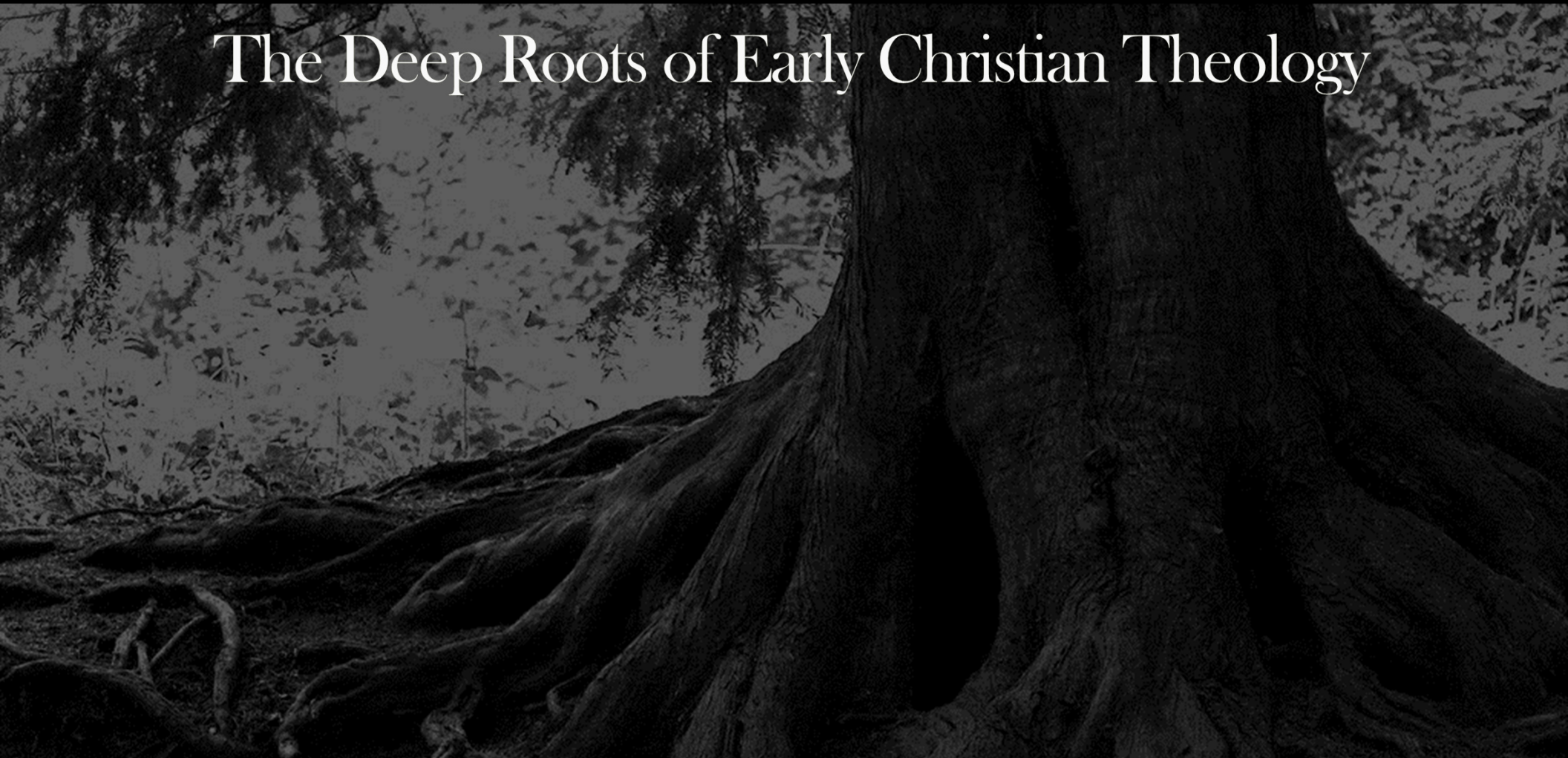




THE ANÁSTASIS CENTER  
FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION & MINISTRY

# Reconstruction

The Deep Roots of Early Christian Theology





# Reconstruction

## The Deep Roots of Early Christian Theology

- 10/2 Slavery: How the Early Church Got It Right
- 10/9 Women in the Early Church
- 10/16 Children in the Early Church
- 10/23 The Canonization of the New Testament:  
Why Not the Gospels of Thomas and Judas?
- 10/30 The Nicene Creed, the Trinity, and the Limitations of Human Language
- 11/6 The Goodness of God and the Healing of Creation  
According to Athanasius of Alexandria
- 11/13 Hell as the Love of God
- 11/20 Christian Mysticism and the Shaping of Desire:  
Gregory of Nyssa and the Vision of Ecstasy
- 12/4 Qumran: A Proto-Christian Sect and What It Means for  
Jewish-Christian Relations Today
- 12/11 Romans 9 – 11, Predestination and Free Will, the Hardening of Hearts, and  
Ongoing Outreach to the Jewish Community





THE ANÁSTASIS CENTER  
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# Hell as the Love of God

Mako A. Nagasawa

The Anástasis Center for Christian Education and Ministry



# Outline

- Introduction: Defining Heaven and Hell
- Theology
- Church History
- Scripture: Fire
- Scripture: Human Being, Human Becoming



# Outline

- **Introduction: Defining Heaven and Hell**
- Theology
- Church History
- Scripture: Fire
- Scripture: Human Being, Human Becoming

# Defining Heaven: Self-Centered Rewards?





# Defining Heaven: Self-Centered Rewards?



# Defining Hell: Self-Centered Fears?





# Defining Hell: Self-Centered Fears?



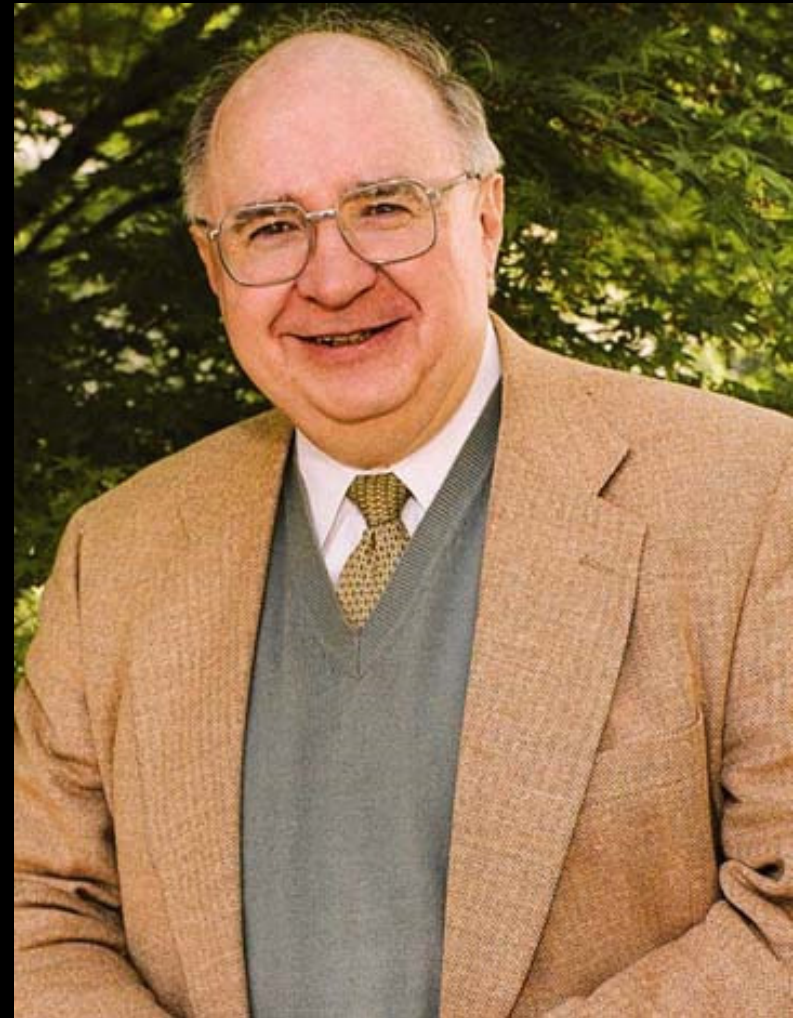
# Defining Heaven and Hell: A Center In Yourself?

- Jesus is just a gatekeeper?
- What if your desires are messed up?
- What if God is actually trying to fix your desires?
- Then you can't start with yourself and your current desires



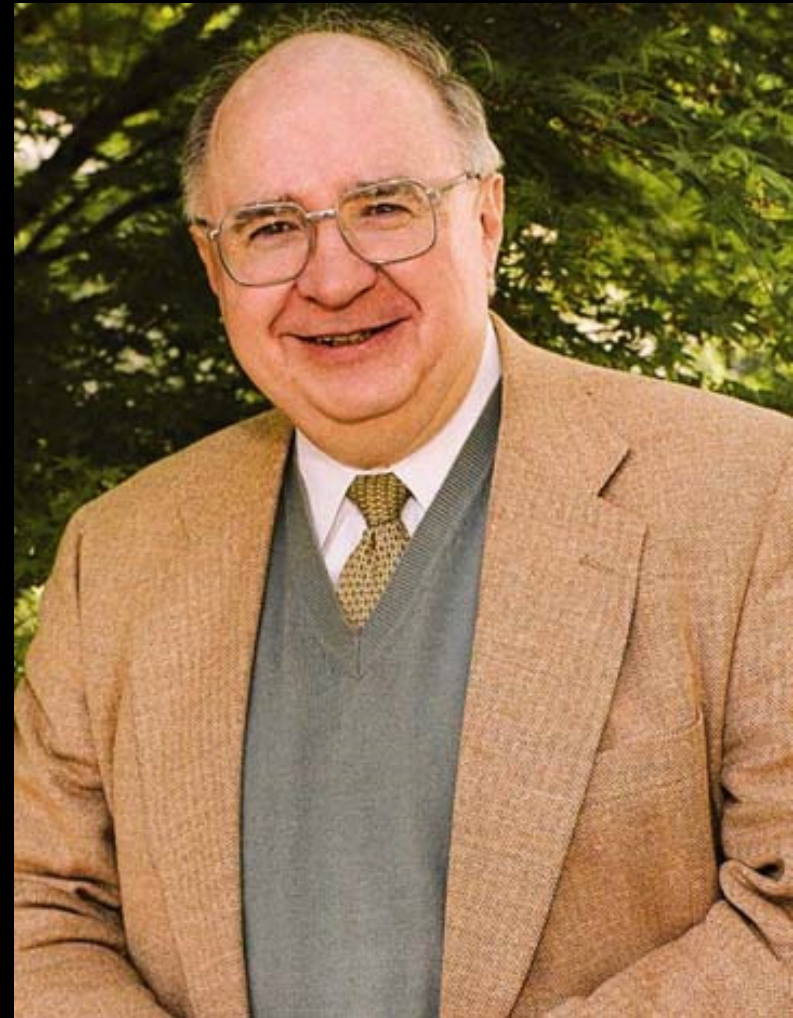
# Defining Heaven and Hell: The Character of God Comes First

- “Of course, the question of punishment, i.e. of hell and damnation will arise in many people’s minds, and quite rightly. But damnation does not mean that God ceases to love the one damned. If that were true, then the sinner would be more powerful than God, since the sinner would have the power to make God, who is love, *agape*, something less than God.



# Defining Heaven and Hell: The Character of God Comes First

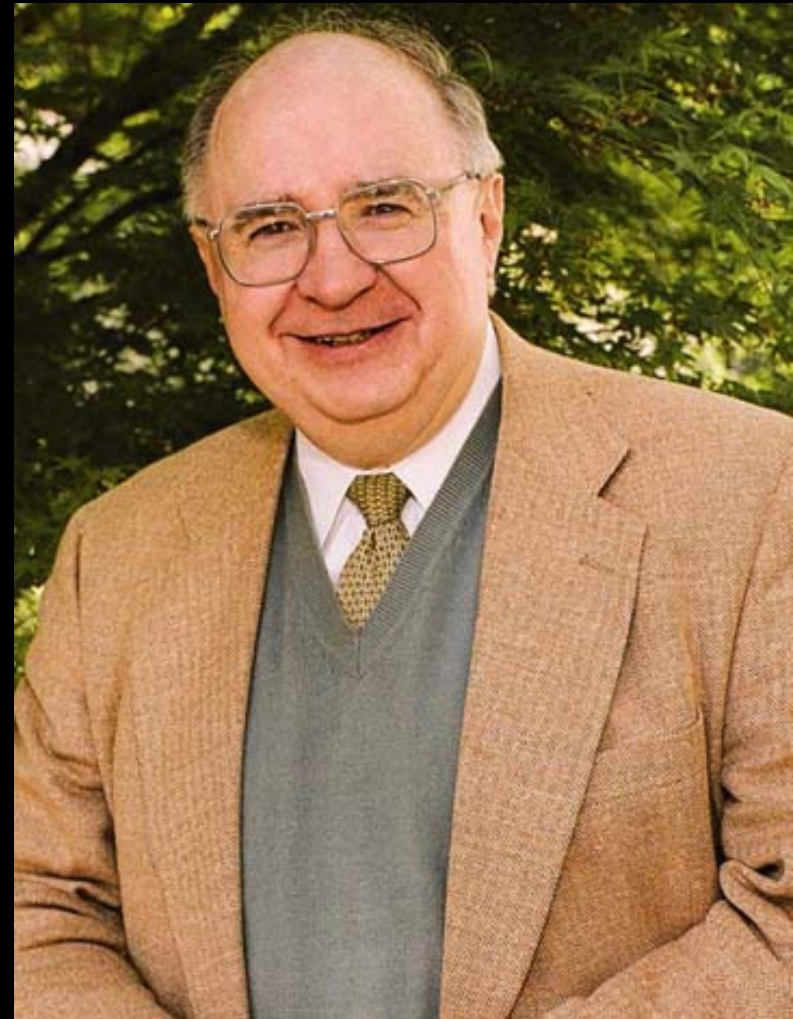
- “No, God’s love is constant, unchanging and perfect. Damnation means that the sinner refuses finally and absolutely to accept being loved and to love in response. The damned may not love God, but God continues to love the damned. After all, the love of God is what holds us in existence...





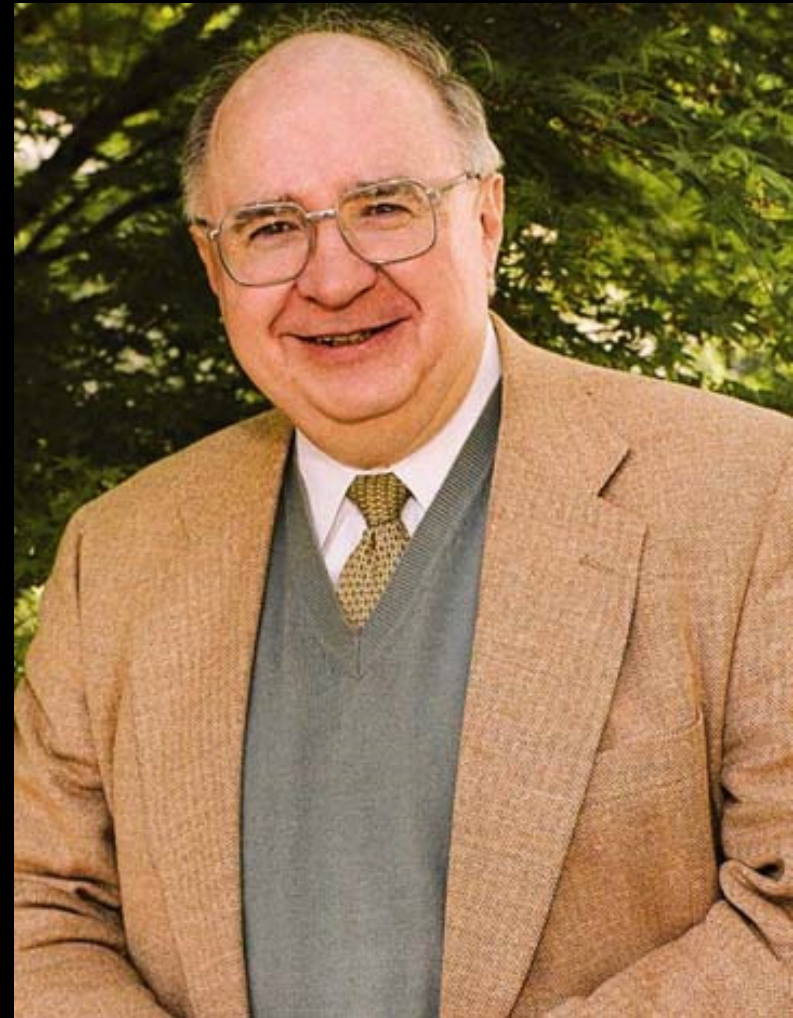
# Defining Heaven and Hell: The Character of God Comes First

- “If God does not love you, you’re not damned. You simply aren’t. What supports our existence and holds us in being is God’s love. We exist by the fact that God gives God’s self to us at every moment. Therefore, of course, God loves the damned. God loves everything that exists just because it exists. Indeed, that is what makes it exist: God loves it into being...



# Defining Heaven and Hell: The Character of God Comes First

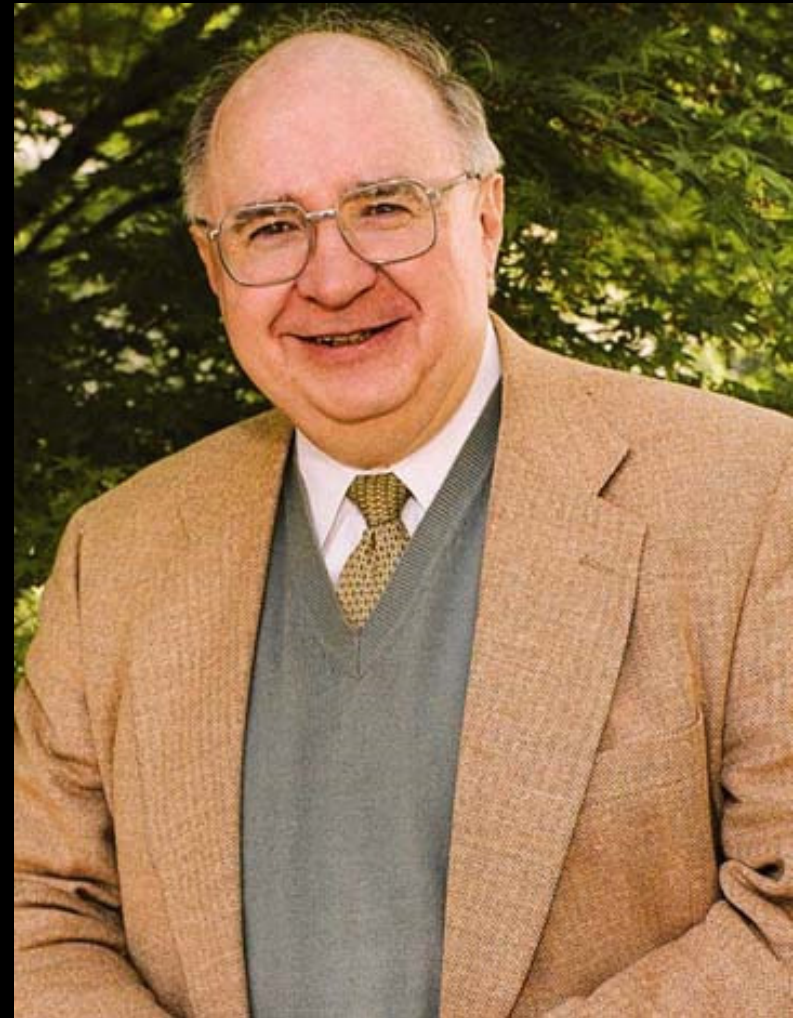
- “Let me give you an image which comes from Gregory of Nyssa at the end of the fourth century. The difference between heaven and hell is described in this story he tells: Picture yourself walking out on a bright sunny day with healthy eyes. You will experience the sunlight as something wonderful and pleasant and beneficent.





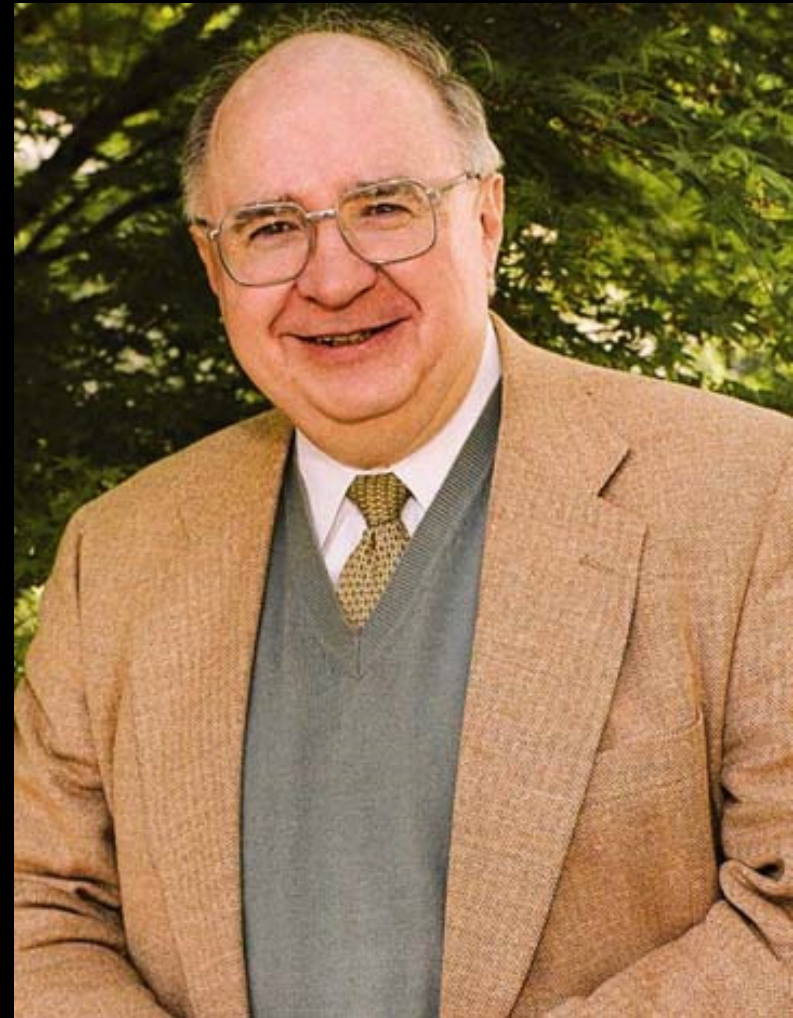
# Defining Heaven and Hell: The Character of God Comes First

- “Now, picture yourself walking out on exactly the same bright sunny day, but with a diseased eye. You will now experience the sunlight as something terrible and painful and awful, something to shy away from. Well, the sun didn’t change. You did...



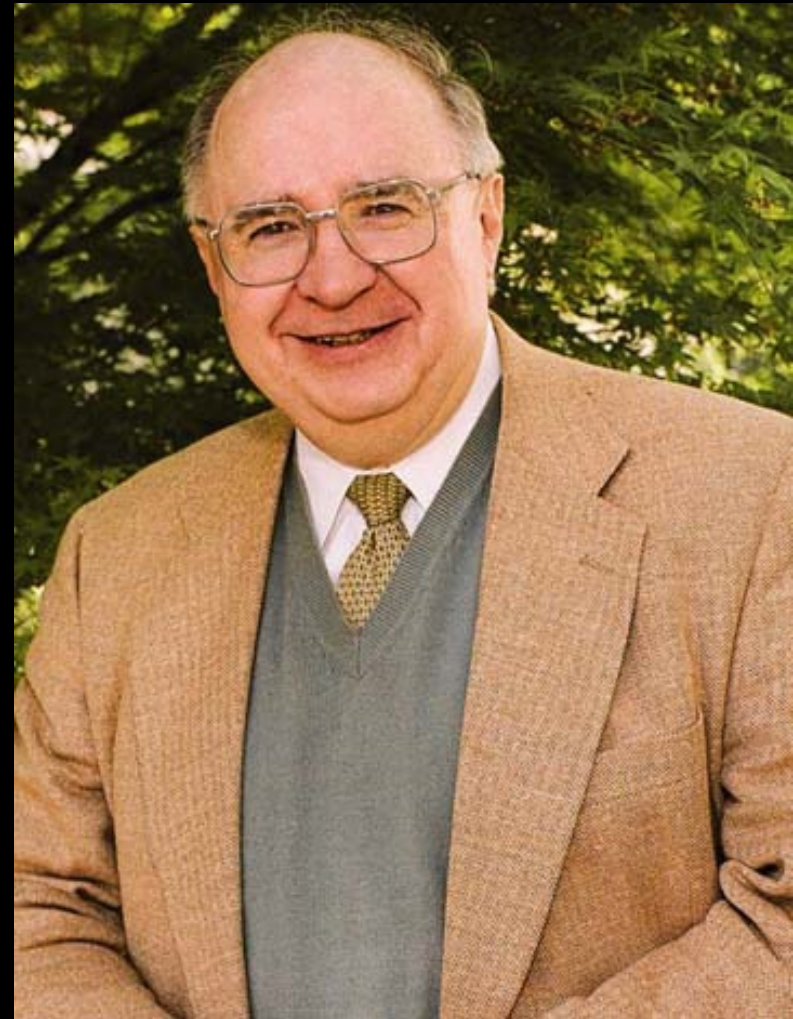
# Defining Heaven and Hell: The Character of God Comes First

- “That is the point about heaven and hell. Heaven and hell are exactly the same thing: the love of God. If you have always wanted the love of God, congratulations, you got heaven. If you don’t want the love of God, too bad, you are stuck for all eternity. God remains God. God makes the sun shine on the just and the unjust, the rain fall on the good and the wicked.



# Defining Heaven and Hell: The Character of God Comes First

- “If you don’t want rain or sun, too bad, you are still going to get them. The question is not that God changes in response to us. It is that we are judged by our response to the absoluteness of God’s self gift.”
  - Michael Himes, S.J., *Doing the Truth in Love*, p.14 – 15





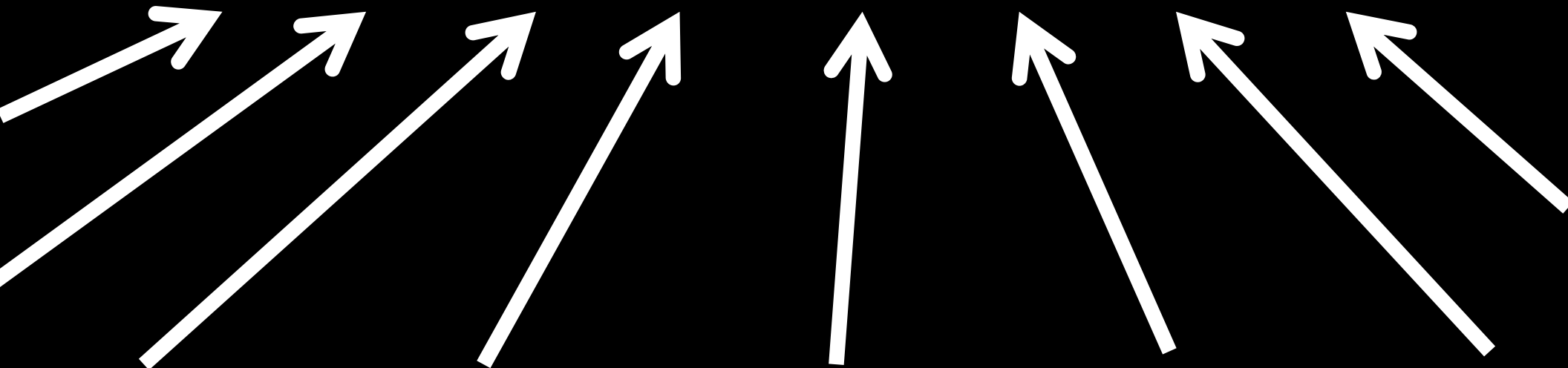
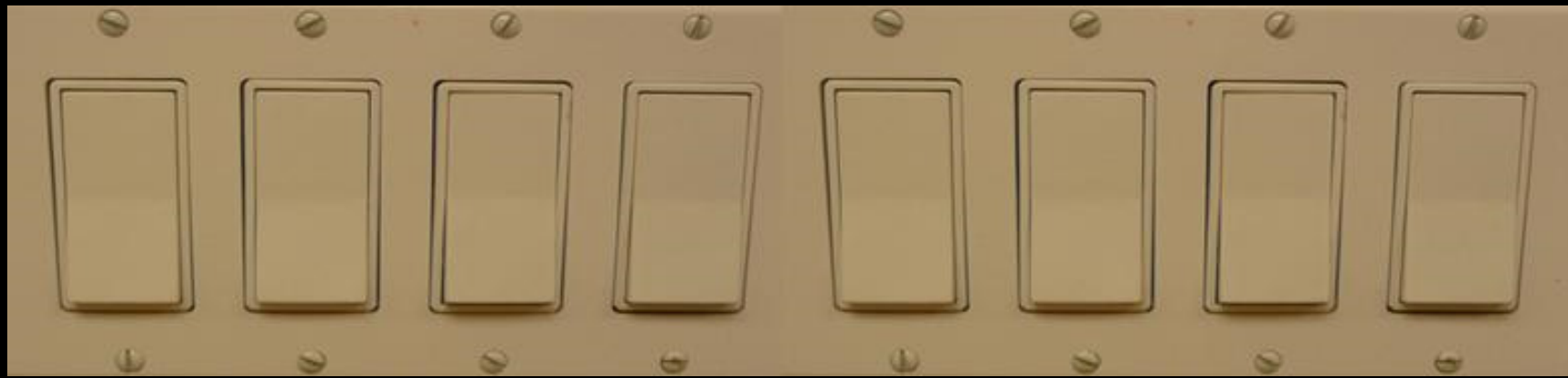
Really? What's the Evidence?



# Outline

- Introduction: Defining Heaven and Hell
- **Theology**
- Church History
- Scripture: Fire
- Scripture: Human Being, Human Becoming

# “God as Lightswitches”?



Love

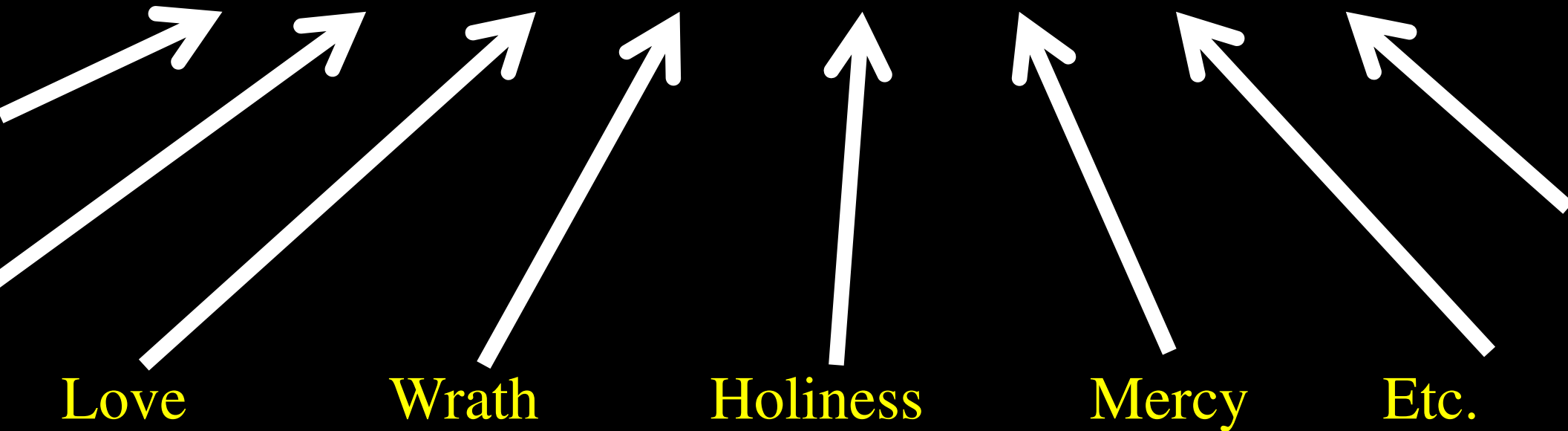
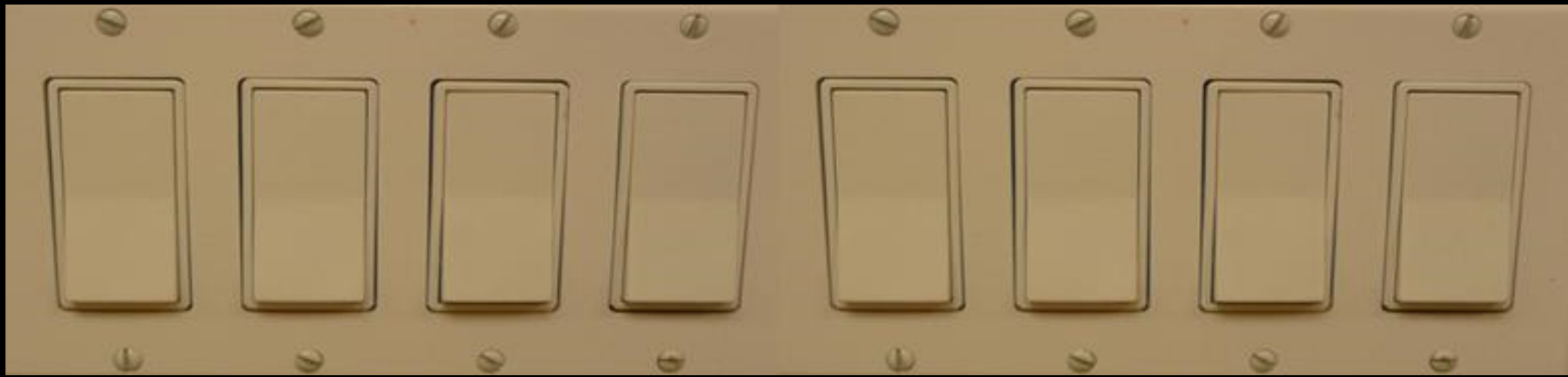
Wrath

Holiness

Mercy

Etc.

# Systematic Theology: How to Integrate these Characteristics?



Love

Wrath

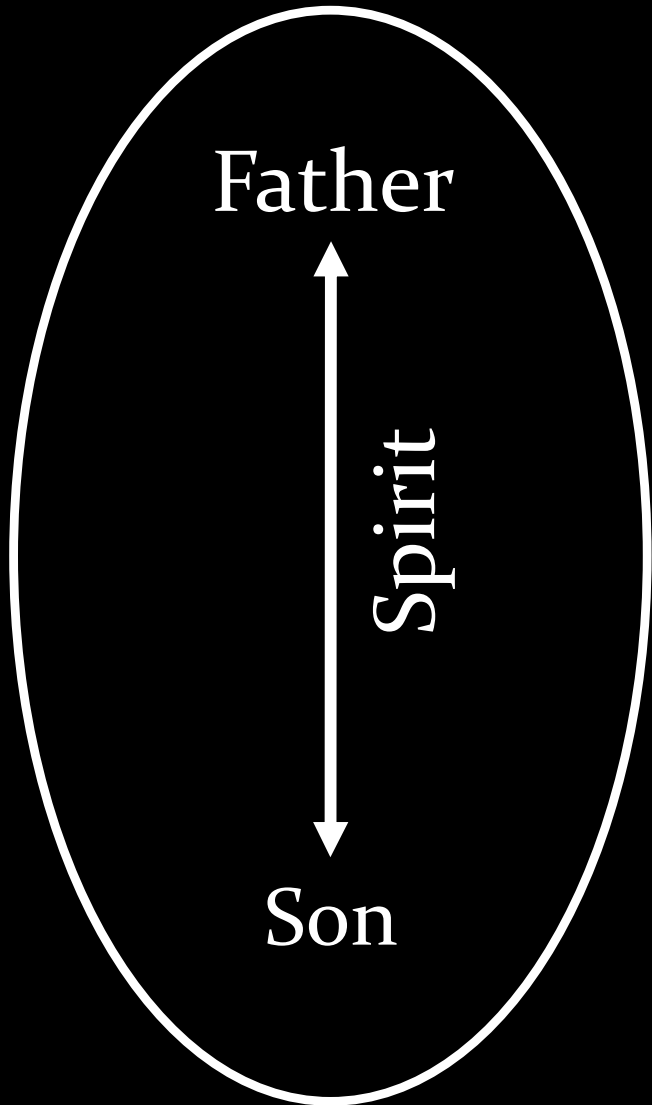
Holiness

Mercy

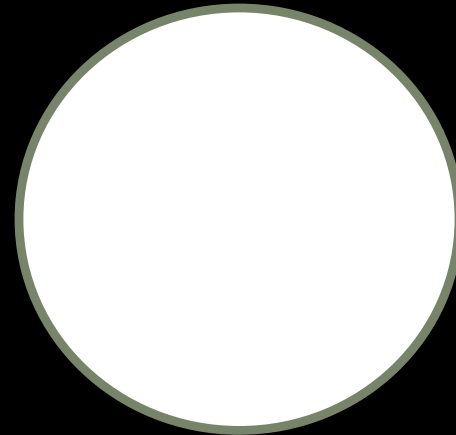
Etc.

# What is God's Nature?

**God as Trinity**



**God as Singularity**





# God's Primary Characteristics? Before Creation

## God as Trinity

- Loving
- Good
- Personal
- Relational
- Family
- Friendship
- Unified
- Community
- Other-centered

## God as Singularity

- ??

# God's Primary Characteristics? Before Creation

## God as Trinity

- Is Love (summary)

## God as Singularity

- ??

# God's Secondary Characteristics? After Creation: Recall Athanasius

- “But the God of all is *good* and exceeding noble by nature, and therefore is kind; for one that is *good* can grudge nothing: for which reason he does not even grudge existence, but desires all to exist, as objects for his loving-kindness” (*Against the Heathen* 41.2)
- “For it were not worthy of God’s *goodness* that the things He had made should waste away... what was God in His *goodness* to do? ... For neglect reveals weakness, and not *goodness* on God’s part... It was, then, out of the question to leave men to the current of corruption; because this would be unseemly, and unworthy of God’s *goodness*” (*On the Incarnation* 6.5 – 10)

# God's Secondary Characteristics? After Creation

## God as Trinity

- Is Love
- Holy
- Wrathful
- Merciful
- Just
- Sovereign
- Powerful
- Wise
- Etc.

## God as Singularity

- ??

Secondary characteristics are how God relates to creation

- Holiness requires commonness, etc.



# Discussion Questions

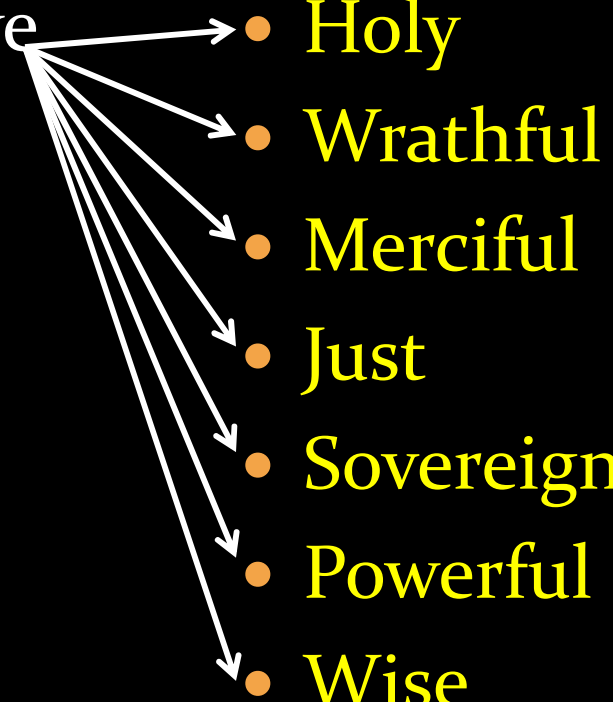
1. Definition: Holiness means “set apart from”
2. Before God created, was God “set apart from” anything?
3. Is God’s holiness a primary characteristic, or fundamental attribute, of God, equal to God’s love? One of many characteristics/attributes?



4. When Isaiah says, “Holy, holy, holy” (Isa.6:3), what is the larger context? What happens next?
5. How is holiness an activity of God’s love?

# God's Secondary Characteristics? After Creation

## God as Trinity

- Is Love
    - Holy
    - Wrathful
    - Merciful
    - Just
    - Sovereign
    - Powerful
    - Wise
- 

- Must be integrated
  - E.g. How is God's justice an *activity* of His love?

## God as Singularity

- ??

- Can be arbitrary
- Can do and be anything
- No need to integrate

# Systematic Theology

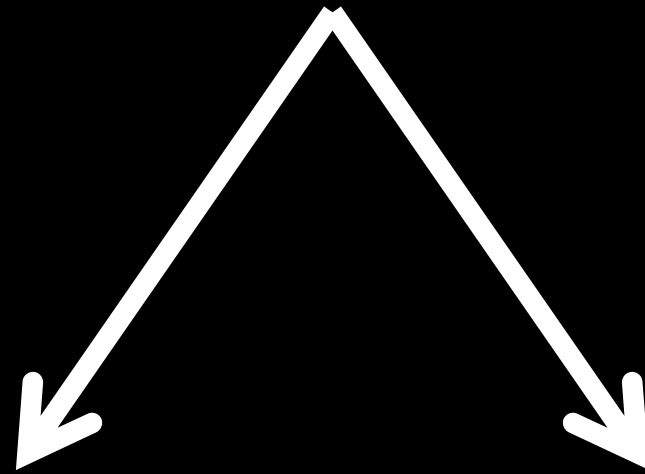
- Which model of God is Trinitarian?

God is loving



God in Jesus  
offers new humanity  
to ALL, opposes all  
human evil down to  
its source in us

God is arbitrary



God  
saves  
some  
(mercy)

God  
damns  
others  
(justice)

# Systematic Theology

- Does God change fundamentally just because He created us and we sinned?
- “God is love” becomes “God is love and wrath”?? How?

God is loving



God in Jesus  
offers new humanity  
to ALL, opposes all  
human evil down to  
its source in us

God is arbitrary




God  
saves  
some  
(mercy)

God  
damns  
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(justice)

# Systematic Theology

- Did anyone else notice that that is a problem?
- Yes, let's see what they said!

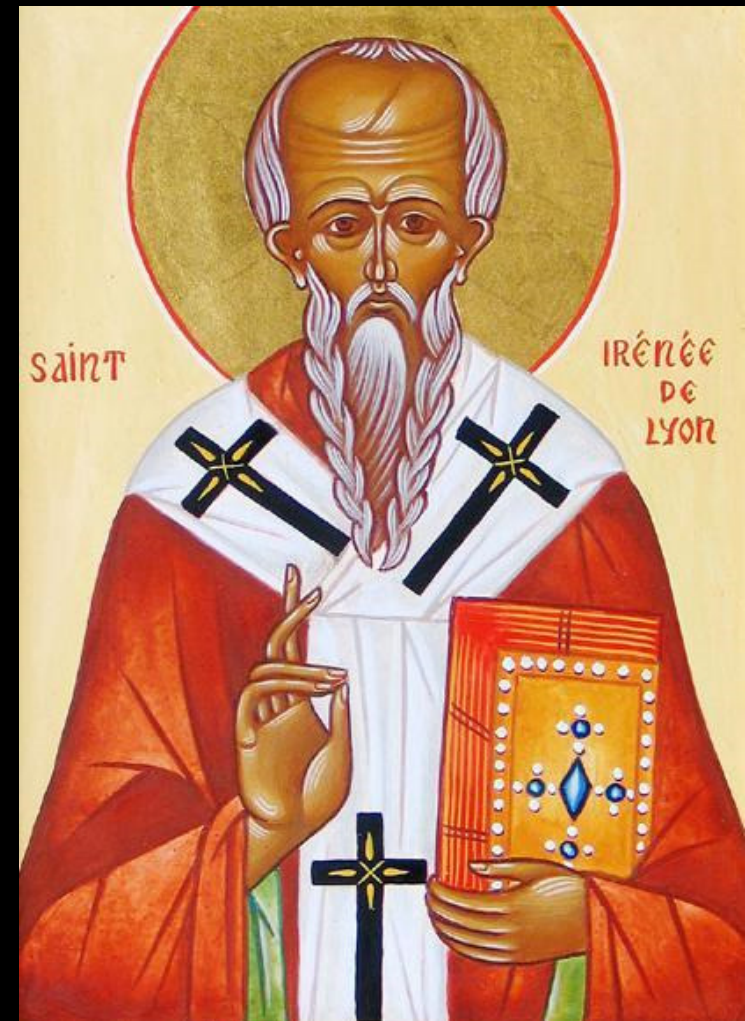
# Outline

- Introduction: Defining Heaven and Hell
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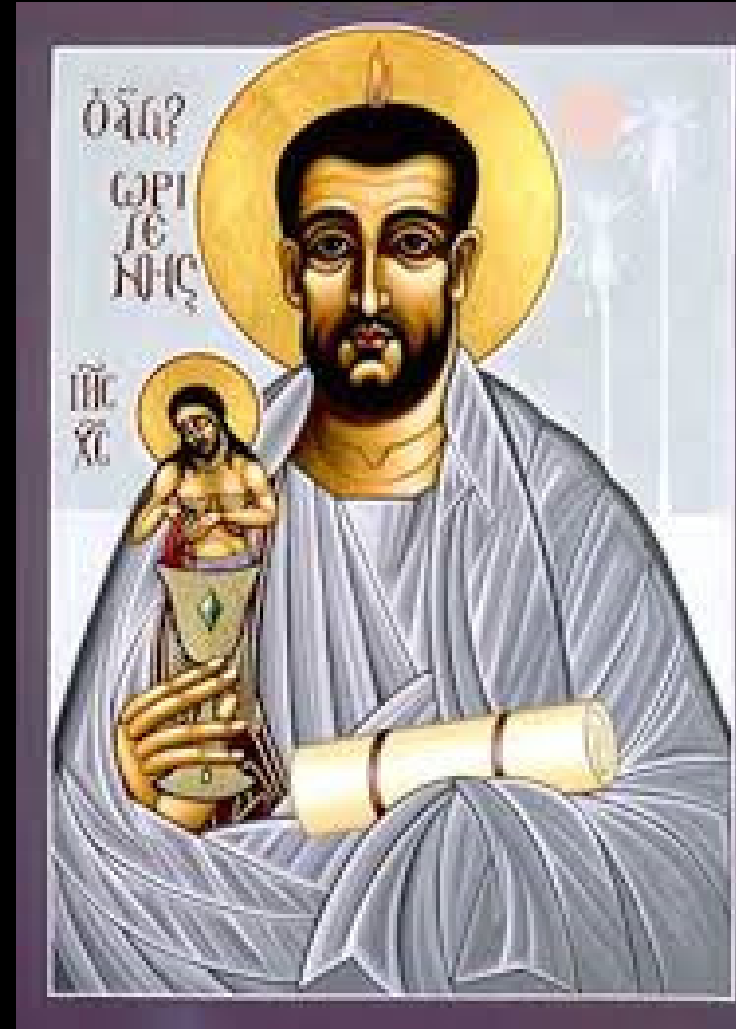
# Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- “For one and the same God [who blesses those who believe] inflicts blindness upon those who do not believe, but who set Him at naught; just as the sun, which is a creature of His, [blinds] those who, by reason of any weakness of the eyes cannot behold his light; but to those who believe in Him and follow Him, He grants a fuller and greater illumination of mind.”
  - Irenaeus of Lyons (130 – 202), *Against Heresies* 4.29.1; cf. 4.39.1 – 4



# Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- “...the sun, by one and the same power of its heat, melts wax indeed, but dries up and hardens mud not that its power operates one way upon mud, and in another way upon wax; but that the qualities of mud and wax are different, although according to nature they are one thing, both being from the earth.”
  - Origen of Alexandria (185 – 254), *De Principiis*, book 3, chapter 1 ‘On the Freedom of the Will’, paragraph 11



# Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- “God is good, dispassionate, and immutable...Thus to say that God turns away from the wicked is like saying that the sun hides itself from the blind.”
  - Egyptian monk and leader of monasticism Anthony the Great (251 – 356), *Philokalia*, Vol.1: On the Character of Men, 150





# Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- “You cannot, moreover, separate the brightness of fire from the virtue of burning which it possesses; but God, who wished to attract His servant by a wonderful sight, set a fire in the burning bush, which displayed all the brilliancy of flame while its devouring property was dormant. It is that which the Psalmist affirms in saying “The voice of the Lord divideth the flames of fire.” [Ps.29:7] Thus, in the requital which awaits us after this life, a mysterious voice seems to tell us that the double nature of fire will be divided; the just will enjoy its light, and the torment of its heat will be the torture of the wicked.”
  - Basil of Caesarea (c.329 – 379), *Hexaemeron* 6.3



# Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- “Every inordinate affection is its own punishment.”
  - Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430), *Confessions* book 1





# Hell: *Why* It's Like That

## *An Imaginary Dialogue*

- *Jesus*: Hello there!
- *Person* (rather taken aback): You...so it's true...
- *Jesus*: Yes, it is me.
- *Person* (sighing): Well, I hope you're going to treat me well for all the good I did? Lots of ice cream?
- *Jesus*: I think you have the wrong idea about what's going on here. I don't have ice cream.
- *Person*: What do you mean? I don't understand. I did a lot of good on earth.

# Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- *Jesus*: You did do some respectable things, because you were made in my image and you retained a sense of goodness that comes from me.
- *Person*: What?! That goodness came from *me*! So I should be able to get all the ice cream I want now, right?
- *Jesus*: I'm afraid you have the wrong idea. I am only offering myself.
- *Person*: You? I don't want you. I thought there was some reward involved.
- *Jesus*: There is only me. Everything else is connected to me, so if you don't receive me, everything else here will be a terrible hardship to you.

# Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- *Person*: What? How could you treat me like this?
- *Jesus*: You feel I have wronged you?
- *Person*: Of course! Look at all the good I've done!
- *Jesus*: Indeed, but there are many things you did that are not good, and much good you failed to do. That points to the need you have to receive from me a new human nature, the human nature I lived and died and rose again to create in my own physical body. Will you receive me now?

# Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- *Person*: No! I'm *offended*! How can you say I need to be healed? Transformed? I'm not that bad.
- *Jesus*: You are indeed. You have trained yourself to become addicted to ice cream, and much more: flattery, money, quite a bit of alcohol and porn, and independence. And your corrupted human nature is resisting me.
- *Person*: I'm resisting you, because you never gave me what I wanted in life. Even now you're not giving me what I want, and what I deserve!

# Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- *Jesus*: I think you're mistaking me for someone else. I'm giving you what you *need*. You need to be with me, to be joined to me, and to be like me. You need to be loved by me and healed and transformed by me.
- *Person*: I refuse to believe that! That is insulting!
- *Jesus*: It is the truth. I only tell the truth.
- *Person*: Look at how you're treating those people over there. Why don't you treat me better?
- *Jesus*: I treat all people the same. I give myself to them, and ask that you give me your very self. They have chosen to say 'yes' to me.



# Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- *Person:* Even my wife? You took her from me! Twice. At her so-called 'conversion.' And then she died. You took her. Now I demand that you give her back to me. I want to see her.
- *Jesus:* She is not yours.
- *Person:* She loved me, until you started taking her from me!
- *Jesus:* I did not cause her death. I healed her from our mutual enemy: the corruption of sin, which leads to death of all kinds.
- *Person:* You corrupted her. You stole her from me! Give her back to me the way she was.

# Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- *Jesus*: You would do her evil just trying to possess her, by reducing her to her former state of weakness when she accepted your ego. But that is not possible, for she is now who I made her to be. She does love you, but only because she shares my love for you. She would say the same things to you that I am saying to you now. Would you like to hear her now?
- *Person*: No! I don't need her! And I don't need you! Leave me alone!
- *Jesus*: I will not leave you alone. I *cannot* leave you alone. It is not my nature. I love you.
- *Person*: You love me? You're stalking me!

# Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- *Jesus*: For all eternity, I will call out to you to surrender yourself to me, to let me burn away the thing in you that should not be there, and replace it with my very self. That is my love.
- *Person*: Nothing you do could make me love you. You're repulsive, and the closer you get, the more I hate you. Stop! You're tormenting me!
- *Jesus*: *You* have made it so.

# Hell: *Why* It's Like That

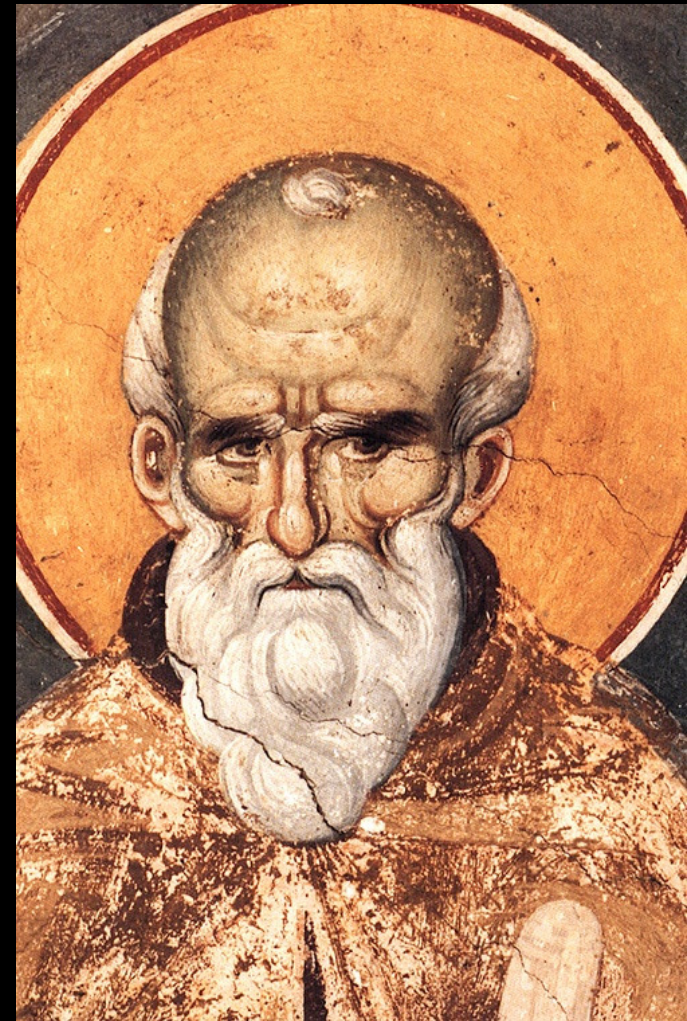
- “Every inordinate affection is its own punishment.”
  - Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430), *Confessions* book 1





# Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- “God is the sun of justice, as it is written, who shines rays of goodness on simply everyone. The soul develops according to its free will into either wax because of its love for God or into mud because of its love for matter. Thus just as by nature the mud is dried out by the sun and the wax is automatically softened, so also every soul which loves matter and the world and has fixed its mind far from God is hardened as mud according to its free will and by itself advances to its perdition, as did Pharaoh. However, every soul which loves God is softened as wax, and receiving divine impressions and characters it becomes the dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”
  - Maximus Confessor (c.580 – 662), *Chapters on Knowledge*, par.12





# Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- “In eternity God supplies good things to all because He is the source of good things gushing forth goodness to all... After death, there is no means for repentance, not because God does not accept repentance – He cannot deny Himself nor lose His compassion – but the soul does not change anymore... people after death are unchangeable, so that on the one hand the righteous desire God and always have Him to rejoice in, while sinners desire sin though they do not have the material means to sin... they are punished without any consolation. For what is hell but the deprivation of that which is exceedingly desired by someone? Therefore, according to the analogy of desire, whoever desires God rejoices and whoever desires sin is punished.”
  - Syrian priest John of Damascus (c.675 – 740), *Against the Manicheans* 94.1569, 1573



# Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- “The sorrow which takes hold of the heart which has sinned against love, is more piercing than any other pain. It is not right to say that the sinners in hell are deprived of the love of God...But love acts in two different ways, as suffering in the reprovéd, and as joy in the blessed.”
  - Isaac the Syrian (c.613 – c.700), cited in Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p.234; and Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, p.181 – 82



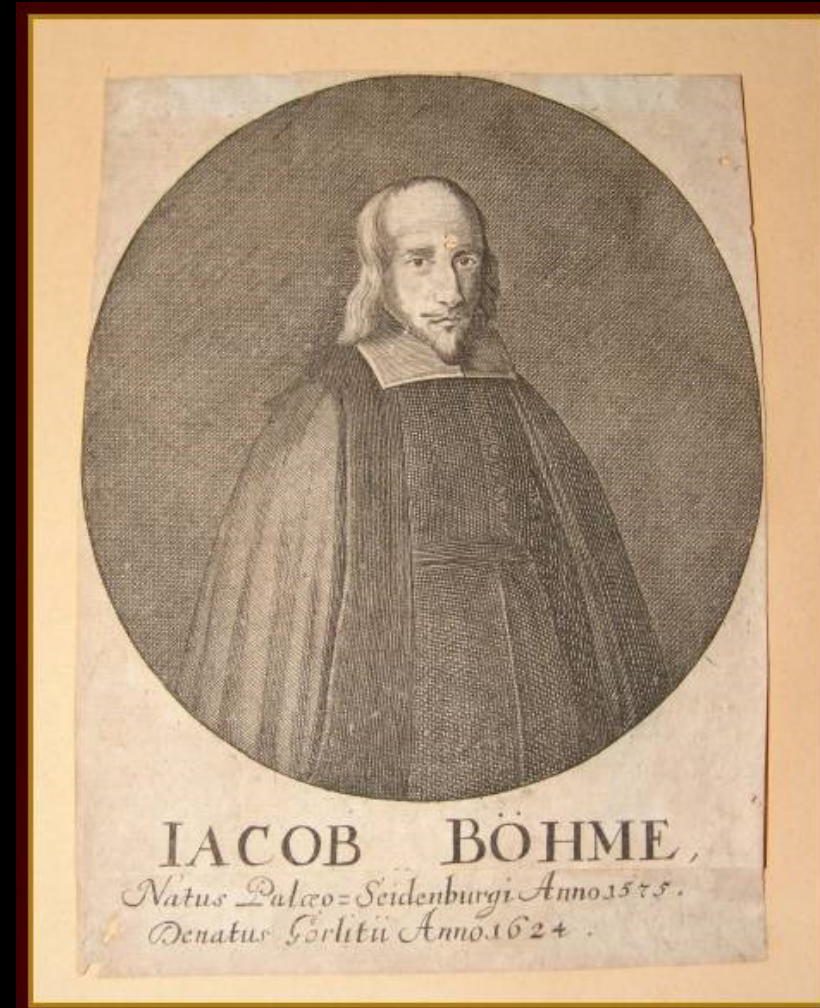
# Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- “The Eastern Orthodox church teaches that heaven and hell are being in God's presence which is being with God and seeing God, and that there is no such place as where God is not, nor is hell taught in the East as separation from God. One expression of the Eastern teaching is that...God's presence...is punishment and paradise depending on the person's spiritual state in that presence.”
  - Wikipedia, “Christian Views on Hell”



# Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- “Hell is in heaven and heaven is in hell. But the angels see only the light, and devils only the darkness.”
  - Jakob Boehme (1575 – 1624)



# Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- “What is hell? I maintain that it is the suffering of being unable to love.”
  - Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821 – 1881),  
*The Brothers Karamazov*
- Endless jealousy?





# Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- “The gates of hell are locked on the inside.”
  - C.S. Lewis (1898 – 1963), *The Problem of Pain*



# Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- Who believes this?
  - The united church for a thousand years+
  - The entire Eastern Orthodox church
  - C.S. Lewis (Anglican), *The Great Divorce*
  - J.R.R. Tolkien (Catholic), *LOTR*, e.g. Gollum
  - Karl Barth (Reformed), *Church Dogmatics*
  - T.F. Torrance (Reformed), *Atonement*
  - Donald Bloesch (Reformed), *The Last Things*
  - Roberta Bondi (Methodist), *Out of the Green Tiled Bathroom*
  - Michael Himes, S.J. (Catholic), *Doing the Truth in Love*
  - Karl Rahner (Catholic), *Theo Investigations Vol.VI, Ency. of Theo.*
  - Hans Urs Von Balthazar (Catholic), *Dare We Hope*
  - Pope John Paul II (Catholic), *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*
  - Richard John Neuhaus (Catholic)
  - Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J. (Catholic)

# Hell: *Why* It's Like That

The dove descending breaks the air  
With flame of incandescent terror  
Of which the tongues declare  
The one discharge from sin and error.  
The only hope, or else despair  
Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre-  
To be redeemed from fire by fire.  
Who then devised the torment? Love.  
Love is the unfamiliar Name  
Behind the hands that wove  
The intolerable shirt of flame  
Which human power cannot remove.  
We only live, only suspire  
Consumed by either fire or fire.



T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*

# Hell: Is There an Urgency?

- *Apathetic Dawdler*: I actually like what you're saying here, because I feel like there's not a rush for me to come to Jesus!
- *Me*: What do you mean?
- *Apathetic Dawdler*: I mean that you're not threatening me with hell. Other Christians would try to make me feel scared that I could die on my car ride home, and then I'd be in hell because I didn't accept Jesus right here, right now. You make it sound like I have a lot of time.

# Hell: Is There an Urgency?

- *Me:* Well, I think there is still a real urgency to looking into Jesus now.
- *Apathetic Dawdler:* Why?
- *Me:* Because you are developing an addiction. What makes you think you will become the type of person who will want to give your life to Jesus later, if all you want now is more time to yourself?
- *Apathetic Dawdler:* What? Why? Won't it be easy?



# Hell: Is There an Urgency?

- *Me*: No. If all you really want is independence, and not healing, then you are training your human nature, desires, and mind to reject Jesus. When you meet him, you will probably look at all eternity stretched out in front of you and say, 'Jesus, what's the rush? You've got lots of time in this eternity. How about 10,000 more years of freedom for me, and then I'll accept you?'
- *Apathetic Dawdler*: Say, that's right! I'm going to use that with him. See, there is no rush. [smiles]

# Hell: Is There an Urgency?

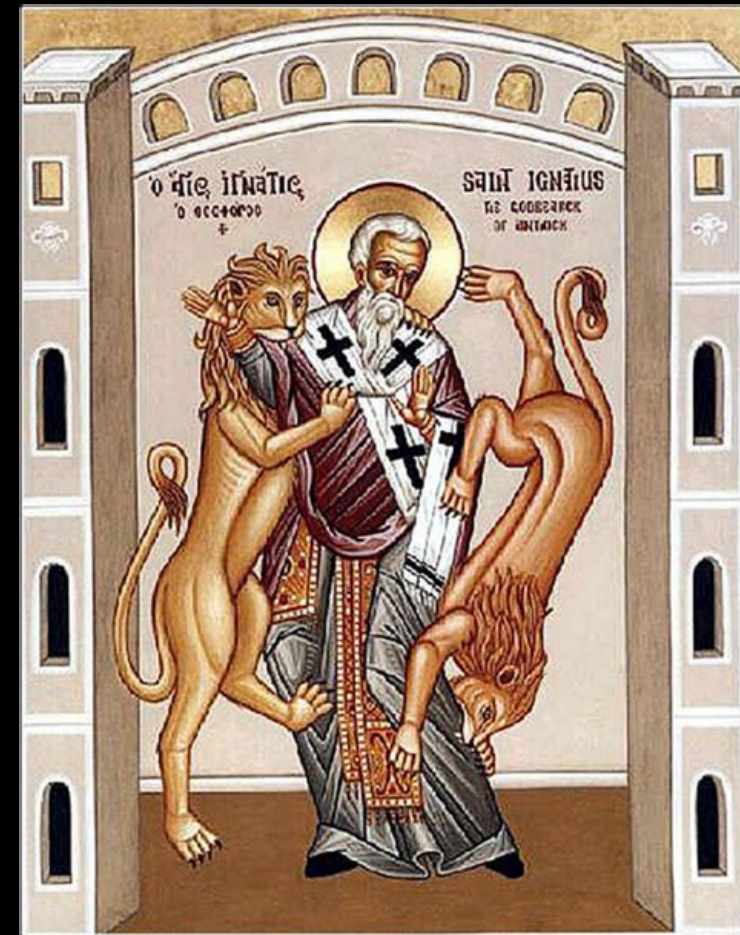
- *Me*: There *is* a rush, actually. Not a rush because your life might be cut short by a car crash, but a rush because the longer you develop an addiction, the harder it is to break it.
- *Apathetic Dawdler*: That's a good question. If I'm an addict, I would probably say, 'I don't want what *you* have. Give me what *I* want.'
- *Me*: Absolutely. So what's your addiction?
- *Apathetic Dawdler*: Wait, so you think I'm going to hell?

# Hell: Is There an Urgency?

- *Me*: I think you are *becoming* someone who would experience the love of Jesus as hell, because you're so apathetic, and Jesus wants you to be as loving as he is.
- *Apathetic Dawdler*: [silence]
- *Me*: Don't you look back on your life and see how apathy, lack of love, has hurt other people in your life? Hurt you? The question is whether you want to be in touch with the God of love. Maybe you'd like to read a short and surprisingly fun book by C.S. Lewis about why people in hell want to stay there (it's called *The Great Divorce*), and talk about it with me?

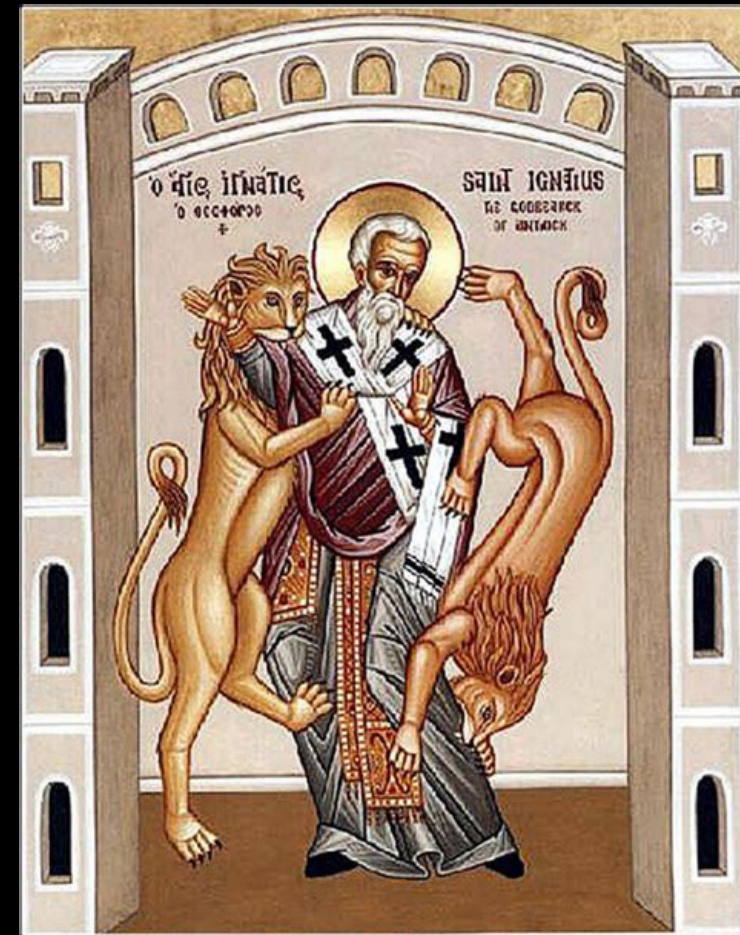
# Human Being, Human Becoming

- “For I remark, that two different characters are found among men--the one true coin, the other spurious. The truly devout man is the right kind of coin, stamped by God Himself. The ungodly man, again, is false coin, unlawful, spurious, counterfeit, wrought not by God, but by the devil...



# Human Being, Human Becoming

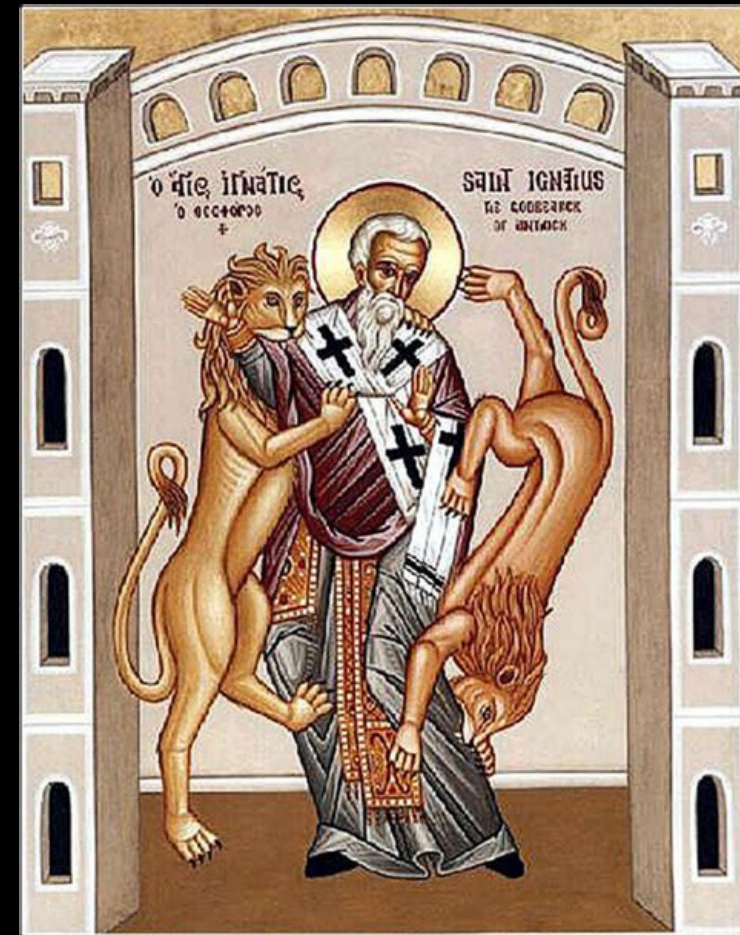
- “I do not mean to say that there are two different human natures, but that **there is one humanity, sometimes belonging to God, and sometimes to the devil.** If any one is truly religious, he is a man of God; but if he is irreligious, he is a man of the devil, made such, not by nature, but **by his own choice...**”





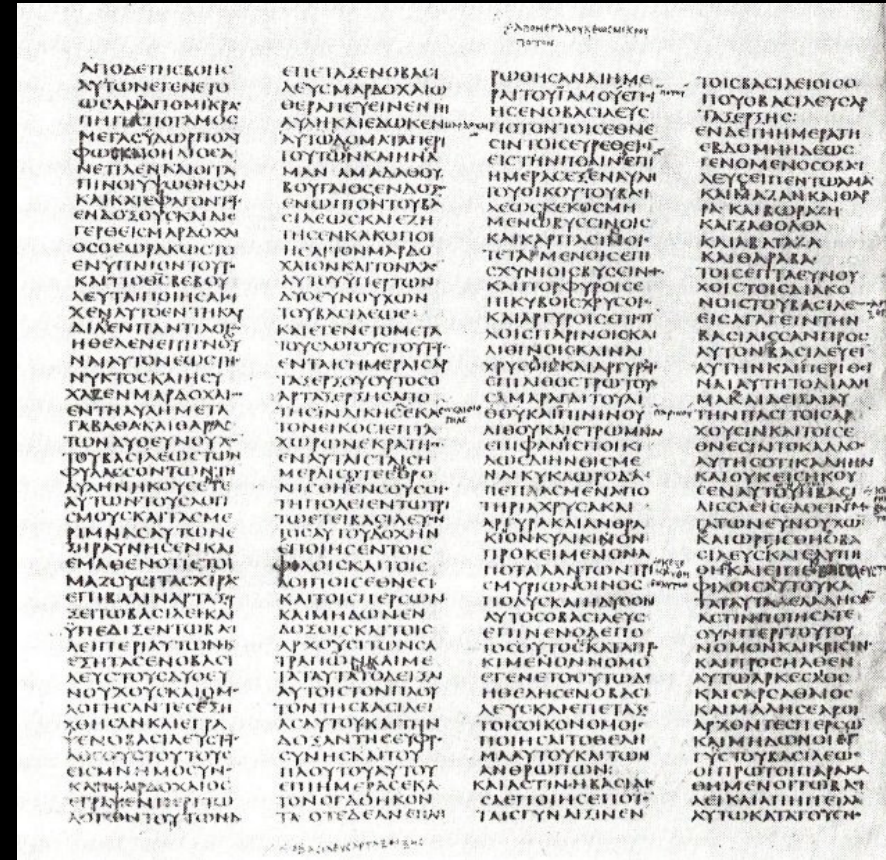
# Human Being, Human Becoming

- “The unbelieving bear the image of the prince of wickedness. The believing possess the image of their Prince, God the Father, and Jesus Christ, through whom, if we are not in readiness to die for the truth into His passion, His life is not in us.”
  - Ignatius of Antioch (c.35/50 – 108/117), *Epistle to the Magnesians*, longer version, ch.5



# Human Being, Human Becoming

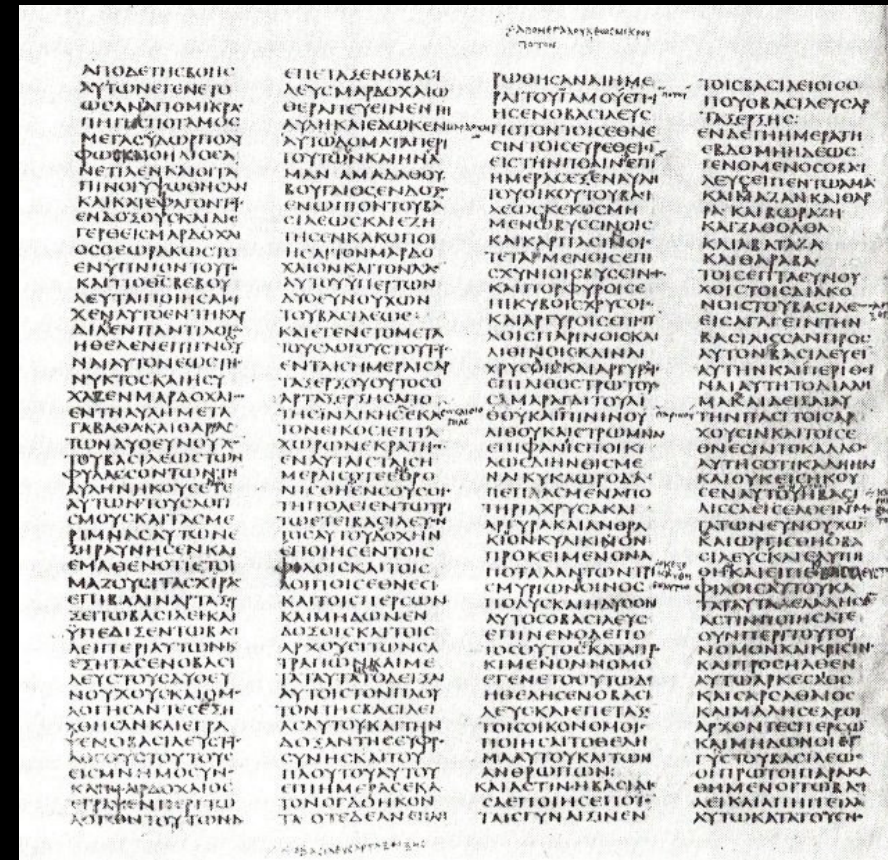
- “Let us then utterly flee from all the works of iniquity, **lest these should take hold of us**; and let us hate the error of the present time, that we may set our love on the world to come: let us not give loose reins to our soul, that it should have power to run with sinners and the wicked, lest we **become like them**.”
  - *Epistle of Barnabas* (2<sup>nd</sup> century), ch.4





# Human Being, Human Becoming

- “But the way of darkness is crooked, and full of cursing; for it is the way of eternal death with punishment, in which way are **the things that destroy the soul**, viz., idolatry, overconfidence, the arrogance of power, hypocrisy, doubleheartedness, adultery, murder, rapine, haughtiness, transgression, deceit, malice, self-sufficiency, poisoning, magic, avarice, want of the fear of God.”
  - *Epistle of Barnabas* (2<sup>nd</sup> century), ch.20



# Human Being, Human Becoming

- “The sun also blinds those whose sight is dim: and they whose eyes are diseased are hurt by the light and blinded. Not that the sun’s nature is to blind, but that the substance of the eyes is incapable of seeing. In like manner unbelievers being diseased in their heart cannot look upon the radiance of the Godhead.”
  - Cyril of Jerusalem (c.315 – 386), *Catechetical Lectures* 6.29





# Human Being, Human Becoming

- “We shall be raised therefore, all with our bodies eternal, but not all with bodies alike: for if a man is righteous, he will receive a heavenly body, that he may be able worthily to hold converse with Angels; but if a man is a sinner, he shall receive an eternal body, fitted to endure the penalties of sins, that he may burn eternally in fire, nor ever be consumed...





# Human Being, Human Becoming

- “Therefore, brethren, let us be careful of our bodies, nor misuse them as though not our own. Let us not say like the heretics, that this vesture of the body belongs not to us, but let us be careful of it as our own; for we must give account to the Lord of all things done through the body. Say not, no one sees me; think not, that there is no witness of the deed. Human witness oftentimes there is not; but He who fashioned us, an unerring witness, abides faithful in heaven [Ps.139:7], and beholds what you do....



# Human Being, Human Becoming

- “And the stains of sin also remain in the body; for as when a wound has gone deep into the body, even if there has been a healing, the scar remains, so sin wounds soul and body, and the marks of its scars remain in all; and they are removed only from those who receive the washing of Baptism. The past wounds therefore of soul and body God heals by Baptism; against future ones let us one and all jointly guard ourselves, that we may keep this vestment of the body pure...





# Human Being, Human Becoming

- “...and may not for practicing fornication and sensual indulgence or any other sin for a short season, lose the salvation of heaven, but may inherit the eternal kingdom of God; of which may God, of His own grace, deem all of you worthy.”
  - Cyril of Jerusalem (c.315 – 386), *Catechetical Lectures* 18.19 – 20



# Human Being, Human Becoming

- “In order then that we also may extinguish all the furnace of **disordered pleasure** here, and so escape the hell that is there, let these each day be our counsels, our cares, and our practice, drawing towards us the favor of God, both by our full purpose concerning good works, and by our frequent prayers. For thus even those things which appear insupportable now, will be most easy, and light, and lovely...



# Human Being, Human Becoming

- “Because, so long as we are in our **passions**, we think **virtue** rugged and morose and arduous, vice **desirable and most pleasing** but if we would stand off from these but a little, then both vice will appear abominable and unsightly, and virtue easy, mild, and much to be **desired**.”
  - John Chrysostom of Constantinople (349 – 407), *Homilies on Matthew’s Gospel, Homily 16*





# Human Being, Human Becoming

- “In eternity God supplies good things to all because He is the source of good things gushing forth goodness to all... After death, there is no means for repentance, not because God does not accept repentance – He cannot deny Himself nor lose His compassion – but the soul does not change anymore... people after death are unchangeable, so that on the one hand the righteous desire God and always have Him to rejoice in, while sinners desire sin though they do not have the material means to sin... they are punished without any consolation. For what is hell but the deprivation of that which is exceedingly desired by someone? Therefore, according to the analogy of desire, whoever desires God rejoices and whoever desires sin is punished.”
  - Syrian priest John of Damascus (c.675 – 740), *Against the Manicheans* 94.1569, 1573



# Discussion Questions

1. How did the early Christians answer, “Why Jesus?”
2. What do you observe about how the early Christians are reading and using Scripture?
3. What questions about Scripture do you have?

# Outline

- Introduction: Defining Heaven and Hell
- Theology
- Church History
- **Scripture: Fire**
- Scripture: Human Being, Human Becoming

# The Motif of Fire

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Ambrose of Milan (c.337 – 394)
  - “And Isaiah shows that the Holy Spirit is not only Light but also Fire, saying: And the light of Israel shall be for a fire. [Isaiah 10:17] So the prophets called Him a burning Fire, because in those three points we see more intensely the majesty of the Godhead; since to sanctify is of the Godhead, to illuminate is the property of fire and light, and the Godhead is wont to be pointed out or seen in the appearance of fire: For our God is a consuming Fire, as Moses said. [Deuteronomy 4:24] For he himself saw the fire in the bush, and had heard God when the voice from the flame of fire came to him saying: I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. [Exodus 3:6] The voice came from the fire, and the voice was in the bush, and the fire did no harm...



# The Motif of Fire

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Ambrose of Milan (c.337 – 394)
  - “For the bush was burning but was not consumed, because in that mystery the Lord was showing that He would come to illuminate the thorns of our body, and not to consume those who were in misery, but to alleviate their misery; Who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire, that He might give grace and destroy sin. [Matthew 3:11] So in the symbol of fire God keeps His intention... What, then, is that fire? Not certainly one made up of common twigs, or roaring with the burning of the reeds of the woods, but that fire which improves good deeds like gold, and consumes sins like stubble. This is undoubtedly the Holy Spirit, Who is called both the fire and light of the countenance of God...



# The Motif of Fire

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Ambrose of Milan (c.337 – 394)
  - “And as there is a light of the divine countenance, so, too, does fire shine forth from the countenance of God, for it is written: “A fire shall burn in His sight.” For the grace of the day of judgment shines beforehand, that forgiveness may follow to reward the service of the saints.” (Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit*, book 1, chapter 14, paragraphs 164 – 165, 169 – 170)

# The Motif of Fire: Pentateuch



# The Motif of Fire: Pentateuch

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Pentateuch
  - First appearance: **Flaming sword** (Gen.3:24)
    - Guarding way back to the tree of life
    - Symbolizing the word of God (Rev.1:16, etc.) which cuts, burns away the corruption of sin



# The Motif of Fire: Pentateuch





# The Motif of Fire: Pentateuch

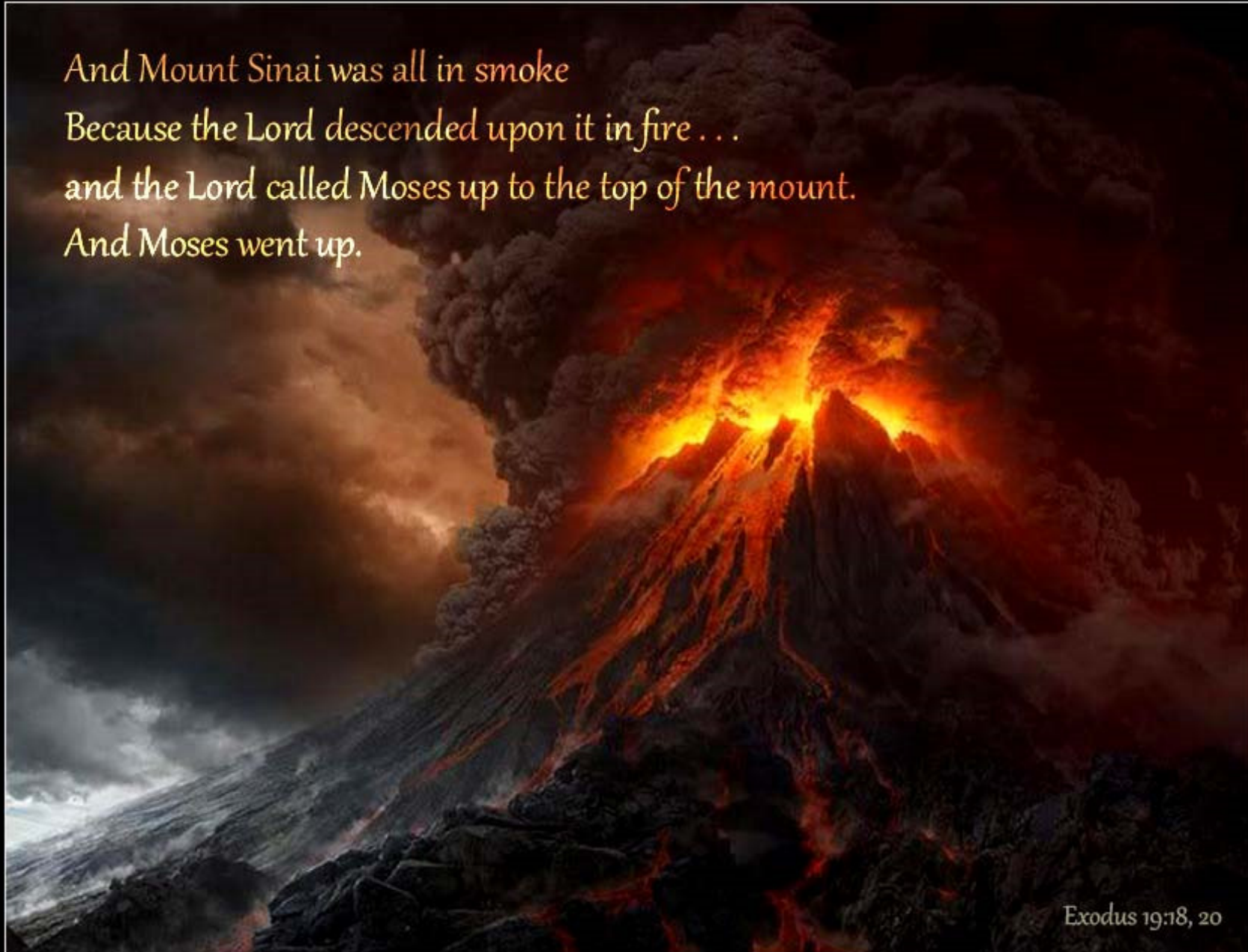
- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Pentateuch
  - God as **fire** in the vision of Abraham (Gen.15:17)
  - God as **fire** on Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen.19:24; Rev.14:10)
  - God as **fire** in the burning thorn bush (Ex.3:2; Acts 7:30)
  - God as **fire** delivering Israel from Egypt (Ex.14:24)

the bush burned  
with fire and it was not  
consumed



# The Motif of Fire: Pentateuch

*And Mount Sinai was all in smoke  
Because the Lord descended upon it in fire . . .  
and the Lord called Moses up to the top of the mount.  
And Moses went up.*



Exodus 19:18, 20

# The Motif of Fire: Pentateuch

*And Mount Sinai was all in smoke  
Because the Lord descended upon it in fire . . .  
and the Lord called Moses up to the top of the mount.  
And Moses went up.*

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Pentateuch
  - God as **fire** on Mount Sinai inviting Israel up (Ex.19:13; Dt.5:5), and transfiguring Moses' face (Ex.34)
  - See also Hebrews 12:18 – 29, where the writer says that we come not to the fiery Mt. Sinai, but to a new Mt. Zion after having been cleansed and perfected through Jesus, 'for our God is a consuming **fire**.'

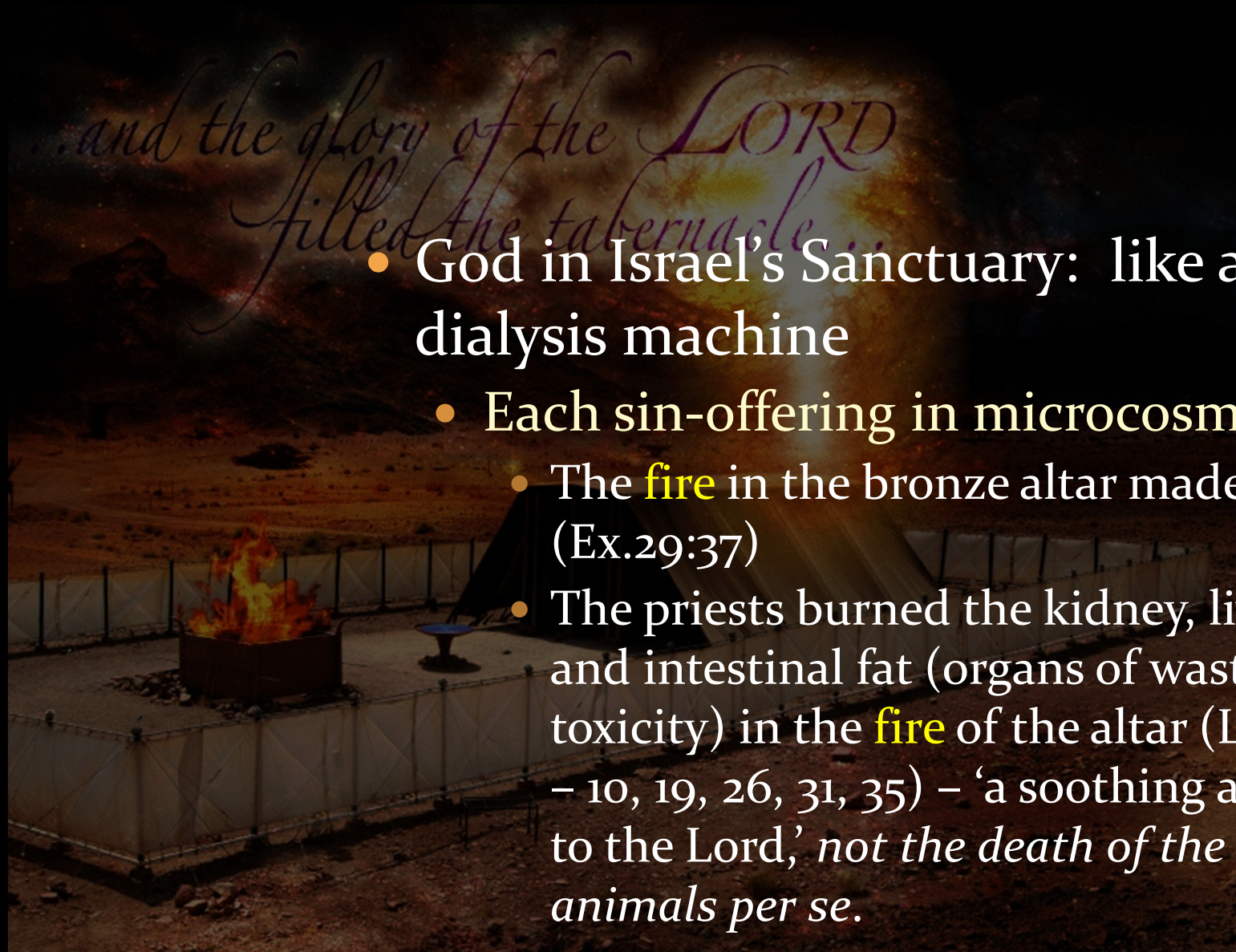


# The Motif of Fire: Pentateuch





# The Motif of Fire: Pentateuch



*...and the glory of the LORD  
filled the tabernacle...*

- God in Israel's Sanctuary: like a dialysis machine
  - Each sin-offering in microcosm
    - The **fire** in the bronze altar made holy (Ex.29:37)
    - The priests burned the kidney, liver, and intestinal fat (organs of waste, toxicity) in the **fire** of the altar (Lev.4:8 – 10, 19, 26, 31, 35) – ‘a soothing aroma to the Lord,’ *not the death of the animals per se.*



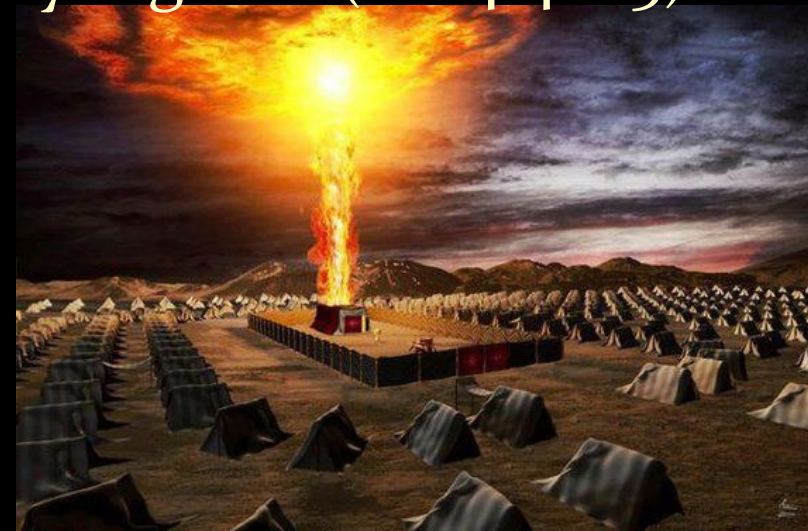
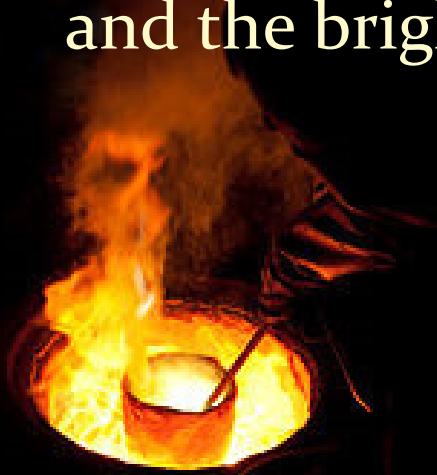
# The Motif of Fire: Pentateuch

- God in Israel's Sanctuary: like a dialysis machine
  - Whole annual cycle repeated Moses' ascent up Sinai
    - Priests ate flesh, central to atonement (Lev.6:24 – 30; 10:16 – 20)
    - High priest on Yom Kippur = Moses at top of mountain
    - Two goats = Sin into God, and far away
    - Bull and first goat consumed by **fire**



# The Motif of Fire: Isaiah

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Isaiah
  - “I will smelt away your dross” (Isa.1:25)
  - “When the Lord has **washed away** the filth of the daughters of Zion and **purged** the bloodshed of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and the **spirit of burning**, then the LORD will create over the whole area of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, even smoke, and the brightness of a **flaming fire** by night...” (Isa.4:4 – 5)



# The Motif of Fire: Isaiah

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Isaiah
  - God cleanses Isaiah's unclean lips by a **fiery coal** (Isa.6:6)
  - Fire *becomes destroying* for those who want to hold onto their impurity (Isa.29:6; 30:27 – 30; 66:1 – 24 which is also connected to the theme of renewal of God's presence on Mt. Zion, a retelling of Sinai)



# The Motif of Fire: Jeremiah

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence
  - “Behold, I will refine them and assay them” (Jer.9:7; 11:20; 12:3; 17:10; 20:12)





# The Motif of Fire: Ezekiel

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Ezekiel
  - God's throne: "a great cloud of fire...like glowing metal in the midst of the fire" (Ezk.1:4, 13, 27; 8:2)
  - "Because all of you have become dross, therefore, behold, I am going to gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As they gather silver and bronze and iron and lead and tin into the **furnace** to blow **fire** on it in order to melt it, so I will gather you in My anger and in My wrath and I will lay you there and melt you. I will gather you and blow on you with the **fire** of My wrath, and you will be melted in the midst of it. As silver is melted in the **furnace**, so you will be melted in the midst of it; and you will know that I, the LORD, have poured out My wrath on you." (Ezk.22:19 – 22) This leads to a purified Israel (Ezk.36:16 – 36)



# The Motif of Fire: Malachi

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence
  - “For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness.”  
(Mal.3:2 – 3)



# The Motif of Fire: Zechariah

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence
  - “I will bring the third part through the fire, refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested” (Zech.13:9).



# The Motif of Fire: Psalms

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Psalms
  - “Test” (*tsaraph*) us (Ps.17:3; 26:2; 66:10; 105:19)
    - Also means “smelt, refine”
    - “For You have tried us, O God; You have **refined** us as silver is **refined** ...We went through **fire** and through water, yet You brought us out into a place of abundance.” (Ps.66:10, 12)
  - “Test/try” (*bachan*) us (Ps.7:9; 11:4, 5; 17:3; 26:2; 66:10; 81:7; 95:9; 139:23)
    - “The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord **tests** hearts” (Pr.17:3)
    - Psalm 18:6 – 14 uses Mt. Sinai as a reference point
  - “The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times.” (Ps.12:6)



# The Motif of Fire: Matthew

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Jesus in Matthew's Gospel
  - “The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the **fire**. As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove his sandals; he will baptize you with the **Holy Spirit and fire**. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will thoroughly clear his threshing floor; and he will gather his wheat into the barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable **fire**.” (Matthew 3:10 – 12)
    - How you experience divine **fire** depends on you

# The Motif of Fire: Matthew

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Jesus in Matthew's Gospel
  - How you experience divine **fire** depends on you (positively):
  - Jesus:
    - Will baptize with Spirit and fire; the Spirit is fire (3:7 – 12)
    - Anointed by the Spirit to purify his humanity (3:13 – 4:11)
    - Say those in Galilee are seeing a “great light” (4:16)
    - Visible “light” when the Spirit transfigures him (17:1 – 13; implicitly 28:1 – 3)
    - Commissions his disciples to baptize with his teaching (28:20)

# The Motif of Fire: Matthew



Mosaic of Jesus transfigured on Mount Tabor,  
from the 5<sup>th</sup> century, St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican

# The Motif of Fire: Matthew

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Jesus in Matthew's Gospel
  - How you experience divine **fire** depends on you (positively):
    - Disciples:
      - “You are the light of the world... a city on a hill... nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” (Mt.5:14 – 16)
      - “Oil lamps” (Mt.25:1 – 13)



# The Motif of Fire: Matthew

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Jesus in Matthew's Gospel
  - How you experience divine **fire** depends on you:
    - Disciples:
      - “Most people's love will grow **cold**. But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.” (Mt.24:12 – 13)
    - Backdrop: Love for God is a fire

“For love is as strong as death,  
Jealousy is as severe as Sheol;  
Its flashes are flashes of fire,  
The very flame of the Lord” (Song of Songs 8:6)

# The Motif of Fire: Matthew

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Jesus in Matthew's Gospel
  - How you experience divine **fire** depends on you (negatively):
    - “Whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the **fiery** hell.” (Mt.5:22)
    - “Throw them into the **furnace of fire**; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Mt.13:42)
    - “Throw him into the **outer darkness**; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Mt.22:13)
    - “Throw out the worthless slave into the **outer darkness**; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Mt.25:30)

# The Motif of Fire: Matthew

- **Fire** and **darkness**:
  - Literary motifs, of Israel's failure at Mount Sinai
  - They said, "No" to God's invitation to come higher up and further in, and *did not ascend to the top*
  - "You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with **fire** to the very heart of the heavens: **darkness**, cloud and thick gloom...' I was standing between the LORD and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the LORD; *for you were afraid because of the fire and did not go up the mountain*" (Dt.4:11; 5:5)

# The Motif of Rejection: Matthew

- What about Jesus apparently pushing people away when they want him?
  - “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness’” (Mt.7:23).
  - “Later the other virgins also came, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open up for us.’ But he answered, ‘Truly I say to you, I do not know you.’” (Mt.25:11 – 12)
- Paralleled to each other
  - *The Chiastic Structure of the Gospel of Matthew*, available here: [www.anastasiscenter.org/bible-messiah-matthew](http://www.anastasiscenter.org/bible-messiah-matthew)



# The Motif of Rejection: Matthew

- In both cases (Mt.7:23; 25:11 – 12), they want:
  - A reward from Jesus
  - Not Jesus himself
  - Not his heart transformation

# The Motif of Rejection: Matthew

- The false prophets
  - Are inwardly ravenous wolves (Mt.7:15 – 23)
  - Reject the heart-changing teaching of Jesus (Mt.5:1 – 7:14)
- Jesus
  - Denies them what they want, i.e. a reward
  - Keeps calling them to real repentance; they refuse

# The Motif of Rejection: Matthew

- The other five virgins
  - Had no oil, had not wanted to carry it (Mt.25:2)
  - Lied about having oil (Mt.25:8)
  - Want to drain oil from others, which would cut short the feast, showing their petulant refusal to repent
  - By analogy, you cannot drain oil from others; you must have your own
    - Oil represents the Holy Spirit and the internalized word of Jesus
- Jesus
  - Denies them what they want, i.e. a reward
  - Keeps calling them to real repentance; they refuse

# The Motif of Fire: Luke

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Jesus in Luke
  - Acts
    - The Holy Spirit is **fire**, refining or destroying (Lk.3:9 – 18)
    - At Pentecost, the Spirit comes with “tongues of **fire**” (Acts 2:1 – 3)
      - Each believer a miniature Mount Sinai
      - Jewish calendar: Pentecost commemorates the giving of the Sinai Law at Mount Sinai
    - How you experience divine **fire** depends on you



# The Motif of Fire: Luke



*Pentecost by by Holger Schué from Pixabay*

# The Motif of Fire: Paul

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Paul
  - “Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with **fire**, and the **fire** itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is **burned** up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through **fire**.” (1 Cor.3:12 – 15)

# The Motif of Fire: Paul

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Paul
  - “Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. ‘But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap **burning coals** on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Rom.12:17 – 21)

# The Motif of Fire: Paul

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Paul
  - For 2 Thessalonians 1:6 – 10:
    - See *Divine Fire and Justice in Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians*, available here: [www.anastasiscenter.org/bible-messiah-paul-thessalonians](http://www.anastasiscenter.org/bible-messiah-paul-thessalonians)
    - “Justice” (*dike*- root words) but what type of justice (retributive or restorative)?
      - Depends on larger canon
      - Larger canon: divine restorative justice
      - God calling offenders to repent is the torment
    - “Destruction” is *from* (not *away from*) the presence of the Lord (1:9; cf. Rev.14:10)



# The Motif of Fire: Revelation

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Revelation



- “His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of **fire**. His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a **furnace**... and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged **sword**; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.” (Rev.1:14 – 16; 2:18)

# The Motif of Fire: Revelation

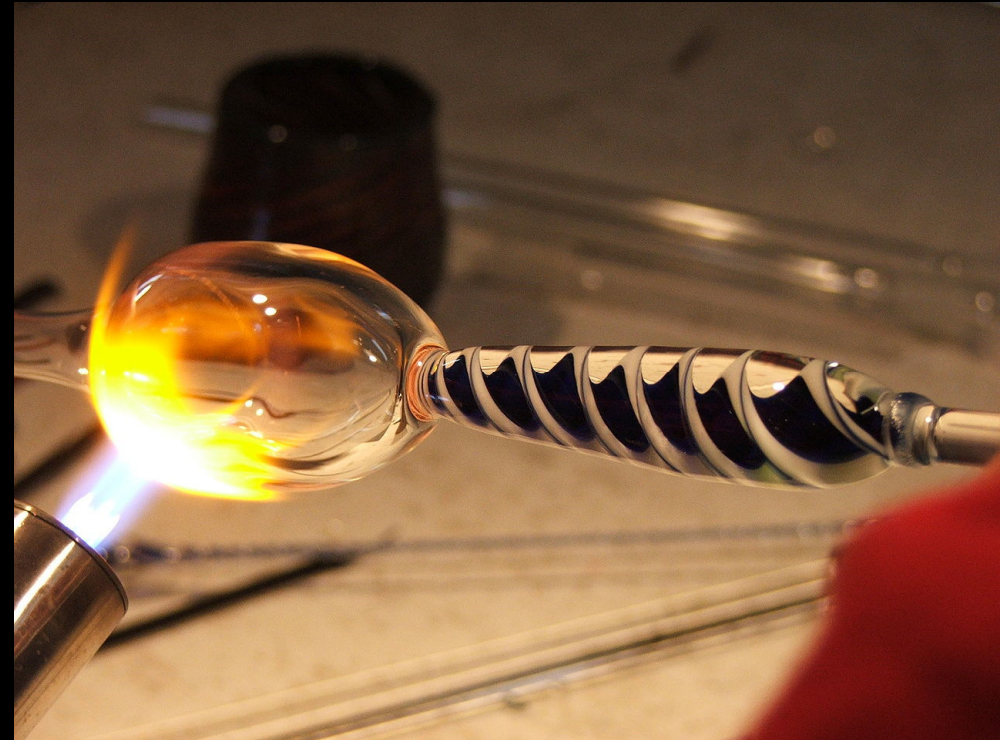
- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Revelation
  - “I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by **fire** so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.” (Rev.3:18)
    - Wealth = Health = Life
    - Jesus' New Humanity

# The Motif of Fire: Revelation

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Revelation
  - Fire is destroying for those who cling to impurity:  
“tormented with **fire and brimstone** in the presence of the holy angels and *in the presence of the Lamb*” (Rev.14:10; cf. 2 Thess.1:9; Gen.19:24)

# The Motif of Fire: Revelation

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Revelation
  - “And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was **pure gold, like transparent glass.**” (Rev.21:21)





# The Motif of Fire: Revelation

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Revelation
  - “And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the **lake of fire**. This is the second death, the **lake of fire**. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the **lake of fire**.”  
(Rev.20:12 – 15)

# The Motif of Fire: Revelation

- Another example of *literary* interpretation: “Lake of fire” (Rev.20:14 – 15)
  - Lake: a remnant of the primordial chaos-waters
    - Water and Land in Creation
      - Genesis 1: Seas surround land
      - Revelation 20 – 22: Land surrounds “lake”
    - Red Sea
      - God drowned the Egyptians who pursued Israel
    - Sea of Galilee
      - Geographic wind-tunnel considered unstable, dangerous
      - Jesus drowned pigs possessed by demons

# The Motif of Fire: Revelation

- Another example of *literary* interpretation: “Lake of fire” (Rev.20:14 – 15)
  - Fire: God’s refining presence
    - Where: A physical region
    - Who: People experience the refining love of God as torment
    - Why:
      - They have become addicted to something else, are not stable
      - A “lake of fire” suggests a contradiction
    - “Hell is in the midst of heaven”

# Outline

- Introduction: Defining Heaven and Hell
- Theology
- Church History
- Scripture: Fire
- **Scripture: Human Being, Human Becoming**



# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: John

- Before you ask the question, “What is hell like?” you must ask the question, “What does sin do to us?”
  - Sin is an attempt at self-negation (John 18 – 19)
    - Jesus: “I am” (18:5, 6, 8)
    - Simon Peter: “I am not” (18:17, 25, 27)
    - Pontius Pilate: “What is truth?” (18:38)
    - Jewish leaders: “We have no king but Caesar” (19:15)

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: John

- Before you ask the question, “What is hell like?” you must ask the question, “What does sin do to us?”
- John’s Gospel: Which father have you chosen?
  - God or the Devil? “I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father... If God were your Father, you would love Me... You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the **desires** of your father.” (Jn.8:38, 42, 44)

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: John

- Before you ask the question, “What is hell like?” you must ask the question, “What does sin do to us?”
  - Revelation: Whose mark (image) have you (currency) received?
    - Mark of Jesus (Rev.7:3; 9:4; 22:4)
    - Mark of the Beast (Rev.13:16 – 18; 14:9 – 11; 16:2; 17:5; 19:20; 20:4)
  - Revelation: Empires, Emperors, and Currency
    - Fire to mint coins, stamped with Emperor’s image
    - Ignatius of Antioch (c.35/50 – 108/117), *Epistle to the Magnesians*, longer version, ch.5 uses the metaphor of the two coins

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: John

- Sequencing Questions
  - Before you ask the question, “What is hell like?”
  - You must ask the question, “What does sin do to us?”
- Evidence in Scripture?
  - The theme of *human being* – *human becoming*

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Pentateuch

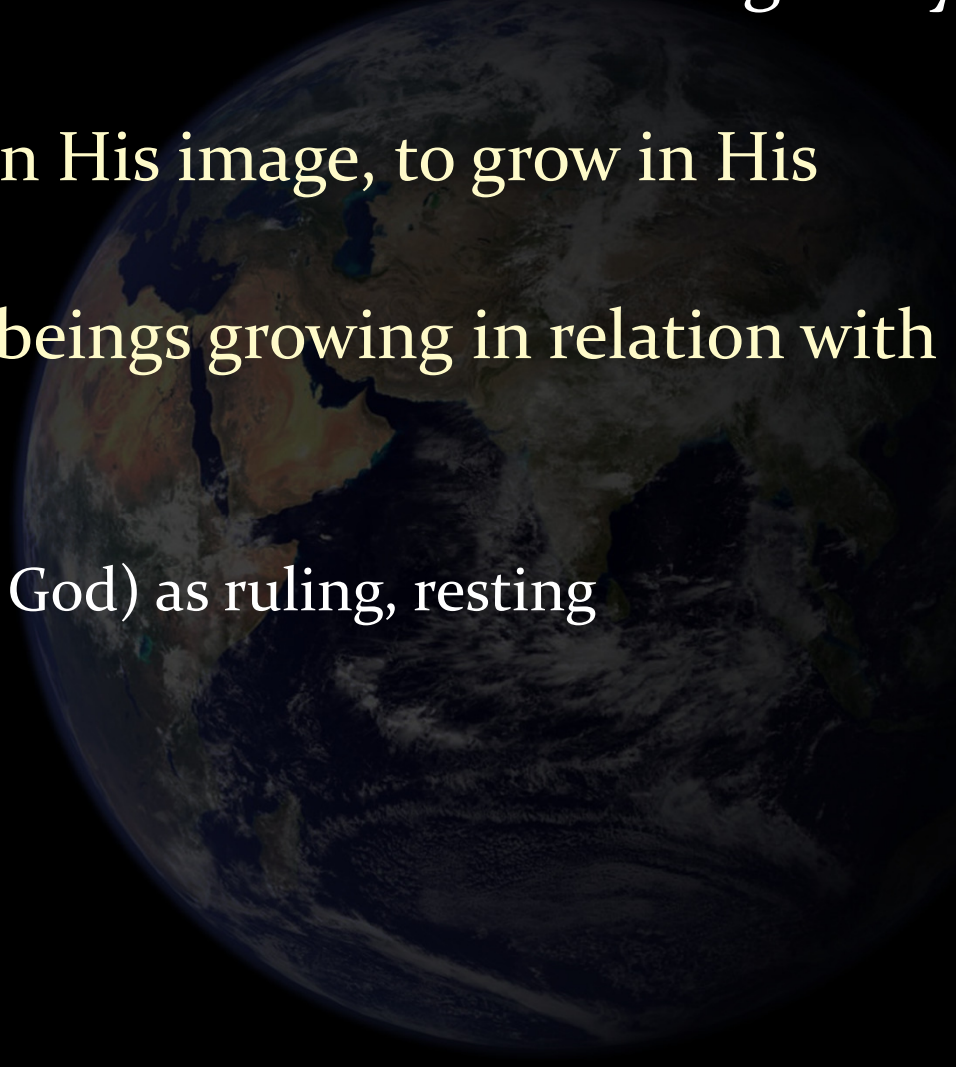
- Pentateuch: The Big Picture Vision of Becoming Fully Human (Gen.1:1 – 2:3)





# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Pentateuch

- Pentateuch: The Big Picture Vision of Becoming Fully Human (Gen.1:1 – 2:3)
  - Positive: God made us in His image, to grow in His likeness (Gen.1:26 – 28)
  - Infinite Growth: Finite beings growing in relation with Infinite Love
    - Life-bearing
    - Working, speaking (like God) as ruling, resting



# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Pentateuch

- Pentateuch: The Relational Vision of Becoming Fully Human (Gen.2:4 – 4:26)





# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Pentateuch

- Pentateuch: The Relational Vision of Becoming Fully Human (Gen.2:4 – 4:26)
  - Positive: God invited us to receive life by eating from the tree of life (Gen.2:9, 16)
  - Positive: God intended for us to grow in the knowledge of good and evil by letting Him define good and evil (Gen.2:9 – 17)
  - Infinite Growth: Finite beings growing in love from Infinite Love
    - Spread the garden
    - Spread human life
    - Each new human marriage is a recapitulation/retelling of Adam and Eve

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Pentateuch

- Pentateuch: The Relational Vision of Becoming Fully Human (Gen.2:4 – 4:26)
  - Negative: Adam and Eve corrupted human nature
    - Internalized the power and desire to define good and evil from one's self (Gen.3:1 – 7)
    - We are relativistic absolutists and absolutist relativists
  - Negative: Cain further corrupted his human nature
    - Killing his brother damaged himself (4:11)
    - Cain and land
      - No longer cultivate life from the land
      - Further alienated from the land than others (compare 3:17 – 19)
    - Cain and empire
      - Started a mini-empire where injustice flourished (4:16 – 24)

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Pentateuch

- Pentateuch: The Relational Vision of Becoming Fully Human (Gen.2:4 – 4:26)
  - Lesson: We inherit a corrupted human nature (“ancestral sin”), and we can definitely make it worse





# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Pentateuch

- Pentateuch: The Relational Vision of Becoming Fully Human (Gen.2:4 – 4:26)
  - Methodological Mistake: Treating Gen.1 – 3 as “creation and fall”
    - Amputates Gen.4 from “the fall narrative”
    - We fail to perceive further “human becoming” getting worse
    - Theological anthropology suffers
      - Personal (human nature)
      - Relational (brotherhood)
      - Institutional (cities, empires)

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Pentateuch

- Pentateuch: The Relational Vision of Becoming Fully Human (Gen.2:4 – 4:26)
  - Recall:
    - Gen.1:1 -2:3 is one literary unit (an introduction hymn to Genesis)
    - Gen.2:4 – 4:26 is one literary unit (one of ten genealogical “toledot” units in Genesis)
      - 2:4 Heaven and earth
      - 5:1 Adam
      - 6:9 Noah
      - 10:1 Shem, Ham, Japheth
      - 11:9 Shem
      - 11:27 Terah
      - 25:12 Ishmael
      - 25:19 Isaac
      - 36:1 Esau
      - 37:2 Jacob

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Pentateuch

- Pentateuch: The History of Human Becoming (Gen.5:1 – 6:8)
  - Mixed: Adam shared his own likeness and image with descendants (Gen.5:1 – 3)
  - Negative: violence; human hearts other than Noah's family have become 'only evil continually' (Gen.6:5 – 6)

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Pentateuch

- Pentateuch: The Need for a New, “New Humanity” (Gen.6:9 – 9:29)
  - Human bloodshed
    - The flood cleansed the land of it
    - Noah is a “new Adam”
    - New deterrent: human bloodshed regulated
    - Other kinds of relational violence (Ham, Canaan, etc.)
  - Negative: the human heart is evil from youth (Gen.8:21)
    - This time, apparently including Noah’s family
    - If not another flood, then what?

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Pentateuch

- Pentateuch: Abraham, Sarah, Hagar's Experiences of Becoming a "New Humanity" (Gen.11:27 – 25:11)
  - Positive: God made Abraham and Sarah a new Adam and Eve; the meaning of circumcision (Gen.17)
    - Received God's blessing, went to a new garden land (Gen.12)
    - Cut off male centeredness: wife Sarai in God's promise (Gen.12)
    - Honored a new Eden: altar on a mountain (Gen.12:8; 13:4)
    - Restored brotherhood: Lot (Gen.13 – 14)
    - Cut off male centeredness: son from your body (Gen.15)
    - Cut off male centeredness: son from your wife (Gen.16)
    - Cut off foreskin as "sign" or be "cut off"; Abraham laughed (Gen.17)



# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Pentateuch

- Pentateuch: Abraham, Sarah, Hagar's Experiences of Becoming a "New Humanity" (Gen.11:27 – 25:11)
  - Positive: God made Abraham and Sarah a new Adam and Eve; the meaning of circumcision (Gen.17)
    - Sarah believed and laughed: Sarah's faith, not just body (Gen.18)
    - Honored brotherhood: Prayed for Lot (Gen.19)
    - Honored marriage (eventually): Sarah (Gen.20)
    - Released both sons to God: Ishmael, Isaac (Gen.21, 22)

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Pentateuch

- Pentateuch: Abraham, Sarah, Hagar's Experiences of Becoming a "New Humanity" (Gen.11:27 – 25:11)
  - Positive: God gave the creation blessing to Hagar; Hagar and Sarah became a new Cain and Abel
    - Mini-Eden: Hagar met God "by a spring of water" (16:7)
    - Creational blessing: God blessed Hagar with the same fruitfulness as Abraham (16:10)
    - New Eden: God gave "well of water" to Hagar and Ishmael (21:19)
    - Honored a broken sisterhood: Sarah and Hagar

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Pentateuch

- Pentateuch: Joseph's Experience of Becoming a "New Humanity" (Gen.37 – 50)
  - Positive: Joseph indwelt by divine Spirit (Gen.41:38)
    - Restored brotherhood: Potiphar (Gen.39)
    - Respected marriage: Potiphar's wife (Gen.39)
    - Nurtured a garden: wine and bread (Gen.40)
    - Nurtured a garden: Egypt, world for seven years (Gen.41)
    - Respected marriage: Joseph married Asenath (Gen.41)
    - Restored brotherhood: reunited brothers (Gen.42 – 44)
    - Challenged father to release son: Jacob and Benjamin (Gen.43 – 44)
    - Provided for all little ones: of Israel and Egypt (Gen.47:12, 24)
    - God brought good out of human evil (Gen.50:20)

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Pentateuch

- Pentateuch: Israel's Experience of Becoming a "New Humanity" (Ex.1 – Num.36)
  - Positive: circumcision and Passover (Ex.4, 12)
    - Israel is God's "firstborn son" (Ex.4:22)
    - Moses had to circumcise his son (Ex.4:24 – 26)
    - Journey marked by blood on doors (Ex.12), meaning walk into the life God provides, which is via a "firstborn son"
  - Multiple levels of significance
    - Passover lamb is a "firstborn son" to each Israelite family
    - Israel is a "firstborn son" to the "mixed multitude" (Ex.12:36)
    - David will be the "firstborn son" to a new kingdom (Pss.2, 22, 34)
    - God the Son is the "firstborn son" of the Father, who gives life to all, and offers more life to all

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Pentateuch

- Pentateuch: Israel's Experience of Becoming a "New Humanity" (Ex.1 – Num.36)
  - Positive: God called Moses upward (Eden-Sinai-Zion), and marked Moses' face with glory (Ex.34; Num.6:22 – 27), but Israel stayed on the ground
  - Negative: hearts are still uncircumcised (Lev.26:49)
  - Negative: even Moses was unfaithful (Num.20)
  - Negative: human nature is still poisoned (Num.21:4 – 7)
    - Israel freed from Pharaoh, symbolized by serpent (Ex.7)
    - Israel still poisoned by the venom of the ancient serpent
    - Second generation will need to resist the venom and seek healing
    - Jesus is like the serpent on the pole (Jn.3:14 – 15)



# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Pentateuch

- Pentateuch: Israel's Experience of Becoming a "New Humanity" (Deut.1 – 34)
  - Positive: write God's commands on hands, foreheads, doorposts (Dt.6), meaning internalize the commands
  - Positive: God commands us to circumcise our hearts by internalizing His commandments (Dt.10:16)
  - Positive: God will circumcise our hearts (Dt.30:6)
  - Positive: Joshua is filled with the Spirit (Dt.34:9)

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Wisdom

- Proverbs and Psalms
  - Positive: God tests and tries us like a metalsmith uses fire (Ps.17:3; 26:2; 66:10, 12; 105:19)
  - Positive: God wants truth in the innermost part of us (Ps.51:6)
  - Positive: God shapes our desires and rejoicing (Ps.19:8; 37:4; 119:16, 18, 27, 32, 36, 135; Pr.3:15; 8:22 – 36)
  - Positive: see God's face (Ps.11:7; 17:15; 22:24; 24:6; 27:8 – 9; 30:7; 31:16; 34:5; 67:1; 69:17; 80:3, 7, 19; 105:4; 119:135; 143:7)
  - Positive: receive God's Spirit and words (Pr.1:1 – 9, 23; 2:1 – 3, 10 – 12; 8:22 – 36)
  - Positive: write God's law on the heart (Pr.3:3 – 8; 6:21; 7:1 – 5)

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Wisdom

- Proverbs and Psalms
  - Negative: Sinfulness also shapes our desires (Pr.6:25; 8:36)
  - Negative: God will have to make a clean heart for us, in us (Ps.51:9 – 11)

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Prophets

- Isaiah
  - Positive: God cleanses (1:25; 4:4 – 6; 6:1 – 13)
  - Negative: Israel became unjust (58:1 – 14)
  - Positive: God will turn sin away from Jacob (59:1 – 21) and pour out His Spirit so that we can speak clean words (59:20 – 21)
    - Paul in Rom.11:26 – 27 quotes LXX Isa 59:20

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Prophets

- Jeremiah
  - Positive: God commands us to circumcise our hearts (4:4)
  - Negative: Our hearts are uncircumcised (9:25 – 26)
  - Negative: Israel has written, engraved sin onto their hearts (17:1 – 10)
  - Positive: God will write His law on human hearts, not stone tablets (31:31 – 34)



# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Prophets

- Ezekiel
  - Negative: God will give us a new heart and spirit (11:18)
  - Negative: God commands us to make for ourselves a new heart and spirit (18:31)
  - Positive: God will put a new heart and spirit in us (36:26 - 36)
  - Positive: God will pour His Spirit out into us (37:1 - 14)

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Prophets

- Habakkuk
  - Negative: The law is ineffective, numbed (1:4)
  - Positive: God's people will live by faith (2:4)
  - See notes on Romans, below

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Paul

- Romans
  - God's faithfulness, Jesus, and the Sinai covenant
    - Romans 1:17a and 3:1 – 8
      - Did God abandon Israel/Sinai covenant?
      - God's righteousness = faithfulness to the covenant
    - Romans 1:17b and Habakkuk 2:4
      - Why the commandments could not help Israel enough
      - "Live by faith" – faith that God will bring forth new life
    - Romans 10:4
      - Jesus is the climax (*telos*, end-goal) of the covenant

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Paul

- Romans
  - Negative: All human beings are corrupted and in decline
    - Immoral Gentile: human **desires** are in decline (1:21 – 32)
    - Judgmental Gentile: hypocrisy should wake us to **desire** the good (2:1 – 16)
    - Jew: Jews are in exile, should **desire** “circumcision of heart” to honor and fulfill the covenant (2:17 – 3:8)
    - All: Sin affects human nature; our choices shape our **desires** (3:9 – 20)

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Paul

- Romans
  - Reversal in Jesus, medical substitutionary atonement:
    - Jesus fulfilled the covenant through his own faithfulness (*pistis christou*, 3:22)
      - Israel's side: To circumcise the heart
      - God's side: To give a circumcised heart
    - God displayed Jesus publicly as a *hilasterion* (3:25)
      - Literally “mercy seat” or “place of atonement”
      - Yom Kippur:
        - God took the corruption of sin (symbolically) into Himself
        - God sent it far away from Israel – a type of circumcision
        - God gave back purified life
      - Jewish sacrificial system: God as dialysis machine
      - Jesus is the truly human one, and spiritual “organ donor”



# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Paul

- Romans
  - Positive: Faith in Christ fills to the full the faith of Abraham and Sarah
    - Faith that God will bring about a new life (4:1 – 15)
    - Results in new life in us (4:16 – 25)
    - Jesus was “raised for our justification” (4:25)
      - Jesus is “the justified one”
        - Donald Fairbairn, “Justification in St. Cyril of Alexandria with some Implications for Ecumenical Dialogue,” edited by Matthew Baker and Todd Speidell, *T.F. Torrance and Eastern Orthodoxy: Theology in Reconciliation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015), ch.6
    - Real participation, not imputation, by the Spirit

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Paul

- Romans
  - Positive: Life in Christ, Christ's life in us
    - Christ's life in us by the Spirit
      - The "hope of glory" (5:1 – 11)
      - We grow in **hope** (5:5)
      - "We shall be saved by his life" (5:10)
    - Jesus' life over death
      - Topples the reign of human death ("the condemnation")
      - Topples the reign of sin via human mortality from Adam (5:12 – 21)
    - We died and rose to new life with Christ, in Christ (6:1 – 11)
      - Jesus crucified "the old self" (6:6) – the underlying corruption
      - i.e. Jesus makes death work backwards
      - Implied: You already **desired** to change

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Paul

- Romans
  - Positive: Life in Christ, Christ's life in us
    - Bondservant analogy:
      - Self and members
      - Be slaves to righteousness in Jesus, not to sin (6:12 – 23)
      - Different masters (Jesus vs. sin) pay different wages so **desire better** for yourselves (6:21 – 23)

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Paul

- Romans
  - Positive: Life in Christ, Christ's life in us
    - For Jews (7:1)
      - Dying, rising with Christ = emerging on the other side of the Sinai covenant (from exile, to restoration) (7:1 – 4)
      - Restoration to the garden land depended on human nature being healed (Dt.30:6)
    - Why the Sinai covenant? Why Israel?
      - Could not abolish coveting, and even made it worse (7:5 – 13) but
      - Helped Jews diagnose
        - The “I myself” apart from “the sin which indwells me” (7:14 – 25)
        - The “the good that I **want**” apart from the “the evil I do not **want**” through **desires**
        - The need for a new humanity, a healed human nature, a circumcised heart
        - Not “Israel just needs to suffer” – not an issue of passive obedience

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Paul

- Romans
  - Reversal in Jesus, medical substitutionary atonement:
    - God sent Jesus because the commandments were “weakened by the flesh” of Israel
    - Jesus finally “condemned sin in the flesh” of his own body by never sinning and killing the thing that was killing us (8:1 – 4)
    - Implied: Jesus’ **desires** overpowered the corruption of sin



# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Paul

- Romans
  - Positive: Life in Christ, Christ's life in us
    - Positive: We participate by the Spirit in Jesus' achievement (8:5 – 11), which is the “circumcision of the heart” that the covenant required (8:4; 10:4; cf. Dt.10:16; 30:6)
    - We **desire** liberation from the corruption of sin, like the creation (8:12 – 25)
    - The Spirit, Son, and Father are “for us” (8:26 – 39)

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Paul

- Romans
  - Positive: Jesus' new humanity for all humanity
    - In the world:
      - God desires all Jews and Gentiles to know Jesus (9 – 11)
      - God's **desires** are Paul's **desires** (9:1 – 6; 11:26 – 36)
    - In the church:
      - Christians of Jewish and Gentile backgrounds living together (12 – 16)
      - Christians participate in the mission

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Paul

- Colossians
  - Negative: “The old self”
    - You laid aside “the old self” which was greedy, impure, and sensual (3:1 – 9)
  - Positive: “The new self”
    - You put on the “new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him” (3:10 – 14)
  - Reversal in Jesus, medical substitutionary atonement:
    - “In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ” (2:11)
    - The cross as a circumcision: “made peace through the blood of His cross” (1:20)

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Paul

- Ephesians
  - Negative: “The old self”
    - Human hearts, thoughts, and desires become more greedy, impure, and sensual (4:17 – 19)
    - “Old self being corrupted by lusts” (4:23)
    - Note: Dynamism downwards qualifies static-sounding “dead in sin” description in 2:1 – 3
  - Positive: “The new self”
    - The “truth is in Jesus” (4:21)
    - “Put on the new self which in God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (4:24)
  - Reversal in Jesus, medical substitutionary atonement:
    - “...having broken down the hostility in his flesh... having slain the hostility *in him*” (*en auto* in 2:16) (2:14 – 16)

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Peter

- 2 Peter
  - Positive: in Christ we become “partakers of the divine nature” (1:4)
  - Positive: add Christ’s virtues to ourselves (1:5 – 11)
  - Reversal in Jesus, medical substitutionary atonement
    - Jesus transfigured (purified) his humanity (1:16 – 18)
    - Now we know the prophetic word is like “a lamp shining in a dark place” and sunlight/starlight “in your hearts” (1:20)



# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Peter

- 2 Peter
  - Negative: many follow “sensuality and greed” (2:1 – 22) rather than being purified
    - “they entice by fleshly desires... promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved. For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them.” (2:19 – 21)

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Peter

- 2 Peter

- All creation will be purified

- “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be [burned up / discovered]. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.” (3:10 – 15)

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Peter

- 2 Peter
  - All creation will be purified
    - Several ancient manuscripts say that the earth and its works will be “discovered/disclosed” rather than “burned up” (3:10)
      - Douglas J. Moo, *Nature in the New Creation*, p.468 – 469
    - λύω, *luo* (3:10, 11, 12) not “annihilation,” but rather “being undone, untied, unbound”
      - Cf. “creation itself also will be *set free* (*luo*- root) from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom.8:21 – 22)
    - New heavens, earth in 3:13 emerges from, and is disclosed by, the refining divine fire burning through the old
  - Jesus’ transfiguration (1:16 – 18) is evidence of purification

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Hebrews

- Hebrews
  - Jesus purified and perfected human nature
    - “Purification from sin” (1:3)
    - Jesus “learned obedience... and having been made perfect” through his faithfulness, death and resurrection, “he became the source of eternal salvation” (5:7 – 10)
      - Jesus at birth was not instantly “perfect”
      - Jesus “wrote the law on his heart” (8:6 – 13, quoting Jer.31:31 – 34)
    - The Sinai covenant “can never... make perfect” (10:1)

# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: Hebrews

- Hebrews
  - We are being perfected by faith in Jesus
    - The Old Testament saints: “apart from us they would not be made perfect” (11:40)
    - Jesus is “the author and perfecter of faith” (12:2)
    - We are among “the spirits of the righteous made perfect” (12:23)
    - “For our God is a consuming fire” (12:29)



# The Motif of Human Being, Human Becoming: John

- Revelation: Whose mark have you received?
  - Mark of Jesus (Rev.7:3; 9:4; 22:4)
  - Mark of the Beast (Rev.13:16 – 18; 14:9 – 11; 16:2; 17:5; 19:20; 20:4)
- John's Gospel: Which father have you chosen?
  - God the Father, via the Son (Jn.1:12 – 13, 17 – 18; 3:1 – 21; 13:1 – 17:26)
    - “*your Father*” (20:17): first time
  - Devil, via lies and ungodly desires (Jn.8:38, 42, 44)
  - Recall: Sin is self-negation

# The Themes of Fire and Becoming

- **Divine fire** is a *literary theme* in many biblical books
  - Methodological mistake: Drawing the conclusion that **fire** is only intended to be painful
- **Human becoming** is a *literary theme*
  - Methodological mistake: Drawing the conclusion that human nature and human desires are static
    - *Human becoming* is concentrated in Genesis and the Pentateuch, as paradigmatic, governing the rest of the biblical canon, as:
      - Humans as “image of God”
      - Marriage as monogamous, male-female
      - Humans as co-gardeners with God

# The Themes of Fire and Becoming

- Methodological Mistake: Breaking up a literary theme into pieces and drawing conclusions based on the pieces (Acts as example)
  - Tongues and the Spirit:
    - Only times the Spirit bestows tongues?
  - Imprisonment:
    - Only times God breaks the apostles out of jail?
  - The apostles' speeches and evangelism:
    - Only evangelistic speeches appealing to creation? (to Gentiles)
    - Or only appealing to fulfillment of Messianic passages? (to Jews)
- That would be bad literary methodology

# The Themes of Fire and Becoming

- From Deserving to Desiring
  - “For what is hell but the deprivation of that which is exceedingly **desired** by someone? Therefore, according to the analogy of **desire**, whoever **desires** God rejoices and whoever **desires** sin is punished.”
  - John of Damascus (c.675 – 740), *Against the Manicheans* 94.1569, 1573



# The Themes of Fire and Becoming

- From Deserving to Desiring
  - “What is hell? I maintain that it is the suffering of being unable to love.”
    - Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821 – 1881), *The Brothers Karamazov*
  - Endless jealousy?





# The Themes of Fire and Becoming

- “The gates of hell are locked on the inside.”
  - C.S. Lewis (1898 – 1963), *The Problem of Pain*



# The Themes of Fire and Becoming

- From Deserving to Desiring
  - Do we desire Jesus?
    - For ourselves
    - For others
  - Human deeds and human words are vital
    - Our choices shape our desires
    - We do not “merit” or “deserve” salvation
    - We must participate in our own healing in Christ’s humanity
    - Salvation is from the corruption of sin (Mt.1:21)

# The Themes of Fire and Becoming

- From Deserving to Desiring
  - Is there a score kept? Where?
    - On a scoresheet in God's mind?
    - On our human nature?
    - Protestant suspicions of “good works” – why?
    - Athanasius: “try virtue a bit, and see how hard it is” (*On the Incarnation* 57.3)
  - See *Reconstruction Session 8: Christian Mysticism and the Shaping of Desire*

# Outline

- Introduction: Defining Heaven and Hell
- Theology
- Church History
- Scripture: Fire
- Scripture: Human Being  Human Becoming

# Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- God's refining power, feels like destroying power





# Implications

- God's Character
  - God is 100% good, trying to undo 100% of the evil of humanity
  - Consistently and thoroughly Trinitarian
- Church Unity
  - The teaching of the earliest, united church, for a thousand years+
  - Everyone else must explain their departure from this
- Personally Relevant
  - What/Who do you desire?
  - Urgency: Address your addiction *now*; later is harder

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## God's Goodness: In the Theme of Fire in Scripture

# Discussion Questions

1. How does this paradigm answer, “Why the urgency to accept Jesus?”
2. What questions do you have about how Scripture is being read here?

# Appendix A: Quick Comparison

# Two Views of Hell

## Legal: Prison Sentence

- God's wrath – like a judge
- God hates you, punishes you by throwing you into a prison or torture chamber
- You desire to be with God, but He says no
- Hell is against your desires
- Hell is infinite wrath and retributive justice

## Medical: Addiction Treatment

- God's wrath – like a surgeon
- God hates the 'cancer' in you, denies your addiction, demands you let him perform the surgery
- You desire to be without God, but He says no
- Hell is your desires
- Hell is infinite love and restorative justice



# Two Views of Hell

## Legal: Prison Sentence

- Scriptures Emphasized:  
*What* it's like
- 'Original sin' =  
inherited guilt
- Fire is punishing
- Darkness is being  
abandoned by God

## Medical: Addiction Treatment

- Scriptures Emphasized:  
*Why* it's like that
- 'Ancestral sin' =  
inherited corruption
- Fire is refining
- Darkness is their self-imposed  
blindness, un-creation

# Two Views of Hell

## Legal: Prison Sentence

- Scriptures Emphasized:  
*What* it's like
- Sin is lawbreaking
- God's wrath is against us for lawbreaking, for the consequences of sin

## Medical: Addiction Treatment

- Scriptures Emphasized:  
*Why* it's like that
- Sin is addiction and self-destruction, then lawbreaking
- God's wrath is against the corruption in us, the source of our sin (Rom.1:18; 7:14 – 8:4)

# Atonement, Salvation, Destiny

## Majority Protestant

## Patristic & Eastern

What framework?	Legal (judicial)	Medical (being, ontology)
What is human sin?	Wrong actions	Wrong condition
Jesus dealt with sin...	At his death only	From conception to death
God's wrath went from...to...?	Father to Son, or God to God	Jesus to the corruption in his human nature
Jesus is the	Victim	Victor
God saves us from	Himself	The corruption in us
Salvation is	Forgiveness	New identity, healing
Gets us into the	After-life	Mission-life
Election is	Only for some?	Mission-partners 'chosen ppl'
Human free will	Is questionable	Is essential to our becoming
Hell is	A prison	Jealousy amid love
God's nature is	Love and Wrath	Love only