer to see. It has also been an expression of my desire that Christian professors, not to mention all Christians everywhere, be perfectly forthright with them.