

M.A. THESIS ABSTRACT
**HELL, HERMENEUTICS, AND THEOLOGY:
A METHODOLOGICAL APPRAISAL OF
THE CONTEMPORARY EVANGELICAL
DEBATE ON THE DURATION OF HELL**

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Problem

The debate on the duration of hell is one of the major doctrinal controversies within contemporary evangelicalism, well known for its wide impact and the notoriety of the scholars involved. The purpose of this present study was to evaluate the consistency with which each side adheres to the principles of theological method endorsed by contemporary evangelical scholarship, a perspective never taken before in other similar studies.

Method

Once the hermenutical and theological presuppositions which make up the evangelical theological method for doing doctrinal theology are documented from current evangelical works on hermeneutics and theological method, the methodology of a comparative study was followed, and each phase in the development of the two competing views on hell, traditionalism vs. annihilationism, was evaluated in light of the above principles.

Results

The annihilationist view is more in line with the larger paradigms of biblical interpretation and theological investigation. Its supporters build their view on those *sedes doctrinae* containing a teaching repeatedly emphasized throughout the entire Bible, interpret NT metaphors and apocalyptic passages primarily in the light of their OT background, and, as a general principle, allow for the *clear* texts to guide the interpretation of the *obscure* ones.

On the other side, the traditionalists neglect certain such basic principles. They classify all NT *sedes doctrinae* on hell as alternative imagery, choose as their foundational doctrinal blocks a limited number of apocalyptic and figurative passages, pay less attention to the question of genre, and, in their exegesis, rely heavily on the testimony of the noncanonical literature, over and against the OT background.

Conclusions

Contemporary evangelical theologians, who are trying to save at any cost the traditional teaching of the church on hell, are, in the end, found guilty of disregarding important principles of hermeneutics and theological method to which they otherwise give their consent. Such discrepancy shows the need for the theologian's hermeneutic conscience to prevail over his or her confessional loyalties.