

The Conditionalist View of Hell

(<http://www.rethinkinghell.com/2013/02/episode-19-eternity-heaven-or-hell-with-david-reagan/>)



CHRIS DATE: I am your host today, Chris Date. And I'm joined today by Dr. David Reagan. Dr. Reagan is the Founder and Director of Lamb & Lion Ministries, host of the international television program *Christ in Prophecy*, editor of the bi-monthly *Lamplighter Magazine*, and author of several books about Bible prophecy. But he joins me today to discuss primarily one specific area of prophecy and eschatology and that is the nature of Hell. About which he writes in his 2010 book, *Eternity: Heaven or Hell*. Thanks so much for joining me Dr. Reagan.

DR. REAGAN: Well thank you Chris, it is good to be with you.

CHRIS DATE: I would like to begin by getting to know little bit about you and your ministry. And at the end of the interview I'll ask you where listeners can go to find you online. But for now can you tell us about the message and mission of Lamb & Lion.

DR. REAGAN: Sure Chris I appreciate you asking that. For the first 20 years of my career life I was a professor of international law and politics at the university level. And then in 1980 the Lord placed a call on my life to give up my academic career and step out in faith and start preaching the soon return of Jesus. And since the ministry I founded was a ministry whose purpose is to teach the fundamentals of Bible prophecy I decided to call it Lamb & Lion because those are the two great prophetic images of the Messiah in the Old Testament. The prophet said He would come first as a suffering lamb and He would return as a conquering lion. So since 1980 we have been teaching Bible prophecy and proclaiming that we are living in the season of the Lord's return.

CHRIS DATE: Ok, and like I said when I introduced you you've authored a number of books, booklets, articles but your ministry also produces the bi-monthly magazine, *Lamplighter*, and weekly television program *Christ in Prophecy*. And it looks like each issue of this magazine, and each episode of this television program are available for download on-line. Can you tell us about those, and why listeners might want to check them out?

DR. REAGAN: Well yes the magazine is put out every other month, so we put out 6 issues a year, 20 pages long and it goes into depth about various issues of Bible prophecy. And as you said you can get it free of charge by e-mail. If you want it by mail there is a small charge, but either way you can sign up at our website. With regard to the television program it's a weekly program broadcast on 4 national networks right now so it's on almost every day of the week on some network. And it's a 30 minute program and we have a variety formats there, many of the programs are shot in Israel. Some of them

are teaching programs. The majority I would say are probably interview programs we interview a lot of people, very interesting people. And nearly always the interviews focus on one of two subjects either Bible prophecy, or apologetics.

CHRIS DATE: Two very good subjects to study.

DR. REAGAN: That's right.

CHRIS DATE: One of the things that I find really fascinating about you is that it seems to me that most dispensationalists would seem very opposed to any alternative to the traditional view of Hell. And I hope you don't mind me using the word dispensationalist to refer to you. And they would say that Conditionalists are sort of spiritualizing away text that they think ought to be taken literally. In fact that is a question you address in the book and you know we are going to come back to that in a little bit. But first can you summarize for our listeners where it is that you stand right now when it comes to the nature of Hell, whatever your view is.

DR. REAGAN: Sure, first of all I don't consider myself to be a dispensationalist. I have a dispensational viewpoint concerning Bible prophecy. But I disagree with dispensationalists on a lot of other points that they make. So I never really considered myself to be one even though I do have that viewpoint of end time Bible prophecy. And with regard to my view of Hell that I have developed through the study of Scripture. My view is that Hell is a very real place, it was created for Satan and his angels that it is the ultimate destiny of the unsaved, they are temporarily in Hades right now waiting to be put into Hell, nobody is in Hell right now. And that at the end of the Millennium the unsaved will be resurrected, they will be judged, they will be consigned to Hell, they will suffer for a time in proportion to their sins, and then they will suffer destruction. And I don't think that any of that is a spiritualization of Scripture. In fact I think that those who have the traditional view are the ones who really spiritualize, they would have to spiritualize a lot of things to come up with the traditional view. The only thing that those who have the viewpoint we have which is called the Conditionalists view, the only thing that we spiritualize is what the Bible puts in a symbolic way, such as the smoke of Eden goes up forever. Well you could go to Eden you don't see any smoke going up so that is obviously a symbolic term that has to be interpreted symbolically.

CHRIS DATE: Yeah, I agree. So then you would characterize your view as either conditional immortality or annihilationism, is that fair?

DR. REAGAN: Yes.

CHRIS DATE: Now many of us Conditionalists perhaps even most or were once committed Traditionalists though some were unsettled by the Traditional view of Hell their commitment to the authority of Scripture really forced them to accept it and that is to be commended. Of course it would turn out that same commitment is what would lead them to embrace Conditional Immortality. But I bring this up because the other thing that I find very interesting about you is if I read your book correctly this conversion from Traditionalism to Conditionalism isn't something that you necessarily experienced. Because in your book you write, "I have never been able to embrace the traditional viewpoint of conscious eternal punishment." So can you elaborate on that a little bit as a life-long Bible student,

teacher and preacher what is it that you did believe and teach about Hell before you embraced this view you now hold.

DR. REAGAN: Well I was born and raised in a very conservative church and they taught the traditional view of Hell whenever they mentioned it, it was very rarely was ever mentioned. But when it was they taught the traditional view so that was the only view that I knew. And for many, many years probably until I was 30 years old I didn't even know there was any other viewpoint. So I held that view really until the 1970's but I was never easy with it Chris, I was always very, very uneasy with it. And the reason was because the Bible teaches, over, and over and over that the God of this universe is a God of justice. And I found it hard to believe that a God of justice would torment a person eternally for a temporal sin. Let me just give you an illustration that occurred to me many, many years ago. Let's take a 16 year old boy who gets his driver's license now according to the Jewish tradition a person becomes responsible for his sins at about the age of 13. Of course the age of accountability can vary, but that was the traditional age. So let's say he became accountable at age 13, at age 16- 3 years later he gets his driver's license, goes out drives recklessly and is killed, he has never become a Christian. He's been responsible for his sins for 3 years, do we really believe that God of justice is going to take that boy responsible for his sins for 3 years and torment him for eternity? This turns God into a monster, it turns God into a director of an Auschwitz concentration camp, and I just could not believe that this God of justice would do that. So I always had this uneasiness in my soul about the Traditional view. And then I really started studying the Scriptures about this I found out why I should be uneasy about it.

CHRIS DATE: So tell us about that, what was the turning point for you with regard to you change of view about Hell.

DR. REAGAN: Well that was very interesting Chris because the turning point for me was in the 1970's when I went to a Bible Conference in Nashville, Tennessee and one of the persons at that conference was a man I had heard of but never met his name was Edward Fudge, he wasn't even a speaker he was just there with the rest of us at the conference. And I had lunch with him one day and he just asked me point blank, "What do you believe about Hell?" And I told him and he said, "Well have you really examined the Scriptures about that?" And I said, "Well, not really. I just thought that was the traditional view that all Christians have." He said, "It is but you need to examine the Scriptures. Go home and search the Scriptures." He didn't try to convert me to a viewpoint or anything of that nature, he just planted the seed and said, "Go test it by the Scripture." Well I am a person who believes that everything should be tested by the Scripture so that was the beginning of my turning point. Now for some of your listeners maybe they don't know who Edward Fudge is but he later became the major proponent of the Conditionalist viewpoint. And the other thing that happened one of the person I respected most was C.S. Lewis I had read just about everything that he had ever written and I think it was in his book on pain and suffering, *The Problem of Pain* that he suddenly said in the middle of the book said, "I've always been bothered by the fact that Jesus said that those who do not accept Him will perish." He said, "Now how can you be perishing for eternity? You either perish or you don't perish." And that was another seed that was planted. And I got to thinking, "You know that's really true. You either perish or you don't perish." Incidentally later on in life when I was studying CS Lewis in detail I found out that his father in law who was a Presbyterian preacher was a very, very strong Conditionalist. So I supposed that C.S. Lewis was exposed to that viewpoint through his father-in-law.

CHRIS DATE: That's very interesting. It's funny you mentioned Edward Fudge he has been instrumental in many of our thinking. And in fact we interviewed him as the very first episode of this podcast.

DR. REAGAN: Oh, is that right?

CHRIS DATE: I think our listeners probably do know who he is. Now in a Christian culture at least in America probably abroad as well in which Conditionalism is seen by many as a very dangerous doctrine even possibly heretical. And in which Conditionalists are ostracized sometimes, prohibited from ministering sometimes. How is teaching Conditionalism impacted you and your ministry if at all? What sort of responses have you received?

DR. REAGAN: Well of course I have received some very negative responses from people who thought that I was some sort of heretic and the next thing I knew they were out telling people that I did not believe in Hell. Well I believe very strongly in Hell that is one of the reasons I wrote this book, *Eternity: Heaven or Hell*. I believe very strongly in the existence of Hell. But there is this tendency to say, "Well this guy just doesn't believe in Hell." So there has been that kind of distortion of the viewpoint. There have been negative responses. But overwhelmingly I have found the response to be very positive. I've found people who say, "You know I've always been troubled by this, and now for the first time I really understand what the Bible says." So very, very positive. Now I've addressed it mainly in writings and the people who have read the writings have been very positive. It is interesting though Chris that I only have been asked one time in my life to speak on the topic and that was at a conference where there was going to be a number of speakers and it was going to be held at a church. And about a week before I got ready to go to the conference the fellow who had organized it called me and said, "Well you are going to have to change your topic." And I said, "Why?" And he said, "The pastor said that he doesn't want anybody in his church discussing point because it is too controversial." So I have really never given a public talk about it. I have done audio recordings and video recordings and written but people seem to be scared of the topic.

CHRIS DATE: Yeah, that is unfortunate. Well let's start talking about your book, *Eternity: Heaven or Hell*. What initially prompted you to write it and what sort of overall impact do you hope it has on its readers?

DR. REAGAN: Well I've always been concerned about what happens when you die? I never had any preaching or teaching about it, it was just when you died you went to Heaven. And today you can ask a Christian, "What happens when you die?" They say, "I'm going to Heaven." You say, "Ok, what does that mean?" And there is just silence. Because they don't know what that means. They haven't really studied what the Bible has to say about that. So I really got fascinated about that and I started studying it day and night. And one of the first in depth articles that I wrote when I formed this ministry in 1980 was, "What Happens When you Die?" That took off like a rocket this was before the age of the Internet. But passed around from person to person, word of mouth and we've gone through many, many editions since then. People have been handed this on their death bed. We've had all kinds of testimonies of how it has impacted people on their death bed. People want to know what happens when you die and the average pastor can't give them any details. All he can say is, "Well you either go to Heaven or Hell." So that is how I got into the topic to begin with.

CHRIS DATE: Yeah, very good. You know one of the things that really bothers me and frustrates me is how few Christians are even aware that they are going to rise from the dead in the future. They sort of think that eternity is just floating around in clouds in Heaven.

DR. REAGAN: Well that's what I was taught Chris. I was taught that when I died I went to sleep and I laid in the grave for ions of time waiting for the Lord to come back. When the Lord came back the whole world blew up ceased to exist, my spirit was resurrected and I went to Heaven to float around on clouds playing a harp for all of eternity. Needless to say I could not get excited about the future. I could not get excited about going to Heaven, it sounded like the most boring place in the world. And I used to get home and get in the closet and die laughing even when I was 12 years old. Because I went to church that taught that the worse sin you could ever commit was to play a musical instrument in a worship service. And here was the pastor getting up and condemning musical instruments and then telling us we were going to play one for eternity in Heaven. It made no sense to me.

CHRIS DATE: Yeah it doesn't make any sense. So in the introduction to the book you write about man's sort of innate fear of death. Can you tell us about how that serves as a very appropriate introduction to a book discussing Heaven and Hell? What is it about our fear of death that ought to prompt within us?

DR. REAGAN: Well yes that is the reason that I wrote the book. In Hebrews 2 it says that Jesus came to deliver us from the fear of death. That mankind lives in fear of death. And I give a lot of examples in the book of famous personalities were scared stiff as they approached death. But I find that the average Christian also has great difficulty dealing with this fear of death. And I just see people all the time who are desperately ill and whose only hope is clinging to this life, I've got to cling to this life, I have to go to another doctor, get another pill, do this, do that, someday or other I have to cling to this life. And I keep thinking well don't you know what is coming? Paul said, "The sufferings of this time are not even worthy to be compared to the glory that is yet to be revealed to us." But when people don't know anything about the future, when they don't know what the Bible says is going to happen to them. They are afraid and they cling to this life because this life is the only thing they know.

CHRIS DATE: Yeah, it's sad.

DR. REAGAN: I remember John Wesley once wrote he said, "One of the proudest accomplishments of my ministry is that my people know how to die."

CHRIS DATE: Yeah, that is good. Well ok, but this is the rethinking Hell project so naturally I'm going to want to focus on a chapter of your book discussing Hell. But I'd also like to give you an opportunity to tell our listeners a little bit about the other topics that you discuss. So what are some of the misconceptions that you attempt to correct in the first three chapters of your book in which you discuss: What Happens When you Die?; Resurrection and Judgment, and What Heaven will be Like?

DR. REAGAN: Well I get into a number of things there of course. I talk about resurrection and judgment, about the fact that most people don't understand that there is going to be a bodily resurrection, that there is going to be a judgment for both the believers and unbelievers, they are doing to be very different. The judgment for believers is going to be a judgment of their works to determine the degrees of reward. Not that their works will determine their salvation because we are saved by grace. But we are

to be judged in our works to determine of degrees of reward. And the unbeliever of course is going to be judged in his works and determine his eternal destiny. Since nobody can be justified by works then the unbeliever will be consigned to hell. Then I get into a chapter about what Heaven is like and I like to talk about that because again people have really weird ideas about Heaven. And I talk about how we are going to have a real body, and we are going to be recognizable and we are going to live on a new earth that has been redeemed and refreshed and restored. And God is going to put His whole creation back the way He originally created it. So people often find that really amazing because they've never been taught that the book of Revelation means when it says when it says we are going to be living on this new earth for eternity.

CHRIS DATE: Yeah, very good. Now that brings us to chapter four which is the chapter on Hell and we will talk about that in a moment. But first what about the three chapters following it? This book isn't just about correcting common Christian misunderstandings about Heaven and Hell, but the chapters that follow the chapter on Hell are some different topics aren't they?

DR. REAGAN: Well they are I talk about what is rapidly becoming the Christian viewpoint in America, and that there are many different roads to God. You go out and do polls even among the Evangelicals and you'll find that 40-50% of them say, "Oh, yeah there are many roads to God." Of course 40-50% of them also say that Jesus sinned. It just shows the famine of the Word in the Church today our pulpits are filled with people preaching modern psychology and anything but the Word of God. And the average person in the pew is simply ignorant of God's Word today and so this is the age of tolerance and therefore who are we to say that somebody might be go Hell. So surely there must be many different roads. When Jesus said, "I am the only way. You must come through me to get to the Father." So I have a whole chapter on are there many roads to God? I have a whole chapter on how can be certain of life after death? And that focuses them on the resurrection of Jesus the evidence of His resurrection. The overwhelming evidence and we can be certain of life after death because of His resurrection. And then finally I conclude by talking about Are you Living with an Eternal Perspective? Because most of us are so caught up in this world and so caught up with the problems of the world that we very rarely have an eternal perspective. But we are supposed to be living with an eternal perspective because we are like pilgrims who are passing through this world to the eternal world where we will either be destroyed, or we will live eternally with the Lord.

CHRIS DATE: Well hopefully that sort of summarized the other chapters in a way that encourages our listeners to pick up a copy of the book for themselves. And at the end of the interview I will ask you how they can do that. But now let's talk about chapter 4 the chapter on Hell. We Conditionalists are sometimes accused of trivializing Hell, softening it, weakening its significance that kind of thing. But the way that you open this chapter suggest that you don't think what the Bible says about Hell is trivial at all. In fact you talk about how Hell has been trivialized by the world. So tell us about how see Hell has been trivialized by the world and why you think it is instead a very important topic.

DR. REAGAN: Well it has been trivialized by the world as I point out in that chapter. I give you a lot of examples of people trivializing it and I could have given many, many more. But it is just unbelievable the way people flip off Hell, talking about how, "Oh, yeah I know I'm not doing very well in this life, but so what I am going to spend eternity partying in Hell," AC/DC in their 1979 song, *Highway to Hell*, they

celebrate it. And I see this so often on TV. I was watching a famous star the other night he was celebrating his 75th birthday and people were there on TV honoring him and they said, "We also have some video celebrations." And the first one said, "Hey buddy how are you? I'm sorry I can't be there but I'll meet you in Hell and we'll party forever." You know this is the trivialization of Hell. It's mainly thought of as just a curse word, but not a real place. And what I try to do is to emphasize that it is very, very real place. It is a horrible place, it is horrible beyond anything that we can possibly imagine. It is not to be taken as a joke. And I think another reason it has trivialized is because the Church has ignored teaching about it and most people don't know much about Hell.

CHRIS DATE: Well yes and that touches on the next questions I was going to ask you, because you also mention at this point in the chapter that it seems pastors seldom preach about Hell now days. Why do you think that is?

DR. REAGAN: Well would you want to preach about Hell if you believe the traditionalists viewpoint? Chris I believe the reason the average pastor hardly ever mentions Hell and certainly never devotes a sermon to it because he is embarrassed by it. And I give him credit for one thing I give him credit for believing what he thinks the Bible teaches. But that is not what the Bible teaches, it does not teach eternal torment. So if you believe that who wants to get up and delivers a 45 minute sermon on how God is going to torment people for eternity? You turn God into a cosmic sadist who enjoys pulling the wings off butterflies. So I think they are uncomfortable with it, they are embarrassed by it, and therefore they just ignore it.

CHRIS DATE: SO you go on in the chapter to make a very important distinction one that I think is too often over looked by Traditionalists when it comes to this debate over the nature of Hell. I mean I can't count for example the number of times I've been challenged by Traditionalists based on the parable of Lazarus and the rich man recorded in Luke 16. So what this important distinction that you talk about toward the beginning of this chapter?

DR. REAGAN: Well that is one of the greatest sources of confusion about Hell. And you are right people are so confused about that and that has to do with translations. The Bible clearly makes it very clear there is a difference between Hades and Hell. In the Old Testament Hades is called Sheol, and in the New Testament the Greek word is Hades, it is temporary holding place of the spirits of the dead. And when a person who is unsaved today dies he goes to this place called Hades to a compartment called Torments and his spirit is held there until the time of his resurrection. And at that time he is condemned and put into Hell. Nobody is in Hell now. Hell is empty. The first ones to go to Hell will be the false prophet and the Antichrist, the third one will be Satan himself. It was created as an eternal abode for Satan and His demonic angels. But there is a difference between those two. The problem is that the King James translators as well as even modern translators often translate Hades as Hell, they don't do it consistently they just do it rather inconsistently. But sometimes they will call it Hell, sometimes they will call it Hades when these are two entirely different places. For example at the end of the book of Revelation it says Hades is going to be thrown into Hell, they are not the same place. And we need to keep that clear but again a lot of the confusion is due to improper translations.

CHRIS DATE: Yeah, that has definitely been a source of a lot of confusion. I am hoping one day to see that confusion cleared up.

DR. REAGAN: Amen.

CHRIS DATE: Now it is at this point that you begin to discuss the duration of Hell as believed by Traditionalists on one hand and Conditionalists on the other hand and you introduce it by addressing the question of the centrality of this debate to the Christian faith. What do you think the people on both side of this debate really have to remember as we engage in dialogue with those Christians we disagree with on this topic?

DR. REAGAN: Well first of all we need to realize that there is room for differences of opinion and we don't have to write off the other side as being apostate. So often, you know Chris Christians need to learn how to disagree. I get letters all the time even about trivial points of doctrine where somebody will write in and say, "Well you know you are going to Hell because you believe that." Or they will write in and say, "Well the only reason you take that position is because you want to make money and you know that is a popular position." Why must you attribute improper motives to those you disagree with? It's just not a Christian thing to do. You have to realize that there is plenty of room on most issues for differences of opinion and you must be respectful of those differences. And instead of condemning the person, deal the issue and try to convince the person of your position on that issue. Another point I like to make to people is that all truth is important, but not all truth is equally important. I grew up in church that was very legalistic we were taught that if you didn't take communion every Sunday in a certain way then you were going to go to Hell. Well let me tell you something, the truth about communion is important but it is nothing compared to the truth that Jesus is Lord. Not all truth is equally important. And we should rejoice over those who have embraced Jesus as their Lord and Savior and not condemn them to Hell because they happen to disagree with us on some point of doctrine. So be respectful of other opinions.

CHRIS DATE: At least when they are on the non-essentials.

DR. REAGAN: Right, right. I mean if you are talking about the virgin birth, or you are talking about the atonement of Jesus or you are talking about the Second Coming and you are denying those things, yes, that is something to get concerned about.

CHRIS DATE: Absolutely. That answer you gave sort of touches on the next question I want to ask. Before moving on to articulate some reasons for holding the Conditionalists view in this chapter you summarize the traditional view of Hell and few of the arguments commonly advanced in favor of it. And I was really impressed because you commended traditionalists despite being unhappy with the eternal torment they believe awaits the wicked neither the less accepted because they believe it is biblical. And I absolutely agree they should be commended for doing that, but what I find that is unfortunate is it seems that commendation is often not reciprocated.

DR. REAGAN: Amen.

CHRIS DATE: Many traditionalists. I am sure you have experienced this. Many traditionalists think that what we are doing is abandoning the authority Scripture. They would say that our belief that we are subjecting Scripture to our emotions or our philosophy, that kind of thing. What would you say to critics of our view that won't commend us for our commitment to believing what we think the Bible teaches?

DR. REAGAN: I would simply urge them to study the issue that is what Ed Fudge to me and it worked. What I do with Catholics when I talking with them I just say, "Read the Scripture, see if what your beliefs and your Church teaches see if it lines up with Scripture that is the important thing." So I ask them to study the issue of death. Study the issue of Hell and that you will then see that there is a biblical basis for the conditional view. I have found that much of their response is based on either a lack of knowledge about what the Scripture say or a misunderstanding of what we believe. And that is probably the most important thing to misunderstanding. The most common response I get is, "Oh, you are just like the cultist. You are like those who believe in annihilationism, that when you are dead you are dead." No, I do not believe in annihilationism. Annihilationists are teaching that yes when you die you are dead and that is it, atheists teach that, that there is no afterlife. I don't believe in that at all. I believe in Hell. I believe that people are going to be judged. I believe they are going to be consigned to Hell. I believe they are going to be terminated for a period of time proportion to their sins and cease to exist. But they usually just write us off as Annihilationists and therefore some sort of cult. Annihilationism

CHRIS DATE: Yeah, one of the things that I really appreciated that while this isn't the case of all Traditionalists that I have spoken to on a personal level, many of them have, even though they are not convinced by the case that we present have told me, "You know what I can see now that there is a biblical basis for what you believe even if we don't agree." And I really highly respect that. My goal is not to convince them so much as to just get them to realize we are presenting what we think is a biblical view. There is a lot in this chapter that we could go on to discuss. But what I am going to try to do is pick out a few things that stood out to me and then sort of play the preverbal Devil's advocate on a few points. So in listing some of the difficulties that you find in the traditional view of Hell you talk about how it seems to run contrary to some biblical examples, types, pre-figures of Hell. Can you tell us about that?

DR. REAGAN: Well Sodom and Gomorrah was destroyed suddenly and quickly. The Flood resulted in a sudden and quick destruction. God wasn't tormenting people, torturing people. The Canaanites suffered sudden and quick destruction. There was no provision of torture in the Law of Moses it was either retribution of death. Sacrificial animals were killed as mercifully and quickly as possible. There were definite prescribed ways of doing that. And I think the whole concept of eternal torment contradicts the description of a second death. Going to Hell is described as the second death that doesn't sound like eternal torment to me.

CHRIS DATE: Particularly in light of the fact when John and God used that phrase what they are doing is offering their interpretation of the imagery of the Lake of Fire. And if you look throughout Scripture beginning with the life of Joseph who was a dreamer and interpreter of dreams. The interpretation that he would offer of very highly symbolic imagery the interpretation was always very straight forward. And I think that alternatives to conditional immortality like traditionalism, and universalism they make the second death more perplexing in meaning then the imagery that it is supposed to interpret so I agree

with you. And what is interesting about the examples that you mention: Sodom and Gomorrah, the Flood, even the Israelites being killed in the wilderness as punishment these are examples that New Testament authors sometimes call upon as examples, or prefigures of Hell, Jude and Peter do that very thing. Anyway I will get off my soapbox for a moment. You go on to give a very brief version of the argument that Dr. Glen Peoples here at Rethinking Hell has called the biblical language of destruction in which you call in your book the problem of destruction. What is that problem for traditionalists and why do you think that their understanding of words like destroy and perish isn't really sufficient?

DR. REAGAN: Well that is where you get into spiritualization. When they talk about perish and destroy they begin to spiritualize those words immediately. And yet the Bible is very precise in its language, the people will perish, they will be destroyed, body and soul can be destroyed. Jesus Himself said that. It is just as clear as it can be. Now let me say this though when interpreting any literature whether it be the Bible or any literature context is always what determines the meaning of a word. There are places in the Bible where destroy does not mean ceasing to exist. For example in the Epistles of Peter he mentions the fact that the earth as it was originally created was destroyed by water. Well that doesn't mean it ceased to exist it means its nature was completely changed by that, we know that by the context. But when you look at these Scriptures in context and there list of them as long as my arm and you look at them in context you can see that they are clearly referring to a cessation of existence I just don't know how you can get around that and the only way you can is by spiritualizing it. Saying, "Well it doesn't really mean that, it just means eternally separation from God." That is spiritualization.

CHRIS DATE: And along the lines of context you know when you mentioned Matthew 10:28 where Jesus said that God will destroy both soul and body in Gehenna you know Dr. Glen Peoples has done a study and written an article on it at Rethinking Hell where he demonstrates that the word translated destroy there, everywhere it appears in the active voice to refer to what one personal agent does to another in the synoptic Gospels it always means something kill, or slay and of course that is contextually appropriate since what He is doing is contrasting what man can't do with what God can do. I agree there are places where the word seems to mean something like lost, or ruined or whatever but when we look at Matthew 10:28 and some other passages it is very clear what destroy means. In the debates that I have participated in, a couple of them my opening argument for Conditionalism was based primarily on the proof text commonly cited in favor of the Traditional view including the notorious passages from Revelation, because what I've become convinced of is that with virtually no exception every single proof text commonly cited by them is actually far better support for our view. So I really appreciated how you went on in this chapter to show how the symbolism of Revelation 14:9-11 with the smoke of torment rising forever is actually very strong support for Conditionalism, can you explain that for us?

DR. REAGAN: Well yes, because again the Bible says that for example in Isaiah 34:10 it talks about the destruction Edom and says the smoke of Edom's destruction will go up forever. And then you go over to the New Testament and you talk about Sodom Gomorrah and Jude 7 says that, "As the punishment of eternal fire, and the smoke goes up forever." Well I've been to Edom I didn't see any smoke. I've been to where they think Sodom and Gomorrah was located and pretty sure it was and I don't see any smoke. So this has to be symbolic language. I think it means that the consequences of sin, what happened to Edom, what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah is an eternal illustration of the consequences of sin

when it is unrepented and you go against God that ultimately there is going to be destruction. I think that is what it is talking about, that they are an eternal illustration of the consequences of sin.

CHRIS DATE: Ok, now let's sort of turn the tables and I will play the Devil's advocate on a few points, challenging you. In summarizing the traditional view of Hell early in the chapter you point out that Traditionalists sometimes argue that since man was made in the image of God, and the image of God cannot be uncreated therefore man must exist forever. Now you talk about the issue of immortality, but I don't think that I saw a response to this argument about the image of God being unable to be uncreated. So how do you respond to that? Just how could a person created in the image of God be completely destroyed?

DR. REAGAN: Well first of all we are created in the image, we are not gods. I'm not a god, you're not a god, we are not going to become gods unlike the Mormons who teach that, they will become gods. We are created in the image of God. And since God is spirit that certainly doesn't refer to our physical being because He is spirit. So it refers to our immaterial nature, it refers to our mental creation that we have free will and reason that relates to our morality that we have a moral compass a conscience, a sense of right and wrong. It refers to the fact that we are social beings and we are created for fellowship with others. The Word says point blank, we are not immortal, 1 Timothy 6 says, "God alone is immortal." 1 Corinthians 15 says, "The saved will not become immortal until the time of the resurrection." The idea of the immortality of the soul as you well know Chris is an idea of Greek philosophical thought. And it was brought into Christianity when Christianity began to convert Greek thinking people to Christianity. But it is not a biblical thought.

CHRIS DATE: Yes and I think people misunderstand what it means you know when someone says something like the image of God can't be uncreated I think they are misunderstanding what it means when it talks about man being created in the image of God. It means in certain respects we are created like God. An image isn't a tangible thing that can't be uncreated, it is a way of explaining that we are like God in certain respects.

DR. REAGAN: Amen.

CHRIS DATE: With the exception of the immortality part. Now you mentioned difficulties that you have with the traditional view beginning with how it seems to you to impugn the character of God because eternity of suffering isn't just. And we talked about that several times during the course of this interview. But you point out that the traditionalists will sometimes argue that since sin is an offense against an infinitely holy God that it is therefore infinitely odious and therefore deserving of an eternity of punitive suffering. So how do you think that a finite period of suffering can account for what is allegedly the infinitely heinous nature of one's sin.

DR. REAGAN: Chris the very first time I ever heard that argument it came across to me as a theological contrivance, and it still comes across to me as a theological contrivance. And it seems to run counter to the Bible's clear teaching that there are degrees of sin and there will be degrees of punishment, and that is about all I can say about it.

CHRIS DATE: Well I'll add a little bit which is that you and I both I think understand that annihilation following the resurrection, that annihilation is an eternal punishment in the sense that it is eternal in the results of being punished.

DR. REAGAN: Absolutely.

CHRIS DATE: So it seems to me that annihilation to me in a sense is an infinite punishment and therefore could account for even if this weren't a contrivance and I think that it is, but even if it weren't and if we did want to admit that finite sin does deserve infinite punishment that is what annihilation is.

DR. REAGAN: Well it certainly is and that is a good point, thanks for making it.

CHRIS DATE: You're welcome. Another difficulty that you say you have with the traditional view in your book is that Revelation describes Hell using the phrase the second death, and we talked about this a little bit. But traditionalists often respond by saying that death has various meanings in Scripture one which is spiritual death and separation from God. Some even go so far to say that death never means extinction in the way that we Conditionalist argue that the second death is. So how would you respond to this argument? Isn't it more biblical to understand the second death as eternal spiritual death and separation from God?

DR. REAGAN: Well I think just as death is a cessation of existence in this world the second death refers to a cessation of existence in the eternal world. Again Matthew 10:28 Jesus says that the body and soul can be killed in Hell.

CHRIS DATE: Yeah, but Traditionalists would of course would push back at that and say that death in this life isn't a cessation of existence, particularly if they are dualists, they are going to say the body dies but it doesn't cease to exist and the spirit lives on you know after death.

DR. REAGAN: Well it certainly is a cessation of existence in this world. My mom and dad are both dead and I don't see them, and I don't have any fellowship with them.

CHRIS DATE: Ok. So yeah I think there is something to that. It could also just be argued that death is the cessation of life, and the cessation of life that is only extended to the body in this death in the first death is extended to both body and soul in the second. Well before we wrap up I wanted to point out like you do in each chapter you conclude this one with some questions and answers. And I wanted to talk about a couple of those before I let you go. Question number 4 reads, "What about the Antichrist and the False Prophet? Doesn't the Bible say they will be subjected to eternal torment?" How do you answer that question?

DR. REAGAN: Well yes it does say that they are going to be subjected to eternal torment. But doesn't mean that you and I are going to be subjected to that. For one thing you have to keep in mind that these two individuals are going to be responsible for the death for 1/2 of all the people on planet earth, plus 2/3 of all the Jews. The Bible teaches we are going to be punished in proportion to our sins. These two people are going to kill more people than Hitler, and Stalin, and Pol Pot, and Mao all put together. And their punishment is going to be much greater. There is also a possibility that we are talking here about demons in human flesh. We know that the angelic world can take on flesh from time to time, and they

talk about they are called beasts in the book of Revelation who arise from the pit. So it could very well be that these are demonic beings who are going to be punished for ever anyway in Hell. But that is the only thing that I can say about that. It doesn't say anything about you and me being punished eternally.

CHRIS DATE: That's right. And we interviewed another person who holds your end times view his name is Robert Taylor and he wrote a book called, *John 3:16 Salvation Rescue from Death*. And he agrees with you on this point about them representing demonic beings. And he points out that there is no reason why we should see the wicked, the unsaved being thrown into the fire as having the same meaning as the demonic beings thrown in. Particularly since John has this thing where he separates each vision he had with "then I saw, then I saw, then I saw," and there is a difference. One of those "then I saw," and there is a difference one of those, "I saws," appears between the Devil, the Beast and the False Prophet being thrown into the fire, between that and the unsaved. So yeah I don't think there is any need to see, and of course there are also those of us Conditionalists that don't believe that the Devil, the Beast, and the False Prophet are actually going to be eternally tormented to begin with.

DR. REAGAN: Sure, I understand, yes.

CHRIS DATE: Like Edward Fudge. And I really appreciated your answer to the eighth and final question, "What do you consider to be the single most powerful argument against the Traditional concept of eternal torment and Hell? I appreciated it so much that I cited in an article that I wrote at Rethinking Hell. Tell our listeners what your answer to that question is

DR. REAGAN: Well very simply it is the fact that the Bible says that Jesus paid the price for our sins, it teaches that over and over. And what was that price? Well it was extreme suffering followed by death, it was not eternal torment. And so unrepented sinners I think are going to experience the same thing that Jesus experienced, and that is suffering and then death. One thing Chris that we didn't touch on that I think is very important is when I talk about this people often say to me, "Well the Bible says there are is going to be eternal punishment? How in the world can you get around eternal torment?" And I always like to make the point that there is a difference between suffering and eternal punishment, and suffering eternal punishing. There is a big difference. And yes, destruction or annihilation at a certain point is an eternal punishment. But there is a difference between eternal punishment and eternal punishing.

CHRIS DATE: That's right.

DR. REAGAN: So I just think we need to keep that in mind. The Bible speaks of the fact that we are going to have an eternal judgment, that doesn't mean that judgment is going to go on eternally, it means the judgment has eternal consequences.

CHRIS DATE: And you point out in your book that the author of Hebrews talks about how Jesus attained eternal salvation for everybody, and eternal redemption for everybody. And I would go as far to say it is heretical to say that for eternity Jesus will be saving and redeeming the elect, even after our glorification. So what that proves....

DR. REAGAN: It was finished on the cross.

CHRIS DATE: It was finished on the cross that's right. So anyway I think you are absolutely right and I am glad that you mentioned that. Now let's begin to wrap up. I enjoy giving our guests an opportunity to leave me and our listeners with a parting message of sorts. Something that they hope gives us something to think about and which sticks in our minds after the interview is over. What would you leave us with today?

DR. REAGAN: God is the God of grace, mercy and love, but He is also a God of justice, and holiness, and righteousness, which compels Him to deal with sin. And the Bible teaches that God deals with sin in one of two ways, either grace, or wrath. Every person listening to this broadcast right now is under either the grace of God or the wrath of God. It's a glorious thing to be living under the grace of God. It's a terrible thing to be living under the wrath of God. It says when Jesus returns those who are living under the wrath will crawl into holes in the ground and pray for the rocks and the mountains to fall upon them. But it says those who are living under grace will go forth like calves released from a stall. I'm from Texas and I've seen calves released from stalls. They don't like stalls, they run out into the pasture, they roll in the grass, they kick their feet in the air they are happy. We are all living under either grace or wrath. And if there is any person listening to this broadcast who has never received Jesus as Lord and Savior I would urge them to do it now because the time is late, we are living on borrowed time. Another point I would like to make is the prospect of judgment gives life meaning. If there is no judgment that we are going to face in the future then life has no meaning what-so-ever, but we are going to face judgment and we need to keep that in mind.

CHRIS DATE: Very good. Where can our listeners go to find you Lamb & Lion Ministries, Lamplighter, and Christ in Prophecy on line?

DR. REAGAN: At our website, our website is lamblion.com, no and in the middle. Lamblio.com. We have a Web Minister who is on that website 8 hours a days. He debates with Hindus, Muslims, Atheists and he answers questions about Bible prophecy. And if you have a question you can either ask him or you can use our high powered search engine to find any topic related to Bible prophecy. We have hundreds of articles there. We have our television programs posted there. We have other vides posted, and you can also sign up for our magazine there.

CHRIS DATE: Thank you for your time today. I really appreciate it.

DR. REAGAN: Thank you Chris it was good to talk with you. And I appreciate your detailed preparation for this.