In Defense of the Descent

Daniel R. Hyde

The phrase in the Apostle’s Creed “he descended into Hell” has been a source of controversy for nearly 2000 years. Even today we may recite that line with a bit of reluctance. We know it is there for a reason. Someone thought it a Biblical statement. But we find it hard to find where the Bible says this. This is why we squirm when we read it. This book by Daniel Hyde takes away that fear, and restores our confidence that “He descended into hell” is not only Biblical, but valuable for us to confess.

The book begins with a discussion of why some from days passed through modern times have sought to keep this phrase out of the Creed. Rev. Hyde traces the origin of the insertion of the phrase. He also includes the thoughts of contemporary critics. I am glad that he did this. It sets the stage for the rest of the discussion. It also puts those of us who have tripped over this phrase at ease when we see others struggles with it.

The second part of the discussion explains the six basic interpretations of “descent.” Rev. Hyde rejects four, and keeps two as the combination of Reformed interpretation of the phrase. Those rejected are: “1. It means Christ went to hell to suffer more than His suffering on the cross. 2. It means Christ went to hell to preach a second chance to those who died apart from him. 3. It means Christ went to hell and pronounced His victory to those who already believed in Him before their deaths. 4. It means Christ went to hell and pronounced His victory to Satan.” Rev Hyde presents each of these views and along with those who have supported them, followed up with the reasons these views should be rejected.

There are two views that are presented as the Reformed views as represented by the confessions and creeds of the Reformed churches. “5. It means Christ was buried. 6. It means Christ suffered hell His whole life, especially on the cross.” These views are presented not a contrasting views, but as complementary. Chapter four presents both of these views with Scriptural, confessional, and historical support for them.

In chapter five, Rev. Hyde gives us “The Benefits of Retaining He Descended into Hell.” I appreciated this chapter because it took this from being an academic or theological argument to one of importance for the church as whole.

Over all, this book is compact (which I appreciate), thorough enough for the scholar, but simple enough for the layman to understand. This book is worth reading.