

THE WRATH OF GOD IN FINAL JUDGEMENT & THE
ESCHATOLOGICAL FIRES OF HELL ARE EVERLASTING

Ideological Development – Two Views Permanent – Two Views Temporary
C.A.R.M. Resources – Ruined Reputations – Article Series – Second Death

What Happens When You Die?



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Immortality in Scripture and Theology

Part of the difficulty in the debate over the immortality of the soul is that the term, “immortal” is used somewhat differently in theology than it is in Scripture. Scripture tends to use the words, “everlasting,” or “eternal” instead of “immortal.” Through these words, the immortality of the soul is clearly taught.

The following charts attempt to clarify the use of the term “immortality” in both Scripture and theology.

Biblical Use of “Immortality”

God—1 Tim 6:16

“Only God has immortality.”

—
God is the source of life and immortality for all.
God has no experience with sin or death.

The Body of Man—1 Cor 15:54

“But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’”

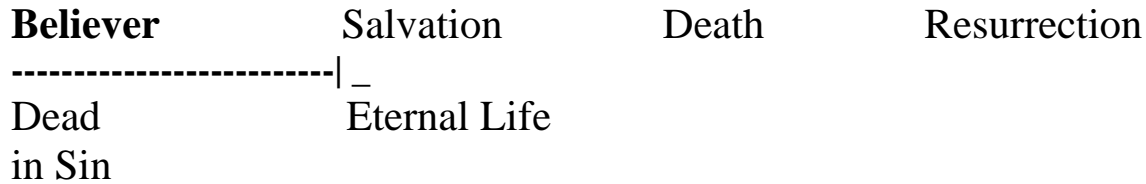
Point: Immortality of the Resurrected Body

Believer

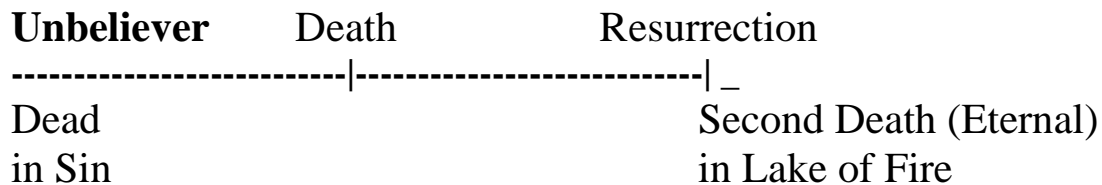
Human Life	Intermediate State	Eternal State
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Mortality	Death	Resurrection—Immortality of the body

Theological Use of “Immortality” of the Soul

Traditional Reform View: Protestant Immortality of the Soul

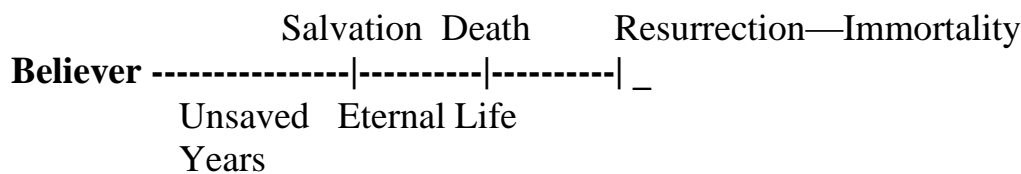


Always has immortality of the soul, though it is manifest in mortal flesh in this life. Beginning at salvation, has “eternal life” beginning at the resurrection, receives an immortal body.



Always has immortality of the soul. Never has eternal life.

Annihilationist View: Conditional Immortality



Has eternal life beginning with salvation (John’s use).
Has immortality beginning at the resurrection.



Never has immortality of the soul.
Never has eternal life.

Conditional Immortality



con·di·tion·al subject to one or more conditions or requirements being met; made or granted on certain terms.



im·mor·tal·i·ty the ability to live forever; eternal life.

Life Death and Resurrection Series No.1 - Conditional Immortality

God alone has immortality.
We do not have immortality,
- but we may be granted immortality on one condition.
If our faith is in Christ, we will also be granted immortality.

Conditional Immortality - a summary of events

A person is a living being. Dust + Breath of Life = A living being. (Genesis 2:7)

Death is a return of dust and breath to their origins. (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

A person ceases to be alive in any form at the point of death.

(Ecclesiastes 9:5,10)

People can be made alive again only by God resurrecting them.

(1 Corinthians 15:20-22)

If a person is in Christ, they will be resurrected and be granted immortality.

(1 Corinthians 15:53,54)

Conditional

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, **that whoever believes in him** shall not perish but have **eternal life**. (John 3:16 NIV)

Immortality

Conditional

Whoever believes in the Son has **eternal life**, **but whoever rejects the Son** will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them. (John 3:36 NIV)

Immortality

Tragic Condition

Tragic Result

Conditional

But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, **and the result is eternal life**. (Romans 6:22 NIV)

Immortality

Tragic Condition

Tragic Result

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23 NIV)

Immortality

Conditional

Conditional

But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. (1 Timothy 1:16 NIV)

Immortality

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT?

Martin Woodier

The focus of this paper will be upon the question mark of the title! My intention is to concentrate upon the growing debate amongst Evangelicals concerning whether or not the unrighteous will consciously suffer under the wrath of God forever. I am not, therefore, going to present a broad overview of the biblical teaching concerning the doctrine of Eternal Punishment (then the title would need no question mark). Such material is readily available in any standard Systematic Theology.

KEYWORDS: immortality, annihilationism, conditionalism, soul, punishment, death, destruction, hell, wrath, torment, justice, judgement

Tentative Beginnings

Over the past two or three decades especially, Evangelicals have raised tentative questions concerning the traditional orthodox belief that the lost will suffer endless, conscious punishment. In 1974 the IVP published John Wenham's book *The Goodness of God* (reprinted in 1985 with the new title of *The Enigma of Evil*). This book is a serious attempt to address "the moral difficulties of the Bible". In it, Wenham devoted one chapter of fifteen pages to the subject of hell. He presented the case for Conditional Immortality as an 'alternative' to the traditional doctrine in the space of only three pages and stresses that his 'summary of the debate . . . provides no basis for decision on so grave and complex an issue'. In 1988 John Stott, in the book *Essentials*, admitted that he preferred Annihilationism to the orthodox Evangelical position. However, he stated that he was 'hesitant to have written these things' and that he held this position 'tentatively'.

Increasing Boldness

It would now seem that with the passage of time and the growing numbers of Evangelicals swinging to an Annihilationist position (both privately and in print) courage has risen and the element of the tentative has disappeared. The gloves have been taken off. In 1991, at the Fourth Edinburgh Conference on Christian Dogmatics, John Wenham declared, 'I believe that endless torment is a hideous and unscriptural doctrine which has been a terrible burden on the mind of the church for many centuries and a terrible blot on her presentation of the gospel. I should indeed be happy if, before I die, I could help in sweeping it away.' It is evident that the mood has changed. We therefore, need to get back to the Scriptures to be absolutely sure that the ground we are standing on is the solid rock of God's Word.

Awesome Issue

Before we move to look more closely at the issues involved in this debate I need to comment upon the seriousness of it. The subject before us is extremely awesome and weighty.

We are talking about the final state of countless thousands of people. We are talking about what should be an essential element of our gospel preaching. We are talking about the final vindication of the name and righteousness of God. I agree strongly with Wenham: 'Whichever side you are on, it is a dreadful thing to be on the wrong side of the issue.' We need, therefore, to move forward with sober minds and humble hearts, looking to the God of Scripture to thoroughly equip us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

Definitions

There is confusion amongst Evangelicals concerning the terms 'Annihilationism' and 'Conditional Immortality'. J.I. Packer says that the view that the ultimate end of the unsaved is non-existence 'may be called either Annihilationism or Conditionalism'. Such a statement is confusing since there are important differences in the two views. However, this misleading over-simplification is understandable since firstly, each view is in no way homogeneous, having several strands of opinion. Secondly, there is quite a degree of overlap between Annihilationism and Conditionalism and, thirdly, to all intents and purposes, the eventual end of the wicked is believed to be the same irrespective of whether you are an Annihilationist or a Conditionalist i.e. the wicked, one day, will not exist. Consequently, to attempt to use the terminology with precision is rather like trying to walk through a heavily loaded minefield. I will therefore, attempt to tread carefully, whilst asking you not to explode if I put one toe out of place!

Annihilationism, is fundamentally a question of eschatology (the doctrine of the 'last things') whilst Conditional Immortality is one of anthropology (the doctrine of man). This helps us to see immediately that Annihilationists and Conditionalists approach the same question of what happens to man after his physical death from different angles. It also illuminates why they can come to the same conclusions whilst using different arguments.

Annihilationism

Annihilationism is the view that some or all human souls will cease to exist after death. It can be broadly divided into four forms:

1. Immediate annihilation of everyone at death;
2. Immediate annihilation of the wicked at death;
3. Immediate annihilation of the wicked after being raised from death on the Judgment Day;

4. Eventual annihilation of the wicked after a period of suffering following the Judgment Day.

Conditional Immortality

Conditional Immortality, on the other hand, is the view that man is naturally mortal and that immortality is a gift which God gives through the gospel of Jesus Christ. It can be broadly divided into three forms which correspond to the latter three forms of Annihilationism. To use the jargon invented by Kendall S. Harmon (a doctoral student in Theology at Oxford) these could be labelled as:

2. Conditionalist uniresurrectionism (i.e. the resurrection of only the righteous);
3. Conditionalist immediate extinctionism (i.e. resurrection of all, followed by the immediate extinction of the wicked);

**TABLE 1. DEFINITIONS:
ANNIHILATIONISM AND CONDITIONAL
IMMORTALITY**

Annihilationism

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Immediate annihilation of everyone at death | 2. Immediate annihilation of the wicked at death |
| 3. Immediate annihilation of the wicked after being raised on the Judgment Day | 4. Eventual annihilation of the wicked after a period of suffering following the Judgment Day |

Conditional Immortality

- | | |
|---|--|
| | 2. Conditionalist uniresurrectionism |
| 3. Conditionalist immediate extinctionism | 4. Conditionalist eventual extinctionism |

The Overlap of Conditional Immortality and Conditionals

4. Conditionalist eventual extinctionism (i.e. resurrection of all, followed by the extinction of the wicked after a period of suffering).

What is clear from these definitions is that Conditional Immortality opens the door for Annihilationism, except in the form of universal Annihilationism⁹. Those who describe themselves as Evangelicals who do not believe in the orthodox position of endless, conscious punishment for the wicked (e.g. B.F.C. Atkinson, J.W. Wenham, J.R. Stott, P.E. Hughes) appear to agree that all mankind will be raised on the Judgment Day, will be punished and then annihilated (forms 3 and 4 in Table 1).

There does not appear to be a consensus on the question of whether the punishment will be instantaneous or over a period, or to put it another way, whether they will be annihilated immediately or eventually. This is probably due to the fact that their main aim is to be *against* the idea of *endless* punishment and consequently they fail to state positively what they actually stand for.

The Way Forward

One writer has outlined succinctly the way forward for Evangelicals on both sides of this debate. He says 'It will involve the following: 1. the elimination of all unjustified presuppositions; 2. a new openness to the Biblical data; 3. a willingness to embrace and apply Biblical convictions and presuppositions to the question; 4. if necessary, a willingness to move freely of the traditional orthodoxy.'¹⁰ I will attempt to follow these guidelines as I now examine the Scriptures to see if there is any justification in turning from the traditional doctrine of Endless Punishment to some form of Annihilationism. I shall approach it from both the anthropological and eschatological perspectives in order to deal with the issues raised by those who emphasize the Conditionalist or the Annihilationist arguments respectively. In practice, Evangelicals tend to deal with both aspects anyway.

The Soul – Its Nature and Duration

Basil Atkinson, who has been an enormous influence for the Conditionalist position (John Wenham having recently admitted that he was won to Conditionalism by Atkinson's teaching¹¹), begins his book on this subject *Life and Immortality* with this statement: 'As we cannot understand what the Bible reveals about immortality and a future life until we discover the nature of death, so we cannot understand what it teaches about the meaning of death until we first obtain a clear idea of the nature of man.'¹² The ensuing first chapter is an extremely detailed analysis of 'The Nature of Man' which forms Atkinson's basic rationale for Conditional Immortality. It gives particular attention to the doctrine of the Soul in the Old and New Testaments, majoring on the relevant Hebrew and Greek words. By looking at the recurrent use of the Hebrew *nephesh* in Genesis 1 and 2 (1:20, 21, 24, 30; 2:7) he asserts, 'We have now found that the Scripture conclusively teaches that a human being is a soul in the same sense in which an animal, a bird, or even a fish,

is a soul.¹³ This is the kind of logic which abounds in what anyone would describe as a tedious book: having shown the meaning in some (or even in many) texts, usually quite correctly, he extrapolates to conclude that this meaning holds true in all texts. It should be noted that this conclusion is reached on page 4 of a 29 page chapter which concludes very little more on page 29 than it did on page 4! He takes his conclusion, based on a few verses, *assumes* it as the basis of his further studies and concludes that his original conclusion was correct!! This approach is surely faulty for two reasons: firstly, because of the cyclical logic and secondly, because it doesn't adequately allow for the flexibility of language.

To be fair, Atkinson sees a little variety in shades of meaning with regard to soul (e.g. self, emotions, mind) and says that 'though we expect a word to be used in a figurative sense it is impossible that it could sometimes carry a meaning completely contradictory to its normal sense'.¹⁴ That seems reasonable enough. But, we must ask this question: is the notion of the soul as an immortal part of a person which can exist both integrally with and separately from the body contradictory to or complementary with the idea of the soul as embracing the person with thoughts and feelings? Surely it is not contradictory but complementary. This kind of reasoning would lead Atkinson into enormous difficulties if he used it in examining references to heaven. The heaven of Acts 1:10 ('they looked steadfastly towards heaven as he went up') is completely different from the heaven of Luke 11:2 ('Our Father in heaven'). What this shows is that there is no reason why the soul cannot refer to the mind/emotions and to a part of the person which is immortal.

When John Wenham's paper on 'The Case for Conditional Immortality' was published in 1992 one might have expected a stronger argument against the immortality of the soul. This was the first time in eighteen years that Wenham had gone into print on the subject, since his initial brief comments in his book *The Goodness of God*. In the paper he complains that those who have attempted to reply to his original comments have failed to do so for this reason: 'While not answering the Conditionalist arguments with any seriousness, these writers do of course state their own case. They set out certain well-known texts and claim that their meaning is "obvious"'.¹⁵ It is a very real shame that Dr Eryl Davies' book *An Angry God?* is not in the list Wenham considers (it was possibly published after Wenham had written his paper). Dr Davies treats the Conditionalist arguments with seriousness and gives a thorough presentation of the orthodox doctrine of endless conscious punishment. Bearing that in mind, I would otherwise have to say that I have some sympathy with Wenham's complaint. However, when Wenham comes to his section on the Immortality of the Soul, he falls into the same trap. He gives only one page to the subject! He uses the 'obvious' technique by saying that 'From Genesis 3 onwards man looks mortal indeed', refers to three verses (1 Timothy 6:16; Romans 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:10) and rests his case!¹⁶ There is no dialogue with traditionalists' arguments and no reasoning through important texts which would not appear to be in his favour (e.g. Luke 12:19, 20; Matthew 10:28; Ecclesiastes 3:19–21). Wenham complains that the traditionalists' main argument is (to quote Shedd

and others) 'everywhere assumed'¹⁷ in Scripture. This is a gross overstatement. If this paper of Wenham's represents one of the most advanced and developed presentations of the case for Conditional Immortality (which it would purport to do) we should have grave misgivings if this is all that can be mustered on the side of those who argue that immortality is conditional.

Having now looked at the arguments presented by the Conditionalists and seen the weakness, inconsistencies and inconclusiveness of them, we need now to look at the Scriptures themselves and survey what they teach about the nature and duration of the soul.

We could spend a lot of time looking at numerous texts which imply that the soul is an immortal part of the person, but few would be conclusive. If we are honest, many could be read as if the soul is a synonym for life, the heart or the mind. It must also be remembered that, in the context of the current debate, it is no use to look at Scriptures which speak of the immortality of the righteous. The Conditionalist does not question that.

Luke 12:19-20

One passage that, when read in a straightforward way, appears to be conclusive is Luke 12:19,20: 'And I will say to my soul "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years . . ." But God said to him "You fool. This night your soul will be required of you"'. This triple use of the Greek word *psyche* in two consecutive verses would appear to lead us to the conclusion that it refers to an inner part of man which survives death. This is because it is something within the man which he addresses, and something which God requires. No hint is given that the *psyche* will ever cease to be. This is the soul. If you translate it as life, self, mind etc, the verses become non-sensical. The only way to avoid this conclusion is to translate it in two different ways: self (twice in v.19) and life (v.20). It appears to be an extremely unnatural use of language to use the same word three times in the same breath and mean two different things by it. This is what Atkinson does (along with the NIV). He also separates his comment on v.19 from that on v.20 by a page and consequently draws no attention to the problem.

Matthew 10:38

Another key text is Matthew 10:38, 'Do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell.' This is totally against Atkinson's assertion that 'We have seen that the nephesh [soul] dies when the body . . . dies'.¹⁸ But Jesus says that it is possible in this world to kill the body, but not the soul. How does Atkinson deal with this verse? In this text we find the contrast between soul and body which sometimes occurs in the New Testament, though very seldom in the Old . . . Our text here taken in isolation is easily capable of implying the survival of the soul after the death of the body . . . But a careful study of the meaning of the word "soul" in the original language of the Old Testament, and also as we shall see of the New, shows that it is always con-

nected with a human being who is alive on earth and that it dies or is destroyed when death comes to him in the way that is so familiar to our experience. When we bear this in mind, the meaning of the Lord's words here becomes clear. To kill the body here means to take the present life on earth. But this does not kill the soul or the person himself. It only puts him to sleep. He is finally destroyed in the second death, when his person or self is killed for ever²⁰. When compared with his earlier statement quoted above (i.e. 'we have seen that nephesh [soul] dies when the body dies.'). I think you will agree with me: Houdini would have been proud of him!! The contradiction is self-evident.

R.T. France, commenting on the same verse, stresses that soul also means 'life' and says, 'The intention is not to separate man into two parts, "body" and "soul", but to point out that there is more to man than his animal existence . . . "Soul" and "body" are again not two separable parts of man; each alone, and both together can be used to indicate that whole person²¹'. If 'soul' and 'body' are in no way separable (as France states), how can the one be killed without the other? That is Jesus' assertion: 'Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul'. And how can the body be killed without the life being killed unless that life is deposited within some element of man's constitution other than the body? Matthew 10:28 must lead us to the conclusion that there is a part of man which survives death i.e. the soul. (What it means to 'destroy the soul', in Matthew 10:28 will have to wait until the eschatological aspect of this subject is considered.)

Ecclesiastes 3:19-21

When Eryl Davies addresses the question "Is the Soul Immortal?" in his book *An Angry God?*, he makes very helpful reference to Ecclesiastes 3:19 – 21. 'Verse 19 teaches that there are similarities between men and beasts but nowhere is this seen more clearly than in their death (v.20). However, verse 21 draws attention to an important dissimilarity between humans and animals, namely, the fact that "the spirit of man . . . goeth upward and the spirit of the beast . . . goeth downward to the earth". We will not press the statement too far except to note man's spirit, unlike that of the animal, is directed beyond the grave with the strong implication of continuity and life²²'.

Three Key Texts

We must now turn to three key New Testament texts which refer directly to immortality. these verses state that God 'alone has immortality' (1 Timothy 6:16); those who do good 'seek for . . . immortality' (Romans 2:7); immortality has been 'brought to light through the gospel' (2 Timothy 1:10). From these, the Conditionalists' argument is that if only God is immortal, all creatures must be mortal and that immortality is promised only to believers, leaving unbelievers as mortal and therefore liable to extinction at death or at some time after death. An examination of these verses shows that the word 'immortality' (translated from the Greek *athanasia* and *aphtharsia* literally meaning 'no death' and 'no corruption' respectively) is being used to speak of something far

higher than what is often meant by immortality i.e. 'endless existence'.

As William Hendriksen concludes in his comments on 1 Timothy 6:16, 'For the believer immortality is therefore a redemptive concept. It is everlasting salvation. For God it is eternal blessedness. But while the believer has received immortality as one receives a drink of water from a fountain, God has it. It belongs to His very being. He is himself the Fountain²³'.

Immortality

This has led to Eryl Davies concluding that 'rather than using the term immortality it is more precise to refer to the soul's continuity and survival after death²⁴'. While basically agreeing with that, I think we must be willing to recognize that language is not always precise and scientific and we must therefore work with it as given. For instance, when Jesus Christ asserted that 'the Father has life in himself' (John 5:26; cf 1 John 5:11) he meant far more than the life which Paul spoke of when he said that God 'gives to all life, breath, and all things' (Acts 17:25). But we continue to speak of 'life' in both contexts. I am, therefore, a little reluctant to make this modification as suggested by Dr Davies. An important reason for my reluctance is that it would seem that a major flaw in the reasoning of the Conditionalists is their attempt to use language in a rigid and scientific way. An example of this would be Basil Atkinson's treatment of Matthew 6:25: 'Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink . . . Is not life more than food . . .?' Because the Greek for life is *psyche* and can also be translated soul, he concludes that the association of *psyche*/life/soul 'with food and drink . . . shows that it [*psyche*] does not survive the body²⁵'. The only way that such a conclusion can be valid is to assume that everywhere the word *psyche* appears it must mean precisely the same thing. Such an assumption is false. If it was true, the process of translating the Bible from the original languages into English would be much simpler. Although Atkinson makes this assumption and uses it in his reasoning in many places in his book, he is not consistent in the application of it when the same word *psyche* occurs three times in two consecutive verses, viz. Luke 12:19-20 (as seen earlier). One can only wonder if this is because to do so would not support his case in these verses.

Summary

So, on the nature and duration of the soul we have seen (i) the weakness of the arguments used by those who believe that immortality is given to the soul only upon condition of obedience to the gospel; (ii) that there is biblical evidence to show that the souls of both the righteous and the wicked survive death (NB these verses do *not* automatically infer eternal survival); (iii) that some verses point towards the endless existence of the souls of believers and unbelievers; (iv) that the souls of the righteous eternally enjoy something infinitely greater than mere survival, described as 'immortality'.

Beyond this, John Blanchard is wise to state, 'If it can be

shown from Scripture that man has one of only two destinies, that the righteous will enjoy endless bliss in heaven and that the wicked will endure endless punishment in hell, then the doctrine of man's immortality (using the word in its widest sense) will be established regardless of the presence or absence of any direct Biblical statement on the subject³⁰. This then, naturally moves us from the anthropological to the eschatological aspect of this study.

The Punishment of the Lost – Its Nature and Duration

In this section I will deal with the four arguments that John Stott raises as those which he believes point in the direction of Annihilationism. I do this, firstly, because these four arguments comprehensively cover the issues of relevance to the nature and duration of the punishment of the wicked and secondly, because it is the writing of Stott which has been and will be most influential amongst Evangelicals in the United Kingdom. The four arguments 'relate to language, imagery, justice and universalism'³¹.

1. Language

What does the language of the following verses tell us about the nature and duration of the punishment of the unsaved: 'the wages of sin is death'; 'fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell'; 'the way of the ungodly shall perish'; 'these shall be punished with everlasting destruction' (Romans 6:23; Matthew 10:28; Psalm 1:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:9)? Upon our understanding of these few simple words hangs our understanding of eternal punishment.

Death

Atkinson states 'Death is a basic word with a simple meaning. The words "to die", "death", "dead" in Hebrew and Greek as in English mean simply the deprivation or extinction of life'. Stott takes the next logical step, 'If to kill is to deprive the body of life, hell would seem to be the deprivation of both physical and spiritual life, that is, an extinction of being'³². The Annihilationists' view that punishment will immediately or eventually lead to annihilation is based on their view of death. But is it a biblical one?

We are first introduced to the concept of death in Genesis 2:17: 'for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.' However, Adam and Eve's death (in the sense that Atkinson and Stott take it) is not recorded for many years. So what happened? Their fellowship with God was broken (3:8), guilt fell on them (3:10) and they were excluded from the garden of Eden and the tree of life (3:23,24). That is how they died 'in the day' they ate of the forbidden fruit. Death is not annihilation but separation. Henri Blocher at the Fourth Edinburgh Conference said, 'The biblical idea of death does not involve non-existence, but, indeed, the loss of life. Life is ability to act and to project, life is sharing in exchanges; total death is isolation, paralysis'.³³ Death then is entrance into a totally different order of existence from that which went before, a severance of what once belonged together. The Annihilationists' view of death seems to have more in common with secular atheistic philosophy than with Scripture.

What we see from Genesis 3 is that spiritual death is the

separation of the soul from God. This is supported by comparing Ephesians 2:1, 'dead in trespasses and sins' with Ephesians 4:18, 'alienated from the life of God'. Matthew 10:28, 'Do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul', shows that physical death is the separation of the soul from the body. What then does the use of the language of death in connection with the final state of the last tell us about that final state? Revelation 20:14 describes hell as 'the second death'. In Matthew 10:28 Jesus, having spoken of killing the body but not the soul, describes hell as the place where both soul and body will be destroyed. The second death, then, is the separation of the soul and body from God. This is just how Jesus described it: 'Depart from me . . . Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness' (Matthew 7:23; 22:13).

The language of death, therefore, causes no problem to the doctrine of endless, conscious punishment but rather points towards it.

Perishing and Destruction

What then of perishing and destruction? John Stott puts it this way, 'It would seem strange . . . if the people who are said to suffer destruction are in fact not destroyed; and . . . it is "difficult to imagine a perpetually inconclusive process of perishing"³⁴'. The assumption Stott is making is that destruction is to be equated with extinction and annihilation. Atkinson goes into great detail to prove the point³⁵. In summary, he argues from verses like Matthew 9:17 'and the wineskins are ruined' (Greek *apollumi*, literally to perish) and concludes that to perish is to become extinct. But the question must be, have the wineskins totally ceased to be or have they become irreparably damaged, unable to fulfil their original function? The answer is obviously the latter. To put it another way, this is consistent with what we have seen of the biblical view of death: the wineskin has entered into a totally different order of existence from that which it held before.

Careful study of other texts show that destruction is not to be equated with annihilation. Let me give just two examples: 'Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture' (Jeremiah 23:1); 'Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died' (Romans 14:15). Both of these texts refer to serious, painful, harmful damage inflicted by one upon another. Neither the sheep nor the offended brother ceases to exist. However, their relationship with God and others has been seriously damaged. *Apollumi* is also used in the sense of 'lost': the lost sheep (Luke 15:4), the lost coin (Luke 15:9), the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:6), the lost, whom Jesus came to seek and to save (Luke 19:10). None of these had been annihilated. Peter speaks of the days of Noah: 'the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water' (2 Peter 3:6). There is no suggestion that God annihilated the world and then created a new one. But the earth went through a catastrophic period of judgment – it perished.

Annihilationists also look at the Greek word *olethros* (literally 'to destroy'). This occurs only four times in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 5:5 the immoral man is to be delivered over to Satan 'for the destruction of the flesh'; in 1 Thessalonians 5:3 the final judgment of the wicked is in view: 'then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labour

pains upon a pregnant woman'; 2 Thessalonians 1:9 says that unbelievers 'shall be punished with everlasting destruction'; and 1 Timothy 6:9 states that harmful lusts 'drown men in destruction and perdition'. The nature of the destruction is most clearly defined in 1 Thessalonians 5:3. It is like the incredible pains of a woman in labour. She is not annihilated! The flesh (i.e. sinful nature) of the immoral man in 1 Corinthians 5 is not annihilated but dealt a severe blow, through godly sorrow and repentance. So, what is the 'everlasting destruction' of 2 Thessalonians 1:9 if it is not the everlasting experience of pain, torment and sorrow? Because this destruction is everlasting there is no possibility of change either by later annihilation or by post mortem conversion.

Let Henri Blocher summarise this section on Language for me: 'it remains unlikely that "death" and "destruction" in Biblical parlance should be construed as the extinction of existence . . . the language of Scripture . . . seems to insist on the durational, permanent character of the state of torment, and to exclude any later change, anything beyond the outcome of the last judgement. One can sense a paradox in the concept of permanence in destruction which the Bible itself expresses when it speaks of "second death", "undying worm", and tradition sharpens, e.g. in the words of Saint Gregory the Great: "a deathless death, and endless end, a ceaseless cessation, since the death lives, the end always begins, and cessation knows not how the cease"'.³³

2. Imagery

The main concern of Annihilationists at this point is the imagery of fire used in Scripture to characterize hell. Stott states: 'The main function of fire is not to cause pain, but to secure destruction . . . it would be very odd if what is thrown into it proves indestructible.' The IVP Illustrated Bible Dictionary says, 'The fire of hell is unquenchable (Mark 9:43), eternal (Matthew 18:8) . . . However, the New Testament leaves the door open for the belief that while hell as a manifestation of God's implacable wrath against sin is unending, the existence of those who suffer in it may not be.'³⁴

In Matthew 25:46 the Lord declares that the unrighteous 'will go away into everlasting punishment'. What is the nature and duration of that punishment? Jesus has already described it in verse 41: 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.' This shows that the everlasting punishment of the wicked is the everlasting fire and that the punishment is the same for the devil, his angels and all the wicked. Is it possible that while the fire of hell is eternal that those condemned to that fire will at some point be annihilated? Revelation 20:10 gives the answer with clarity: 'The devil . . . was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone . . . And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.' This verse shows that the punishment for the devil will be, firstly, conscious (because of the use of the word 'torment') and endless (because of the use of the phrase 'day and night forever and ever'). Linking it to the fire of Matthew 25:41, into which the devil, his angels and unbelievers are cast, shows that unbelievers also suffer conscious, endless punishment. It is hard to imagine how the Spirit of God through the Scriptures could have made a clearer case for endless, conscious punishment if these

verses are deemed inconclusive. It is everlasting, just as surely as life is everlasting for the redeemed. It explicitly involves torment day and night for ever and ever.

What do Annihilationists make of these verses? Atkinson makes much of the use of the word 'punishment' in Matthew 25:46. He says that if eternal conscious suffering was intended, Jesus would have had to have spoken of 'everlasting punishing'. He is saying that it is the effect of the punishment, not the process of it, which is being spoken of.³⁵ This approach is flawed for two reasons: (i) the division is an artificial one. As one writer has put it: 'A punishment that is not felt is not a punishment. Someone cannot be punished eternally unless that someone is there to receive the punishment . . . Once we have said the word "punishment" we have also said, at least by implication the word "conscious"'.³⁶; (ii) he fails to link Matthew 25:46 with verse 41 and Revelation 20:10 (as discussed above).

To further attempt to avoid the obvious conclusion of these verses Atkinson directs attention to Revelation 14:9 – 11 where it states that, 'And the smoke of their torment ascends for ever and ever.' He concludes, 'The ascent of the smoke shows that the stroke of judgment is over.'³⁷ Stott makes the same assumption, 'It is not the torment itself but its "smoke" (symbol of the completed burning) which will be "for ever and ever"'.³⁸ They are assuming that smoke never rises from a fire until everything on the fire has been destroyed. In actual fact it is smoke that can often be seen from a fire *before* the flames. Such an argument therefore, must be described as fallacious. As the smoke rises eternally, the object being burnt must be burning eternally. Therefore this verse again indicates the eternal punishment of the lost.

I have now shown that the biblical use of imagery to describe hell, far from implying that punishment is temporal, adds further weight to other Bible teaching that punishment is eternal and will be suffered consciously. This fire is an eternal fire which is seen to torment endlessly.

One more thing needs to be said by way of conclusion of this section of imagery. Some Evangelicals conclude that as symbols are used, the reality will not be as awful as the symbols imply. When commenting on the 'flaming fire' of vengeance in 2 Thessalonians 1:8, William Hendriksen set the record straight: 'To speak about a "mere" symbol in such connections is never right. The reality which answers to the symbol is always far more terrible (or more glorious) than the symbol itself. Human language is stretched almost to breaking point in order to convey the terrible character of the coming of the Lord in relation to the wicked'.³⁹

3. Justice

John Wenham is honest to his own concerns when he writes, 'My problem is, not that God punishes, but that the punishment traditionally ascribed to God [i.e. endless torment] seems neither to square with Scripture nor to be just . . . I cannot see that endless punishment is either loving or just . . . Unending torment speaks to me of sadism, not justice'.⁴⁰ John Stott considers that if the traditional doctrine of endless punishment is correct there would be 'a serious disproportion between sins consciously committed in time and torment consciously experienced throughout eternity'.⁴¹

The question really is this: is it possible to maintain the doctrine of everlasting conscious punishment of the wicked alongside the biblical doctrine of the justice of God? Two things need to be highlighted at this point: firstly, we need to remember that our minds are finite and, therefore, even if we were not able to fully reconcile endless punishment with the justice of God this would not allow us to discard or adjust our doctrine of hell when (as I have been showing) it is firmly based on Scripture. There must be a willingness to allow for the element of mystery. But, secondly, I maintain that the traditional view of eternal punishment is in no way guilty of militating against the justice of God. This I will now show by surveying the arguments used by the traditionalists in defence of this point.

W.G.T. Shedd, in his book *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment*, brings forward five arguments which we need to consider. Shedd's first argument is that 'endless punishment is rational, in the first place, because it is supported by the human conscience'.⁴² In developing his theme he states, 'Natural religion, as well as revealed, teaches the despair of some men in the future life. Plato . . . Pinder . . . Plutarch describe the punishment of the incorrigibly wicked as eternal and hopeless'.⁴³ This is extremely weak ground to stand on because firstly, it is not biblical and secondly, many could be quoted with completely contrary views. Shedd has done the orthodox position a disservice by including this argument, but especially by placing it first in his list. Shedd's fifth argument uses the 'history of morals' where he tries to support the doctrine from the belief that societies with sound ethics believe in future retribution. I would not want to use this argument for the same reason.

'In the second place' Shedd writes, 'endless punishment is rational, because of the endlessness of sin'.⁴⁴ He argues that 'sin is actually being added to sin, in the future life, and the amount of guilt is accumulating'.⁴⁵ Therefore, according to Shedd, endless punishment is just because the wicked continue to sin in hell i.e. sin itself is endless in the unsaved. This view is supported by orthodox theologians such as Charles Hodge and A.H. Strong.⁴⁶ Dr Eryl Davies asserts that 'sinners continue to sin even in hell'.⁴⁷ Is this the biblical view of hell? Shedd supports it from Romans 2:5 . . . 'treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God'. But the verse states 'you are treasuring up . . . not 'you will be treasuring up . . . i.e. it refers to this life, not the next. The biblical view of hell is stated in 2 Corinthians 5:10: 'We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body according to what he has done.' Punishment is received for the sin of this life. I agree with Henri Blocher: 'Strikingly, those who affirm continuance in sin in the fate of the lost make the feeblest attempt at any Scriptural proof . . . Supporting reasons being so weak, we may observe that the thesis of sin continuing is found nowhere in Scripture'.⁴⁸ Therefore, in my view, this is an unhelpful argument to use, which has had detrimental effects upon the orthodox cause, allowing Annihilationists to caricature the traditional view of hell as a 'colony of devils'. (More will be said of relevance to this point under Stott's fourth argument for universalism).

This leads to Shedd's fourth argument: endless punishment is reasonable because it is 'proved by the preference

of the wicked themselves'.⁴⁹ He believes that 'the impenitent spirit prefers hell to heaven'⁵⁰ and that "Milton correctly represents Satan as saying ' . . . in heaven much worse would be my state' ". He asserts, 'Sin ultimately assumes a fiendish form and degree. It is pure wickedness without regret or sorrow'.⁵¹

Yet the picture given by the Lord Jesus of the rich man 'being in torments in Hades' is one of longing to be in heaven or at least to know some of the comforts of heaven. 'He lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame"' (Luke 16:23, 24). Abraham explains: 'Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us' (v.26). This makes clear that one of the rich man's preferred options was to pass to heaven. There is nothing that vaguely suggests that he prefers hell to heaven. On the contrary, he would prefer heaven to hell. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of those who 'fall short of the grace of God' (Hebrews 12:15) i.e. the lost. He then presents a parallel between the eternity of the lost and Esau: 'he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears' (Hebrews 12:17). Part of the 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' (Matthew 22:13) will be the longing that hell could be turned into heaven, with the realization that it cannot. Consequently, I believe this is another very unhelpful attempt to prove the justice of endless punishment. (Again, more will be said of relevance to this point under Stott's fourth argument for universalism.)

The one argument of Shedd's five to be supported is this: 'endless punishment is rational because sin is an infinite evil'.⁵² The reason behind this is that sin is always against an infinite being, with infinite holiness i.e. God (cf Psalm 51:4, 'Against you, you only have I sinned . . .'). In the Scriptures, (as well as in most, if not all, judicial systems) the seriousness of a particular sin varies depending on the person sinned against. God's judgement of leprosy upon Miriam for the sin of criticism is understood only when we recognize that this sin was against Moses, the servant of God (Numbers 12). When David refused to kill Saul it was because he was 'the anointed of the Lord' (1 Samuel 24:6). Is it not this principle which lies behind the judgement of the Lord upon Judas, 'The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would be good for that man if he had not been born' (Matthew 26:24)? It was 'the Lord of glory' whom Judas was betraying. What needs to be recognized to understand the justice of God in punishing sin eternally is that every sin is a sin against him 'who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light' (1 Timothy 6:16). Or, to put it another way, we need to understand sin for what it is. Every sin is a sin against God, whose majesty and person are infinite. This makes every sin immeasurably evil. Therefore, justice demands that infinite evil must be punished with everlasting torment.

Before we move on, we need to recognize the fatal mistake in the reasoning of Annihilationists on this point. Their idea is that there will come a time when the wicked will have fully satisfied justice by a period of torment in hell and that

annihilation must then take place. But this actually proves too much. As John Blanchard has reasoned, 'If this was so, surely a God of justice would then welcome then into heaven rather than consign them to non-existence? The idea that sinners pay their dues and are then "rewarded" with annihilation is not merely improbable, it is immoral'.⁵⁴

4. Universalism

Under this heading, John Stott explains that while he is most certainly not a Universalist, those texts which tend to be used to support Universalism appear to him to be difficult to reconcile with the eternal existence of the impenitent in hell. This leads Stott to conclude that Annihilationism is the only solution.

Allow Henri Blocher to give the biblical perspective on these important verses: 'The theory of sin forever flourishing ignores the message of Christ's perfect victory over sin and all evil. "Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess . . ." (Phillipians 2:10), those of the lost included. It cannot mean mere outward hypocritical and forced agreement; what sense could there be in any outward show in the light of that Day, when all the secrets shall be exposed? (Romans 2:16) . . . Sinners are forced, then, to confess the truth, but they are forced by the truth itself, by its overwhelming evidence and spiritual authority; they can no longer refuse to see, they cannot think otherwise'.⁵⁵ More weight is given to this from 1 Corinthians 15:25 "He must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet." These so called 'universalistic texts' must not be overlooked by Evangelicals. But they do not lead us to Universalism, as Liberals suggest, or Annihilationism, as Stott suggests. They rather lead us to conclude that Christ has complete and eternal victory over all sin, even in hell. This is the reason why I believe Shedd is wrong to use the arguments of 'the endlessness of sin' and 'the preference of the wicked' to support the justice of the doctrine of endless punishment.

We have now looked at the four areas of language, imagery, justice and universalism which comprehensively cover the arguments used by Annihilationists against the traditional doctrine of endless, conscious punishment. To summarise, there are three conclusions which we have arrived at concerning the nature and duration of the punishment of the lost: (i) none of the arguments raised by Annihilationists actually contradicts the orthodox doctrine (apart from a couple of peripheral views held by some theologians i.e. 'the endlessness of sin' and 'the wicked preferring hell to heaven' which have no bearing on the conclusion; (ii) one of their arguments is complementary to the orthodox view (i.e. the so-called 'universalistic texts' which speak of Christ's complete victory over sin. This has been shown to have no bearing on the endlessness of punishment but rather on the fact that the lost will not sin in hell); (iii) most of the issues raised by their arguments, when carefully examined, actually support the orthodox view (i.e. the language of death, destroy, perish actually point to separation and a totally different and devastated order of existence, not Annihilation; the imagery of fire is seen to represent torment forever and ever; and the question of justice actually demands endless punishment because of the infinite gravity of sin).

Thus I see no reasons to support Annihilationism and every reason to maintain the biblical doctrine of endless, conscious punishment of the lost.

Having completed these two sections on the nature and duration of the soul and the nature and duration of the punishment of the lost (i.e. the anthropological and eschatological aspects of the subject) I want us to consider:

Two Challenges From Within

These are challenges that I perceive are being made upon the doctrine of endless, conscious punishment of the wicked from those who actually believe it.

1. Will Christians Rejoice in the Wrath?

In Prof. Donald Macleod's excellent book *Behold Your God* he devotes a chapter to the question "Will Christians Rejoice in the Wrath?"⁵⁶ In recognition of the fact that he stands against the position held by 'giants' like Jonathan Edwards⁵⁷ and Robert Murray McCheyne⁵⁸ he respectfully answers in the negative. Another similar question is asked by Paul Helm in the Banner of Truth Magazine by way of criticism of Eryl Davies' *An Angry God?*: 'Is there not a sense in which the final judgement is not a glorious vindication of the wrath of God but a sad and mournful occasion?'⁵⁹ Let me make absolutely clear that I am not suggesting that either of these men would see themselves as challenging the traditional doctrine of hell as a whole, but only a peripheral and 'non-essential' element of it. However, my concerns are both biblical and pragmatic. From the biblical angle, I must disagree with both Macleod and Helm. Verses of importance are Revelation 18:20; 19:1 – 4. The context of both passages is the judgement of God on the world and the response in heaven to this event. 'Rejoice over her . . . for God has avenged you on her' (Revelation 18:20). 'For true and righteous are his judgements . . . And again they said "Alleluia! And her smoke rises up forever and ever"' (Revelation 19:2,3). Homer Hailey comments, 'This is not an expression of glee over the fall of a great city or people, but a rejoicing over the defeat of evil and the victory of righteousness'.⁶⁰ We are given another glimpse of the judgement in Isaiah 63. The One who is 'mighty to save' (i.e. the Lord Jesus, v.1) is seen approaching with his clothes spattered with red. He gives this as his explanation, 'I have trodden the winepress alone . . . I have trodden them in my anger, and trampled them in my fury; Their blood is sprinkled upon my garments, and I have stained all my robes' (v.3 cf Revelation 14:19, 20; 19:15). Is this portrayed as a 'sad and regretful occasion', as Helm suggests? No. The One who has judged in anger is described as being 'glorious in his apparel' (v.1) even though blood-stained (NIV 'robed in splendour', NASB 'majestic in his apparel').

However, if my only concern was biblical, I would not have included these comments in this paper. The questions Macleod and Helm have raised are, in a sense, peripheral to the current debate because they certainly do not affect the endlessness of future punishment. But I have very real pragmatic concerns for this reason: those who have swung from an orthodox doctrine of hell to Annihilationism have begun their journey with an emotional distaste for the orthodox

view. Stott says that 'emotionally, I find the concept intolerable'.⁶¹ Atkinson said that it was his hope 'to show that the teaching of Scripture about the final state of the lost is far less *burdensome*' than the traditional view.⁶² Therefore, if it is believed that even in heaven the saints will find no cause to rejoice in the righteous judgement of God upon the wicked and will see it as a sad and regretful occasion, what hope have we of ever coming to terms with the facts of future judgement now (when our understanding is far from perfect)? I, therefore, believe that there is a real danger that the comments of Donald Macleod and Paul Helm could lead some to take the next step of rearranging their theology in order to erase the doctrine of endless, conscious punishment from their minds. Their comments may encourage some in their search for an alternative and allow them to justify their process of escapism. This, I believe, is a very real (however unintentional) challenge from within.

2. Silence Threatens the Doctrine

J.H. Moorhead in his survey of 'Death and Afterlife in Protestant Thought 1840 – 1925' (speaking in the American context) found that 'the real decline in the traditional hell came as a result of a silence about, rather than an explicit attack upon, that doctrine'.⁶³ He wrote, 'The decline of hell . . . was not primarily the result of open questioning of the doctrine. The outspoken critics probably never accounted for more than a minority of the Protestants. Far more important was a growing silence on the subject. Even those who adhered to the traditional notion often gave it merely a passing nod'.⁶⁴ I suggest that similar research (if ever undertaken) of late twentieth century Evangelicalism in Britain would reach the same conclusion. While the number of 'Evangelicals' explicitly opposed to the traditional doctrine are few in number there is widespread confusion and disbelief in the pew. The greatest cause for this is probably the silence of preachers on the subject rather than the influence of outright opponents. This silence is very real, and maybe the most powerful challenge to the orthodox doctrine; and it comes from within.

The biblical doctrine of endless punishment needs to be preached with its biblical emphasis. It must be preached regularly, systematically, simply, directly, urgently, passionately and compassionately. It must not be avoided or marginalized or treated with a 'passing nod' out of fear of offence and misunderstanding, not only of unbelievers, but of believers as well. The consequences of neglect are inestimable. Sinners must be faithfully warned of their future and urged to repent and find salvation in Jesus Christ. Saints must both be comforted by realizing what they have been saved from and warned of what their unbelieving friends will one day enter unless they are first converted.

We need to be confident of the biblical foundation of the doctrine of endless, conscious, punishment and preach it in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

Let C.H. Spurgeon set the standard as he preaches on the hopelessness of the lost: 'They have not even the hope of dying – the hope of being annihilated. They are forever – forever lost! On every chain in hell, there is written "forever". In the fires, there blaze out the words "forever". Up above their heads, they read, "forever" . . . Oh! if I could tell you tonight

that hell would one day be burned out, and that those who were lost might be saved, there would be a jubilee in hell at the very thought of it. But it cannot be – it is "FOREVER" they are "cast into outer darkness".⁶⁵

Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined the issues involved in the current debate amongst Evangelicals concerning the final state of the wicked. Having come to the Scriptures afresh, seeking to set aside all unjustified presuppositions, we have seen that the traditional doctrine of endless, conscious punishment is indeed biblical. Sadly, at times, it has been supported by poor arguments and inappropriate texts. But the central issues remain unscathed despite current attacks.

At times, the content of this paper has, of necessity, been academic, but the issues involved are never academic. They are momentous. It is not only our minds but our hearts also which need to be moved by this doctrine. In closing, I allow John Donne to underscore the point: 'When all is done, the hell of hells, the torment of torments, is the everlasting absence of God and the everlasting impossibility of returning to His presence . . . to fall out of the hands of the living God, is a horror beyond our expression, beyond our imagination . . . What Tophet is not Paradise, what Brimstone is not Amber, what gnashing is not comfort, what gnawing of the worme is not a tickling, what torment is not a marriage bed to this damnation, to be secluded eternally, eternally, eternally from the sight of God?'

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C.A.R.M. @CONDITIONAL IMMORTALITY

What is conditional immortality?

by [Matt Slick](#)

10/11/2018

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Conditional Immortality (which is also sometimes called annihilationism and conditionalism) is the position that only those who have trusted in Christ will be granted continued, eternal existence in the afterlife. Upon our physical death, according to the majority of conditionalists, we enter a state of soul sleep where we are unconscious. Then sometime in the future, the person is resurrected, reunited with his physical body, and is then judged. The wicked are annihilated (either right away or later after a duration of punishment) and only those who have put their faith and trust in the sacrifice of Jesus will be granted physical immortality and will then live forever.

"Conditionalism is the view that life or existence is the Creator's provisional gift to all, which will ultimately either be granted forever on the basis of righteousness (by grace, through faith), or revoked forever on the basis of unrighteousness. Evangelical conditionalists believe that the saved in Christ will receive glory, honor and immortality, being raised with an incorruptible body to inherit eternal life ([Romans 2:7](#)). The unsaved will be raised in shame and dishonor, to face God and receive the just condemnation for their sins. When the penalty is carried out, they will be permanently excluded from eternal life by means of a final death (loss of being; destruction of the whole person; [Matthew 10:28](#))."¹

Is there a difference between annihilationism and conditionalism? It depends on the definitions. But, among many who hold to conditionalism, there is a distinction. Annihilationism is the condition of nonexistence that awaits the damned. Conditionalism is the state that awaits the redeemed; they are to receive immortality on the condition of their faith in Christ. But, conditionalists affirm the annihilation of the wicked.

"...conditionalism emphasizes what awaits the redeemed, namely, eternal life and immortality...annihilationism is about what awaits the damned, namely, the eternal punishment of destruction in hell. Such is their perishing, the permanent end to the conscious existence of the whole person."²

Conditionalists have various arguments they employ to support their position. Generally, the arguments fall under these main categories:

1. God alone possesses immortality and the Bible only ascribes immortality to the redeemed.
2. Eternal life is associated only with the redeemed.

3. According to Scripture, unbelievers are said to be destroyed; therefore, they will not exist anymore.
4. Eternal conscious torment is not proportional to the finite sins committed by people.
5. God is too good and loving to punish someone forever in eternal conscious torment.
6. Eternal conscious torment benefits neither God nor the one being punished.
7. The Greek word for "eternal" actually means age; therefore, the wicked are punished for an age, not forever

Each of these arguments have their strengths and weaknesses and are addressed here on CARM.

CARM's position is that conditional immortality is not biblical. The wicked will experience eternal, conscious torment due to their sin against God and their rejection of Jesus.

- [Matthew 13:41–42](#), "The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, 42 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."
- [Matthew 25:41](#), "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;'"
- [Matthew 25:46](#), "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."
- [2 Thessalonians 1:9](#), "These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,"
- [Revelation 14:10–11](#), "he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11 And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.'"

[Revelation 20:10](#), "And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

What is annihilationism and is it biblical?

by [Matt Slick](#)

10/11/2018

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Annihilationism is the philosophical teaching that all people who have not trusted in Christ as Savior will, upon the Day of Judgment or sometime afterward, be annihilated. In other words, God will cause them to cease to exist. Different annihilationists have slightly different ideas about the order of how it works. There is instant annihilationism and gradual annihilationism.

Instant Annihilationism

Some annihilationists believe that once a person dies, his soul instantly ceases to exist. Upon the Day of Judgment, he is "re-created" to be judged and then he is immediately annihilated. But, this is problematic because there is no continuity between the person who first was created and then was re-created. It is a logical difficulty to assert that the person who completely ceases to exist is actually the same person who is re-created. Without a continuous existence, this is difficult to defend. This is why a criticism of this position is that the second person is an exact duplicate of the first person. This is a serious problem.

Gradual Annihilationism

Other annihilationists teach that upon death people go into a state of soul sleep, with no activity, and will gradually be destroyed. This is a condition where the person still exists, but is unconscious, has no experiences, and is unaware. Then on the Day of Judgment, he is awakened to face God's judgment and is annihilated. This avoids the problem with the first view dealing with continuity. But it is also problematic in that it ties the existence of the soul with that of the physical body and implies the soul is a property of the physical. This has its own difficulties as well. In addition, how does a person who is alive exist without there being any activity? That is what life is.

Then there are others who teach that upon the death of a person, he enters a state of soul sleep. On the Day of Judgment, he is awakened and faces the sentencing of God who assigns him a period of suffering that is in proportionate to the level of sin that he committed on earth. After the appropriate length of time of his suffering has been completed, he is annihilated. But this is problematic because if the person is judged by his sin, which is breaking the law, and the law requires punishment, then why isn't he saved after he fulfills the requirement of the law by his punishment?

Shifting the definition

Annihilationists consider the action of God annihilating a person to be Eternal Punishment. They equate eternal punishment with eternal nonexistence. But, this is problematic since punishment is experienced and nonexistence is not. Punishment is an

action of God that occurs in time. Nonexistence is not. In order to affirm their position, annihilationists shift the definition from the action of God's judgment to the result. But this doesn't work. Eternal punishment is not the same thing as eternal nonexistence. If they were, then they would have the same attributes. But since they don't, they're not the same thing.

Comparing Eternal Punishment and Nonexistence	
Eternal Punishment	Nonexistence
An action	Not an action
Is the supposed cause of non-existence	Is nothing
Occurs in time	Eternal non-existence does not occur in time
Completed in time	Eternal non-existence is not completed in time
Momentary	Eternal nothing has no 'moment'

Why Annihilationism?

There are various reasons annihilationists hold to their positions. Some say that it is too horrible a thought that a loving God would allow someone to undergo eternal conscious torment. Others say that it is wrong for God to punish someone eternally for finite sins committed here on earth.

One of the more common reasons people hold to annihilationism is because of the Greek words such as αἰών *aión* and αἰώνιος *aiónios*. They mean an age, a period of time, an extended period of time, and, depending on context, "forever." So, since annihilationists deny eternal conscious torment, they often take verses that seem to teach it and say that the period of punishment is for "an age," not forever. Take the following verse as an example.

- [Revelation 20:10](#), "And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

So in this case if we were to apply the annihilationist interpretation, the devil, the beast, and the false prophet would not be tormented for ever and ever. Instead, they would be tormented for an extended age which can end. Then, once the age is completed, the wicked are annihilated.

But, this reasoning can work against them. Please consider this verse.

- [Matthew 25:46](#), "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

As is obvious, Jesus contrasts eternal punishment with eternal life. It would make sense to say that if eternal punishment was only for an age (if we assumed the word eternal means age of the ages), then eternal life would also only be for an age. This would obviously be problematic for the annihilationist interpretation. So what they do? Simple. They shift the definition of punishment that a person experiences for eternity, and say that punishment is nonexistence which lasts forever. But of course, this does not make any sense because that which is non-existent doesn't last forever.

Is conditionalism the same thing as annihilationism?

Annihilationism is also called conditionalism, though there are slight differences in the terms. All who hold to conditionalism also hold to annihilationism. But conditionalism deals with the believer, where annihilationism deals with the unbeliever. Conditionalism is the teaching that the person who has trust in Christ will receive immortality (eternal existence) in both body and soul. This continued existence is conditioned upon their faith in Christ. But, annihilationism deals with the unbeliever because it is the unbeliever who will be judged and brought to extinction by God on the Day of Judgment.

Conclusion

After a great deal of research, in the opinion of CARM, annihilationism is not biblical. It is a false teaching. There are too many scriptures which speak of continued, conscious judgment for unbelievers

- [Matthew 13:41–42](#), "The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, 42 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."
- [Matthew 25:41](#), "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;'"
- [Matthew 25:46](#), "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

- [2 Thessalonians 1:9](#), "These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,"
- [Jude 6–7](#), "And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day, 7 just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire."
- [Revelation 14:10–11](#), "he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11 And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name."
- [Revelation 20:10](#), "And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

What are the basic assumptions of conditionalism, also known as annihilationism?

by [Matt Slick](#)

10/11/2018

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Everybody has assumptions. And in my opinion, after reading through lots of material written by conditionalists, I believe that many of them have gone to the Bible with preconceived ideas looking for justification to support them. I also believe many others, who were more open-minded, have been convinced that certain annihilationist ideas are biblical. I think that, for the most part, they are sincere people who want to understand God's word accurately.

Nevertheless, I offer the following list of basic assumptions/beliefs that must be in place or are soon adopted by those who become conditionalists. I have produced this in outline form so that I can make brief comments after each one.

1. Destruction of a person means non-existence
1. This is an assumption made by every conditionalist I've encountered. Biblical examination of the words used for destruction means that there is a wide variety of usages depending on the context. Destruction does not necessitate a person's nonexistence.
2. [What does the destruction of people mean according to the New Testament](#)
2. Natural mortality of the human soul
 1. We do not know whether God creates people with the inherent immortality of their souls, or that he sustains their existence by the exertion of his will, or that all people are naturally mortal in their souls so that when the physical body dies, the soul ceases to have existence and life. But, annihilationists assume that when God creates a person, his eternal existence is not a necessary part of his nature and that his existence must be sustained by God.
3. A person's body and soul are united in such a way that when the body dies, the soul dies.
 1. This is closely related to the previous point. Conditionalists unite the body and soul very closely. They assume that when the physical life ceases the soul cannot continue. Some see this as immediate annihilation while others adopt a soul-sleep position. This is very problematic.
4. Soul sleep
 1. Soul Sleep is the position that a person's essence continues in the afterlife but in a state of dormancy where no conscious activity occurs. Other than this, there isn't much clarification. This does not seem to be supported by Scripture since many scriptures speak of conscious existence after death such as [2 Cor. 5:18](#); [2 Cor. 12:2](#); [Luke 16:19-31](#).
5. Immortality of the soul is a pagan concept
 1. I routinely encountered the belief that the natural immortality of the soul is pagan in origin. Saying it doesn't make it so. The issue is whether or not Scripture teaches it. Furthermore, there are plenty of common ideas between pagan thought and Christian thought. The conditionalist

needs to be careful with his assertion because the sword cuts both ways. See the article, [Is the immortal soul is a Greek concept adopted by the early church?](#) for more information on this. The fact is that there are lots of similarities between biblical events and ideas and paganism. Why do the annihilationists only focus on one of those? To make eternal conscious torment bad via guilt by association.

6. God's eternal punishment is the wicked's nonexistence
1. Conditionalists equate God's eternal judgment, His eternal punishment with a person's nonexistence. They shift the definition from the action to the consequence. In other words, they define God's eternal punishment as everlasting because the people don't exist anymore, forever. But this is problematic. How does something that does not exist undergo punishment? It can't. It is nothing. So, they conflate punishment with nothingness. See the article [Conditionalism and the challenge of conflating eternal punishment with non-existence](#)
7. The word "forever," based on the Greek aion which can mean for an age, a period of time
1. The New Testament Greek uses word aion (and its different forms) to mean "age," or a "period of time," or even "forever." But, in the context of God and people it seems that interpretations from conditionalists always lean in the favor of the presuppositions so that God himself is eternal (aionos), but man's eternal (aionos) punishment is not. After all, you can't be punished forever, if you don't exist.
8. Immortality must given bestowed upon a person upon belief in Christ
1. This is one of the main arguments of conditionalists. They believe that immortality belongs to God alone and he grants it only to those who believe in Christ. The rest are annihilated. But, angels don't die ([Luke 20:36](#)) but they are never said to be immortal. See also, [1 Tim. 6:16, Annihilationism, and God alone has immortality](#)
9. Infinite punishment is wrong for finite sins
1. This is more of an emotional argument that is not really based in logic. But annihilationists typically argue about moral propriety in relationship to what God ought to do in relationship to our sin. See [Eternal Conscious Torment would mean that God is not just to punish finite sin infinitely](#)
10. God's love means he won't punish people forever.
1. This is another emotionally based argument which focuses on the love of God and reduces his majesty, holiness, and righteousness so that they can argue against eternal conscious torment. See [Eternal Conscious Torment makes God unloving](#)

These 10 basic assumptions are woven throughout conditionalist writings. Not all conditionalists hold to all points. In fact, many disagree with each other on various issues.

Finally, I want to make it clear that I'm not judging their salvation. I do not believe that adopting conditionalism mean someone is not a Christian. I believe they are in error. See, [Does belief in annihilationism mean you are not a Christian?](#)

Eternal Conscious Torment would mean that God is not just to punish finite sin infinitely

by [Matt Slick](#)

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Sometimes conditionalists argue that it would be unjust for God to punish someone for an infinite amount of time because of finite sins committed in their lifetime. They base their argument on the limited nature of that sin. They argue that when a person sins, such as stealing a stereo, it occurs in a finite per period of time and is not a continuous act of stealing. Therefore, since the sin is finite, it would not make sense to punish the person infinitely.

"Infinity just seems immediately, and wildly, out of proportion to a finite amount of sin, however large and virulent."[1](#)

His criticism is dismissive and condescending. It says that being punished infinitely for sins committed against the infinite God is feudalistic. Feudalistic? Really? Feudalism was a kind of governmental system in Medieval Europe in which the nobility owned lands, and the tenants on those lands worked it and were obligated to provide various services to the nobility such as the production of goods and military service. So, how is an infinite consequence due to offending an infinite God feudalistic? Fudge is fudging in his logic.

Furthermore, notice how he says that "enlightened people" reject such a notion today. This is a condescending remark implying that those who don't agree with him are not enlightened. Such emotional and irrational argumentation has no place in such a serious discussion. Again, Fudge is "fudging" in his argumentation and uses emotionalism, subjective opinion, and false accusation to ridicule the position with which he does not agree. Though in other areas of his book he is far more rational, in this quote he has failed to uphold that level of competence, and he is allowing his emotions to show through. I can't help but wonder how much his exegesis of Scripture has been affected by such poorly based, emotional reasoning and twisted to fit his condescending attitude.

Eternal Conscious Torment makes God unloving

by [Matt Slick](#)

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Though it is not a very common argument, some annihilationists state God would be unloving to torment someone forever. They say that since God is love ([1 John 4:8](#)), it cannot be that God would allow such a horrible thing.

First, this argument is a subjective appeal to emotion. This is so because love is itself a personal experience. Since people can love, and since we do not love perfectly as God does, the argument must then rest in a person's subjective experience, and opinion about love is and then project that opinion upon God.

Second, this weak argument ignores the fact that God is also just and holy. He must punish the sinner for his rebellion against him. If he does not do that, then God is approving of sin. Furthermore, God's holiness means that the filth of sin, which goes against God's nature, cannot be tolerated. God will deal with the sinner and repay him for his rebellion against him.

Third, when someone takes a single attribute of God, isolates it from his other attributes, and bases an argument on that single attribute (i.e., love), he is committing a logical fallacy, the fallacy of composition. This fallacy of thinking asserts that what is true of the part is true of the whole. An example of this would be, "The engine is blue; therefore the car is blue." This is, of course, not necessarily true. When we apply this to the issue at hand, we see that to say that God is love and therefore he will not judge someone to eternal torment is to commit this error because it takes a single attribute of love, and identifies the whole of God with it. In so doing, it ignores the other attributes of his character such as holiness & justice & the conclusion cannot be trusted.

Eternal Conscious Torment makes God immoral

by [Matt Slick](#)

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One of the complaints raised by conditionalists against the teaching of eternal conscious torment (ECT) is that it makes God immoral. They say that it is wrong for someone to suffer for eternity, in utter agony, for finite sins committed here on earth. Therefore, to accuse God of such a thing is to accuse God of immorality. But, such reasoning is flawed and I will show you why. Their argument goes something like this.

1. Eternal conscious torment is immoral by nature
2. To accuse God of enacting eternal conscious torment would make God immoral.
3. Therefore, eternal conscious torment is not true, since God is not immoral.

The problem with this line of reasoning begins with the first premise. To say that eternal conscious torment is immoral by nature is an opinion. There is nothing in the Bible that states such a view is true. When a logical argument is based on a subjective opinion, its conclusion cannot be trusted. Furthermore, people who often present such opinions inadvertently assert that there is a moral standard which rests outside of God to which God must submit. In other words, the person would be saying that this action, this particular action of ECT is by nature immoral and God is obligated to submit to that moral truth. This is, of course, ridiculous.

As Christians we must agree that the only source of absolute morals rests in God himself. Furthermore, God has revealed his will in the Bible and we must turn to the Bible in order to find out if eternal conscious torment is indeed true or not.

But, this is precisely the debate that we are having. Though some conditionalists claim that the Bible condemns eternal conscious torment as morally reprehensible, proving it from Scripture is another matter entirely. If anything, we find in Scripture many verses that certainly imply eternal conscious torment is true.

- [Jude 7](#), "just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire." (See [Jude 6-7](#), [angels undergoing punishment of eternal fire](#))
- [Revelation 14:9-11](#), "Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10 he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels

and in the presence of the Lamb. 11 “And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.” ([Revelation 14:9-11, worshippers of the beast are tormented forever](#))

- [Revelation 20:10](#), “And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” (See [Revelation 20:10, the devil, the beast, and the false prophet, tormented day and night forever](#))

Finite sins don't deserve eternal punishment

Some annihilationists argue that it would be wrong for God to punish someone eternally for sins that are finite. But this argument fails to understand that sinners are punished according to the severity of their sins. It is not simply an issue of a sin as a finite concept, but of who the sin is against. If I were to slap you in the face, you might slap me back or step back and ask why did that? But if I were to slap the President of the United States in the face, that would be a serious offense, and I would go to jail. Why the difference in result? This is because of who the action is against. When we go up the chain of command to the infinitely holy God, we should realize that to sin against God is to incur an infinite offense because of who is against. Therefore, to say that a sin is finite misses the point because it fails to properly understand who the sin is against. Since the sin is against God and he is infinite, therefore people's sins require a judgment that is commensurate with the infinite nature of God.

Common Sense

Those against eternal conscious torment sometimes, though not very often, appeal to the idea that common sense declares it to be false. But, of course, this is way too subjective. What is common sense to one person is not common sense to another. For anyone to appeal to common sense as a universal moral standard, is to offer a subjective preference as a universal norm. This is wrought with problems and cannot be the foundation upon which a valid criticism of eternal conscious torment can be constructed.

Conclusion

God is the standard of holiness and moral truth. He does not answer to anyone, and there is no moral standard outside of himself. Therefore, for anyone to cogently make his case that eternal conscious torment is immoral, he would have to do so based on the revelation of God himself found in the Bible. But the problem is that nothing in Scripture says it is immoral for someone to suffer eternally for the sins against God that they have committed here on earth. It just isn't there. Therefore, the criticism that eternal conscious torment makes God immoral is nothing more than an unsubstantiated appeal to subjective opinion. It is, therefore, an invalid criticism.

C.A.R.M. – PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS

Conditionalism and conflating eternal punishment with non-existence

by [Matt Slick](#)

10/11/2018

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The Fallacy of Conflation occurs when two or more terms or ideas that share some common characteristics, are used to refer to the same thing. When this occurs, the individual identity of those terms and ideas is lost. Another way to look at it is to understand the Fallacy of Conflation as a confusion of terms or ideas and results in ambiguity. It is like comparing apples and oranges. Though both share the common characteristic of being fruit, but they are different in texture and color. So, to compare apples and oranges as though they are the same thing would be the Fallacy of Conflation.

Here are some more examples.

- Conflation of Legality and Morality: Drug use in that state is legal. Therefore, it is morally acceptable.
 - This conflates (confuses) legality with moral acceptability.
- Conflation of Love and Marriage: Love is what makes a marriage work. After all, true marriage is true love.
 - This conflates (confuses) love with marriage. They are related, but different.

This issue of conflation is very important, especially in the context of punishment and eternal nonexistence. When conditionalists say that eternal punishment is annihilation, they are equating the concepts. They are saying that the eternal punishment of God is a person's eternal nonexistence.

"This is a punishment which is eternal, but not because the lost themselves will live forever. *Instead the punishment is eternal insofar as what the lost will miss out on is eternal.*"¹

So, the above quote is saying that eternal punishment *is* eternal nonexistence (eternally missing out on existence). More specifically conditionalists say that God's eternal punishment results in man's eternal nonexistence. But, in so doing, they are confusing God's action with the result of the action when they say that God's punishment is eternal nonexistence. In other words, they are conflating one with the other by saying they are essentially equal.

Are Eternal Punishment and Eternal Non-existence equal?

To say that eternal punishment is eternal nonexistence is to equate eternal punishment with eternal nonexistence. It is to make them equal. But, this equality can't work because they are not the same thing. Please consider the following table.

Table 1 Comparing Eternal Punishment and Nonexistence	
Eternal Punishment	Nonexistence
An action	Not an action
Is the cause of non-existence	Is the result of the punishment
Occurs in time	Eternal non-existence does not occur in time
Completed in time	Eternal non-existence is not completed in time
Momentary	Eternal nothing has no 'moment'

As you can see, eternal punishment and nonexistence are not the same thing. Therefore, to say that God's eternal punishment is a person's nonexistence is to commit the Fallacy of Conflation. It is bad reasoning.

But, it is the result of punishment that is the issue

Conditionalists respond by saying that God's eternal punishment is not an ongoing action, but the result of a single action: annihilation. They say that the one momentary action has an eternal effect. But, this makes no sense as Table 1 above shows.

Once a punishment is carried out, there is no more punishment to be administered - especially if the recipient does not exist anymore. It is finished. In the case of the conditionalists, the

punishment is God's action upon a person which results in his nonexistence. But, the action of *rendering* someone nonexistent is not the same thing as the *condition* of nonexistence. The *cause* (punishment) is not the same thing as the *result* (non-existence). Nonexistence is nothing. But punishment is something. Punishment is an action. Non-existence is not. Punishment is momentary. Nonexistence is not. Therefore, they are not the same thing and the conditionalists make a mistake when they equate God's punishment with eternal nonexistence.

I've done a lot of research on the notion of punishment from a biblical perspective. See the articles, [Usage of the English word 'punish' in the Bible](#) and [What is punishment?](#) Punishment is experienced. Therefore, for punishment to be eternal nonexistence is not consistent with biblical usage.

Capital Punishment as an analogy

"This destruction [of [Matt. 25:46](#)] is not accidental, nor is it self-inflicted. It is the penal outcome of God's judgment. It is punishment, in this instance capital punishment. And, unlike even the capital punishment man may inflict, it is irreversible capital punishment. It is, truly, "everlasting" or "eternal" punishment, "everlasting destruction," the second death from which there is no resurrection or return forever."²

Because conditionalists often equate God's judgment with capital punishment, I thought I would devote space to addressing that issue. They say that just as the effect of capital punishment is forever since it stops biological life, in the same way the effect of eternal punishment is forever, since it stops spiritual life. To be clear, when I say 'spiritual life' I am referring to the totality of human existence that includes body and soul in the afterlife. But, in stating their position, they inadvertently admit that punishment is not the same thing as annihilation. (See Table 1 above for review of this.)

In annihilationism, the punishment of nonexistence is not experienced. This is because it occurs in a moment. The person is existing and then poof, he is not existing. The transition is not experienced by the individual. Only existence is experienced and then the experience stops. Therefore, punishment is not experienced - which is not consistent with biblical revelation that shows that punishment is experienced: [Gen. 4:13](#); [Exodus 21:20](#); [32:34-35](#); [Lev. 5:17](#); [19:20](#); [22:16](#); [26:18](#); [26:28](#); [2 Chron. 6:23](#); [Psalm 89:32](#); [149:7-8](#); [Prov. 21:11](#); [Isa. 29:6](#); [30:32](#); [Jer. 27:8](#); [36:31](#); [44:13](#); [44:29](#); [Lam. 4:22](#); [Hosea 4:9-10](#); [Zeph. 1:8-9](#); [1:12-13](#); [Zech. 17:18-19](#); [Luke 23:16](#); [23:22](#); [Acts 22:5](#); [26:11](#); [2 Cor. 2:6](#); [6:9](#); [1 Pet. 2:14](#); [2 Pet. 2:9](#); [Jude 7](#).

Their reasoning is not sound. A punishment which renders a person nonexistent is not an everlasting punishment because nonexistence isn't anything. It is nothing. It is not experienced. It is not an effect, because you can't have an "effect" on nothingness. Nothingness cannot be not a state of punishment and it can't be a punishment. Let me illustrate.

Table 2
Comparing Conceptual Conditions

Condition 1 Nothingness	Condition 2 Existence	Condition 3 Existence	Condition 4 Existence	Condition 5 Punishment
Non-existence	Conscious Existence	Soul Sleep	Conscious Existence	Non-existence
Before being born	Conception to physical death	Between physical death and resurrection	Resurrection to Annihilation	After judgment

You will notice that Condition 1 (nonexistence) is identical to Condition 5 (nonexistence). They are exactly identical because both of them have absolutely no characteristics, no attributes. If we have two things, X and Y, and all of the attributes of X are exactly identical to Y, then X is Y. They are the same thing. Likewise, if **Condition 1** is exactly identical to the **Condition 5** (nonexistence, having no attributes at all), then Condition 1 *is* Condition 5. But, that makes no sense in the conditionalist worldview since **Condition 5** is supposed to be punishment and **Condition 1** is not punishment. They have a problem since they place an attribute of punishment upon **Condition 5** which is in actuality exactly equal to **Condition 1** yet **Condition 1** is not punishment.

Here is the above table expanded.

Table 3
Comparing Conditions of Existence

Condition 1	Condition 2	Condition 3	Condition 4	Condition 5
Non-existence	Conscious Existence	Soul Sleep	Conscious Existence	Non-existence

				Punishment as a characteristic isn't possible since "nothing" has no characteristics
No characteristics and no attributes	Attributes of self awareness, reason, consciousness, etc.		Attributes of self awareness, reason, consciousness, etc.	No characteristics and no attributes
	Soul Sleep provides the continuity between Conditions 2 and 4, though conditionalists have a great deal of difficulty defining exactly what soul sleep is.			
Before being born	After being born	After physical death	After resurrection	After judgment

To reiterate, if **Condition 5** is punishment, then why is **Condition 1** not also punishment since they are absolutely identical in all respects. Both are nonexistence. Now, I understand the conditionalists will say that **Condition 5** is the *result* of something; namely, the judgment of God that occurs concomitantly with **Condition 4**. But again, if **Condition 5** is judgment and **Condition 5** is also nonexistence, then they are equating judgment with nonexistence and this is, again, the Fallacy of Conflation (Table 1). In addition, the nature of nonexistence in **Condition 1** is exactly identical to the nature of nonexistence in **Condition 5** since both are nonexistence - which is exactly equal to each other. If they are exactly equal to each other, then they are the same thing. But, that can't be if one is *not* punishment and the *is* punishment. Therefore, their position makes no sense.

Conclusion

The conditionalist view that God's eternal punishment is the same thing as a person's eternal nonexistence makes no sense. It commits the fallacy of conflation. Eternal punishment and nonexistence are not the same thing and to state that they are is logically impossible.

Conditionalism and the genetic fallacy regarding the immortal soul

by [Matt Slick](#)

10/11/2018

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The genetic fallacy is the error in logic dealing with origins. It is the error of reasoning which validates or invalidates a conclusion, information, or belief due to the source of the information.

1. Example: The Nazi regime developed the Volkswagen Beetle. Therefore, you should not buy a VW Beetle because of who developed it.
2. Example: Frank just got out of jail last year. Since it was his idea to start the hardware store, I can't trust him and it must be a bad idea.
3. Example: She is very good looking and nice. So, I will trust that she's telling me the truth.

The genetic fallacy is important in our discussion on conditionalism and the immortality of the soul because the conditionalists try to invalidate eternal conscious torment by attacking the immortality of the soul and saying its origin is pagan.

- "Today, as a growing host of evangelical (and other) scholars bear witness, the evidence for the wicked's final total destruction (rather than the traditional view of unending conscious torture, which sprang from pagan Platonic theories of immortal, indestructible souls) is finally getting some of the attention it demands." (Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism (Kindle Locations 899-902). Cascade Books, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition.)
- "The immortality of the soul was a principal doctrine of the Greek philosopher, Plato..." (Fudge, Edward William. The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment, Third Edition (p. 19). Cascade Books, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition.)

First of all, similarities of concept between different cultures does not mean one borrowed from another.

Second, logically speaking, whether or not non-Christian thought originated the idea of the immortality of the soul does not mean the doctrine is true or not true. It's origin is irrelevant to its truth.

Third, the truth or falsity of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul must depend on the revelation of God's word and not an attitude of dismissal and guilt-by-association based on an accusation of pagan origin.

Fourth, such routine fallacies of thought such as this one under discussion (the genetic fallacy), puts the whole system of argumentation proposed by conditionalists under suspicion. If they are using faulty reasoning in this area, how do we know they're not using faulty reasoning in other areas?

Fifth, the sword cuts both ways. If the conditionalists seek to invalidate the idea of the immortality of the human soul based on its supposed origins in paganism (which I do not concede is true), then will they condemn other biblical doctrines that have similarities with paganism? There are common themes between biblical and nonbiblical cultures which include Jonah and its closeness to the "Sumerian myth of Inanna's journey to the underworld." Sheol is also found in Ugaritic literature is being the place of the dead. "Canaanite literature from Ugarit describes the trials of King Keret who, like Job, lost seven sons." "Various biblical texts depicting the God of Israel in battle with the sea and/or a dragon...have been connected to Mesopotamian mythological motifs." The first use of the phrase "King of Kings" in reference to God occurs in [2 Maccabees 13:4](#), which is not Scripture. Biblically, the phrase "King of Kings" is first used of Artaxerxes in [Ezra 7:12](#) and Nebuchadnezzar in [Ezekiel 26:7](#) and [Daniel 2:36](#). Are we to invalidate the reference to God as King of Kings in [1 Tim. 6:16](#) and [Revelation 17:14](#) because of its association with Artaxerxes and Nebuchadnezzar? Of course not.

For more on this line of reasoning, with documentation of the above quotes, see the article [Is the immortal soul is a Greek concept adopted by the early church?](#)

Conclusion

My point is that the conditionalist, as well as others, need to be as objective as possible when looking at the issues and not pick and choose which concept they will associate with paganism in order to attempt to invalidate it. Again, we need to be careful not to commit what is called the Genetic Fallacy which means that since the source of information is bad, therefore the information/conclusion is bad. Finally, their logic error here and another dealing with [Fallacy of Conflation](#), casts doubt on their objectivity and ability to offer logical reasoning pertaining to the discussion at hand.

Conditionalism and the figurative literal interpretive error

by [Matt Slick](#)

10/11/2018

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In light of conditionalist interpretations of Scripture, one of the interpretive mistakes I've discovered that when they encounter a Scripture that uses a figurative example in order to illustrate a literal truth, they extracted a literal subpoint out of the overall text and then interpret the whole text in light of the literal sub-point. Let me cite three scriptures as examples of what the annihilationists sometimes do in this regard.

- [Isaiah 66:24](#), "Then they will go forth and look on the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm will not die and their fire will not be quenched; and they will be an abhorrence to all mankind."
- [John 15:5–6](#), "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned."
- [Mark 9:47-48](#), "If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell, 48 where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED."

Isaiah 66:24 and Mark 9:47-48

"Trito-Isaiah was not referring to an eternal fire, because eventually that fire would stop burning after the corpses were completely consumed." ¹

This quote illustrates how a single literal point within an illustration of a biblical truth is used to interpret the whole quote. There is in logic an error called The Fallacy of Composition which is the error of assuming what is true of the part is also true for the whole. For example, the engine is blue; therefore, the whole car is blue.

Just because it is technically correct that worms die and fires do go out, it does not mean that in the New Testament context, Jesus was saying that the fires of hell will go out. What makes more sense is to understand that the Old Testament context of chapter 66 is eschatological. It mentions the new heavens and the new earth in verse 22. Jesus was referencing Isaiah in the context of the final judgment when he mentioned the unquenchable fire. Jesus used the imagery of undying worms and unquenchable fire to warn about the horrible consequences of sin and the coming judgment. The idea is to convey permanence and eternal judgment. But the conditionalist, with his presuppositions, and with risking the figurative and literal interpretive error, gets the text of Christ to say the opposite of what it appears to teach.

John 15:6

- "Trees with bad fruit are burned ([Matt 7:19](#)), as are unfruitful vines ([John 15:6](#)) and useless weeds ([Matt 13:40](#)). In Jesus' teaching, as in John's, these figures from the land represent sinners in the end. They stand for false prophets, hypocritical."²
- "[John 15:6](#): 'If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.' We notice that such branches are burned. The text does not say, 'into the fire, where they are preserved forever in suffering.'"³

In this illustration that is given by Christ in [John 15:6](#), those branches that do not abide in Christ are burned. We can understand how real vines are burned with fire and stop existing. The conditionalist will then take the literalness and apply to the whole of the verse. This look at it again.

- [John 15:5–6](#), "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 'If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.'"

Notice that Jesus said that he is the vine and we are the branches. He was speaking figuratively. He spoke about us bearing fruit. Then he talked about how those who do not abide in him are thrown away as a branch and burned with fire. But, the context is obviously figurative and Jesus is use it to illustrate a spiritual point. It would appear that those who are not true Christians are cast in the fire and burned. He is relating the judgment of being burned to the imagery of vines that are also burned. Is the conditionalist truly warranted in insisting that the idea of these vines which are technically burned to nonexistence, must then be carried over to human beings in the final judgment and that they too are consumed and don't exist? Conditionalist says yes. But, that's what this whole series of articles in this section is about. The issue is what does the Bible actually teach about this?

In light of that questions, please consider other verses in the New Testament that support eternal conscious torment. Then, once examined, ask which is a better explanation for [John 15:6](#)? Is it that those who are burned stop existing? Or does the burning continue in the illustration of the final judgment of what will happen to the wicked?

- [Matthew 10:15](#), and degrees of punishment
- [Matthew 25:41](#), eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels
- [Jude 6-7](#), angels undergoing punishment of eternal fire
- [Revelation 14:9-11](#), worshippers of the beast are tormented forever

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- 1. [A Consuming Passion: Essays on Hell and Immortality in Honor of Edward Fudge](#) (Kindle Locations 4252-4253). Pickwick Publications, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition, underline added
 - 2. [Fudge, Edward William. The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment](#), Third Edition (p. 130). Cascade Books, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition, underline added
 - 3. [Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism](#) (Kindle Locations 2629-2632). Cascade Books, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition, underline added

Conditionalism and the anthropological monism, physicalism and Jesus problem

by [Matt Slick](#)

10/11/2018

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Unfortunately, within the conditionalist camp, people hold a variety of beliefs regarding the nature of the soul, spirit, mind, brain, and body and how they relate to consciousness, thought, continuity of existence, physical death, etc. This means that the permutations of possible positions become rather large. Addressing each variation would be difficult. As a result, this paper will discuss the general principles dealing with anthropological monism and anthropological physicalism and attempt to show why they are heretical.

- "The Scriptures, both Old and New Testament, represent individual personality as a complex and totally mortal monism, a unity that can be viewed from different perspectives, but that cannot be broken into separately existing parts."¹
- "...man is one indivisible entity, not a combination of two, body and soul."²
- John [the apostle] has a distinctly monist view of human existence; in other words man is one indivisible entity, not a combination of two, body and soul."³

Monism and Physicalism and proper logical inference

Anthropological monism is the position that the characteristics of a human being whether they are thought, soul, consciousness, brain, or body, are all comprised of or the result of being one single substance. Since the one substance is the same substance of the universe, matter, etc., then the human brain is part of the one substance. Since this one substance is governed by the laws of physics, then the mind, which emanates from the physical brain, is also governed by the laws of physics. Therefore, when the physical body dies, the human mind/soul completely ceases to exist. However, this position is self-refuting because if the physical brain is governed by the laws of physics (motion, chemistry, electricity, etc.) and the mind emanates from that physical brain, then this means that the mind is also limited to the laws of physics - and chemistry since the brain has lots of chemicals in it. But, if the mind is limited to the laws of physics and chemistry, then it cannot be trusted to produce proper logical inference since the laws of physics and chemistry don't produce logic. They only produce necessary reactions. Thus, anthropological monism is self-refuting because it forces doubt upon the validity of its own position since it logically must assert that its own position is the result of neurochemical reactions in the brain which in turn are nothing more than the reactions to stimulus produced by our senses. This means anthropological monism cannot be true.

Anthropological physicalism is the position that the human person is only a physical thing and that the soul must be explained in physical terms, i.e., mass, volume, energy, properties, etc. Therefore, the human being is a physical system without a separate soul. When the physical body dies, the soul ceases to exist. Anthropological physicalism is self refuting for the same reasons as anthropological monism. To reiterate, physicalism anthropological requires that the brain be limited the laws of physics and chemistry. This means that the mind which proceeds from the physical brain and is dependent upon it for its own existence, is also restricted to the laws of physics and chemistry. But the laws of physics and chemistry describe necessary reactions to stimulus produced by our senses. The laws of physics and chemistry do not produce proper logical inference. Therefore, the position of anthropological physicalism cannot be trusted to be true since it refuted self.

For clarification, proper logical inference deals with logical necessity. For example, if A equals B, and B equals C, then A equals C. Another example would be, all men are mortal. Socrates was a man. Therefore, Socrates was mortal. So, proper logical inference is the process of reasoning where we move from premises to logical conclusions. Furthermore, logical reasoning is a process of the mind, not of chemistry and not of the laws of physics which describe such things as acceleration, conservation of energy, etc. We do not find the laws of logic (the Law of Identity, the Law of Non-contradiction, the Law of Excluded Middle, etc.) under rocks. We cannot photograph them, measure them, weigh them, etc. This is because they are abstractions; that is, they are "of the mind" and are not the result of physics and chemistry.

Jesus' two natures and his intermediate state

If a conditionalist holds to anthropological monism or anthropological physicalism, then aside from both positions being self-refuting, it must be the case that when a person dies, the human soul ceases to exist. This further necessitates that when Christ died, his human nature ceased to exist. This then denies the true incarnation since it destroys the hypostatic union (that the person of Jesus has two natures: divine and human) and would be a grave heresy. Furthermore, upon Christ's resurrection, there would have to be a re-creation of the human spirit of Jesus which was then united with the divine nature which would be a second incarnation. The second human soul would not be the same one as the first due to the continuity issue.

Continuity Illustration: One chair or two chairs?

If I were to build a chair out of twenty pieces of wood, I would have a particular instance of a chair. I then burn that chair so that it no longer exists. If I were to take another twenty pieces of wood that are exactly identical to the first twenty and build another chair that is exactly identical to the first, then is the second chair the first chair or are they different chairs that are exactly alike? Though they are exactly the same, they are not the same chair since the particular instance of the 1st chair is not the same instance of the 2nd chair. They are different chairs.

What about the human spirit of Jesus? If it ceases to exist, as both anthropological monism and physicalism maintain, and another human spirit is created that is identical to the first, is it the same human spirit? Logic would suggest that it is not. But, if it is not, then the resurrected Christ who consists of one person with two natures would not be the same Christ that was crucified.

This is because the continuity between the first and second human spirits does not exist; after all, we call them 1st and 2nd human spirits which necessarily means they are not the same.

Error Begets Error

I believe that one error leads to more error. Furthermore, in my opinion, most of the conditionalists that I've encountered and have read are looking for reasons to believe in their conditionalism, in spite of what God's word says. Nevertheless I don't offer my opinion as proof of anything. It is just my opinion. I suspect that a lot of conditionalists are starting with the premise of annihilation and then by working backwards they must attack, to some degree, the incarnation of Christ. Let me explain. Let's start with one of their presuppositions and work from it.

1. The wicked will be annihilated and not exist, because...
2. The human soul/spirit does not have the natural characteristic of eternal existence and ceases to exist upon physical death. Therefore...
3. When Jesus died on the cross his human soul/spirit ceased to exist. Which means...
4. The **hypostatic union**, an essential Christian doctrine, is now threatened.

If we were to reverse this order and start with Christ, it could go something like this...

1. The hypostatic union (Jesus is both God and man) is essential Christian doctrine that cannot be denied.
2. When Jesus died on the cross, the hypostatic union was not destroyed and continued after death, which means the human soul/spirit of Christ continued in its conscious state since we cannot divide the natures of Christ according to the doctrine of the hypostatic union.
3. Jesus represents the perfect man. Therefore since Jesus human nature continued after death, this implies that people also continue to exist after death.
4. If people continue to exist in a conscious state after death, then this lends support to the traditional view of eternal conscious torment.

Of course, I could reword this and fine-tune both sets of statements, but I hope you get the point. Where you begin, determines where you end and if you begin with man, you must reinterpret Christ.

Scripture and the existence after death apart from the physical body

The Scriptures give us several places where we see people who are alive without their physical bodies. Please consider the following scriptures.

1. [Matthew 17:2-3](#), "And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. 3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him."

2. [Luke 16:22–24](#), "Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. 23 "In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 "And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.'"
3. [2 Corinthians 5:8](#), "we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord."
4. [2 Corinthians 12:2–4](#), "I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven. 3 And I know how such a man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows— 4 was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak."

In the first set of scriptures in [Matthew 17:2-3](#), we see an account of the Transfiguration where Jesus was glorified and was speaking to Moses and Elijah. Since the resurrection has not yet occurred, then Jesus was speaking with two individuals who are alive apart from their physical bodies. (See the article [Matthew 17:2-3, Christ's Transfiguration, Moses, and Elijah](#))

In the second set of scriptures in [Luke 16:22-24](#), Jesus speak of two people who died and both were conscious after death. Now, some say this is a parable and some say it is not. Either way, Jesus is speaking about conscious existence after death and the torment that one of them is in as he cries out from the flames. (See the article [Luke 16:19-31, the rich man and Lazarus](#))

In the third set of scriptures [2 Corinthians 5:8](#), Paul clearly says that he preferred to be absent from his body, that must be his physical body, and to be at home with the Lord. Paul further reiterates this concept in [Philippians 1:23](#) which says "but I am hard-pressed for both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better. He is speaking in both 2 Corinthians and Philippians of dying and going to be with the Lord Jesus. (See the article [2 Cor. 5:8, Separated from the body and at home with the Lord](#))

In the fourth set of scriptures [2 Corinthians 12:2-4](#), Paul speaks of an individual who was either in the body or out of the body experienced things when he was caught up to paradise where he heard inexpressible words. This clearly refutes the idea of anthropological monism as well as anthropological physicalism which both state that upon a person's physical death, the spirit/soul ceases to exist. Here, Paul is obviously contradicting that notion. (See the article [2 Corinthians 12:2, in the body or out of the body, caught up to heaven](#))

Conclusion

If any particular conditionalist holds to either anthropological monism or anthropological physicalism he is adopting a false position. Sure, there are variations of views held by their proponents, but the basic principles apply. There are logical problems with these views dealing with the resurrection and the continuity of the person regarding existence, to nonexistence, and then existence again. Furthermore, this is seriously problematic when we apply this to the person of Christ where the two positions would each necessitate the violation of the hypostatic union which is a violation of the incarnation where the one person of Christ has two distinct natures.

Finally, some scriptures speak of people existing after death and apart from the body who are aware which necessitates existence apart from the physical body. Clearly, the Bible refutes both anthropological monism and anthropological physicalism.

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- [1.](#) *Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism*, Kindle Locations 2954-2956). Cascade Books, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. underline added
 - [2.](#) Ed., Date, Christopher M. and Highfield, Ron. *A Consuming Passion: Essays on Hell and Immortality in Honor of Edward Fudge*, Pickwick Publications, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition. (Kindle Locations 4500-4501). underline added
 - [3.](#) *ibid.* Locations 4500-4501, underline added
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Why is the nature of the soul so important in conditionalism?

by [Matt Slick](#)

10/11/2018

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The nature of the human soul is important in the discussion of conditionalism for two reasons. First, the conditionalists themselves demonstrate that the topics are necessarily connected. Second, the nature of man's existence is related to the nature of man's punishment. If the human soul has the God-given attribute of continued existence, then annihilationism is proven false. On the other hand, if the human soul automatically and naturally ceases to exist upon physical death, then annihilationism is supported. So, ignoring the relevance would be wrong.

The conditionalists themselves demonstrate the direct relationship between the nature of the soul and conditional immortality, also known as annihilationism. Please consider the following quotes.

- "...the Bible always speaks of human immortality as God's gift to the saved, never as an inherent quality or birthright of every person born into the world."¹
- "While "those who belong to Christ" at the resurrection of the dead will "put on immortality," immortality is never promised to those who reject God."²
- "There is nothing in the nature of the human soul that requires it to live forever. The Bible teaches conditionalism: God created humans mortal with a capacity for life everlasting, but it is not their inherent possession. Immortality is a gift God offers us in the gospel, not an inalienable possession."³

As you can see, the late Edward William Fudge, a well-known conditionalist, says that immortality is not an inherent quality of the soul but is something that must be granted to a person by God. This has direct reference to his view of conditionalism because it would mean that immortality is given only to the redeemed and that the unbelievers will cease to exist. Clark Pinnock says "there is nothing in the nature of the human soul that requires it to live forever... it is not their inherent possession." In the book *Rethinking hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism*, it says that "immortality is never promised to those who reject God." So, the conditionalists themselves relate the nature of the soul to conditional immortality which makes soul sleep important to the whole discussion.

In addition, most conditionalists I've interacted with say that the human soul falls into two categories: 1) nonexistence upon death, and 2) soul sleep.

- "When death occurs, then it is the soul that is deprived of life. Death cannot strike the body or any other part of the soul without striking the entirety of the soul . . . It is deliberately said both that the soul dies ([Judg 16:30](#); [Num 23:10](#); et al.), that it is destroyed or consumed ([Ezekiel 22:25, 27](#)), and that it is extinguished ([Job 11:20](#))."⁴

- “soul sleep,” the view that death is a state of total unconsciousness, rather than survival in heaven, hell, or purgatory.”⁵

Again, most conditionalists I've interacted with claim that upon a person's death, he either ceases to exist or enters a state of soul sleep. *Few conditionalists believe in the conscience continuation of the soul after physical death where they will be annihilated upon the final judgment.*

Nevertheless, the majority of conditionalists hold to nonexistence and soul sleep. I've written on the problems of both positions in other articles.⁶ But in summary, if the soul ceases to exist and then exists again, there is the problem of continuity where the personal identity of an individual is lost, which implies that a new, exact copy of the original person is created by God. This exact copy then experiences God's blessing or judgment. Second, what exactly is soul sleep? No conditionalist can tell me. Is it a state of the soul that has absolutely no activity during this period? But if that is the case, what is the difference between it and nonexistence since a nonexistent soul also has no activity? When I ask detailed questions about soul sleep and what activities there might be of the soul, I am met with silence or dismissal. In my opinion, I do not believe the conditionalists really understand what they assert when they use the ambiguous term "soul sleep" to describe the state between a person's physical death and physical resurrection.

Conclusion

The nature of the soul is important in the discussion of conditionalism because the conditionalists themselves relate the two topics by addressing the nature of the soul and claim that it does not naturally possess immortality which in turn supports annihilationism. But what I find interesting is that the majority of conditionalists I've talked to about the nature of the soul routinely avoid discussing it. Though they might address an issue or two, but generally they do not want to get into the topic very deeply. I suspect it is because there are weaknesses in their position dealing with the problem of the continuity of the soul, the activity or inactivity of the soul, disagreements among them about what it means & not having a clear understanding of what soul sleep really is.

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- 1.Fudge, Edward William. *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment*, Third Edition (p. 24). Cascade Books, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition, underline added.
 - 2.Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism (Kindle Locations 510-511). Cascade Books, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition, underline added.
 - 3.Pinnock, Clark H., Zondervan. *Four Views on Hell* (Counterpoints: Bible and Theology) (Kindle Locations 2153-2155). Zondervan. Kindle Edition, underline added.
 - 4.Fudge, Edward William. *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment*, Third Edition (p. 27). Cascade Books, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition, underline added.
 - 5.Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism (Kindle Locations 503-504). Cascade Books, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition.[/fn]
 - "The first man was created when the dust of the earth and the breath of God were brought together (Gen 2: 7), and just as surely as the man did not exist prior to creation, he does not exist when the spirit returns to God who gave it and the dust returns to the earth (Eccl 12:7)."Peoples, Glen, A., *Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism* (Kindle Locations 583-586). Cascade Books, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition, underline added.
 - 6.In conditionalism, there is a logical problem with the soul ceasing to exist then being resurrected; Examining soul sleep and its problems; Questions on soul sleep

In conditionalism, there is a logical problem with the soul ceasing to exist then being resurrected

by [Matt Slick](#)

10/11/2018

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Some conditionalists believe that when a person dies, he ceases to exist and is then later resurrected in order to be judged. But this is a problem. Please consider these quotes from conditionalists, also known as annihilationists.

- "The first man was created when the dust of the earth and the breath of God were brought together ([Gen 2: 7](#)), and just as surely as the man did not exist prior to creation, he does not exist when the spirit returns to God who gave it and the dust returns to the earth ([Eccl 12:7](#))."¹
- "While one may continue to "live" in one's name or progeny, viewed as a corporate extension of one's own soul, there is no longer any personal life or being. The "spirit [that] returns to God who gave it" ([Eccl 12: 7](#)) is not, as Platonists read it, a part of the individual's personality, much less his essential ego, but rather the "spirit of life" ([Gen 7: 22](#); cf. [2: 7](#)) that God grants and, at death, takes back (e.g., [Job 34: 14f.](#)).²
- "When death occurs, then it is the soul that is deprived of life. Death cannot strike the body or any other part of the soul without striking the entirety of the soul."³

The first quote above states that the person, upon death, ceases to exist. The second quote states that the spirit of life in the person is taken back to God. The third says that the soul has no life in it. This can only mean that upon death, the human person ceases to have existence. He is nothing.

Continuity and the Personal Identity Problem

In regard to people, continuity deals with the continuous existence of a person through time. Personal Identity deals with who a person is, his memories, self-awareness, characteristics, essence, etc. So, for example, let's say there is a person who committed a crime 20 years ago, is caught, and goes to trial. Is he the same person he was 20 years ago? Is his Personal Identity the same during those 20 years? Is he now the same person he was back then? These questions relate to the continuity of a person through time. The Personal Identity of a man 20 years ago is equal to the Personal Identity of a man today if there has been unbroken continuity during those 20 years. In other words, he is the same person only if he has been continuously alive during those 20 years. Therefore, the Personal Identity of the man has been carried through those 20 years, second by second, day by day, year by year, unbroken and complete. Accordingly, continuity, which is the continued existence of something from one moment in time to another, supports that the notion that the person who committed a crime 20 years ago is the same person today and can, therefore, be held accountable for his crime.

But what if he dies and, in the context of our discussion, ceases to exist? Does his Personal Identity also cease to exist? The conditionalist who holds to the nonexistence of the human soul after physical death must assert that the individual's Personal Identity has ceased. But, such conditionalists who state that a person dies and ceases to exist and is subsequently resurrected faces a logical problem. There is no continuity. Therefore, the issue of the person being the actual same person and not an exact copy is a logical challenge.

Chair 1 and Chair 2

If I were to take a large tree trunk and cut out 50 pieces of wood out of it and made a chair, then I would have a chair. If I were to then destroy that chair by burning it in a fire, it is now gone. It is not there. It is "extinct." If I then cut out another 50 pieces of wood that are exactly identical to the previous 50 and I then made another chair that is exactly equal to the first, is the second chair actually the first chair? No, it is not. The second chair is the same as the first in appearance, weight, mass, but it is not the first chair. It is a different chair. It is a duplicate. But, a duplicate is not the same chair. Chair 2 is not Chair 1. It is a copy. It is a different chair even though it has identical appearance and properties.

Let me illustrate with Table 1

Table 1		
Chair 1 Existence	Nonexistence	Chair 2 Existence

Is the first chair...

...actually...

...the second chair?

I hope you see the problem. It cannot be maintained that Chair 1 is actually Chair 2 because the continuity is lost.

Continuity and personhood

Let's apply this issue of continuity to the issue of the conditionalist's view of a human person who exists, does not exist, then exists again. Consider Table 2.

Table 2		
Person 1 Created	Nonexistence	Person 2 "resurrected"

Is person 1...

...actually...

...person 2?

When the conditionalists say that a person ceases to exist and then is resurrected by God, we have to ask if such an assertion makes any sense. Is the second person, actually the first person? It would not appear so.

But conditionalists tend to respond by saying that the person really is resurrected. Therefore, it is the same person. But, saying that God resurrects a person doesn't address the issue that I have raised here. Furthermore, it would be begging the question to say that this so-called "resurrection" that God has upon a person somehow means it is the exact same person - considering the continuity problem I've presented.

Another response from some conditionalists is to say that God can do anything. Therefore, he can reconstruct/resurrect the actual person. Consider the following quote from a well-known annihilationist, Edward Fudge.

"The nature of the human creature does not determine the outcome in our debate. Dualists, who teach that the soul consciously survives the death of the body (dualism), acknowledge that God is able to destroy both soul and body in hell if he so desires. Monists, who deny that a disembodied soul consciously survives physical death, acknowledge that God is able to resurrect the wicked in immortality if he so desires."⁴

Just saying that God can resurrect the wicked if he so desires - when that so-called resurrection is from nonexistence - doesn't mean it is true. Nowhere in scripture is such an assertion made. People don't realize that God cannot do everything. He cannot lie, stop being God, make round squares, or do the logically impossible. The conditionalists "God-can-do-anything" response is insufficient.

Let's step even further into this issue

I'd like to add more to the Table in order to further illustrate the problem with this particular view we are examining.

Table 3			
Logical Condition 1	Logical Condition 2	Logical Condition 3	Logical Condition 4
Nonexistence	Existence: Person 1	Nonexistence	Existence: Person 2
No properties Nothing No essence	Human properties Exists Human essence	No properties Nothing No essence	Human properties Exists Human essence
Nonexistence is identical...		...to nonexistence	

Is Logical Condition 1 exactly identical to Logical Condition 3 in every way? Yes, because nonexistence is nothing. It has no characteristics and no properties. It's simply nothing. If the two Logical Conditions are identical in every way, then they are the same thing.

But, if Logical Condition 2 and Logical Condition 4 are separated by Logical Condition 3 (nonexistence), there is no continuity between the persons in Logical Condition 2 and 4. If Logical Condition 3 is nonexistence, the same as Logical Condition 1, then how is the Person 1

(Logical Condition 2) the same as Person 2 (Logical Condition 4)? Remember, Person 1 is a new creation preceded by Nonexistence. Person 2 is also preceded by nonexistence. Person 1 is a new creation. Why then isn't Person 2 also a new creation since both are preceded by exactly the same thing: nonexistence?

The conditionalist will again say that Person 2 is actually Person 1 because it is a resurrection. But then again, that is begging the question and we are back to where we started with the problem of continuity and personal identity.

Conclusion

There is a problem with the conditionalist position that a person stops existing and then becomes existing again. Though the conditionalist must reject my analysis because of his presuppositions, such rejection does not mean my argument is invalid. I've presented something here that is a problem and if it cannot be answered, then it stands. In my opinion, this demonstrates a weakness in the conditionalist position which says that soul sleep is equivalent to nonexistence.

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- [1](#).Peoples, Glen, A., *Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism* (Kindle Locations 583-586). Cascade Books, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition. Underline added
 - [2](#).Ellis, E. Earle, *Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism*, Kindle Locations 2913-2919. Cascade Books, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition. The bracket word [that] is original to the quote. Underline added
 - [3](#).Fudge, Edward William. *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment*, Third Edition (p. 27). Cascade Books, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition.
 - [4](#).Fudge, Edward William. *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment*, Third Edition (p. 367). Cascade Books, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition.
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The conditionalist Bible

by [Matt Slick](#)

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Following is an attempt to illustrate the teachings of conditionalism by putting the conditionalist slant into Scripture. Of course, they do not have their own Bible. But, if we instert their interpretations into Scripture, we might find something like the following in the table below.

As you go through the Conditionalist Bible verses note that the documentation for those interpretations are after the table.

Enjoy.... or not.

Verse	NASB	Conditionalist Bible
Matt. 3:12	"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. "	"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 fire that will burn until the fuel source runs out and they don't exist anymore. "
Matt. 5:29	"If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. "	"If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into outer darkness and eternal non-existence. "

Matt. 8:12	but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."	but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and anger and rage."
Matt. 9:18	"While He was saying these things to them, a synagogue official came and bowed down before Him, and said, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay Your hand on her, and she will live.'"	"While He was saying these things to them, a synagogue official came and bowed down before Him, and said, "My daughter has just entered into a state of total unconsciousness and does not exist; but come and lay Your hand on her, and she will live."
Matt. 10:28	"Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."	"Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to make the soul not exist; but rather fear Him who is able to make both soul and body not exist in eternal non-existence."
Matt. 25:41	Matthew 25:41 , "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;"	Matthew 25:41 , "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the fire that burns until after the corpses are consumed which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;"
Matt. 25:46	"These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." .	"These will go away into eternal non-existence, but the righteous into eternal existence with God."
Mark 9:43	"If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire."	"If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the fire that will burn until the fuel source runs out."

Luke 12:47	“And that slave who knew his master’s will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes,	“And that slave who knew his master’s will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive not grades of punishment, but divine impartiality.
Rom. 6:23	For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.	For the wages of sin is lack of relationship with God, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Heb. 2:6	"But one has testified somewhere, saying, “WHAT IS MAN, THAT YOU REMEMBER HIM? OR THE SON OF MAN, THAT YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT HIM?"	"But one has testified somewhere, saying, “WHAT IS THE INDIVISIBLE ENTITY OF FLESH AND SPIRIT, THAT YOU REMEMBER HIM? OR THE SON OF MAN, THAT YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT HIM?"
Jude 7	just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.	just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of fire that will burn until the fuel source runs out and they don't exist anymore."
Rev. 14:11	“And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.”	“And the conscious suffering has ended, but “its smoke will rise forever” because the extinction is perpetual.; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.”

1. **Death:** "Death is lack of relationship with God." (Fudge, Edward William. *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment*, Third Edition (p. 48). Cascade Books, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition)
2. **Eternal Fire, Unquenchable fire:** "Trito-Isaiah was not referring to an eternal fire, because eventually that fire would stop burning after the corpses were completely consumed." (*A Consuming Passion: Essays on Hell and Immortality in Honor of Edward Fudge* (Kindle Locations 4252-4253). Pickwick Publications, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition)
3. **Eternal Punishment:** "This is a punishment which is eternal, but not because the lost themselves will live forever. Instead the punishment is eternal insofar as what the lost will miss out on is eternal." (*Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism* (Kindle Locations 567-568). Cascade Books, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition)
4. **Grinding of teeth:** "The phrase "grinding of teeth" appears many times in the OT (see [Job 16: 9](#); [Pss 35: 16](#); [37: 12](#); [Lam 2: 16](#)), and it always pictures someone so angry at another that he grinds his teeth in rage, like a mad animal straining at the leash. We see the same usage in the NT, where Stephen's enemies "gnashed their teeth at him" ([Acts 7: 54](#)). Traditionalist interpretation has ignored the biblical usage of this phrase and has homiletized instead on souls grinding their teeth eternally in excruciating pain. In the Bible, however, the teeth grind in rage, not particularly in pain— though there may well be time for that along the way. [Psalm 112: 10](#) is instructive concerning the wicked's end in this regard." (*Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism* (Kindle Locations 1035-1041). Cascade Books, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition, Edward Fudge)
5. **Hell:** "Hell is in 'outer darkness' ([Matt 8: 12](#)). It is everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, not torment in his presence ([2 Thess 1: 9](#))."(*Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism* (Kindle Locations 2652-2653). Cascade Books, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition.)
6. **Man is an indivisible entity.** John [the apostle] has a distinctly monist view of human existence; in other words man is one indivisible entity, not a combination of two, body and soul."(Ed., Date, Christopher M. and Highfield, Ron. *A Consuming Passion: Essays on Hell and Immortality in Honor of Edward Fudge*, Pickwick Publications, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition, Locations 4500-4501, underline added)
7. **Many Lashes:** "...these sayings [lesser and greater beatings] are intended to underscore divine impartiality; God will take into account the opportunity and circumstances of people in determining judgment. This is not the same as teaching "grades of punishment." The reference in [Luke 12:47– 48](#) is part of the scenery of the parable and teaches, if anything, the principle that responsibility is commensurate with endowment and opportunity. Moreover, can one meaningfully speak of degrees of unending pain? Does not the endless duration of the pain render any relative measures of severity both arbitrary and meaningless?" (*Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism* (Kindle Locations 5583-5587). Cascade Books, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition.)
8. **Smoke ascends forever:** "The "smoke" that "rises for ever and ever" ([Rev 14: 11](#)) also deserves defining by prior biblical usage. This picture comes from the destruction of Sodom. The Lord "rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah" ([Gen 19: 24](#)) until not even vegetation survived...All is quiet. The sinners are all destroyed. The rising smoke testifies to their complete extinction....Isaiah says "its smoke will rise forever," telling us that Edom's destruction is not only certain (not quenched) and complete (smoke rising) but also irreversible. The desolation

will be unending...Conscious pain has ended there, but “its smoke will rise forever”— the extinction is perpetual." (Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism (Kindle Locations 1046-1061). Cascade Books, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition)

9. **Soul Sleep:** “soul sleep,” the view that death is a state of total unconsciousness, rather than survival in heaven, hell, or purgatory." (Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism (Kindle Locations 503-504). Cascade Books, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition.)
10. **Spirit does not exist upon death:** "The first man was created when the dust of the earth and the breath of God were brought together ([Gen 2: 7](#)), and just as surely as the man did not exist prior to creation, he does not exist when the spirit returns to God who gave it and the dust returns to the earth ([Eccl 12:7](#))." (Peoples, Glen, A., Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism (Kindle Locations 583-586). Cascade Books, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition.)

Sin against God deserves an infinite punishment, but suffering forever does not satisfy that infinite punishment

by [Matt Slick](#)

Some annihilationists argue against eternal conscious torment by saying that if God deserves the payment of an infinite punishment for sins committed against him, then how is it possible for someone who suffers eternally, is able to satisfy that infinite requirement.

There are two main problems with the argument. The first rests in the definition of "infinite" and the second deals with the validity of the statement.

In philosophy, there are discussions about actual and potential infinite. An actual infinite may not "actually" exist. But basically, it is the position that, for example, if you had a line between two locations how many points are on that line? Since a point has no dimensionality, logically there would be an infinite number of points. But if you take half of that same line, how many points are on half of that line. The answer would again be an infinite number. But how could half of an infinite be equal to the whole of the infinite? This apparent paradox is why some philosophers argue that actual infinities cannot exist.

A potential infinite occurs when there is, for example, the addition of one second of time in a continuous manner. As long as the process continues, there is a potential infinite. In other words, it is potentially infinite because it is continuing. However, if we were to pick a moment in time and measure the number of seconds that have passed, there would be a finite number. This is because it had a definite beginning and is increasing over time but we stopped at one point to measure it.

How do we apply some of these thoughts to the issue at hand? Well, we would not say that God has a quality of potential infinity. We would say that God, who has no beginning and end ([Psalm 90:2](#)) is, an actual infinite in his duration of time. But of course, applying "duration of time" to God who is the creator of time, is philosophically problematic. Nevertheless, since the goal of this paper is not to discuss those issues, we will continue with the other infinite, the potential infinite.

If a person suffers forever, then his suffering had a beginning and therefore it has a potential infinite quality to it. Since God is infinite in his nature in that he is without beginning and end, then the sin against him is an offense that would require an infinite amount of time. Then a potential infinite of punishment would meet the requirements of God's infinite judgment since it would be without end.

Finally, *saying* that suffering forever does not satisfy an infinite punishment does not mean it's true. Many times, people will make a statement that sounds like it could be true but it isn't. Or at the very least, is not being demonstrated to be true. So, the objection that this article is dealing with is an unfounded objection. It is an opinion and is not a good argument against eternal conscious torment.

God is holy and will not allow evil to exist forever. Therefore, the wicked will be annihilated.

by [Matt Slick](#)

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Occasionally, some annihilationists pose the argument that God is holy and will not allow evil to exist forever. Therefore, the wicked will be annihilated. But this argument amounts to nothing more than wishful thinking based on an opinion.

The holiness of God is his purity, his immutable perfection in which no sin, no impurity has ever existed nor can ever exist. By contrast, evil is that which is contrary to God and his will. But, God allows evil to exist in both the physical and spiritual worlds as is evident around us. So, we can clearly see that it is within God's will to allow evil to exist. But, when someone says God is holy and will not allow evil to exist forever all he is doing is offering an opinion. When people make an argument based on opinions, the conclusion cannot be trusted.

Therefore, the few conditionalists who raise this argument for annihilation mistakenly offer of their opinion as fact and misrepresent God in the process. **The argument is not valid.**

The New Testament interprets the Old Testament, not the other way around

by [Matt Slick](#)

10/11/2018

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By far, the conditionalists that I have read are intelligent people. I do not believe they are insincere. But I do think they are mistaken in their conclusion on annihilationism.

Nevertheless, when reading their material, I've noticed various mistakes in how they approach the word of God. One of them is to interpret the New Testament in light of the Old Testament. In other words, they turn to the Old Testament in order to interpret the New Testament. Now, this is a somewhat tricky business because we know that the Old Testament can shed light on the New Testament. However, we must understand that God's final revelation, the New Testament, is what sheds light on the meaning of the Old Testament. I'll get to more on that in a bit.

But for now, let me provide an example of what many conditionalists do to support your conditionalism. One of most commonly quoted verses from conditionalists in support of their soul sleep/nonexistence of the person after physical death is to quote [Ecclesiastes 12:7](#) which says, "then the dust will return to the earth as it was & the spirit will return to God who gave it."

"The first man was created when the dust of the earth and the breath of God were brought together ([Genesis 2: 7](#)), and just as surely as the man did not exist prior to creation, he does not exist when the spirit returns to God who gave it and the dust returns to the earth, ([Eccl 12:7](#))."¹

So, in the New Testament when we have verses that strongly suggest conscience existence after physical death and before our resurrection. Please consider the following.

1. [Matthew 17:2–3](#), "And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. 3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him."
2. [Luke 16:22–24](#), "Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. 23 'In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 'And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.'"
3. [2 Corinthians 5:8](#), "we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord."
4. [2 Corinthians 12:2–4](#), "I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven. 3 And I know how such a man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows— 4 was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak."

But if a conditionalist is working from the position that in the intermediate state (between a person's physical death and physical resurrection) that such a person must be in a state of soul sleep (unconsciousness) or nonexistence, then conditionalists must interpret these four verses consistently with their presuppositions. Therefore many of them turn to [Ecclesiastes 12:7](#) which says "then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it." They then use this verse to hold their position over New Testament revelation by interpreting the New Testament in light of the Old Testament. This is the wrong approach. (See the article, [Ecclesiastes 12:7, the soul returning to God](#))

The New Testament interprets of the Old Testament

The New Testament interprets of the Old Testament, not the other way around. But, of course, there is nothing wrong with looking at the Old Testament context of verses that the New Testament quotes in order to find out what the context originally was. Often times such contexts can illuminate a New Testament passage. Illumination is fine. However, it is always the New Testament that interprets the Old Testament, not the other way around. This is very important because many false doctrines are developed by submitting the New Testament to the Old Testament.

To show you that this principle is indeed biblical, let's look at some of the following scriptures.

Old Testament	New Testament
<p>Isaiah 40:1–5, "Comfort, O comfort My people," says your God. 2 Speak kindly to Jerusalem; And call out to her, that her warfare has ended, That her iniquity has been removed, That she has received of the LORD'S hand Double for all her sins. 3 <u>A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.</u> 4 Let every valley be lifted up, And every mountain and hill be made low; And let the rough ground become a plain, And the rugged terrain a broad valley; 5 Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, And all flesh will see it together; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."</p>	<p>Matthew 3:1–3, "Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 2 Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. 3 For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, <u>"THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!'</u> ""</p>
<p>Mal. 3:1, "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me.</p>	<p>Mark 1:2-4, "As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: <u>"BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF</u></p>

<p>And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the dmessenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts.</p> <p>Isaiah 40:3, "A voice is calling, “Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God."</p>	<p>YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY; 3 THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, ‘MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.’ ” 4 John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness apreaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."</p>
<p>Isaiah 29:13, "Then the Lord said, 'Because this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote.'"</p>	<p>Mark 7:6-7, "And He said to them, “Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 7 ‘BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.’</p>
<p>Zechariah 13:7, "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, And against the man, My Associate,” Declares the LORD of hosts. “Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered; And I will turn My hand against the little ones."</p>	<p>Mark 14:27–28, "And Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away, because it is written, ‘I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP SHALL BE SCATTERED.’ 28 “But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.”"</p>
<p>Psalms 69:24–26, "Pour out Your indignation on them, And may Your burning anger overtake them. 25 <u>May their camp be desolate; May none dwell in their tents.</u> 26 For they have persecuted him whom You Yourself have smitten, and they tell of the pain of those whom You have wounded."</p> <p>Psalms 109:6–9, "Appoint a wicked man over him, And let an accuser stand at his right hand. 7 When he is judged, let him come forth guilty, And let his prayer become sin. 8 Let his days be few; <u>Let another take his office.</u> 9 Let his children be fatherless And his wife a widow."</p>	<p>Acts 1:20, "For it is written in the book of Psalms, ‘<u>LET HIS HOMESTEAD BE MADE DESOLATE, AND LET NO ONE DWELL IN IT</u>’; and, ‘<u>LET ANOTHER MAN TAKE HIS OFFICE.</u>’"</p>

For more of such comparisons see [Isaiah 40:4](#) with [Luke 3:5](#), [Malachi 3:1](#) with [Luke 7:27](#), [Isaiah 56:7](#) and [Jeremiah 7:11](#) with [Luke 19:46](#); [Isaiah 54:13](#) and [Jeremiah 31:34](#) with [John 6:44-45](#), [Psalm 69:25](#) with [Acts 1:20](#); [Habakkuk 2:4](#) with [Romans 1:17](#), [Isaiah 29:14](#) with [1 Cor. 1:18-19](#), [Habakkuk 2:4](#) with [Galatians 3:11](#), etc.

Conclusion

Though it is acceptable to look at the Old Testament quotes found in the New Testament and look at their context in both places in order to better understand Scripture, we must be careful not to submit the New Testament revelation to the Old Testament declaration. Whenever the New Testament quotes the Old Testament, the New Testament must be preeminent. Unfortunately, too many annihilationists reverse this process and submit New Testament revelation to the Old Testament. They do this in order to support their preconceptions. Generally speaking, this is a bad way to interpret Scripture and often leads to error as is the case with annihilationism.

Annihilationism and Matthew 10:15 and degrees of punishment

by [Matt Slick](#)

10/11/2018

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Matt. 10:15, “Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.”

Before I tackle this verse as it relates to annihilationism, let me say that not all annihilationists believe the exact same things. Some affirm that upon death the wicked face their immediate nonexistence. Some affirm that upon death the person enters a state of soul sleep and is later awakened to face judgment. Others say that upon being resurrected and facing God, there is an immediate cessation of existence upon God's judgment, good while yet others affirm that the wicked will face a degree of punishment before being annihilated. It is to this last position that I'm addressing the article; namely, that the wicked will face a degree of punishment before being annihilated.

Jesus said that it would be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the Day of Judgment than for those cities who reject the disciples' gospel message. If the annihilationist assumes the position that there will be degrees of punishment, then we would have differences in degrees of what is "**more tolerable**" for Sodom and Gomorrah over those other cities. This implies a degree of punishment.

Now, we know that there are different degrees of punishment spoken about in Scripture.

- **Luke 12:47-48, “And that slave who knew his master’s will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, shall receive many lashes, 48 but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few.**
- **John 19:11, “Jesus answered [Pilate], ‘You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me up to you has the greater sin.’ ”**
- **Heb. 10:29, “How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?”**

Okay, so there are degrees of punishment and according to [Matthew 10:15](#) the implication is that on the Day of Judgment there are degrees of punishment. But how can this be if someone is simply annihilated? There would be no degrees of punishment since all of them would be equal in punishment if every wicked person is simply annihilated. That would make no sense. So since there certainly is the implication of degrees of punishment in [Matt. 10:15](#), we must address the idea that the wicked will face degrees of punishment before their annihilated. But there's a problem with this position..

If they face a degree of punishment, then it must mean that they are doing so because of their sins. This further means that the punishment is in compliance with the Law of God. But if they face different degrees of punishment before they are annihilated, then why aren't they saved afterward since they have completed the requirement of the Law in a punishment?

Conclusion

There are problems with the annihilationist position that the wicked are resurrected in order to face degrees of punishment before God annihilates them. Why would God bring the wicked through different levels of punishment and once that requisite amount of punishment is accomplished, they are then punished again via annihilation? **This is double jeopardy.** Think about it. In this particular position, the wicked are punished according to their sins. They suffer for a while until they have completed the punishment due to the Law. But once the Law has been satisfied by them completing their punishment requirement, why then would they be annihilated? Why aren't they saved since they have satisfied the requirements of the Law? This annihilationist position makes no sense and even implies that God is unrighteous. It should be abandoned.

Annihilationism and Luke 12:47-48 and degrees of punishment

by [Matt Slick](#)

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Luke 12:47-48, “And that slave who knew his master’s will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.”

These verses are part of a short discourse Jesus gave on the faithful steward whom the master put in charge of other servants ([Luke 12:42-48](#)). In these verses Jesus says, "**but if that slave says in his heart, 'my master will be a long time in coming,' and begins to beat the slaves, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk...**" So, Jesus spoke of an evil slave and went on to say in verse 46 that when the master returned at an hour that the servant did not know, that the master will come and "**cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.**" (This is paralleled in [Matt. 24:45-51](#)) It is in this context we find verse 48 where Jesus speaks of different degrees of punishment. And, it is in this context that we compare this to annihilationism

To be clear, not all annihilationists are the same. Some believe in immediate nonexistence upon a person's physical death while others believe in soul sleep and yet others affirm the teaching that a wicked person is resurrected, is punished for a while according to his sins, and then is annihilated. This latter view is what I am addressing here in this article.

It cannot be that the wicked are resurrected to face varying degrees of punishment and then they are annihilated. This is because varying degrees of punishment must be according to the Law of God. After all, sin is breaking the law of God ([1 John 3:4](#)). Therefore, the punishment must be commensurate with those laws broken. But if the wicked are punished according to the Law before they are annihilated, then why are they annihilated at all if they've complied with the requirements of the Law after their punishment? In this case, annihilation should not be an option because they satisfy the requirements of the law by their suffering. Why then are they not saved? This is a huge problem for this particular view held by annihilationists and should be abandoned.

Conclusion

Even though not all annihilationists are the same, and some hold differing views about the nature and extent of the final judgment as it relates to conditionalism and the annihilation of a person, this view of experiencing a measure of punishment before being annihilated seems to be self-refuting. If the wicked suffer according to the Law and once the suffering is completed, then the requirement of the Law has been satisfied. Logically, they should be saved because they've accomplished requirement of the Law. But, to have God then annihilate them would mean they suffer two punishments, not one. This would risk accusing God of immorality by having him punish a person twice for the same sins committed. It makes no sense and cannot be true.

Annihilationism and Luke 16, the rich man and Lazarus

by [Matt Slick](#)

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[Luke 16:19-31](#) (the full text is at the end of this article) is often used to support the idea of conscious torment after death. It is the account of Lazarus and the Rich Man. In it, both died, and both were alive after their deaths. The rich man was in torment in flame and Lazarus, the poor man, was comforted. **Jesus ' message is problematic to most annihilationists because the vast majority of them hold to the doctrine of soul sleep.**

- soul sleep,” the view that death is a state of total unconsciousness, rather than survival in heaven, hell, or purgatory.” ¹
- “When death occurs, then it is the soul that is deprived of life. Death cannot strike the body or any other part of the soul without striking the entirety of the soul.”²

Since most conditionalists affirm soul sleep and since they all deny eternal conscious torment, then this section of Scripture cannot be interpreted to support either one. They must explain it in such a way as to agree with their assumptions.

- "Imperative to understanding the function of this parable is to recognize the close parallels to folktales of the afterlife that were widely popular in Jesus' time. In this parable of Dives and Lazarus, "two major narrative motives can be paralleled to other ancient literature: (1) reversal of fortunes experienced by a rich man and a poor man after death; (2) a dead person's return from the dead with a message from the living."³
- "In examining the Lukan context to Jesus' parable and its cultural and sociological implications, the purpose of the parable clearly serves as a harsh polemic against the Pharisees for their hypocritical attitudes of their wealth and blatant ignorance of the poor in their midst. Furthermore, when considered against the background of extra-biblical parallels, it is revealed that the other purpose of the parable is not to provide the reader an eschatological revelation of Hades, but rather, to point the reader to the sufficiency of the Scriptures to show how to love the poor and needy in our midst."⁴

So, what we gather from the quotes is that story, which they insist is a parable, is not about judgment and punishment. Instead, it is "to show how to love the poor and needy in our midst."

Well, okay then....

The article also says,

- "The parable essentially denies "itself of any claim to offer an apocalyptic glimpse" into details of the afterlife and its geography. Furthermore, the parable points to the "finality of death, and

the futility of thinking that someone coming back from the dead could lead to the repentance of the living."⁵

- "The point of the parable is focused on the Pharisees, who have "disregarded the will of God so clearly expressed in the Scriptures [of Moses and the prophets], by neglecting the poor" in their midst."⁶

Really?

While it is certainly true that we can glean from Christ's words the necessity of dealing properly with the poor, to say that it denies any details in the afterlife is, in my opinion, ludicrous. After all, Jesus speaks of people in the afterlife!

The conditionalist would have to say that the account of the conscious bliss and conscious torment of Lazarus and the rich man in the afterlife is not true. It is false. But if conscious torment in a conscious afterlife is false, then it would be wrong for Jesus to imply that it real. Why would Jesus use a lie (consciousness after death along with punishment) to illustrate a truth about treating people properly if there is no consciousness after death? It makes no sense.

Now, in that same article the author said other things to support his position.

- "During the intertestamental period, the doctrine of the immortal soul "altered the concept of Hades" due to "Persian and Hellenistic influence."
- "Imperative to understanding the function of this parable is to recognize the close parallels to folktales of the afterlife that were widely popular in Jesus' time."
- "One story from Egyptian culture is about an "Egyptian magician, Si-Osiris, [who] returns from Amente, the land of the dead, to defeat an Ethiopian magician."
- "There is also an early Jewish version of this story found in the Palestinian Talmud about a "rich tax collector named Bar Ma'yan and a poor Torah scholar in Ashkelon."

There's a fundamental problem with his approach. You see, accusations don't make something true. The exact same approach is used by atheists when they say that there are pagan cultures that have the idea of the coming Messiah who rises from the dead. So? What of it? Does that mean Jesus didn't rise from the dead? Of course not. Why does the author narrow his criticism & try & maintain a guilt-by-association-attack upon afterlife consciousness by associating the doctrine with paganism? Why doesn't he associate other "biblical doctrines" with paganism as well? Why? Because he is being selective in order to support his preconception.

Let me help him out.

Other "pagan" Christian similarities

In my article [Is the immortal soul is a Greek concept adopted by the early church?](#) I tackle this basic concept of guilt by association and list other so-called similarities between false religions and biblical revelation.

- **Annihilation of the soul:** "Certain Jews portrayed death as the end of personal existence. For example, Jesus ben Sirach taught that there are no joys to seek in Sheol ([Sirach 14:16–17](#)).

Instead, God's people should pursue immortality through children ([Sirach 30:4–5](#)) and a lasting reputation ([Sirach 41:11–13](#))."⁷

- **Jonah**, "A more likely metaphorical use is that of a journey—in the case of Jonah, a journey from the depths (Sheol). This interpretation is collaborated by the connection of this text to the Sumerian myth of Inanna's journey to the underworld (Landes, "Three Days," 449)."⁸
- **Pagan King lost seven sons as did Job**: "Canaanite literature from Ugarit describes the trials of King Keret who, like Job, lost seven sons."⁹
- **Son of Man coming with the clouds**: The discovery of Ugaritic texts further suggest a link between apocalyptic literature and ancient Near Eastern mythology. These Ugaritic texts provide Canaanite parallels to some of the imagery used in Dan 7. In particular, the biblical descriptions of "one like a Son of Man" coming "with the clouds of heaven" (e.g., [Dan 7:13](#)) parallel epithets of Baal as one who rides on the clouds; additionally, Yahweh's title "Ancient of Days" (e.g., [Dan 7:9, 13](#)) is similar to descriptions of El as the "Father of Years" (Collins, Apocalyptic Imagination, 101–02)."¹⁰

Here are more examples in the article linked above. But these four should be sufficient to show that the eisegetical sword cuts both ways. If the annihilationists want to say that consciousness after death is pagan in origin, then let them prove it. Demonstrate the connection not just say it is so. And if they were to attempt to do such a thing, why can't the critics of the Bible say that similar Old Testament and New Testament doctrines found in pagan cultures are also borrowed? Do you see the problem with the author's approach? I do not believe he has done sufficient homework in this regard.

The Lucan Context of Luke 16:19-31 says...

Luke is writing to Theophilus ([Luke 1:3](#)) and provides a narrative of the events of the life of Christ. When we get to the section of Scripture under examination, its context is enlightening. Where Mr. Loewen (the conditionalist author of the article quoted above) asserts that the passage dealing with Lazarus and the rich man is "not to provide the reader an eschatological revelation of Hades."¹¹ It seems that Luke disagrees. Luke arranges the parables of Luke 15 and 16 in a specific way. He mentions where Jesus speaks of the salvation of unbelievers in the parables of the Lost Sheep ([Luke 15:1-7](#)) and Lost Coin ([Luke 15:8-10](#)). He then gives us the parable of the [Prodigal Son](#) ([Luke 15:11-32](#)) which is about being lost, being found, forgiveness, and the love of God. Most probably, the older Son represents the Jews ([Luke 15:31](#)) which is relevant to Jesus' addressing the Pharisees in ([Luke 16:14-18](#)). The [Unrighteous Steward](#) ([Luke 16:1-13](#)) is an appeal to understand the true nature of God (the Steward trusted in the goodness of the Landowner which is why he was praised). Jesus definitely connects this parable to the afterlife since he mentions eternal dwellings ([Luke 16:9](#)). Then Jesus mentions the unrighteousness of the Pharisees which will affect their future dwellings ([Luke 16:14-18](#)). Then, Jesus speaks of the Rich Man and Lazarus along with the afterlife-consequences of their time on earth. Isn't this clear that the context of Luke's writings is not referencing pagan ideas, but the thematically consistent words of Christ instead?

Here is a synopsis.

1. **Lost Sheep ([Luke 15:1-7](#))** - Salvation of people
1. Rejoicing over finding what is lost.

2. Rejoicing over sinners who repent.
2. **Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10)** - Salvation of people
 1. Rejoicing over finding what is lost.
 2. Rejoicing over sinners who repent.
3. **Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)** - Reconciliation, forgiveness (salvation), and the love of God
 1. The older son represents the Jews
4. **Unrighteous Steward (Luke 16:1-13)** - Salvation and eternal dwellings, eschatological
 1. The unrighteous are smarter than the Jews in that they are concerned with their future.
 2. The Jews showed lack of wisdom about their future.
 3. This is eschatological since Jesus mentions eternal dwellings in v. 9,
 4. This is eschatological.
5. **Unrighteousness of the Pharisees (Luke 16:14-18)** - Salvation lost, eschatological
 1. The Jews were lovers of money. They showed lack of wisdom about their future.
 2. The passage is about salvation since Jesus mentions the gospel of the kingdom of God being preached in v. 16
 3. This is eschatological.
6. **The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)** - Salvation, eschatological
 1. Parable or not, Jesus mentions the afterlife
 2. If conscious torment is not true, then why was Jesus speaking of it?

Luke has arranged the parables for a reason. He is speaking of salvation, its importance, and the necessity of avoiding the horrifying afterlife consequences. Furthermore, there are parallels between the unrighteous steward and the rich man and Lazarus.

	Unrighteous Steward Luke 16:1-13	Rich Man and Lazarus Luke 16:19-31
Rich Man	v. 1 "There was a rich man"	v. 19 "There was a rich man"
Servant/Poor man	v. 1	v. 20
Money	v. 2	v. 19

Give an Accounting	v. 2	v. 21, 25
Future Situation	vv. 3, 9 (Make a living, eternal dwellings)	vv. 23-28 (Hades, Afterlife)
Salvation	v. 9 (eternal dwellings)	v. 23 (in Abraham's bosom)
Summary	Rich man is a good man. The servant is not a good man, v. 1 Accounting of this life in the next one Afterlife: Jesus speaks of the final state and warns people about where they might end up.	Rich man is a bad man Poor man is a good man Accounting of this life in the next one Afterlife: Jesus speaks of the final state and warns people about where they might end up.

Conclusion

In the Rich Man and Lazarus account, Jesus mentions explicitly the afterlife (even if the conditionalists deny it). If Jesus was only alluding to pagan ideas of the afterlife as part of an overall storyline, and he used conscious torment to illustrate his point, then why didn't he avoid the pagan teaching lest he misleads people into thinking there is an afterlife, as so many Christians throughout history have maintained?

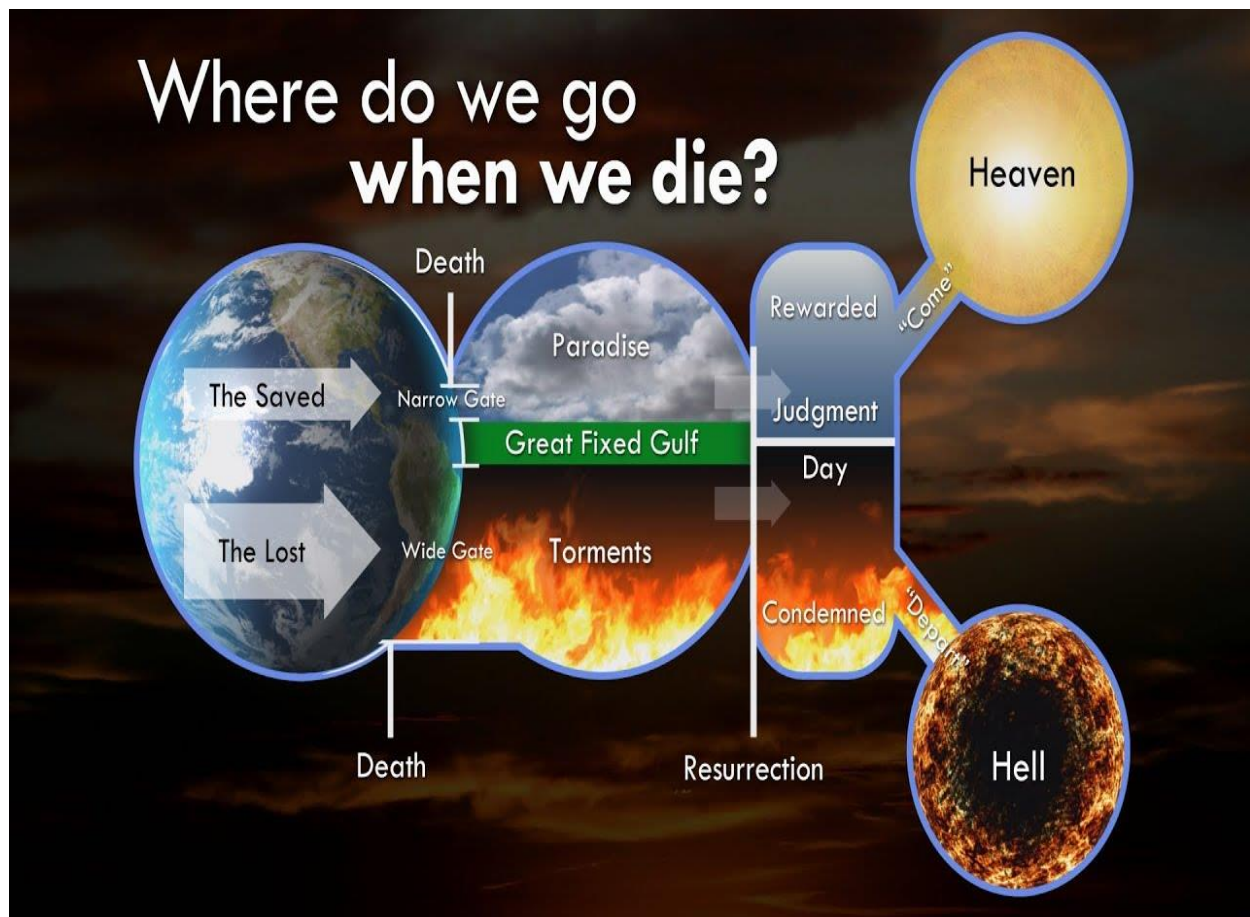
In addition, the Lucan context clearly demonstrates eschatological importance as The Unrighteous Steward, and the Rich Man and Lazarus accounts are parallel. Both deal with the afterlife. The unrighteous steward deals with eternal dwellings ([Luke 16:9](#)) and the account of the Rich Man and Lazarus deals with Hades and the afterlife ([Luke 16:23-28](#)). The conditionalist misfocused interpretation that says The Rich Man and Lazarus is dealing with the futility of believing that someone returning from the dead will bring people to repentance, and the Pharisees neglect of the poor, is to miss the point of Christ's teaching. What we do find in the text that is taught by Jesus is 1) conscious existence of both the good and the bad after death, 2) conscious experience of bliss in the torment of the good and bad after death, and 3) Jesus warning to the unbelievers about their horrible condition after death. The conditionalists have missed the point because they have submitted this section of Scripture to their presuppositions and reinterpreted to fit them. **Error, begets error.**

Text of Luke 16:19-31

19. "Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day.
20. And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores,
21. and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores.
22. Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried.
23. In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom.
24. And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.'
25. But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony.
26. 'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.'
27. And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house—
28. for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'
29. But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'
30. But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!'
31. But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.' ""

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- 1.Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism (Kindle Locations 503-504). Cascade Books, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition, underline added.
 - 2.Fudge, Edward William. The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment, Third Edition (p. 27). Cascade Books, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition, underline added.
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 - 4. *ibid.*, underline added
 - 5. *ibid.*, underline added
 - 6. *ibid.*, underline added
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C.A.R.M. @ IMMORTALITY ISSUES: **Intermediate State & Soul Sleep, and** **Degrees of Reward & Punishment**



Is there an intermediate state and what does it mean for conditionalism?

by [Matt Slick](#)

10/11/2018

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Yes, there is an intermediate state where people are conscious after they die and before the resurrected. But first, let me explain one of the conditionalist views and then counter it with God's word.

Not all conditionalists are the same. Some affirm a conscious intermediate state of the person between physical death and physical resurrection. But, there are others who assert that when the physical body dies, the soul also dies and either is unconscious or nonexistent. In this latter position, monism is often proposed.

- "The Scriptures, both Old and New Testament, represent individual personality as a complex and totally mortal monism, a unity that can be viewed from different perspectives, but that cannot be broken into separately existing parts."¹
- "man is one indivisible entity, not a combination of two, body and soul."²

Because of this monistic view, the conditionalist *must* hold to a form of soul sleep for the person.

- "soul sleep," the view that death is a state of total unconsciousness, rather than survival in heaven, hell, or purgatory."³
- "soul sleep (Gr. psychopannychia) The view that there is a period between one's death and the final resurrection in which one's self (soul) is in an unconscious state."⁴
- "When death occurs, then it is the soul that is deprived of life. Death cannot strike the body or any other part of the soul without striking the entirety of the soul."⁵

So, according to the concept of soul sleep, there can be no intermediate state where a person is conscious between death and resurrection.

Therefore, if we can find a biblical account of someone being conscious in the intermediate state where a person exists between death and resurrection, then this would prove the conditionalist position of monism and soul sleep to be false, and it would greatly weaken their doctrine of annihilation.

Jesus' intermediate state was conscious, not soul sleep

The greatest example of the conscious existence of a person in the intermediate state between death and resurrection is the person of Jesus. He died on the cross, and he rose from the dead three days later. What happened to him during that time? The answer is simple. He continued as a conscious human being. Let me explain.

First, Jesus has two distinct natures: God and man. We call this the [hypostatic union](#). This union can never be dissolved. If any person were to say that the human and divine natures of Christ can be "un-unified," then he would be denying the incarnation. This would be heresy.

Second, Jesus was a single person who claimed attributes of both humanity and divinity [see [communicatio idiomatum](#)]. Jesus walked, talked, slept, etc. No one doubts his human attributes. Jesus, who identified himself as a single person with the word "I", and "me," said such things as "[I am thirsty](#)," ([John 19:28](#)) and "[I am to keep the Passover](#)," ([Matt. 26:18](#)). But, he also claimed divine attributes as well when he used "I" and "me" in relation to them. Please consider the following verses.

- [Matt. 28:19-20](#), "[Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.](#)"
- [John 8:58](#), "Jesus said to them, [Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.](#)"
- [John 14:23](#), "Jesus answered and said to him, [If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.](#)"
- [John 17:5](#), "[Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.](#)"

We can see that the person of Jesus said that he would be with the disciples always ([Matt. 28:20](#)), that he had descended from heaven ([John 3:13](#)), that he claimed the divine name of God for himself ([John 8:58](#); [Exodus 3:14-15](#)), that he said he would indwell believers ([John 14:23](#)), and that he had glory with God the Father before the world was formed ([John 17:5](#)). This is very significant because the single person who said "I" and "me," claimed attributes of both humanity and divinity. Therefore, the "I" and the "me" would signify the single person of Christ, who claim the attributes both human and divine natures.

Since the divine nature of Christ could not enter soul sleep state of unconscious existence, and since the divine nature is unified with the human nature ([hypostatic union](#)) as the one person, it cannot be that the divine nature continued in conscious existence apart from the same conscious existence of the human nature of Christ. That would be heresy.

This refutes the conditionalist view that the human nature ceases, or enter soul sleep, or even stops existing between death and resurrection.

The conditionalists contradict scripture

The preceding argument is very important. I have not yet encountered an explanation for this and all of the material I read from conditionalists. I consider this to be a huge oversight on their part. But, what I have found are such things as the following...

- "The first man was created when the dust of the earth and the breath of God were brought together ([Gen 2:7](#)), and just as surely as the man did not exist prior to creation, he does not exist when the spirit returns to God who gave it and the dust returns to the earth ([Eccl 12: 7](#))."⁶

I'm not saying this one quote represents all conditionalists, but the quote is a problem for the conditionalist considering the person and work of Christ. If the conditionalists say that the human spirit of Christ ceased to exist upon his death (as the above quote would necessitate), then they would be denying the [hypostatic union](#) & would be teaching a form of [Nestorianism](#) which is a damnable heresy. This error states that Jesus was two persons in the single body. This would be two persons, not one person. In reality, the one person of Christ is indivisible. Therefore, the human spirit of Christ could not have returned to God the Father without violating that union.

Furthermore, if the conditionalists were to say that the human spirit of Christ went into a state of soul sleep, then there could be no activity of the human nature during the intermediate state of Christ. This would mean that when he acted as an individual, he was not acting as the God man, but only in a divine sense. This also denies the [hypostatic union](#) and is heresy.

Is Jesus just an exception?

If the conditionalists say that Jesus is an exception, then they are admitting the difficulty and dismissing Christ as that exception. Furthermore, Jesus is the perfect example of what it means to be human. If he is not our example both in conduct & human essence, then the conditionalists would have to say that the person of Christ as a human was different in his humanity than we are. But, this can't be.

Now, of course, Jesus was sinless, and we are not sinless. In that, there's an obvious difference. But if he is not just as human as we are, then he cannot offer an atoning sacrifice on our behalf ([Hebrews 2:17](#)). Therefore, his humanity and our humanity are the same; otherwise, we have no atoning sacrifice. Our humanity is touched by sin. But his humanity is not touched by sin.

Conclusion

Because Jesus has two distinct natures, the divine, and human, and because he shares the attributes of both natures as that single person, the natures cannot be separated from the identity of the personhood of Christ. This would mean that between Jesus death and resurrection he had to continue and conscious existence as a human because to deny this would be to divide the person of Christ, negate the continuation and participation of the human nature in that single person during intermediate state. That would be heretical. Therefore, the conditionalist view of soul sleep is shown to be false.

• [1. *Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism*, Kindle Locations 2954-2956\). Cascade Books, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. underline added](#)

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Soul sleep, Jesus' human nature, and conditionalism

by [Matt Slick](#)

10/11/2018

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Within conditionalist (annihilationist) circles, soul sleep (also called psychopannychism) is a very common doctrine. However, an exact definition of what soul sleep is, has been very difficult to obtain. There are variations of belief held by different adherents. Nevertheless, generally speaking, soul sleep is the position that when a person dies physically, his soul/spirit continues to exist in an unconscious state, where he is unaware, and not active until he is resurrected and judged. Following is the best definition I could find from a conditionalist source.

“soul sleep,” the view that death is a state of total unconsciousness, rather than survival in heaven, hell, or purgatory." ¹

The reason so many conditionalists hold to soul sleep is because they teach that a person is, essentially, a material being. They view the person as a combination of both body and spirit and that the human spirit is directly connected to the physical body so that when the body dies, the soul dies and enters soul sleep. They associate the life of the spirit with the life of the body. So, if the soul continues without the physical body, then that could be used to support the afterlife torment of the wicked in the intermediate state (between death and resurrection). This, in turn, could further be used to support Eternal Conscious Torment (ECT). So, they adopt soul sleep as a kind of undefined existence without self-awareness, without consciousness, without action yet there is existence.

Jesus refutes soul sleep

There are two very important Christian doctrines concerning the person of Jesus. The [hypostatic union](#) and the [communicatio idiomatum](#). The hypostatic union states that in the one person of Jesus are two distinct natures, the divine, and the human. The communicatio idiomatum states that the attributes of those two natures (the divine and human) are ascribed to the single person. Therefore, Jesus, the single person, claimed the attributes of both humanity and divinity. He was obviously a man, but as a man, as a person, he also claimed the attributes of divinity.

"The communicatio idiomatum (Latin for "communication of properties") is the teaching that the attributes of both the divine and human natures are ascribed to the one person of Jesus. This means that the person of Jesus could rightfully claim for Himself the attributes of both the divine and the human natures. Therefore, He could say He had glory with the Father before the world was made ([John 17:5](#)). He could claim that He descended from heaven ([John 3:13](#)); and He could also claim omnipresence ([Matt. 28:20](#)) even though Jesus, the man, began His existence on earth when He was conceived in Mary's womb."²

So, now that we see that the single person of Jesus has two distinct natures, we must also understand that they cannot be separated, otherwise the very nature of Christ's personhood is threatened, and this would violate the true doctrine of the incarnation. Remember, hypostatic union says that in the one person of Jesus Christ are two distinct natures and the communicatio idiomatum says that the attributes of both natures are ascribed the single person.

What does soul sleep mean in regard to Jesus?

Did his human nature go to sleep and therefore lack consciousness activity during the time between his death and resurrection? To be consistent, conditionalists would have to say yes since they say that humans enter soul sleep upon physical death. Jesus is human. But, their position is problematic.

¹ [Peter 3:18–19](#), "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; ¹⁹ in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison,"

According to Scripture, when Jesus was put to death, he "went and made proclamation of the spirits now in prison." This means that Jesus was conscious between his death and resurrection. But if the conditionalist who holds to soul sleep is consistent, he must maintain that the human nature of Christ went into a state of unconscious soul sleep where no activity of the human nature occurred. But if that is the case, how could Jesus have made proclamation to the spirits in prison as the person of Christ? To make a proclamation is to perform an action which is an attribute of consciousness. But, Jesus is one person with two natures. Thus, the conditionalist position of soul sleep would mean that Jesus' proclamation to the spirits was done only with the divine nature and that the human nature was inactive. But that would be heresy.

Let me reiterate. If the human nature of Jesus was not then conscious, how was his personhood (of both divine and human natures), which involves the activity of both natures, continued in the interim between his death and resurrection? It could not be. It is a violation of the incarnation to

say the human nature of Christ was not acting in union with the divine nature in the ONE person of Jesus. Therefore, it cannot be true that Jesus' human nature experienced soul sleep.

Jesus is the perfect man the example what we are to be as people. Jesus' human nature did not experience soul-sleep after Jesus' physical death. Therefore, people do not experience soul sleep after their physical death.

If the conditionalists say that Jesus is an exception because he is God in flesh, then they are admitting the problem exists and are dismissing it by saying it's an exception. It would go against their soul sleep position. Either way the conditionalist has a problem with the position of soul sleep.

Conclusion

The conditionalist view of soul sleep fails when it comes to the person and work of Jesus. It cannot be true. Jesus is the one person with two natures who will forever be in that state ([Heb. 6:20](#); [7:25](#)). Therefore, it cannot be that there is a time in which one of his natures is not active. For soul sleep to be true in the conditionalist sense, the human nature of Christ had to go into a state of consciousness inactivity. But, this violates the doctrine of the incarnation since it implies that in the intermediate state, Jesus only acted in with divine attributes, and not with both human and divine natures as the incarnation doctrine necessitates.

Soul sleep fails. It is not true.



IS THERE SALVATION AFTER DEATH? THE ANSWER TO POSTMORTEM EVANGELISM (Part Three in a three-part series on the place of Jesus in salvation)

by Ronald H. Nash

This article first appeared in the *Christian Research Journal*, volume 27, number 4 (2004).

SYNOPSIS

The view that belief in Jesus is necessary for salvation is known as *exclusivism*. It should be noted, however, that some exclusivists contend that those who do not believe the gospel during their earthly lives will be given an opportunity to believe the gospel after they die and so be saved. This view is known as *postmortem evangelism* (PME).

One well-known advocate of PME, Gabriel Fackre, argues that Scripture teaches that each human's destiny is *not* fixed at death. The context of several key Bible passages, however, does not support his interpretation. In fact, these passages clearly say that everyone will die and be judged (Heb. 9:27) and that each person's eternal destiny, either reward or condemnation, will be based on what was done in this life (Matt. 7:21–23; 13:36–43; John 5:28–29). Jesus, moreover, taught that each human's destiny is fixed at death; for example, in His story of Lazarus, who was eternally in paradise, and the rich man, who was eternally in torment (Luke 16:19–31). Finally, the description of the great white throne judgment in Revelation 20:11–15 unquestionably indicates that our eternal destiny is based on our earthly life. In these and other passages, physical death marks the boundary of human opportunity to be saved. Belief in PME, meanwhile, has serious negative implications for Christian evangelism and missions. The weakness of PME arguments and the total silence of Scripture regarding opportunities to hear the gospel after death, therefore, should cause Christians to reject this view.

In parts one and two of this series, I explained and critiqued two false theories about Jesus' role in human salvation. In part one, I dealt with a theory called *pluralism*, which explicitly denies that Jesus is the only Savior. In part two, I warned about a theory known as *inclusivism*, which teaches that Jesus is the only Savior, but denies that knowledge of, or belief in, Jesus is necessary for salvation. In this concluding installment, I will examine the belief that humans can be saved after death, sometimes known as the doctrine of postmortem evangelism (PME). According to this view, those who have not had a chance to hear the gospel in this life (before physical death) will be presented with the gospel *after* death. Some proponents of PME appear to believe that even those humans who do hear the gospel before their death, but do not accept it, will have another chance after death. (The question of salvation in the case of those who cannot understand the gospel, such as children who die in infancy or mentally challenged adults, was covered in part two of this series and in my book *When a Baby Dies* [Zondervan, 1999].)

According to theologian John Sanders, a proponent of inclusivism, the theory of PME is asserted by such nonevangelical thinkers as Joseph Leckie and Yale University professor George Lindbeck. Sanders finds that even some thinkers who represent more evangelical positions at times, such as Donald Bloesch, John Lawson, and Gabriel Fackre, also defend this view.¹

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Generally speaking, those who teach postmortem salvation are not inclusivists. They are actually exclusivists who believe that a conscious act of faith in Jesus Christ really is necessary for salvation. They reason that if God is going to save people who have not heard the gospel in this life and if explicit faith in Jesus Christ is necessary for salvation, then only one conclusion is possible: the unevangelized *must* have an opportunity to hear the gospel after death.

The reason that the doctrine of PME is inconsistent with inclusivism should be apparent. According to PME, explicit faith in Jesus Christ is necessary for salvation, but according to inclusivism, it is not.

According to PME, general revelation cannot bring people to salvation, but according to inclusivism, it can.

A well-known theologian, Clark Pinnock, however, appears to be a proponent both of salvation after death and of inclusivism even though the two theories seem to be logically contradictory.² It is also worth noting that Pinnock thinks the fate of Christian believers *may* be fixed at death. This view leaves open the possibility that their salvation *may not* be. This leaves Pinnock with a theology in which those who are believers in this life might end up being lost after death!

Many defenders of PME deny that they are teaching a doctrine of a “second chance” because, they argue, the people who hear the gospel after death are those who never had a *first* chance. This view, therefore, must be distinguished from a form of universalism wherein all humans, including those who have rejected the gospel in this life, are said to have a second chance after death. Most of the proponents of this form of universalism believe God will grant the unrepentant a third chance, a fourth chance, and so on, until finally God’s love triumphs over all stubborn resistance to the gospel.

Some thinkers, like Pinnock, believe there is uncertainty about what constitutes a genuine and fair opportunity to accept the gospel. Maybe the person who rejected the gospel did not understand it because the Christian evangelist did not present it clearly or was having a bad day. Maybe the person who rejected the gospel was distracted. According to this modified view of the second chance doctrine, an unclear or misunderstood presentation of the gospel before death does not constitute a genuine first chance; therefore, any presentation of the gospel after death cannot be considered a second chance.

GABRIEL FACKRE’S DEFENSE OF POSTMORTEM SALVATION

One well-known advocate of the belief that salvation is possible after death is Gabriel Fackre of Andover Newton Theological Seminary. Fackre has published a concise statement of his theory as a chapter in a book titled *What About Those Who Have Never Heard?*³ Fackre begins by making two seemingly positive moves: First, he rejects inclusivism. Citing Romans 10:9–10, Fackre declares, “The evidence from Scripture that hearing, believing and confessing the reconciling work of God in Jesus Christ is integral to personal salvation is overwhelming.”⁴ This is an important first step. Second, Fackre talks extensively about the importance of interpreting the Bible correctly. The principles of biblical interpretation he actually uses in his chapter, however, do not lead him to a biblically grounded position on the destiny of the unevangelized.

He begins his interpretation of Scripture with a claim that seems to come out of nowhere. The doctrine of “divine perseverance,” Fackre’s preferred term for PME, “will not deny the saving Word to any, and will contest all the makers of boundaries, including the final boundary, ‘the last enemy, death.’”⁵ Fackre is certainly correct in warning against any human attempt to limit God by placing him within our human boundaries. The specific “human boundary” Fackre has in mind is physical death. It is we humans, Fackre insists, who have said that God’s perseverance in dealing with unbelievers must end at their physical death.

Suppose we concede that God may, if He chooses, continue to pursue unbelievers after their death. That is hardly the issue, I think; rather, the issue is whether that is what God teaches us in His Word. If postmortem salvation is not endorsed in Scripture, we should not be tempted to treat human death as an artificial, human-made boundary that limits God’s power. The reader must not be foolish here and treat Fackre’s assumption as though it were a well-established conclusion; ironically, as we will discover, the human-made boundary about which we should be concerned turns out to be Fackre’s doctrine of salvation after death.

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FACKRE’S USE OF SCRIPTURE

Fackre points to several biblical texts to support his view that unevangelized persons are fit candidates for divine salvation after death; however, he says nothing about the biblical texts that historically have been understood to teach that physical death is indeed the end of any human opportunity for salvation.

Despite Fackre's exhortation to interpret Scripture reverently, carefully, and contextually, he offers some highly questionable readings of God's Word. I have space to examine only four such texts.

First Corinthians 15:19

Fackre paraphrases 1 Corinthians 15:19 as follows: "If in this life alone human beings have hope, then we are miserable indeed."⁶ According to Fackre, the apostle Paul believed all human beings have hope for salvation beyond their earthly lives. Fackre's paraphrase, however, has done great violence to the text, which actually says, "If only for this life *we* have hope in Christ, *we* are to be pitied more than all men" (emphasis added).⁷ The word *we* as well as the context make it clear that Paul's consolation was for persecuted Christian believers whom he encouraged to look at their glorified life beyond their earthly life. The hope that Paul had in view was not postmortem salvation but the resurrection (vv. 17–18) that awaits believers, and the unending glory that will follow. The text simply is not relevant to the issue of postmortem salvation.

John 10:16

In John 10:16, Jesus states, "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd." Fackre argues that the "other sheep" are unevangelized people who become Christians after death. I urge the reader to check as many evangelical commentaries as he or she likes; none of them follow this interpretation. The "other sheep" are understood to be Gentile Christians who were to be united with Jewish Christians into one flock, the church of Jesus Christ. Once again, the text Fackre uses has no relevance to salvation after death.

John 5:25–29

Fackre's most creative piece of biblical exegesis involves John 5:25: "I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live."

Fackre argues that this verse refers to the unevangelized who will hear the gospel for the first time after they die, believe it, and thus become beneficiaries of eternal life. The context of this passage, however, does not support his interpretation.

A little theological background will be helpful. In Ephesians 2:1–4, Paul described Christians as people who were spiritually dead prior to their conversion, but because of God's great love for them, God "made [them] alive with Christ even when [they] were dead in transgressions." Taking our cue from this text, we must realize that two kinds of death, two kinds of life, and two kinds of resurrection are in the New Testament. The two kinds of death are physical death (the death of the physical body) and spiritual death (separation from God in this life). Paul's concern in Ephesians 2 was spiritual death. What John called "the second death" (eternal separation from God) in Revelation 20:14 is actually the extension or outcome of spiritual death if salvation does not occur. Corresponding to these two kinds of death are two kinds of life: physical life (the kind of physical existence we have prior to physical death) and spiritual life (the new life God gives our spirit after regeneration, as described in Eph. 2). Corresponding to these two pairs, there are physical resurrection (the raising of our bodies from death; see 1 Cor. 15:52–54) and spiritual resurrection (the raising of our spirits from death; see Eph. 2:4), which is the same as *regeneration* or the *new birth*.

Throughout John 5:24–29, Jesus referred to these parallel concepts of death, life, and resurrection. He said, "I tell you the truth, a time is coming [a reference to a future event] and has now come [the present] when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live" (v. 25). The present fulfillment of Jesus' words is found in the growing multitude of the physically alive but spiritually dead who hear and accept the message of the Son of God and pass from spiritual death to spiritual life (see v. 24). The still future fulfillment is found in the coming bodily resurrection of believers.

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This understanding is clear from John 5:28–29, verses that Fackre conveniently ignores: "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out —

those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.” Jesus, obviously, was referring to the general resurrection at the end of the world when all who are dead will hear His voice and come forth from the grave. A preview of this was when Jesus ordered Lazarus to come forth from his tomb (see John 11:43–44).

Perhaps the reason Fackre ignores John 5:29 is that it clearly teaches that what differentiates those who rise to life (eternal communion with God) from those who rise to condemnation (eternal separation from God) is what those persons did prior to death. Not only does this passage not teach what Fackre claims it does, but it also goes on to teach things that flatly contradict his myth of salvation after death. I must say that I find the kind of creativity Fackre demonstrates in his approach to Scripture to be irresponsible. Fackre’s theory of salvation after death lacks biblical support; moreover, he fails to deal with the passages of Scripture that contradict his theory. His doctrine, I conclude, is a product of his imagination, and I fail to see how it reflects compassion to offer people a totally false hope about the eternal future of the unevangelized.

First Peter 3:18–4:6

It is not surprising that Fackre appeals to 1 Peter 3:18–4:6 to support the doctrine of salvation after death. Every advocate of PME does this. Peter wrote in 4:6, “for this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead.” PME advocates argue that the “dead” mentioned here are identical with “the spirits in prison,” mentioned in 3:19, to whom Jesus preached. There is, however, no reason to think this. “The dead” in 4:6 were most likely people who heard the gospel during their lifetime but who were, at the time Peter wrote, deceased.

WHAT JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT ETERNAL DESTINY

Let us leave the speculative wanderings of Dr. Fackre and turn to the teachings of Jesus. Wise students of Scripture know that a proper approach to the parables of Jesus is to distinguish between the main point of the parable and secondary points that sometimes may simply provide helpful background. Jesus’ parable about the rich fool in Luke 12:16–21, for example, is a warning against greed. The rich man kept building bigger and bigger barns until he finally thought he could rest on his stored wealth; but God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you” (v. 20). Jesus then made clear the essential message of the parable: “This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.” Let us not be too quick to close our Bibles, however; it is not irrelevant that Jesus added the point that the rich fool’s eternal destiny was sealed when he died.

Jesus taught the same thing in His parable of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16:19–31. We read that Lazarus died, and “the rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side” (vv. 22–23). I am well aware that the primary message of this parable warns against using our resources in this life improperly; but, I note again, the fixed destiny of the two men in Jesus’ story is not irrelevant to Jesus’ teaching. In these and other teachings of Jesus that we will examine shortly, He repeatedly taught that physical death seals our eternal destiny.

Other teachings relevant to the issue before us appear in Matthew 7. Jesus issued a warning about false prophets who come in sheep’s clothing (vv. 15–20) and concluded by saying, “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (v. 19). The emphasis, once again, is on what occurs during an earthly lifetime. In verses 21–23, Jesus spoke of those who will come to Him at the judgment, saying, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?” (v. 22). Jesus reports that He will tell them plainly, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!” (v. 23). Once again, postmortem judgment is based on premortem conditions. The point likewise appears in verses 24–27, Jesus’ well-known story of the two men who built their respective houses, one on rock and the other on sand. Some decisions in this life have eternal consequences.

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We do well also to study Jesus' parables in Matthew 13. Explaining the parable of the weeds (vv. 24–30, 36–43), Jesus states, "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil" (vv. 40–41). The sin and evil referred to here must pertain to things done prior to one's death. There are no qualifications in this or other passages; there are no hints of exceptions arising from events after death. A similar point appears in Matthew 24:41–46.

In Revelation 20:11–15, John recorded a vision of the judgment before the great white throne, where "the dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books" (v. 12). The clear message again is that judgment is based on our earthly lives.

In these passages and others, I contend, one simple point stands out: physical death marks the boundary of human opportunity. Anyone who wishes to argue that Jesus and the authors of the New Testament believed otherwise must shoulder the burden of proof. Given the serious implications of a belief in postmortem salvation for evangelism and missions, the total silence of Scripture regarding opportunities after death should convince us that this idea is wrong; moreover, the theological arguments offered by Fackre and others are highly suspect.

AN INTERESTING SOURCE OUTSIDE SCRIPTURE

The early Christian writing known as 2 Clement is not part of the New Testament; nonetheless, it reflects the thinking of Christians during the church's first century. Second Clement 8.3 states that "after we have gone out of the world, no further power of confessing or repenting will there belong to us."⁸ It is possible that this assertion became necessary because some may have raised the prospect of salvation after death as the first century drew to a close. I also suggest that comments as clear as 2 Clement 8.3 do not appear in the New Testament because they simply were not needed among the members of a community whose every action recognized that physical death marked the boundary of human opportunity to be saved.

HEBREWS 9:27

Let us not forget Hebrews 9:27 as well: "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment."

Many proponents of PME claim that this verse is the only New Testament text that even comes close to declaring death as the boundary of human opportunity. Even if it is the only explicit passage, we have just examined several other New Testament passages about divine judgment that presuppose this fact. It is clear from this verse, nonetheless, that the judgment of each human reflects that person's standing with God at the moment of death.

THE BURDEN OF PROOF

With few exceptions, evangelicals believe that after the death and resurrection of Jesus, explicit personal faith in Jesus Christ before death is a necessary condition for salvation. John Sanders and Clark Pinnock (my two representatives of inclusivism) and Gabriel Fackre (my representative of postmortem salvation) speak for the still small number of people within evangelicalism who dispute this understanding of the Christian gospel. Sanders and Pinnock would have us think that what all or most of us have regarded as bedrock on many issues is simply wrong; and Fackre, who wants us to think that physical death is not the end of a human's opportunity for salvation, is asking us to make a remarkable shift. The seriousness of such claims advanced by these men surely will result in their assuming the burden of proof for their positions, and this burden thus far has not been met. Their arguments, rather, have proven to be logically inconsistent and lacking in biblical support.

I am not suggesting that large numbers of Christians cannot be wrong about some commonly accepted interpretation of Scripture. In fact, I think this is the case with regard to some widely held beliefs about the second coming of Christ. Such beliefs, however, seldom touch any matter so central to the Christian faith as the scope of salvation. It is one thing to disagree over the timing of the second coming in relation to the tribulation and the millennium; it is quite another to discover that we have been mistaken about the meaning of such essential passages as Romans 10:9–10 and John 3:17–18. Sanders, Pinnock, and

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Fackre, nevertheless, are asking Christians today to reshuffle the deck and commit themselves to a totally new understanding of who and how God saves. I believe, as my articles in this series make clear, their work marks a major break with Christianity's historic stance on these issues and poses a serious threat to the future work of the church.

NOTES

1. See Joseph Leckie, *The World to Come and Final Destiny*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1922); George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984); Donald Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978); John Lawson, *Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Wilmore, KY: Francis Asbury Press, 1980); Gabriel Fackre, *The Christian Story: A Narrative Interpretation of Basic Christian Doctrine*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984). For Sanders's list, see chapter 6 of his book *No Other Name* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).
2. Pinnock's views about PME can be found in early chapters of his book, *A Wideness in God's Mercy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992). For a more complete discussion, see Ronald Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 149.
3. Gabriel Fackre, "Divine Perseverance," in *What About Those Who Have Never Heard?* ed. John Sanders (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995).
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., 97.
6. Ibid., 98.
7. All Scripture quotations are taken from the *New International Version*.
8. Vol. 7 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (repr., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985),

NOTE: Guy Woods' comments on 1 Pet. 3:19

"They are called 'spirits' because they were in a disembodied state when Peter wrote; and they were 'in prison' i.e. under restraint as wicked beings...

It should be noted that Peter does not declare that these who were the objects of this preaching were in a disembodied state and in prison when the preaching was done; such was their condition when he wrote...

Christ, in the person of Noah, preached to the antediluvians during the period in which the ark was being constructed; and these, having rejected this preaching, died in disobedience, and were under restraint in the spirit realm when Peter wrote. The meaning of the passage, simply and briefly put, is this: Christ preached; he preached 'in spirit' to 'spirits in prison.' These spirits in prison were wicked persons who lived while the ark was 'a preparing.' The preaching which Christ did was through Noah."

Gospel Advocate Commentary on epistles of Peter, John, and Jude, pg. 101

Are there different degrees of punishment in hell?

by [Matt Slick](#)

Yes, there are different degrees of punishment in hell. First of all, the Bible says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God ([Romans 3:23](#)) and without the sacrifice of Christ to save them from God's righteous judgment, they will suffer eternal damnation.

- [John 3:17-18](#), "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. 18 He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."
- [Heb. 2:2-3](#), "For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard."

But, not all people are equally bad. Though all deserve damnation because all are sinners, different people have committed different degrees of sin.

- [Matt. 11:20-22](#), "Then He began to reproach the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. 21 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 22 "Nevertheless I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you...I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you."
- [Luke 12:47-48](#), "And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, shall receive many lashes, 48 but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. And from everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more."
- [John 19:11](#), "Jesus answered [Pilate], 'You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me up to you has the greater sin.'"
- [Heb. 10:29](#), "How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?"

So, if Jesus speaks of greater condemnation for Chorazin and Bethsaida than Tyre and Sidon ([Matt. 11:21-22](#)), one slave received more punishment than another ([Luke 12:47-48](#)), the one who delivered Jesus to Pilate has the greater sin ([John 19:11](#)), and a more severe punishment is reserved for those who trample underfoot the Son of God, then does not greater sin mean that greater punishment will also happen in hell? Yes, it does.

Conditionalism and degrees of punishment

by [Matt Slick](#)

10/11/2018

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The Bible teaches different degrees of punishment. Let's take a look at the biblical evidence and then turn our attention to how it relates to conditionalism.

- [Matthew 10:15](#), "Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city."
- [Matthew 11:23-24](#), "And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. 24 "Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you."
- [Matthew 23:14](#), "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation," (cf. [Mark 12:40](#); [Luke 20:47](#)).
- [Luke 12:47-48](#), "And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, 48 but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more."
- [John 19:11](#), "Jesus answered, 'You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.'"
- See also the Parable of the two debtors [Luke 7:40-50](#)

Just as there are different degrees of sin ([John 19:11](#)), there are different degrees of punishment as is amply demonstrated through the Scriptures quoted above. So, what are the conditionalists to do with this?

There are three options available to them regarding the different degrees of punishment in the afterlife for those who have not trusted in Christ.

1. The wicked do not experience any conscious punishment prior to them being annihilated.
2. The wicked all experience conscious punishment to the same degree for a time and are then annihilated.
3. The wicked experience conscious punishment in different degrees for a time and are then annihilated.

Option 1: The wicked do not experience any conscious punishment prior to them being annihilated.

First of all, to deny that there are different degrees of punishment for the wicked is deny the Scriptures above. Nevertheless, some annihilationists still deny it. Consider this.

"...these sayings [lesser and greater beatings] are intended to underscore divine impartiality; God will take into account the opportunity and circumstances of people in determining judgment. This is not the same as teaching "grades of punishment." The reference in [Luke 12:47–48](#) is part of the scenery of the parable and teaches, if anything, the principle that responsibility is commensurate with endowment and opportunity."¹

I do not know what percentage of conditionalists affirm the above denial of a varying degrees of punishment in the afterlife. But, unfortunately, they are there. For them I can only surmise that their position must take precedence over the teachings of Jesus who spoke of degrees of judgment on the final day ([Matthew 10:15](#); [11:23-24](#)). He said there is greater condemnation for those who do and do not do God's will ([Matthew 23:14](#)). He said some will receive greater punishment ([Luke 12:47-48](#)). So, can we take rethinkinghell seriously? I can't. After all, it is very clear that there are different degrees of punishment according to Scripture. But, many annihilationists are obligated to deny that because of their presuppositions.

Option 2: The wicked all experience conscious punishment to the same degree for a time and are then annihilated.

Option 2 obviously violates the above Scriptures which teach that there are varying degrees of judgment for different people. This would not seem to be equitable since different people have committed different kinds of sin in different levels of sin. It would make sense to say that God would punish them in accordance with their sins. After all, that is what the Bible says.

- [Matthew 16:27](#), "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS."
- [Romans 2:5–6](#), "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6 who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS:"
- [Romans 14:12](#), " So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God."
- [2 Corinthians 5:10](#), "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

Option 2 is not a valid option either when comparing it to Scripture. Obviously, different people will experience different degrees of punishment. Of course, the judgment that Christians face is not for salvation, but for reward and loss in heaven.

Option 3: The wicked experience conscious punishment in different degrees for a time and are then annihilated.

- "...when God destroys both soul and body in hell, the destructive act or process will be based on perfect divine justice in each individual case, and will allow infinite latitude for degrees of conscious punishment, whether differentiated by its kind, its intensity, or its duration." (ibid., Fudge, Edward William. *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment*, Third Edition (p. 208). Cascade Books, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition.)
- "Traditionalists and conditionalists affirm together that there will be degrees of punishment—the first group, by varying external circumstances or internal sensitivity to them; the second group, by duration, type, or sensitivity to conscious pain during the process of the second death." [2](#)

The third option is for the annihilationist who say that the wicked are resurrected and then experience a different degree of punishment that corresponds to their sin. Once their punishment is completed, they are annihilated.

But this has problems.

First of all, sin is breaking the law of God. Therefore, sin is a legal problem (but not *only* a legal problem). Punishment is properly related with breaking the law. Therefore, the degree of punishment is in relationship to the degree of breaking the law.

1. Sin is breaking the law of God ([1 John 3:4](#))
2. Punishment of the lawbreaker is according to the law ([Rom. 6:23](#))
3. There are different degrees of sin/law breaking ([John 19:11](#))
4. Therefore, there are different degrees of punishment ([Luke 12:47-48](#))

Problem

But, if the unsaved suffer according to their sins, which is according to their wickedness in breaking God's law, then once the punishment is completed, why are they not saved and then go to heaven? After all, the law has been satisfied through their suffering. If they say that once the punishment is completed, then they are annihilated, then that means that God is unjust since they have met the requirements of the Law and yet God still punishes them for what they've paid for. It makes no sense.

Second, if they say that there are different degrees of conscious punishment before they are punished with eternal nonexistence, then they are saying punishment is of two types: conscious punishment and nonexistence. But if this is the case, then this particular view of conditionalism which expresses conscious torment is similar to the traditionalist view. The only real difference is duration. **Then, there's the problem of eternal nothingness being punishment - which it cannot be.**

Legalistic Salvation?

I thought I would review the above point in consideration of Temporary Conscious Torment (TCT). If the wicked fulfill the requirement of the law by being punished, then that punishment is defined as a continued experience. Furthermore, when that punishment ends, the requirement of the law has been satisfied. The continued punishment then stops. How is this not a form of salvation by compliance with the law, since it is being saved from the continued judgment of God?

Conclusion

The words of Christ clearly teach that there are different degrees of punishment that people will experience on the Day of Judgment. The conditionalists who deny this, are clearly denying Scripture. But for the conditionalists who admit that there is a measure of punishment in the afterlife before annihilation, they are being more consistent with Scripture. In addition, they are admitting to temporary conscious torment (TCT), instead of eternal conscious torment (ECT).

Studies In New Testament Eschatology: No. 4: The Abode Of The Spirit After Death

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What is meant by "return unto God"? Does this mean that the souls of just men go directly to heaven at death? If this is true, what of the souls of the wicked? Do they go directly to hell? To be specific, just where do the spirits of men go at death?

Positions Considered

While there may be some differences with reference to minor details, most people who believe that the soul has existence beyond death, take one of three positions: (1) That there is an intermediate state between death and the resurrection, known as "hades;" that hades is the abode of the souls of all men, whether just or unjust. (2) That at death, "particular judgment" takes place creating three classes of people. The first class enters into heaven, for it is argued that they are without sin. The second class are those who have committed venial sin. These enter into what is called "Purgatory." The third class are those guilty of mortal sin and these, we are told, enter directly into hell itself. (3) The third position is that taken by many Protestant faiths (so-called), viz., That the spirits of men do not go into an intermediate state at death, but rather go directly to heaven or hell.

It will be the burden of this writing to establish the first position as the scriptural position and the one most consistent with New Testament teaching. The second position will be discussed in a later article on "Purgatory." As to the third position, our readers will be interested in knowing that William Hendriksen in his publication, *The Bible on the Life Hereafter*, presents a number of arguments in an effort to sustain this idea (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1959; it may be purchased from Truth Magazine Bookstore). He says, "That the soul of God's child goes directly to heaven at death is the clear and consistent teaching of Scriptures" (p. 51). Later in the book, Mrs. Hendriksen discusses the abode of wicked souls. Concerning them, he says, "We must be careful." He throws his caution to the wind, however, when he says, "Scripture teaching on this point, though not extensive, is clear enough" (p. 81). The author's position on this point is that hades is hell, and that hell is to be identified with the Old Testament sheol which in turn is said to be "the place where God's wrath burns, and to which the wicked at death descend" (pp. 85-86). Not much weight can be attached to this position due to the vagueness and ambiguousness of the arguments used to sustain it. Hendriksen has tried in vain to use such passages as 2 Cor. 12:2-4; Heb. 11:10, 16 and 2 Cor. 5:8 to sustain his position.

That the soul of man does not go directly to heaven or hell at death is clearly taught in the Scriptures. The New Testament teaches that those going into "everlasting punishment" and those going to "life eternal," will do so when/and only when "the Son of man shall come in his glory" (Matt. 25:31, 46, italics mine, JT). Since heaven and hell are places of everlasting reward and punishment, and men enter into these abodes at the Lord's coming, it should be evident that they reside some place prior to the

judgment which is in contradistinction to heaven and hell. When the Lord comes a second time, He shall appear with "a shout, and with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God" (1 Thess. 4:16). At the sound of this voice, the dead shall come forth, "they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:28-29). Thus, if one argues that, at the time of death, men go to heaven or hell rather than to an intermediate state, he is forced to repudiate these passages (cf. John 14:16; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; 2 Tim. 4:7-8). He is forced to deny the need for a judgment predicted upon the resurrection of all the dead.

Where Are The Souls Of Men?

Since men enter into heaven or hell after the second coming of Jesus, the spirits of those who have departed this life are in existence somewhere due to their immortal natures. What happens to them? Where do they go? Turn to the account of the "rich man and Lazarus" in Luke 16. Jesus, according to this context, is reproving the Pharisees by portraying them as the "rich man." The believing publicans and sinners are portrayed as "Lazarus." The characters in the story were not in a state of unconsciousness, nor were they in non-existence, for they could see, speak, remember and feel pain (vv. 23-25, 27-28). If they were in a state of unconsciousness or extinction after death, then the entire story loses its significance. Furthermore, it is fruitless to argue that the conditions described are descriptive of conditions after the resurrection, for the statement, "if one rise from the dead" implies that the resurrection had not occurred. Observe also that the object of the rich man's concern was five brothers living on earth (vv. 27-28). This would not be, possible if the resurrection had occurred and the final state had been ushered into existence. The diversified conscious existence pictured symbolically in the account is a reflection of conditions during the intermediate state between this life and the judgment. The departed ones do enjoy either happiness or a form of punishment in this intermediate state, but this is provision and by no means the eternal state in heaven or hell.

"And In Hades He Lifted Up His Eyes"

When the rich man died, his soul entered into hades (hell, KJV). Since "hell" is a place of everlasting punishment, and hades denotes an intermediate state it is improper to translate hades into the English word "hell." Hades we are told, is "the region of departed spirits of the lost (but including the blessed dead in periods preceding the Ascension of Christ)." To this definition given by Fine (Vol. 2, P. 187), Bagster's Analytical Greek Lexicon adds the fact that hades is "the invisible abode of mansion of the dead" (p. 6). Thayer says that hades is "the nether world, the realm of the dead . . . common receptacle of disembodied spirits" (p. 11). Not only was the rich man in the realm of disembodied spirits, but he was in a special section of the nether world, i.e., in a region of woe. Hades in this passage takes the sense of tartarus though the word is not used in the text (Future Punishment, Moses Stuart, p. 134). The word tartarus occurs only once in the New Testament. Of it, Peter said, "For God spared not

the angels that sinned, but cast them down to tartarus (hell, KJV), and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment" (2 Pet. 2:4). In the Greek, tartarus "is employed to designate a supposed subterranean region, as deep down below the upper part of hades as the earth is distant from heaven" (Ibid., p. 137). The rich man entered into hades, but more specifically that part of hades known as tartarus, where all the wicked are confined and tormented between death and the resurrection. Of this state, Jude says that men are "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day" (Jude 6). This demonstrates that the "everlasting chains" and/or tartarus is not hell, for men do not enter into hell until the judgment of that "great day."

"Carried By Angels Into Abraham's Bosom"

In spite of the fact that some ridicule the idea that hades has two divisions, one for the wicked and one for the righteous, the story of the rich man and Lazarus teaches that Lazarus went into "Abraham's bosom" which is also a part of hades (Lk. 16:22). Abraham's bosom stands for paradise. "To repose on Abraham's bosom is to be in paradise, for Abraham is there" (Alfred Plummer, Commentary on Luke). Paradise originally meant "an enclosed park, or pleasant garden," but in time it became known as "the department of Hades where the blessed souls await the resurrection; and therefore, equivalent to Abraham's bosom" (Marvin Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament, p. 431). Paradeisos (paradise) occurs in Lk. 23:43; 2 Cor. 12:4 and in Rev. 2:7; and always denotes the abode of the blessed. Paradise is not heaven, though in the true sense of the term, it is a pleasant park leading into the heavenly mansion. It is not possible to describe the beauty of paradise, for even those who have viewed it were not allowed to describe it to us (2 Cor. 12:2). We will have to satisfy our curiosity by accepting the facts that are revealed, i.e., that paradise is separate from the earth, and by far more delightful than anything in this life. It is not heaven, but is an earnest of heaven itself. Though our knowledge of the thrilling existence of the hereafter is limited, there is no reason why our faith in such an existence cannot be sure. This is certainly true if our grasp on revelation is firm and steady.

Conclusion

When our dear companions in life die, their spirits enter into hades. The righteous abide in that part of hades known as Paradise until the day of resurrection. The wicked have their place in tartarus, which is also a part of hades. There is no turning back from the realm of hades due to the fact that death seals our destiny. We learn from God's own word that "working out salvation is limited to the period of man's earthly existence." "And it is appointed for man once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Heb. 9:27-28). Prepare for eternity now by becoming a child of God (Gal. 3:26-27). Live faithfully until death (Rev. 2:10). Someone said, "The years seem to rush by now, and I think of death as a fast approaching end of a journey. This affords every reason for living, as well as working while it is day." Amen!

One Second After Death

by [Dave Miller, Ph.D., Churches of Christ](#)

We human beings find it very easy to live life as if we will be here forever. We occasionally come face to face with death when a friend or loved one passes away. But the essence of daily living is such that it is easy to ignore the reality of death and the certainty of existence beyond the grave. It is essential that we go to the Bible and find out what will happen to each one of us—one second after death.

The Bible teaches that human beings are composite creatures. We possess a fleshly body that is composed of physical elements made from “the dust of the ground” (Genesis 2:7). This physical body is animated by a life force or life principle that we share in common with the animal kingdom (although, in the Genesis creation account, a distinction seems to be made between animals and man in the direct source of this life principle (Genesis 1:20-21,24; 2:7). In any case, the Scriptures also teach that human beings are unlike the animals in that humans also possess a **spiritual** dimension that transcends the body and physical life on Earth.

God places within each prenatal person at conception a spirit that makes each individual a unique personality. Zechariah 12:1 observed that God “forms the spirit of man within him.” Our spirits are what makes each one of us a distinct entity, a person that will survive physical death and live on immortally throughout eternity.

A number of Hebrew and Greek words are used in the Bible to identify various facets of our beings (e.g., *nephesh*, *ruach*, *neshamah*, *leb*, and *basar* in the Old Testament and *psuche*, *pneuma*, *nous*, *soma*, and *sarx* in the New Testament). These words are somewhat fluid, and are used in a variety of ways—sometimes interchangeably, sometimes in contradistinction to each other. They are translated by many different English words (e.g., “soul,” “spirit,” “breath,” “wind,” “heart,” “mind,” “self,” “body,” “flesh,” et al.). It is a mistake to seize upon a passage where “soul” refers to the **entirety** of a person’s being and conclude that man does not possess a spirit that is distinct from his animated body. Some religious thinkers tend to limit the Hebrew word *ruach* (soul or spirit) to an impersonal vital power that becomes individualized only in the *nephesh* (whole person). Thus, it is claimed that the soul or spirit cannot exist independently of the body, so that when the “life force” exits the body, the person ceases to exist.

But, by avoiding human philosophies and focusing solely upon the Bible, we learn that each person possesses a conscious spirit that ultimately leaves the body and exists separately from it in the spirit realm. For example, Genesis 35:18 states: “[I]t came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died).” The author of the book of 1 Kings wrote that Elijah prayed, “let this child’s soul come into him again...and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived” (17:21-22). Psalm 86:13 says, “You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.”

The Bible defines “death” as “**separation**”—not “extinction.” Physical death occurs when the spirit exits the body. James 2:26 notes: “[F]or as the body without the spirit is dead.” In other words, the separation of one’s spirit from one’s body results in **physical** death. **Spiritual** death, on the other hand, entails separation from God due to sin. So “death” involves the idea of separation—not extinction or unconsciousness.

A clear depiction of existence beyond death is seen in Luke 16:19-31. Some argue that this section of Scripture is a parable, which is incorrect since the story does not contain the usual indicators of parabolic discourse. However, even if the passage were a parable, a parable is not a **fairy tale**. Bible parables parallel true-life situations to teach a basic lesson of truth. They draw from reality and that which people understand as **actual earthly existence** and genuine conditions in order to drive home a spiritual point. After reading Luke 16:19-31, observe the following textual details:

1. Both men are said to have **died**.
2. Wherever Lazarus went, angels were used to transport him there.
3. The rich man was buried.
4. The rich man was in *hades*.
5. The rich man was being tormented in flames.
6. The rich man could see and recognize Lazarus and Abraham.
7. Abraham referred to the rich man's former existence as "your lifetime."
8. Abraham made clear that their respective locations were irreversible.
9. The rich man's brothers were still occupying his father's house on Earth.
10. The Law of Moses was still in effect.
11. The rich man's plea to send Lazarus to his living relatives would require Lazarus to return "from the dead" (vs. 30) and to "rise from the dead" (vs. 31).

The term translated "hell" in Luke 16:23 is the Greek word *hades*, and is not to be confused with the word *gehenna*. "*Gehenna*" is found twelve times in the New Testament, and refers to the place of eternal, everlasting punishment—the "lake of fire" where Satan, his angels, and all wicked people will be consigned after the Second Coming of Jesus and the Judgment. So *gehenna* is **hell**. "*Hades*," on the other hand, occurs ten times in the New Testament, and always refers to the unseen realm of the dead—the receptacle of disembodied spirits where all people who die await the Lord's return. At that time, our spirits will be reunited with our resurrection bodies (1 Corinthians 15:35-54).

Luke 16 shows us that *hades* contains two regions. One is referred to as the "bosom of Abraham" (which simply means "near" or "in the presence of" Abraham—cf. John 1:18). The other region in *hades* is described as tormenting flame. Every other passage in the New Testament that refers to *hades* harmonizes with this description of the intermediate realm of the dead where the deceased await the resurrection and judgment.

For example, while fastened to the cross, Jesus told the thief, "Today, you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). The word **paradise** is of Persian derivation, and means a "garden" or "park." Where was it that Jesus and the thief went on that very day? Certainly not to extinction! Extinction would not be "paradise"! They did not go to the grave together. The thief was not placed in the tomb with Jesus, and the tomb certainly would not be a "paradise." Nor did Jesus go to heaven, for in John 20:17 after His resurrection, Jesus reassured Mary that **He had not yet ascended to the Father**. So where is "paradise"? Where did Jesus and the thief go after dying on the cross? Where had Jesus been for those three days between His death and resurrection?

Peter gave the answer to that question in his sermon in Acts 2 when he quoted Psalm 16. Acts 2:27 states that God would not abandon Christ's soul in *hades* nor allow Christ to undergo decay. So while Christ's body was placed in a tomb for three days, Christ's spirit went to *hades*. Peter argued that David, who penned the 16th Psalm, was not referring to himself. How do we know? David's body was still in the tomb (Acts 2:29). David's spirit was still in the *hadean* realm because Peter also said that David had not yet ascended into heaven (Acts 2:34). Acts 2, by itself, proves that a person does not go straight to heaven or hell

when he dies, and that a person does not become extinct, cease to exist, or pass into a state of unconsciousness at death.

Jesus previously predicted that His death and entrance into the Hadean realm would not prevent Him from accomplishing His divine purposes. Matthew 16:18 reads: “Upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it.” In other words, though He would die on the cross, though His body would be placed in the tomb, and though His spirit would descend into hades, nevertheless, the gates of hades would not prevent Him from coming back out of hades (i.e., resurrection) and then setting up the kingdom a few days later in Acts 2. At that time, Peter and the apostles employed the “keys of the kingdom” (Matthew 16:19) with the help of the Holy Spirit sent by Jesus (Acts 2:33).

It was through Jesus’ death and subsequent departure from hades that Jesus rendered powerless “him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:26,54-57). Jesus’ personal victory over death and the Hadean realm explains why He could declare in Revelation 1:18—I am He who lives; and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of hades and of death.”

While Jesus, the thief, and Lazarus went to the paradise portion of hades, the rich man went to the unpleasant area which included torment and flame. This is the same region of hades, referred to in 2 Peter 2:4, where angels who sinned were committed by God. The term that Peter used was *tartarosas*, or Tartarus, and is described as “pits of darkness” where they are “reserved for judgment.” The parallel in Jude 6 speaks of these angels as having abandoned their proper place and having failed to keep their own domain. They are depicted as existing in “everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.” This region of the Hadean realm must also be in view in Moses’ allusion to the anger of God which kindles fire that “shall burn to the lowest part of Sheol” (Deuteronomy 32:22)—sheol being a general Hebrew equivalent of the Greek hades.

Notice what will happen to this intermediate receptacle of spirits. In Revelation 20, beginning in verse 11, we are presented with a portrait of the final judgment before the great white throne of God. Everyone who has ever lived will be there. Verse 13 says that “death and hades” will be cast into the lake of fire. That means that **hades** will be cast into **hell**. The unseen realm of the dead, where conscious spirits reside until judgment, will have served its purpose, and all people who have ever lived will then be consigned to one of two places: heaven or hell.

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10). “[I]t is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28-29). Paul referred to the occasion “when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Look carefully at the word “everlasting.” Does the human spirit exist beyond physical death and the grave in a conscious state? Or, at death, does the soul cease to exist in a state of “soul sleep”? Does a person’s consciousness become **extinct**? Is the soul **annihilated** at death? The Sadducees denied the existence of the spirit realm. According to Acts 23:8, they

denied the immortality of the soul, believing in “neither angel nor spirit.” Josephus stated that the Sadducees believed that “souls die with the bodies” (18:1:4). There are religious groups today who teach the same thing.

In Luke 20, Jesus showed the fallacy of such thinking by showing that when Moses was at the burning bush in Exodus 3, God declared Himself to be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. At the time God made that statement, the bodies of those three patriarchs had been in the grave for hundreds of years. Yet Jesus concluded: “For He is not the God of the dead but of the living” (Luke 20:38). That proves that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—though separated from their physical bodies—were still in existence. They were not extinct. They would one day be reunited with their bodies in the resurrection.

Many other passages indicate the perpetuation of conscious spiritual life beyond physical death. Revelation 6:9-11 speaks of the souls of those who had been martyred for the Christian cause. They are depicted as spirits—not bodies—who are conscious, who are aware of the means by which they were killed, and who knew that their blood had not yet been avenged.

In 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, Paul described an experience that he, or someone he knew, had in the “third heaven.” The “third heaven” in scriptural thought is the spirit realm where God and other celestial beings reside (Deuteronomy 10:14; 26:15; 1 Kings 8:27,30). It often is referred to as the “heaven of heavens”—a Semitism wherein the genitive is used for the superlative degree—meaning the highest or ultimate heaven (cf. “Song of songs,” “King of kings,” “Lord of lords”). The “first heaven” is the Earth’s atmosphere—the “sky”—where the birds fly (Genesis 1:20; 8:2; Isaiah 55:10; Luke 13:19). The “second heaven” is “outer space”—where the Sun, Moon, and stars are situated (Genesis 15:5; 22:17; Deuteronomy 4:19; Nahum 3:16). Twice Paul stated that he was not certain whether the person described was “in the body, or out of the body” (vss. 2-3). That proves that Paul acknowledged the possibility of the spirit of a human being existing in a conscious state apart from the body. To say that the spirit ceases to exist at death makes Paul imply what is not true.

Both accounts, of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16, and the thief on the cross in Luke 23:43, prove that conscious existence continues after the death of the body. Hebrews 12:23 speaks of “the spirits of just men made perfect”—a reference to deceased saints who remained faithful to God during their life on Earth, but who had since passed into the spirit realm. That passage makes no sense if “spirits” refers to the wind or breath of a person. These people were like Stephen in Acts 7:59 who, as life was being stoned from his body, said to the Lord whom he could see in the heavens: “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” If “spirit” is simply the life force of the body that goes extinct the moment it no longer animates the body, then Stephen was speaking out of ignorance to think that he had a spirit that could be received by Jesus.

The Bible frequently speaks of the ultimate state of both the good and the wicked as being “eternal.” For example, read Hebrews 6:2 which speaks of “eternal judgment,” or 2 Thessalonians 1:9 which speaks of “eternal destruction,” or Revelation 20:10 where Satan will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, and tormented there “day and night forever and ever.” Jude 7 speaks of those who will suffer “the vengeance (punishment) of eternal fire.”

Matthew 18:8-9 identifies the fire of hell (*gehenna*) as “everlasting fire.” The parallel passage in Mark 9:43 states that this fire “shall never be quenched.” Mark 9:48 states that hell is a place “where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.” The image is taken from Isaiah 66:24, and is unquestionably intended to make the point that the fire of hell will be unquenchable—always burning, yet never consuming.

In His description of the final Judgment in Matthew 25:46, Jesus used the same word *aionion* (eternal) to refer to the respective conditions of both the good and evil people who inhabited the Earth. If eternal punishment is not “eternal,” then life eternal is not “eternal” either. The word “punishment” clearly implies pain that is inflicted. Listen to Peter, who said, “The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment” (2 Peter 2:9). The same word is used to refer to the punishment that the apostles narrowly avoided in Acts 4:21.

Some say the word “destroy” (or “destruction”) means “annihilation” (or “extinction”). They go to a passage like Matthew 10:28 where Jesus said, “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” They insist that “destroy” in this passage means “annihilation.” But that cannot be. For if physical death inflicted by one’s fellowman brings extinction and unconsciousness of the soul, what is there to fear from God? Why would Jesus say there is no need to fear other people—who can take your physical life? For in taking your physical life, they also would cause your soul to be annihilated, in which case they have as much power as God, and the comparison that Jesus makes is no comparison at all. If the soul dies with the body, then he who kills the body kills the soul, too.

The parallel passage in Luke 12:4-5 makes this point even clearer. Luke wrote: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He hath killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!” If physical death brings annihilation of the soul, then it is ridiculous to speak of casting the soul into hell **after** killing the body.

In addition, the Greek term that underlies our English word “destroy” does not mean “annihilation.” W.E. Vine, in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, explained: “The idea is not extinction but ruin, loss, not of being, but of well-being” (1966, p. 302). He cited Matthew 10:28 as an example, as well as John 17:12 where Judas, who had not yet hung himself, was called the “son of perdition.” Obviously, Judas was not extinct or annihilated. But he was destroyed in the sense that he lost **spiritual well-being**. He had perished spiritually.

Lexicographer Joseph H. Thayer agreed with this assessment when he said that “destroy” in Matthew 10:28 means “to devote or give over to eternal misery” (1901, p. 64). Albrecht Oepke commented on the meaning of destroy: “definitive destruction, not merely in the sense of extinction of physical existence, but rather of an eternal plunge into Hades” (Kittel, 1:396).

What must be concluded from these passages of Scripture? God gives people this life on Earth to prepare their spirits for their eternal abode. When a person dies, his or her body goes into the grave, while the conscious spirit enters the Hadean realm to await the final Judgment. At the Second Coming of Christ, all spirits will come forth from Hades and be resurrected in immortal bodies. All will then face God in judgment, receive the pronouncement of eternal sentence, and then be consigned to heaven or hell for eternity. Listen closely to the inspired words of the apostle Peter:

Therefore, since all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons 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 dissolved being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? ...You therefore, beloved, since you know these things beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen” (2 Peter 3:11-12, 17-18).

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Are the Dead Conscious?

By Wayne Jackson, Churches of Christ

There is an ongoing controversy in the religious community as to whether or not human beings, after death, exist in a state of consciousness. The Watchtower movement claims: “The dead are shown to be ‘conscious of nothing at all’ and the death state to be one of complete inactivity” (*Aid to Bible Understanding* 1971, 431).

Unquestionably, the Bible teaches otherwise. Though there are numerous arguments that one might employ to establish the fact that the dead are aware of their post-mortem existence, the narrative concerning the rich man and Lazarus is one of the most comprehensive affirmations of this truth.

In the parable of the unrighteous steward (Luke 16:1-13), Christ had taught the value of using one’s material possessions to prepare for eternity. Likewise, he had cautioned about the dangers of becoming enslaved to money. But the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, ridiculed the Lord (16:14). Thus, Jesus subsequently introduced the account concerning a certain rich man and a beggar named Lazarus (16:19-31). The basic design of this case is to show the vivid contrast between these two men—both before and after death!

Is It a Parable?

There are many respectable Bible scholars who consider the account in Luke 16:19ff to be a parable. Even if such were the case, that would not militate against the force of the instruction contained within the story, for the parable is “confined to that which is real. Its imagery always embodies a narrative which is true to the facts and experiences of human life” (Terry 1890, 188).

In a parable “the events must be possible, or likely to have happened” (Bullinger 1968, 752). D. R. Dungan notes: “The actors in a parable are

real—human beings are the actors, and they do nothing which they could not do” (n.d., 227).

It is more likely, though, that this record is not a parable. Some of the apostolic “church fathers” (e.g., Ambrosius, Irenaeus, Tertullian) argued that the account was not parabolic. R. C. Trench stated that this “little history . . . does not fulfill the conditions of a parable” (1877, 453). For example, it would be the only parable in which the characters are actually named.

R. C. Foster’s comment is helpful:

This is usually called a parable, but Jesus does not state it is a parable. In no parable is a person named, as Lazarus is. Discussion as to whether it is a parable is not necessary. The pictures Jesus gives of life beyond the grave cannot be tested by us because of our lack of information. They are true to the facts or else Jesus deceived us (1971, 955).

It would not be out of order here to point out that some religious materialists, i.e., those who deny conscious punishment for the wicked (such as the “Jehovah’s Witnesses”), have placed a very bizarre construction upon this report. The Watchtower people allege:

By this parable Jesus uttered a prophecy which undergoes fulfillment in its modern setting since A.D. 1918. It has its application to two classes existing on earth today. The rich man represents the ultraselfish class of the clergy of “Christendom,” who are now alienated from God and dead to his favor and tormented by the truth proclaimed. Lazarus depicts the remnant of the “body of Christ” and also that class of persons who are of good-will (*Let God Be True* 1946, 79).

In refutation it only need be momentarily noted that if such is the case, since there is a non-negotiable gulf between the two groups, one must suppose that no “clergyman” could ever be converted to the “body of Christ,” and none within the body-class could ever apostatize to the ultraselfish crowd! Yet, this is a consequence to which the “Witnesses” do not subscribe.

A Difficulty

There is, however, a difficulty in this discussion which must be addressed. It is frequently alleged that this account cannot involve a representation of actual facts, for whereas both the rich man and Lazarus had died and their bodies were decaying in the earth, nonetheless, reference is made to their physical features—eyes, tongue, and finger (vv. 23-24).

But these allusions do not negate the literalness of the account overall. The truth is, the Lord is describing only the condition of the spirits of these men. The resurrection has not occurred, as evidenced by the fact that it is stated that there are still people upon the earth (v. 28). Since, however, we are not yet prepared to understand the nature of pure spirits, inspiration must somehow attempt to accommodate ideas regarding the spirit to our current level of comprehension. This is done by figuratively applying physical traits to the description of the spirit. It is a form of anthropomorphism; hence, it is similar to the use of physical characteristics in describing God (cf. Isaiah 59:1-2; 1 Peter 3:12), even though we know he is not human (John 4:24; Luke 24:39).

The Facts of the Case

The narrative involves a certain rich man who lived in an expensive house (suggested by the word “gate”), who was luxuriously clothed, and who lived “in mirth and splendor every day” (cf. ASV fn). By way of stark contrast, Lazarus, a beggar (the Greek word denotes the poorest of the poor), was unceremoniously dumped (so the original language indicates) daily at the wealthy man’s gate, hoping only for the crumbs that fell from that gentleman’s table. Any meager comfort that Lazarus enjoyed was provided by the foraging street dogs who licked the diseased tumors of his frail body.

Finally, both men died and their state of affairs was dramatically altered. The rich man was subjected to agonizing torment while Lazarus was honored and comforted. It is in consideration of the details chronicled in verses twenty-two and following that it becomes very obvious that the dead, both righteous and wicked, are **conscious**. Let us note some of these indications.

Perception

The rich man could see both Abraham and Lazarus; he thus possessed perception. Perception involves an awareness of objects, hence, consciousness.

Satisfaction

Lazarus was described as being “in Abraham’s bosom.” This expression is a biblical idiom which suggests a state of honor (cf. John 1:18; 13:23). It implies that Lazarus was in a warm and respected fellowship with Abraham. Alfred Plummer notes that the language suggests that the former beggar now shares Abraham’s “happiness” (1896, 303). Clearly, this indicates consciousness.

Sensation

The rich man is in “torments.” Indeed, he is suffering “anguish,” which certainly affirms conscious sorrow (cf. 2:48; Acts 20:38). On the other hand, Lazarus is “comforted.”

Communication

The rich man could both speak and be spoken to. Communication is possible only with conscious beings. The suffering rebel had not been annihilated.

Recognition

The rich man recognized Lazarus and requested his services by name. Recognition involves consciousness.

Comprehension

The rich man made two requests of Abraham. First, he asked that Lazarus be permitted to dip his finger in water in order to cool his parched tongue. Abraham reasoned that such was impossible because an impassable gulf separated the righteous from the wicked. Second, the rich man requested that Lazarus be allowed to go and warn his brothers not to come to that place of punishment. The patriarch replied that those brethren had access

to the Old Testament Scriptures, and that such was sufficient to prevent those kinsmen from dying lost if they were disposed to heed the message. Apparently, the rich man understood Abraham's response; he had no further comment to make. Again, the narrative implies consciousness.

Volition

The rich man's petition that Lazarus be allowed to enter the hadean realm where he was, or that he be permitted to return to earth, implies that Lazarus had the volitional and/or locomotive ability to accomplish that feat if divinely allowed. That further suggests consciousness.

Recollection

Abraham reminded the rich man of his earthly status: "Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things." Where there is memory, there is consciousness.

Emotion

When the rich man reflected upon the spiritual condition of his earthly brothers, he evidenced concern and urged that they be warned not to enter that dreadful hadean realm. People without consciousness evidence no concern for others.

A careful and honest consideration of the information contained in this account can only lead to the conclusion that the dead are conscious. Theories which allow for the extinction of the wicked, or for "soul-sleeping" on the part of the righteous dead, are not consistent with this divine teaching as given by Jesus Christ.

Note: In his book *The Fire That Consumes*, which affirms that the wicked will be ultimately annihilated, Edward Fudge, preacher and elder for the Bering Drive Church of Christ in Houston, Texas, struggles mightily with Luke 16:19ff. He finally concludes that the narrative is but a parable drawn "from intertestamental and first-century folklore" (1982, 208). Such a superficial and modernistic approach is scarcely worthy of a response.

The Biblical Concept of Sleep

By Wayne Jackson, Churches of Christ

Since sleep is such a significant part of the human experience, it is no surprise that biblical writers should allude to it frequently. There are a variety of ways in which this term is employed in the literature of scripture.

Literal Sleep

The word “sleep” is used literally of the state of the body in normal, unconscious repose. On one occasion when Jesus and his disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee, the Lord was sleeping on a cushion in the stern of the boat (Mk. 4:38). This is but one of the many evidences which argue for the true humanity of the Savior.

It is interesting that the Scriptures refer to different levels of sleep. At Troas, Eutychus, in a late-night church service, was borne down with “deep sleep,” and fell from an upstairs window to the ground (Acts 20:9). Science makes a distinction between a lighter sleep (REM = Rapid Eye Movement, i.e., the dream stage) and a deeper sleep (non-REM). This is determined by the measurement of brain waves on an electroencephalograph (EEG). In adults, deep slumber represents about 75% of one’s sleeping time.

Sleep as a Symbol

The term “sleep” is used symbolically in several different senses in the Bible. A consideration of these makes a fascinating study.

Does God sleep?

The concept of sleeping is biblically employed with figurative language to stress certain truths about God.

In emphasizing the fact that the Lord is ever watchful of our needs, a psalmist wrote:

“He will not allow your foot to slip; he who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep” (Psa. 121:3-4).

As a result of the Lord’s providential care, the faithful saint takes consolation.

“In peace will I both lay me down and sleep; for you, Jehovah, alone make me dwell in safety” (Psa. 4:8).

On the other hand, when the Hebrew people drifted into sin, and the Lord allowed them to suffer the consequences of their rebellion, it was **as if** he was asleep (i.e., he did not intervene to deliver them from certain calamities). They exclaimed:

“Awake. Why do you sleep, O Lord? Arise, do not cast us off forever” (Psa. 44:23).

A symbol of laziness

Sometimes sleep is used as the equivalent of being lazy.

“Do not give sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids Go to the ant, O sluggard. Observe her ways and be wise How long will you lie down, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest. And your poverty will come in like a vagabond, and your need like an armed man” (Prov. 6:4-11).

The destruction of the wicked

Sleep can portray the utter and final punishment of a wicked power that has stood in opposition to God. The prophet Jeremiah foretold the complete destruction of the evil Babylonian regime.

“Babylon shall become heaps, a dwelling-place for jackals, an astonishment, and a hissing, without inhabitant When they are heated, I will make their feast, and I will make them drunken, that they may rejoice, and sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith Jehovah” (51:37-39).

For a full discussion of precisely how this was accomplished, see the Wayne Jackson’s commentary, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*.

Spiritual apathy

Sometimes spiritual lethargy is represented as a sleep. To the brethren in Rome Paul wrote:

“And this, knowing the season, that already it is time for you to awake out of sleep: for now is salvation nearer to us than when we first believed” (Rom. 13:11).

The apostle subsequently amplifies the significance of the figure by suggesting that the pursuit of an ungodly lifestyle is tantamount to a spiritual coma (v. 13). A similar thought is suggested in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians:

“Awake, you who are sleeping, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine on you” (Eph. 5:14).

Being unprepared

Sleep can suggest the notion of being unprepared to meet the Lord at the time of his return. Jesus warned:

“Watch therefore: for you do not know when the lord of the house is coming ... lest he come suddenly and find you sleeping” (Mk. 13:35-36).

When Paul corresponded with the brothers in Thessalonica, he warned about a false sense of security. Folks will be relaxing in a delusional state of “peace and safety,” when suddenly destruction will come upon them. And so he admonished:

“let us not sleep, as do the rest, but let us watch and be sober” (1 Thes. 5:3-6).

To be awake is thus to be vigilant, ever prepared.

The dead are asleep

Sleep is commonly used as a designation for death, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. David petitioned the Creator:

“Consider and answer me, O Jehovah my God: Lighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death” (Psa. 13:3).

When Lazarus of Bethany died, Jesus informed the disciples: “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep....” The Master’s men did not comprehend the nature of his language. They initially thought that Christ spoke of natural sleep; he therefore had to tell them plainly: “Lazarus is dead” (Jn. 11:14).

Why is death figuratively depicted as sleep?

First, there is a common appearance between a sleeping body and a corpse. The analogy is thus quite natural.

Second, just as the soul of a sleeping person still exists but is oblivious to its material surroundings, even so, in death the soul of man is not extinct; rather, it is only **unaware of earth’s environment**. Solomon asserted that the dead have neither knowledge of, nor reward for, anything transpiring “under the sun,” i.e., on earth (Eccl. 9:5-6).

Third, as the sleeping person awakes and rises from his bed. Even so, the dead will rise from their graves at the time of the Lord’s return. We must briefly pause and comment further about these final two points.

It is not the case, as alleged by some, that the dead are unconscious, i.e., they are in a state of mindless sleep, awaiting the day of judgment. There is ample evidence that the dead are entirely conscious in their own realm of existence. Both the rich man and Lazarus were cognizant (Lk. 16:23-25), and so were the martyred souls in John’s heavenly vision (Rev. 6:9-11). (For a more detailed discussion of this theme, see [Are the Dead Conscious?](#)).

Whenever the Bible describes death as a **sleep**, it is only the **body** that is under consideration.

For example, Daniel referred to those who “sleep in the dust of the earth” (12:2). Note that the part of man which sleeps is that part which is **planted in the dust**. A common Greek word for the “sleep” of death is *koimaomai* (cf. Mt. 27:52), a kindred term to *koimeterion*, from which derives our word “cemetery,” the abode of dead bodies (see “Asleep,” W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary*).

Finally, as suggested above, the term “sleep” implies the **future resurrection** of the human body. In spite of the fact that there are some who say, “there is no resurrection of the dead” (cf. 1 Cor. 15:12), e.g., the advocates of “realized eschatology,” the Bible unequivocally teaches this doctrine.

Paul argues that Christ “is the firstfruits of them that are asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20). This is a clear affirmation that Christ’s bodily resurrection is Heaven’s pledge that we shall be raised similarly—the firstfruits being the initial harvest (cf. Ex. 23:16), and the guarantee of that which is to follow. As the Lord awoke from the dead, so shall we.

“Sleep” is an intriguing study—both from the literal and figurative perspectives. May we be enriched by an investigation of this theme.

Are the Dead “Asleep”?

By **Wayne Jackson, Churches of Christ**

“Why do some teach that the “soul” is conscious after death, when the Bible plainly teaches that the dead are ‘asleep’?”

There are two significant words in the Greek New Testament for the English term “sleep.” Each of these is used both literally and figuratively, that is, for natural sleep, and also as a symbol for death.

The term *katheudo* occurs 22 times in the New Testament. In a literal sense it is used of “natural sleep” (Mt. 13:25; 25:5).

The term is employed with reference to death in only one passage. The daughter of a Jewish synagogue ruler, whose name was Jairus, had died (Mk. 5:35). Christ was bidden to the place where the girl was. When he arrived at the home, the Lord confidently said: “the child is not dead, but is sleeping” (v. 39).

That the maiden actually was dead admits of no doubt. The Savior used the term “sleep” figuratively, in view of the fact that this death was to be a temporary heartache. He then raised the twelve-year-old girl from her state of death. Luke says that her “spirit returned” and she rose up immediately (Lk. 8:55).

Another term in the New Testament for “sleep” is *koimaomai* (a form of *koimao*). The word is found 18 times. While *koimaomai* may refer on occasion to normal sleep (Mt. 28:13; Lk. 22:45), predominately (15 of the 18 times) this word is used figuratively for the “sleep” of death (see Mt. 27:52; 1 Cor. 15:20; 1 Thes. 4:13-15).

This metaphorical use of “sleep,” to describe the death of a body, is ancient. It is found in classical Greek (e.g., Homer, *Illiad* 11.241; Sophocles, *El*.509; *et al.*) and in the Septuagint (e.g., 36 times in 2 Kgs. & Chron, as in “he slept with his fathers” — cf. 2 Kg. 14:16).

The Body Sleeps, Not the Soul

Here is a fact that must be underscored. When the term “sleep” is used to depict the death of a person, the allusion is always to **the disposition of the body**, not the soul. There is no passage in the Scriptures that reflects the notion that one’s **soul** sleeps (i.e., is unconscious) in death. The case to the contrary may be argued briefly in the following fashion.

The prophet Daniel affirmed that those who “sleep [katheudonton] in the dust of the earth shall awake” (Dan. 12:2). Note that the part of man that “sleeps” is that which is deposited in the “dust of the earth.” This obviously is a reference to the physical body. The awakening, then, is a reference to the bodily resurrection.

Jesus once said to his disciples: “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep (kekoimetai — the perfect, passive of koimao); but I go that I may awake him out of sleep” (Jn. 11:11). In view of the subsequent context, the “awakening” clearly refers to the resurrection of Lazarus’ body (vv. 43-44). The verb koimao derives from the root keimai, “to lie down.” In death, it is only the “body” that lies down (not the soul); hence, it is the body that sleeps.

W. E. Vine notes that keimai, “to lie down,” stands as an antonym to “resurrection” (anastasis — from ana, “up,” and histemi, “to cause to stand” — see: *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* under “Asleep”).

Since that which will “stand up” is the body; it follows that the element of man that “lies down” or “sleeps” likewise is the body. The early Christians even called their burial grounds koimeteria, “sleeping places,” and from this term derives our modern word, “cemetery,” a place to which we transport the bodies of our loved ones. The term sleep says absolutely nothing about the state of the soul after death.

Noted scholar D. Edmond Hiebert observed:

“[T]he figure of death as sleep cannot be pressed to establish the teaching that in the intermediate state the soul is in unconscious repose (soul sleep) the body only is thought of as being asleep, no longer in communication with its earthly environment. As sleep has its awakening, so the body of the

believer will have its awakening. The theory of soul sleep is inconsistent with Paul's assertion in [1 Thes.] 5:10 that God's purpose for us is the whether we live or die we should live together with Christ. At death the believer's 'earthly house of our tabernacle' is dissolved (2 Cor. 5:1) and returns to the dust, but the spiritual part of man, the soul, his self-conscious personality, departs 'to be with the Lord' (2 Cor. 5:8). Since to depart from the world in death to 'be with Christ' is described by Paul as 'very far better' (Phil. 1:23) than the present state of blessed communion with the Lord and happy activity in His service, it is evident that 'sleep' as applied to believers cannot be intended to teach that the soul is unconscious" (188-89).

Is the Soul Conscious After Death?

There are those, who identify themselves with Christianity, who contend that the dead are **not** conscious in the intermediate state, i.e., in that condition of existence between the time of one's death and that of the resurrection of his body. Martin Luther once taught that the condition between death and the resurrection is "a deep and dreamless sleep without consciousness and feeling" (Althaus, 414-416).

There have been some among the churches of Christ who have advocated this concept. For example, in a speech delivered at Pepperdine University in April of 1988, F. LaGard Smith asserted the theory of "soul-sleeping." But this position is seriously flawed and is refuted by considerable biblical evidence.

The narrative regarding the rich man and Lazarus unquestionably demonstrates the consciousness of humanity (of both the evil and the righteous) in the intermediate state (Lk. 16:19ff). While some would dismiss this account as a mere parable, the evidence is against that view.

- The text has traits that suggest it is not a parable (e.g., Lazarus and Abraham being named).
- It would not matter if it were, for a parable portrays circumstances that are true to life (unlike, for example, the fable).

For a more detailed consideration of this matter, see the article: [Are the Dead Conscious?](#).

On the mountain of Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared and spoke with Christ regarding his impending death in Jerusalem (Lk. 9:30-31). These Old Testament worthies certainly were not in a state of “dreamless sleep.”

On the cross, Jesus promised the penitent robber, “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Lk. 23:43). The language demands association and consciousness later that day in the realm of the righteous dead. If not, of what value was the pledge?

As Hiebert mentioned (see above), Paul described the state of departing to be with the Lord (i.e., dying in Christ) as being “very far better” than earthly Christian fellowship (Phil. 1:23). Could one affirm that unconsciousness is “very far better” than the sweet communion among the children of God? Moreover, what value would there be in desiring to “depart” to be “with Christ” if one was unconscious, and thus did not even know that he **was** “with Christ.”

In the book of Revelation John saw a vision of the “souls” of those who had been slain upon the earth (Rev. 6:9-11). These souls were petitioning the Lord for information as to when their blood would be avenged, and they were encouraged to wait patiently until Heaven’s plan had reached fruition. It is impossible to eliminate post-death consciousness from this sacred scene.

These arguments represent but a fraction of the case that can be made for the conscious state of the dead in the post-death, pre-resurrection state of human existence. Those who deny this clear biblical teaching reveal that they have been influenced by doctrines that are alien to the scriptural view of man.

Are Some Sins Greater than Others?

By Wayne Jackson, Churches of Christ



CHRISTIAN
COURIER 

When Jesus was on trial before Pilate, he said: “He who delivers me unto you has the greater sin” (Jn. 19:11). Is one type of sin ‘greater’ than another? Explain, please.

On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus, in company with his disciples (Judas excluded), left the city of Jerusalem and made his way eastward across the brook Kidron to the garden of Gethsemane. After the agonizing events in the garden, the Lord was accosted by a band of Jewish officials who bound him and took him first to Annas, a former high priest, and then to his infamous son-in-law, Caiaphas (Jn. 18:12-14).

Since the Jews did not have the authority to administer capital punishment, Caiaphas dispatched the Lord to Pilate, the Roman governor, for his endorsement of the anticipated bloody deed (Jn. 18:28ff; cf. Jn. 11:47-53). It thus was Caiaphas who **delivered Christ** to the Roman authorities.

Special interest should be given to the term “greater” in John 19:11. It is an adjective indicating a comparison. First, it implies sin on the part of Pilate. Though the ruler knew that Jesus was not guilty of any crime deserving

death (Jn. 18:38; 19:4, 6), he nonetheless weakened (for self-serving reasons) and turned the Savior over to the Jewish mob (Jn. 19:16).

Second, the text clearly suggests a **greater degree of culpability** on the part of Caiaphas. Why was this?

Caiaphas' Greater Sin

Caiaphas was a Jewish high priest and the son-in-law of a former high priest (Annas — Jn. 18:13). He had been surrounded with the influence of the Hebrew Scriptures his entire life. He of all people **should have known** the testimony of Israel's Bible. Thus, he should have been familiar with many of the more than 300 Old Testament prophecies that detailed the identifying qualities of the Messiah.

There was **no excuse** for his role in the death of the Son of God. His heart simply was encrusted with rebellion (cf. 2 Cor. 3:14).

Without question Pilate sinned by weakly caving in to political pressure. He knew that the motive of the Jewish leaders was ungodly (Matt. 27:18) and likely that their evidence was suspect (cf. Matt. 26:59). But for fear of falling out of favor with Caesar (Jn. 19:12), he condemned Christ to execution on behalf of the Jews.

As bad as Pilate's sin of weakness and self-motivated "political correctness" was, it was not depraved to the degree of **calculated rebellion** that saturated the soul of Caiaphas. Thus, the spiritual leader's responsibility was greater, because of the high priest's broader knowledge and his opportunity to believe and yield to what was right.

Other Cases of Greater Sin

But this account is not the only case where accountability for sin is viewed in varying measures of guilt. Consider the following texts that are complementary in their characterization of the depths of sin.

When the Israelites bowed before the golden calf at Mount Sinai, Moses charged them with committing a "great sin" (Ex. 32:30-31). A **great sin** appears to be more serious, in some sense, than just sin.

Though Samaria (the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel) was wicked in her fornicating fraternization with the godless Assyrians, Jerusalem (the capital in the south), Samaria's sister city, was even "more corrupt" in her associations with paganism. Both Assyria and Babylon were paramours (Ezek. 23:11). Clearly, though, Jerusalem's greater level of evil was emphasized.

In Paul's first letter to Timothy, he denounced any Christian man who neglected his family.

"But if anyone does not provide for his people, and especially his own household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8).

In passages that speak of greater degrees of punishment, it becomes obvious that there are varying levels of sinfulness. It is possible for evil people to become worse and still worse yet (2 Tim. 3:13).

And so, according to biblical teaching, there will be **more punishment** for some than others (Matt. 11:20ff; Lk. 12:47-48; Heb. 10:28-29; Jas. 3:1; 2 Pet. 2:20-21).

Sharpening Our Understanding of Sin

It must be observed that all sin—**any** sin—is a serious matter, because "sin is lawlessness" (1 Jn. 3:4). In employing a metaphorical analogy involving conception, birth, maturation, and death, James declares that lust (desire), once conceived, gives birth to sin. Then when sin is allowed to grow, the result is death (i.e., eternal separation from God — Jas. 1:15).

Someone has called this the genealogy of sin. Of particular interest is the fact that "sin," as set forth in this text, is preceded by the Greek article, i.e., "the sin." Sin is not viewed merely as an abstraction. **Each sin** is an act of rebellion on its own. If left unchecked, it will result in eternal death. Donald Burdick's comment is insightful when he observes:

"James is not suggesting that only when sin has reached its full development does it result in death. The penalty of sin of any kind or extent is spiritual death" (1981, 172).

If **any** sin potentially is damning — even those transgressions that men consider minor (e.g., that “little white lie” — cf. Rev. 21:8) — how may it be said that one sin is greater than another?

The issue does not lie in the sin itself but in the **circumstances that accompany the sin**. Let us briefly illustrate this point, highlighting principles stated or implied in some of the passages cited earlier, reminding ourselves again, that **any** sin that remains unforgiven according to the divinely prescribed manner is deadly.

Presumption greater than ignorance

A sin of “presumption” is greater than a sin committed “unwittingly” because the former issues from an arrogant spirit, while the latter is done out of ignorance. Consider the following.

“And if one person sins unwittingly, then he shall offer a she-goat a year old for a sin-offering. And the priest shall make atonement for the soul that errs, when he sins unwittingly, before Jehovah, to make atonement for him; and he shall be forgiven. You shall have one law for him that does anything unwittingly, for him that is home-born among the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourns among them. But the soul that does anything with a high hand [presumptuously — KJV], whether he is home-born or a sojourner, the same blasphemes Jehovah; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of Jehovah, and has broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him” (Num. 15:27-31).

It is no wonder that the psalmist prayed:

“Keep your servant from presumptuous sins. Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be upright, and I shall be innocent from great transgression” (Psa. 19:13).

Notice that the “presumptuous” sin is a “great” transgression, and the practice of yielding to “presumptuous” sins soon makes the man the slave of his own weaknesses.

Teaching error which causes another to be lost

To teach a dogma that jeopardizes the soul of another is a greater wrong than advocating a position that technically may be incorrect, yet has no eternal consequence.

For example, to contend that the dead presently are **observing** the affairs of this earth (Eccl. 9:5-6) is without justification (Eccl. 9:5-6), but likely it is not an error that would condemn the person who believes such. To suggest that the “signs” of Matthew 24:5ff relate to the Second Coming of Christ is an exegetical mistake that ignores the context of the Savior’s sermon (cf. Matt. 24:34), but this one error alone would not be a condemning matter.

On the other hand, to argue that there is no future resurrection of the body is a teaching connected with **overthrowing the faith** of some. It thus would seem to be an error of much greater gravity (2 Tim. 2:16-18; 1 Tim. 1:20; cf. Jas. 3:1). A repudiation of the concept of the bodily resurrection has a direct correlation with the historical resurrection of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 15:12-19), which is the very foundation of Christianity.

Greater consequences

Some sins are “greater” because of the consequences they bear. A man who hates his brother is, in principle, a murderer (1 Jn. 3:15). Should such a disposition be sustained, he will be lost. The hater may not, however, suffer any **temporal penalty** for the malicious attitude.

On the other hand, the person who commits an actual murder may be imprisoned for years or even be executed. The latter sin is more serious in terms of the **immediate** price to be paid.

Some sins on the part of Christians warrant extreme discipline on behalf of the offender (e.g., the expulsion of congregational fellowship — see 1 Cor. 5), while other offenses require patience and further instruction (c.f. Rom. 14).

The Christian who abandons the faith and goes back into the world, making no effort to restrain sinning, is committing a greater sin than the poor soul who does not know the gospel. This clearly is the implication of Hebrews

10:26-31 and 2 Peter 2:20-21. The former text mentions the “sorer punishment” of the apostate, while the latter passage speaks of the “last state” as being “worse” than the “first” — possibly suggesting that he will be harder to reach with the truth and certainly indicating a greater condemnation (Lk. 12:47-48).

Some sins more destructive

One sin may be greater than another in terms of its destructiveness. It is one thing to sin privately and so forfeit the blessings provided by the Creator for one’s temporal and eternal welfare. It is quite another thing to live with such reckless abandon that others are spiritually wounded and arrive at last beyond the pale of redemption. Of such persons Jesus said:

“Whoever causes one of these little ones that believes on me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matt. 18:6).

It is not difficult to see the point of emphasis in this frightening warning.

Weakness versus rebellion

There appears to be an intensification of evil between the person who merely falls into sin through weakness and that of the degenerate, calloused individual who shamelessly mocks things sacred. Many scholars have called attention to the progressiveness of evil depicted in Psalm 1.

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful” (Psa. 1:1).

A. F. Kirkpatrick observed:

“The three clauses of the verse with their threefold parallelism (walk, stand, sit: counsel, way, session [sitting with]: wicked, sinners, scornful) emphasize the godly man’s entire avoidance of association with evil and evil-doers in every form and degree. They denote successive steps in a career of evil, and form a climax” (1906, 3).

There is a similar escalation of wickedness suggested in Psalm 32:1-2. The Cambridge professor described the “scoffer” mob as “a class of defiant and

cynical freethinkers” who exhibit a “spirit of proud self-sufficiency, [and] a contemptuous disregard for God and man (Prov. 21:24)” (*Ibid.* 2).

One cannot but be reminded of the “unjust judge” in one of the Lord’s parables. He had regard for neither God nor man (Lk. 18:1ff). The latter disposition frequently follows the former.

Some of the most villainous renegades upon this earth are former “gospel preachers” who have alienated themselves from the faith to become slanderous critics of the Creator, his holy law and his people. Their lips drip anti-Christ venom with almost every syllable they utter. The “pricked/cut” heart, even in the sinner, is of a far different nature than the “seared/branded” one that has become “past feeling” (cf. Acts 2:38; 1 Tim. 4:2; Eph. 1:18-19).

Conclusion

These examples certainly are far from exhaustive. They are, however, illustrative. The important thing to keep in mind is that every sin is damaging, and the conscientious Christian must strive to avoid it at all cost. We should live continuously in the mode of repentance and prayer. And one must remain mindful of the fact that even a child of God can drift into progressively dangerous currents (cf. Heb. 2:1ff).

Are There Degrees of Punishment and Reward?

by [Kyle Butt, M.Div.](#)

Alden Bass

Bert Thompson, Ph.D.

Churches of Christ

Q.

Will there be degrees of reward in heaven? Similarly, will there be degrees of punishment in hell?

A.

Any topic relating to the specific nature of man's ultimate, eternal abode should be of great interest to all accountable people, since every human eventually will inhabit eternity (see Thompson, 2000a, pp. 33-39; 2000b, pp. 41-47; 2000c, pp. 49-55). It is not surprising, then, that questions of what conditions will be like in the afterlife often occupy our thoughts. Whenever questions of spiritual import are under consideration—as they are when discussing the destiny of the soul—the only reliable source of information must by necessity be the One Who is the Originator and Sustainer of the soul. God, as Creator of all things physical and spiritual (Genesis 1:1ff.; Exodus 20:11), and Himself a Spirit Being (John 4:24), is the ultimate wellspring of the soul (Ecclesiastes 12:7). The Bible, then, as God's inspired Word (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21), must be the preeminent authority on this subject. It therefore is to Holy Writ that we must turn to answer any question about eternity.

DEGREES OF ETERNAL REWARD

First, it is important to note that **every** faithful follower of God eventually will receive an **eternal reward**. Writing in the book of Revelation, the apostle John described in striking language the destiny of the righteous when this world finally comes to an end: "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them.... He that overcometh shall inherit these things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son" (21:3,7, RSV). Earlier, John had encouraged his readers with these words: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). John's coworker, the apostle Paul, referred to those who had served Jesus faithfully as "heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:7). The writer of the book of Hebrews spoke of Christ as having become "unto all them that obey him, the author of eternal salvation" (5:9).

Second, it is equally important to realize that every saint will be rewarded "according to his deeds." Matthew wrote: "For the son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds" (16:27). Paul used practically identical words in Romans 2:5-7: "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up for thyself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his works." Such a concept was taught even in Old Testament times. Solomon wrote: "If thou sayest, 'We knew not this,' doth not he

that weigheth the heart consider it? And he that keepeth thy soul, doth he not know it? And shall not he render to every man according to his work?" (Proverbs 24:12).

Parables from the mouth of the Lord similarly demonstrate that every person will be judged according to his or her deeds. The parable of the pounds, recorded in Luke 19:11-27, is a perfect example.

A certain nobleman went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called ten servants of his, and gave them each ten pounds, and said unto them, "Trade ye herewith till I come." But his citizens hated him, and sent an ambassage after him, saying, "We will not that this man reign over us." And it came to pass, when he was come back again, having received the kingdom, that he commanded these servants, unto whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by trading. And the first came before him, saying, "Lord, thy pound hath made ten pounds more." And he said unto him, "Well done, thou good servant: because thou wast found faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities." And the second came, saying, "Thy pound, Lord, hath made five pounds." And he said unto him also, "Be thou also over five cities." And another came, saying, "Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I kept laid up in a napkin: for I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that which thou layedst not down, and reapest that which thou didst not sow." He saith unto him, "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I am an austere man, taking up that which I laid not down, and reaping that which I did not sow; then wherefore gavest thou not my money into the bank, and I at my coming should have required it with interest?" And he said unto them that stood by, "Take from him the pound, and give it unto him that hath the ten pounds." And they said unto him, "Lord, he hath ten pounds." I say unto you, that unto every one that hath shall be given; but from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away from him.

After reading this parable (and the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30), it is clear that certain individuals receive—and thus are responsible for—more pounds/talents than some others. The faithful servant who soundly invested ten pounds was awarded authority over ten cities. The second servant also was recompensed in proportion to the degree with which he fulfilled his responsibility to the master. He wisely invested five pounds, and in return was given authority over five cities. There is no reason to disbelieve, then, that had the third servant been equally faithful, he, too, would have been rewarded commensurate with his investment (which likely would have been authority over one city). This parable, then, teaches the following: (1) all of God's servants are blessed with varied abilities; (2) all who are faithful stewards of the ability with which they have been endowed will obtain a reward; and (3) God's stewards will be rewarded based on what they accomplished with the abilities that were entrusted to them. [This is not to say, of course, that heaven is "earned" by any human works (see Thompson, 1999, pp. 47-49). Ephesians 2:8-9 states unequivocally that salvation is a free gift of God, not something bestowed because of any human merit. Rather, the works done in the here and now provide for the Christian an eternal weight of glory—a weight that differs from person to person (2 Corinthians 4:17).]

If believers are to be judged according to their works (Matthew 16:27; 25:31-46; Revelation 20:12), it logically follows that those with the **greatest responsibility** can expect the **strictest judgment**. Indeed, the Good Book teaches exactly such a principle. Jehovah charged the prophet Ezekiel:

Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, "Thou shalt surely die," and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thy hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Again, when a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die: because

thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteous deeds which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thy hand. Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning; and thou hast delivered thy soul (Ezekiel 3:17-21).

What an awesome and terrifying responsibility that ancient preacher and prophet was given. Millennia later, James offered this warning: “Be not many of you teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive **heavier judgment**” (James 3:1).

Those who suggest that God will reward every saint **equally** often appeal to the parable that Christ presented in Matthew 20:1-15 for support of their position. There, the Lord told of a certain landowner who was in need of workers to assist him in his vineyard. The man went to the marketplace to find laborers and, when he had located some men, agreed to pay them a denarius each. About the third hour, he went to the market again in order to seek additional laborers. He went out twice more and then, at the eleventh hour, he found still more men to help. This last group worked only one hour, and yet when the end of the day arrived and all the men lined up to be paid, those “eleventh-hour” workers received their wages first—a full denarius. The rest of the men were given equal dues. When the master finally got to the laborers he had hired first thing that morning, he gave them the same amount he had given everyone else. Those “first-hour” workers were outraged! The very idea that they—who had been hired first and worked longest—should receive the same recompense as those who worked only one hour, was more than they could handle. The text in Matthew says that “they murmured against the householder” (vs. 11). But the man who had hired them responded simply: “Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things?” (vss. 13-15).

Those who teach that God will reward each of His faithful followers equally suggest that the denarius in this parable represents eternal life (see, for example: Wright, 1980, 122:531; Coffman, 1974, p. 307), and since every worker received a denarius, the implication is that there can be no “degrees” of reward. This, however, cannot be what the parable is teaching. In his commentary on the book of Matthew, renowned biblical scholar R.C.H. Lenski explained why.

Those who think that the denarius is eternal life, of course, regard the evening as the final judgment or the hour of death. Even in this verse this cannot be the sense, for eternal life is never **earned** by any man’s work. The combination of a)po/ with do/j (di/dwmi) means “give what is due.” Eternal life is never **due** anyone either at the time of its first bestowal in conversion or at the time of its full enjoyment when the believer enters heaven (1943, pp. 772-773, emp. added).

If this parable were speaking about final judgment, it would indeed provide a cogent argument for the equality of each person’s eternal reward. But **is** the parable addressing final judgment and eternal rewards? No, it is not. In Matthew 20:11 the text clearly indicates that the ones who worked all day “murmured against the householder.” In regard to those who did so, H. Leo Boles commented that “they were envious; their eyes were evil” (1952, p. 400). But the Scriptures make it clear that there will be no envy in heaven (Revelation 21:27). Lenski correctly observed: “Here, it ought to be plain, the possibility of making the denarius equal to eternal life is removed. The thought that a saint in heaven may murmur against God is appalling” (p. 775).

In addition, the master of the vineyard commanded the workers who labored in the field all day: “Take up that which is thine and **go thy way**” (vs. 14, emp. added). Lenski rendered the phrase, “Take up thine own and **be gone**,” and then observed:

This lord is done with him. And this is the climax of the parable. This u(/page [be gone] cannot mean, “Go and be content with thy wages!” It is exactly like the imperative found in 4:10, and always means to leave, cf., 8:13; 19:21.... This is a man who works in the church for what he can get out of the church. He has what he worked for—and nothing more. He is treated exactly as the hypocrites are who are mentioned in 6:2,5: “Verily, I say unto you, They have received their reward!” i.e., are paid in full.... Those who will learn nothing about divine grace even when they are working in the church will finally be left without this grace; those who are set on justice and refuse to go beyond it shall finally have justice (p. 777).

If we interpret the parable to mean that the master of the vineyard represents God, and the denarius represents eternal reward, how, then, are we to interpret the fact that those who worked all day received a denarius, but were **sent away from the master** of the vineyard? Can such a view be squared with Paul’s word in 1 Thessalonians 4:17—“And so shall we **ever** be with the Lord”?

If this parable is not discussing final judgment (and it is not), and if the denarius does not represent eternal life (and it does not), what, then, is the point of the parable? It appears that Christ was instructing His Jewish listeners about the Gentiles’ place in the Kingdom—a topic that, as we learn from later New Testament writings, became somewhat controversial among first-century Christians. The late Guy N. Woods, former editor of the *Gospel Advocate*, wrote concerning Christ’s discussion:

It is possible, indeed probable, in the minds of many scholars that it was delivered to show that the Gentiles, who came in at “the eleventh hour,” would enjoy in the kingdom (soon to be established when these words were uttered) the same privileges as the Jews who had been the favored and chosen people of the Lord for many centuries. Though last in point of invitation, they were to become first through their acceptance of, and dedication to, the gospel; whereas, the Jews, through their rebellion and disbelief, would be cut off (1976, p. 231, parenthetical comment in orig.).

Numerous conservative biblical commentators have suggested exactly such a view, including Adam Clarke (n.d. 5:194-197) and H. Leo Boles (1952, pp. 400-401). One writer by the name of Watts put it like this:

It is not the design of this parable to represent the final rewards of the saints at the day of judgment, but to show that the nation of the Jews, who had been called to be the people of God above a thousand years before, and had borne the burden and heat of the day, i.e., the toil and bondage of many ceremonies, should have no preference in the esteem of God above the Gentiles, who were called at the last hour, or at the end of the Jewish dispensation (as quoted in Woods, 1980, 122:532).

While the parable of the laborers established that all who are deserving (Jew or Gentile) would inherit a reward, it also emphasized God’s grace. As Lenski remarked:

The warning represented in this parable suggests our responsibility. If we close eye and heart against grace, no matter how high we stand in the church or how much we work, we shall lose life eternal (1943, p. 781).

But what of the denarius? What does it represent, if not eternal life? Lenski concluded—correctly, we believe—that the denarius represents the blessings one receives here on Earth by being a member of the Lord’s church.

The denarius paid at evening constitutes the temporal blessings connected with our Christian profession and work, and these blessings are made ours already during the entire time that we work. Every one of us gets his denarius; every one enjoys the same temporal benefits that are connected

with life in the church. They come to the new convert exactly as they do to the old, to the preacher as well as to the [member], to the child as well as to the octogenarian (p. 772).

REASONS FOR UNEQUAL REWARDS

Lending credence to the idea that Jesus' parable in Matthew 20 is not discussing equality of eternal rewards is the fact that the Bible plainly depicts certain people being awarded a unique and distinguished position in heaven. Revelation 15:3 notes that in heaven "they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb." Surely none of us would be so bold as to suggest that the hosts of heaven will sing a song about **us** as they do about Moses. Furthermore, in Revelation 21:14 John wrote that "the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." While we recognize the somewhat figurative nature of certain terms employed by John, the principle nevertheless remains: the apostles ultimately will occupy a place of greater preeminence in the heavenly abode. Also, Luke 16 portrays Abraham as having more prominence and authority in the afterlife than Lazarus. Consider also Mark 10:40, wherein James and John asked the Lord to allow them to sit next to Him in glory—one on His right side and one on His left. Jesus replied: "To sit on my right hand or on my left hand is not mine to give; but it is for them for whom it hath been prepared." Some glorified beings (whether angelic or human) will occupy a place of distinction beside the Savior—a unique and special place reserved solely for them.

Some have argued against the idea of differing rewards by claiming that heaven will be perfect, and that something perfect can be neither improved nor diminished. However, Jesus observed that "even so there shall be joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, **more** [joy] than over ninety and nine righteous persons, who need no repentance" (Luke 15:7, emp. added). In at least some sense, then, joy in heaven can differ in degrees. The principle of degrees of heavenly reward—which is taught quite plainly in Scripture—should motivate every Christian to "work while it is yet day, for the night cometh when no man can work" (John 9:4).

DEGREES OF ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

But if there are degrees of reward in heaven, will there likewise be degrees of punishment in hell? Yes indeed. On several occasions, when speaking of eternal torment, the Bible mentions those who will suffer to a lesser or greater degree. And each time such a reference occurs, the punishment is proportionate to the opportunities missed. Those who are blessed with numerous opportunities to obey the gospel and still reject it will receive greater condemnation than those who have little or no occasion to accept Christ. Jesus echoed this sentiment in His rebuke to the inhabitants of the cities of Bethsaida and Chorazin.

Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be **more tolerable** for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, shalt thou be exalted unto heaven? thou shalt go down unto Hades: for if the mighty works had been done in Sodom which were done in thee, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you that it shall be **more tolerable** for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee (Matthew 11:21-24, emp. added).

Jesus offered this censure to those Jewish cities where He had done much of His preaching, and where, on occasion, He even had performed miracles. The citizens of those towns had more opportunity to accept the Messiah than many others living around them, yet they persisted in their rejection of Him. On the other hand, the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon—

renowned for their wickedness—would receive a **lesser** punishment at the Day of Judgment for the simple reason that they had been deprived of direct exposure to Christ’s message and miracles. All were to endure punishment, for all had rejected God’s law. But it would not be **equal** punishment. The writer of Hebrews further emphasized this point when he addressed the “sorer punishment” that was to befall those who had “trodden underfoot the Son of God” (10:29). Notice also Peter’s stinging statement regarding the terrible fate that awaits unfaithful, backsliding Christians:

For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, **the last state is become worse with them than the first** (2 Peter 2:20-21, emp. added).

If Peter’s statement teaches anything, it teaches degrees of punishment.

But perhaps the most convincing argument for the concept of degrees of punishment derives from Jesus’ parable of the wicked servant, as recorded in Luke 12:42-48.

And the Lord said, “Who, then, is the faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall set over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will set him over all that he hath. But if that servant shall say in his heart, ‘My lord delayeth his coming,’ and shall begin to beat the menservants and the maidservants, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he expecteth not, and in an hour when he knoweth not, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint his portion with the unfaithful. And that servant, who knew his lord’s will, and made not ready, nor did according to his will, shall be beaten with **many** stripes; but he that knew not, and did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with **few** stripes. And to whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required: and to whom they commit much, of him will they ask the more” (emp. added).

The meaning of the last section of this parable is inescapable. All the wicked will be punished; however, those limited in their opportunities to learn about Christ will be punished “with fewer stripes” than those who knew the truth and obeyed it not.

Does the Bible teach degrees of reward in heaven? Yes, it does. Does it also teach degrees of punishment in hell? Yes, it does. The good news, of course, is that heaven’s offer of salvation is open to everyone (John 3:16; Romans 6:23). No one **has** to go to hell. When Christ was ransomed on our behalf (1 Timothy 2:4), He paid a debt He did not owe, and a debt we could not pay—so that we could live forever in the presence of our Creator (Matthew 25:46). God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 18:23; 33:11). Nor should we. As one writer put it: “No one who has been snatched from the burning himself can feel anything but compassion and concern for the lost” (Woodson, 1973, p. 32). As we discover the hideous nature of our sin, we not only should desire to save ourselves “from this crooked generation” (Acts 2:40), but we also should be passionate about warning the wicked of their impending doom (Ezekiel 3:17-19).

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BOOK CHAPTER: THERE WILL BE DEGREES OF FUTURE PUNISHMENT

THIS is clearly sustained by the Scriptures, and it is utterly fatal to the annihilation theory. "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds;" Rom. 2:5-6. "I the Lord search the hearts, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings." Jer. 17:9-10.

The foregoing texts apply directly to the future state, and plainly say that every man's punishment will be "according to his deeds." As there are many grades of character among the unbelieving here upon earth, so there will be many degrees of woe among the lost hereafter. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." "He that soweth bountifully, shall reap also bountifully." Every act, word, and thought of our life is seed cast out on life's turbulent waters; these seeds will be swept ashore, take root, and bear a great harvest. You will reap what you sow. The more seeds of wickedness you cast-out, the greater will be your harvest. "Sow the wind and reap the whirlwind."

But will some have greater damnation than others? "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers: therefore, ye shall receive the greater damnation." Matt. 23:14.

Light rates the sinfulness of sin. According to the degree of light a man has, sin is sinful to him. Paul says that "sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful." The knowledge of the commandment is what made sin "exceeding sinful." Jesus said to Pilate, "He that delivered me unto thee hath the *greater sin*." John 19:11. By consenting to the wish of the Jews and condemning Christ to be crucified, Pilate committed an awful sin. Yet Christ said that the one who delivered him into Pilate's hands had the "greater sin." That was Judas Iscariot. He had more light than Pilate. Judas had once a blessed part in that sacred

ministry. Because he had more light, his sin was greater. The greater the light, the deeper the sin

“And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.” John 9:39-41.

“If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. “ John 15:22, 24.

Light, I repeat, rates the sinfulness of sin. That being true, we can easily see how men will be punished “according to their deeds”; how they must reap what they sow. Those whose sins are “exceeding sinful” because they reject greater light will receive a “greater damnation.” “That servant which knew his lord’s will”—had a divine revelation—and prepared not himself “shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.” Luke 12:47-48.

Though not only the wicked, but “all the nations that forget God” (Psa. 9:17), will be turned into hell, yet in eternity it will be more tolerable for those nations than for the wicked wretches that willfully and knowingly went against light and truth. Although all will be cast into the same hell, conscience will be a principal part of eternal torment, and the punishment of *sense* and *separation* will be much greater to some than to others.

Thus, we see not only that light rates the sinfulness of crime here, but that it will rate the punishment of the damned in hell forever. Whatever the damnation of the ungodly will be, it must and will be just. Rom. 3:8. “And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I

say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city.” Matt. 10:14-15.

“Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.” Matt. 11:20-24.

Jesus upbraided these: cities and declared that if he had done in Sodom the same works that he did in them, those ancient people would have repented and would not have been destroyed, and that in the day of judgment, Sodom would have it more tolerable than they. The punishment of Sodom will not be so great. If that punishment were simply annihilation, such language would be meaningless.

Of some, Jesus said, ‘It were better if they never had been born.’ Backsliders will receive a greater punishment than those who were never saved. “For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness.” 2 Pet. 2:18-21. “For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under 2 or 3 witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden underfoot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his

people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” Hebrews 10:26-31.

How solemn these truths! Of all the millions in the dark regions of despair, the man and woman that were once saved and then fell away from that state and are lost forever will have the greatest punishment. Their punishment will be a “much sorer punishment” than that of those who were never saved. Through all eternity they will remember a time when they were saved, when the sweet peace of heaven filled their souls. They will remember those seasons of grace and glory, the sweet hymns of Zion, the fellowship of their Creator. They will look back to a time when their hearts were pure, and when they were ready to enter heaven and immortal glory to spend eternity.

Oh, what a remembrance for lost souls! But they sold their souls for a feather. They bartered away the priceless treasure of salvation for some trifle, some of earth’s vanities. Now they are lost—eternally lost; forever cut off from Christ and all that is pure and lovely; sinking away farther and farther from home, heaven, and loved ones—eternally separated. Oh, what a punishment! Yet, once they were saved. It were better for them never to have known the way of righteousness.

From all the foregoing texts, we clearly see, men’s punishment will be “according to their deeds”; that some will have “greater damnation,” a “much sorer punishment,” than others; that some will have “few stripes,” others “many,” according to the degree of light received; that it will be “more tolerable” for some than for others. This stands in square contradiction to the doctrine of annihilation. If the ungodly will simply be burned into ashes, as blind guides vainly hope, such scriptures have no meaning. The annihilation theory stands in opposition & contradiction to every plain text cited under this heading. An unconscious man, lifeless, and reduced to a bit of ashes, cannot suffer.¹

¹ Riggle, H. M. (2005). [Hell and Everlasting Punishment](#). James L. Fleming.

C.A.R.M. Personality: Ed Fudge

Different conditionalists/annihilationists have different views concerning the soul

by [Matt Slick](#)

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Different conditionalists have different views of the nature of the soul. Therefore, it makes it difficult to write and dialogue with them because we would have to find out which particular conditionalist holds to which particular view of the soul. Nevertheless, following is a quote that summarizes the three main views.

"Evangelical conditionalists also differ in terms of what we believe the Bible says about the constitution of human beings, and also about whether people are conscious in the intermediate state between death and resurrection. Some are anthropological physicalists or materialists who believe human beings are physical creatures, the functioning of whose minds is dependent upon their living bodies. Others are substance dualists who believe human beings have immaterial souls, but that they lack consciousness between death and resurrection. Still others embrace a traditional body/soul dualism and contend that the immaterial souls of human beings live on consciously after death (although not immortal in any sense), until a resurrection of the body. The same diversity of perspectives exists within evangelicalism more broadly, and therefore is not a logical requirement or consequence of CI." (rethinkinghell.com/Rethinking-Hell_Statement-on-Evangelical-Conditionalism.pdf, #8.4)

To summarize the above paragraph, consider the three views of the soul

1. Physicalists/materialists - the mind of the human being is completely dependent upon the living body. This means that when the human body dies, the human mind ceases to exist.
2. Substance dualists - the human soul is of a different substance than the physical body and can continue on after death, but they lack consciousness.
3. Body/soul dualism - the human soul is of a different substance than the physical body and continues on after death and conscious existence.

Depending upon which view an annihilationist holds to, there will be ramifications with each position.

In physicalism, if the soul ceases to exist upon physical death, then this would require a form of soul sleep (which itself is different definitions) and or complete extinguishing of the existence of the soul. But, this position has problems. See [Problems with anthropological physicalism/materialism](#) which includes

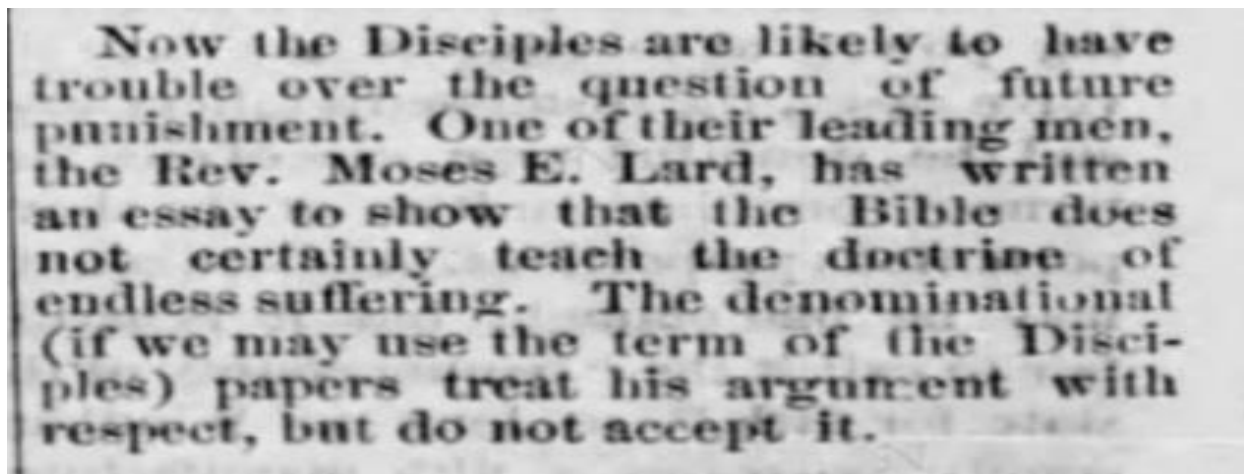
In the form of substance dualism listed above, the issue of soul sleep once again is problematic. Conditionalists typically state that soul sleep is a state of continued existence, but the person is unconscious. The problem is this is not well defined. If it's not specifically declared and what soul sleep is, it cannot be cross-examined. But, if it cannot be cross-examined, it cannot be defended either. The conditionalists can't have it both ways. They can't say that soul sleep is continued unconscious existence without defining whether or not there is in the activity within the soul in this supposed state. If the person says there is no activity, then what is the difference between no activity of the soul and death where that death is nonexistence? If the person wants to state that there is activity, then what is the activity? Is it thought, self-awareness, contemplation, etc.? Again, these are problems for the soul sleep position, and I have have not seen this position adequately addressed by conditionalists. See also, [In conditionalism, there is a logical problem with the soul ceasing to exist then being resurrected](#)

In body/soul dualism where the soul continues conscious existence after death, there is a conflict with anthropological physicalism which says the soul does not continue after death. Furthermore, this is a more biblical view where the spirit continues conscious existence apart from the physical body ([Luke 16:19-31](#); [2 Cor. 12:2](#)). Nevertheless, some annihilationists maintain that the person who continues to exist after death is later judged and then condemned to eternal nonexistence. But, this position has its problems as well.

Moses E. Lard was the first major figure in the Restoration Movement to write or speak on record explaining afterlife @Conditional Immortality

Moses Lard wrote in a fifty-page 1879 published pamphlet entitled *Do the Holy Scriptures Teach the Endlessness of Future Punishment?*

“Belief in endless future punishment is destined to wane. With it, moreover, is doomed the present tyrannous orthodox sentiment which denies to dissent freedom of speech. Men dare not now utter aloud their conviction on the subject. But the day is at hand when they will be free. Manly independence will, at last, assert itself; and intolerance will grow gentle. Mark the course of coming events, and remember this foretelling.” Moses E. Lard (1818 – 1880)



Now the Disciples are likely to have trouble over the question of future punishment. One of their leading men, the Rev. Moses E. Lard, has written an essay to show that the Bible does not certainly teach the doctrine of endless suffering. The denominational (if we may use the term of the Disciples) papers treat his argument with respect, but do not accept it.

Middlebury Register (1879)

New Orleans Democrat (1879)

Lard on Hell.

In the Richmond, Ky., *Register* we find the following notice of Elder Moses E. Lard, formerly a minister in St. Joseph:

Elder Moses E. Lard preached a sermon at the Christian church, in this city, on Wednesday evening, on the subject of the endlessness of future punishment. He examined the question very closely and very critically, and the conclusion which he drew and the assertion made was that no man could say from the scriptures that God had anywhere declared that future punishment was to be endless. He did not say that the punishment was to be endured only for a time, but he advanced the opinion that the sacred book left the question in doubt, and he said that he thanked God that it had been left so in doubt. He also stated it as his candid opinion that a majority of the lawyers of Kentucky to-day denied that a just God could visit endless suffering as a punishment of sins; that the thinking, studious men of the country for many years had denied this proposition, and it was a matter of congratulation that a majority of those who closely studied the question and analyzed it had come to the conclusion as himself—that the Bible had left the question in doubt, neither stating that the punishment to be inflicted in the next world for sin was endless, nor stating that it was to have an end. Mr. Lard's sermon presented many points which were entirely new to his hearers and awakened an interest about a question which has heretofore attracted little attention.

AL MAXEY: @ "The Maxey-Thrasher Debate" A debate on the eternal destiny of the wicked between two Gospel preachers. "'Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living SOUL/being' (Genesis 2:7). Some traditionalists virtually equate this last phrase (living soul) with 'immortal soul.' But, that is NOT what the passage says. God put breath within this body and the body became a living being. The exact same words are used of animals in the Scriptures. Further, it doesn't say man was GIVEN a soul. It says man BECAME a soul."

<http://www.zianet.com/maxey/MxThrshr.htm> (Church of Christ)

ROBERT DOZIER: @ "Dozier-Johnson Debate" The eternal destiny of the wicked by a Gospel preacher. "But Gehenna was all about destroying that which was dumped there. There were not cries of neverending conscious pain coming out of the bodies cast there. No conscious torment, just destruction of trash, carcasses of animals and some dead human bodies. It was all about death % destruction. That is what those who heard Jesus speak of Gehenna would think of. Jesus spoke of the wicked & lost as being cast into Gehenna AFTER God killed them (Luke 12:5)."

Edward Fudge says "apollumi" mostly refers to death. That is misleading

by [Matt Slick](#)

10/11/2018

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Edward William Fudge is one of the best known conditionalists. He wrote a book called *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment*. It is an indepth support of annihilationism. Following is a quote from Mr. Fudge that is, in my opinion, misleading.

"Most often apollumi refers to actual death. It appears ninety-two times in the New Testament, thirteen times in Paul's letters."¹

I have done an extensive analysis of every occurance of the Greek word apollumi found at [Word study on apollumi, destroy](#). In that analysis here is the summation.

Destruction (apollumi) where it is in reference to people has a total of 60 occurrences in the New Testament: But, of those 60 occurrences, none necessitate, from context, that nonexistence is the proper interpretation. This is important since there are contexts where the nonexistence of objects are necessary: flower ([James 1:11](#)), gold ([1 Pet. 1:7](#)), luxurious things ([Rev. 18:14](#)), wine ([Mark 2:22](#)). Nevertheless, within those 60 occurrences where apollumi is in reference to people, the only verses where physical death is necessitated as an interpretation totals 23 ([Matt. 8:25; 21:41; 22:7; 26:52; Mark 4:38; 9:22; 12:9; Luke 8:24; 11:51; 13:3; 5, 55; 15:17; 17:27; 29; 20:16; Acts 5:37; Rom. 2:12; 1 Cor. 10:9, 10; 2 Cor. 4:9; Jude 5, 11](#)). But, those 23 occurrences do not necessitate the interpretation of nonexistence. Furthermore, this means that the occurrence of apollumi range in topics including the option of existence or nonexistence ([Matt. 10:28; John 10:10](#)), physical death or spiritual death ([Matt. 10:39; 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24, 25; 17:33; John 12:25; John 17:12; 1 Cor. 8:11](#)), damnation ([John 3:16; 6:39; 10:28; 18:9; 1 Cor. 1:18; 15:18; 2 Cor. 2:15; 2 Cor. 4:3; 2 Thess. 2:10; 2 Pet. 3:9; James 4:12](#)), death of Jesus where he obviously would continue existence after physical death ([Matt. 2:13; 12:14; 27:20; Mark 3:6; 11:18; Luke 19:47](#)), and of a nation disappearing ([John 11:50](#)), losing body parts ([Matt. 5:29-30](#)), loss of accomplishment ([2 John 8](#)), destruction of demons ([Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34](#)), wineskins ([Mark 9:17; Luke 5:37](#)), flooding of the world ([2 Pet. 3:6](#)), saving the lost ([Matt. 10:6; 15:24; 18:11; Luke 15:24, 32; 19:10](#)), hindering someone ([Rom. 14:15](#)), and unaccounted for ([Luke 15:4, 6, 8, 9; 21:18; John 6:12, 27; Acts 27:34](#)).

According to Edward Fudge, the Greek word apollumi occurs 92 times in the New Testament. Alright, so let's do the math. According to my research ([Word study on apollumi, destroy](#)), 59 occurrences deal with people.

Of those 59 occurrences 31 verses are speaking of a person's physical death. Additionally, of those same 59 verses, 10 speak of either physical death or spiritual death. In other words, the verses can be interpreted either way.

- The verses that directly deal with the death of those persons consist of ([Matthew 2:13; 8:25; 10:28; 12:14; 16:25; 21:41; 22:7; 26:52; 27:20; Mark 3:6; 4:38; 9:22; 11:18; 12:9; Luke 8:24; 11:51; 13:3, 5, 33; 15:17; 17:27, 29; 19:47; 20:16; Acts 5:37; Romans 2:12; 1 Cor. 10:9, 10, 2 Cor. 4:9; Jude 5, 11](#))
- The verses that deal with possible death would be ([Matthew 10:39; 16:25; 18:14; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24, 25; 17:33; John 12:25; 17:12; 1 Cor. 8:11](#))

Conclusion

So it is only 31 out of Edward Fudge's 92 verses that specifically deal with the physical death of people. That is 34%. Therefore, Fudge is mistaken when he says "Most often apollymi refers to actual death."²

But, let's add in the 10 verses that that can mean spiritual as well as physical death. That would be a total of 41 verses out of Fudge's 92 which would be 45%. Again, Fudge is wrong.

I can't help but wonder if he is seeing more in the texts of Scripture that is really there in order to support his annihilationism.

Edward Fudge and eternal salvation, redemption, judgment, destruction, and punishment

by [Matt Slick](#)

10/11/2018

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This is a quote from Edward Fudge, one of the best known annihilationists.

"We have seen this in regard to eternal salvation (not an eternal act of saving), eternal redemption (not an eternal process of redeeming), eternal judgment (not an eternal act of judging), eternal destruction (not an eternal process of destroying), and eternal punishment (not an eternal act of punishing). This punishment, more specifically identified as this destruction, will last forever. Those who are punished with everlasting destruction will cease to exist."¹

I came across this interesting quote from Edwin William Fudge on my Kindle reader. It had been highlighted over 130 times. This piqued my interest. Also, I was drawn to the way he compared various terms and added small comments in parentheses in order to support his annihilationism. Mr. Fudge, and apparently a whole bunch of others, think that the quote is powerful. So, I thought I would analyze it.

I did a quick search on my computer Bible program in the New American Standard Bible (NASB) and discovered that each of the terms "eternal salvation," "eternal redemption," "eternal judgment," "eternal destruction," and "eternal punishment," occurs only once in the Bible. Fascinating. I assumed the terms would have occurred numerous times. But they don't. Just once each.

1. **Eternal salvation:** [Hebrews 5:9](#), "And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation,"
2. **Eternal redemption:** [Hebrews 9:12](#), "and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption."
3. **Eternal judgment:** [Hebrews 6:2](#), "of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment."
4. **Eternal destruction:** [2 Thessalonians 1:9](#), "These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,"
5. **Eternal punishment:** [Matthew 25:46](#), "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Let's examine each one.

Eternal Salvation

[Hebrews 5:9](#), "And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation,"

Fudge says that eternal salvation is "not an eternal act of saving." Okay, but that depends on what is meant by the act of saving. If fudge is referring to the initial act of regeneration that occurs when a person believes and is delivered from God's righteous judgment, then he is correct. God's saving work, which occurs in a moment of time when a person believes, is not ongoing. However, its continued effect of salvation is experienced by the person forever. Now, remember, Fudge is trying to show that just as someone is not eternally being saved, he is not eternally being punished. But there's a problem because eternal salvation is a continued experience whereas eternal punishment is not. He is conflating eternal punishment with non-existence. They are not the same thing. For more information on this, see [Conditionalism and conflating eternal punishment with nonexistence](#)

Eternal redemption

[Hebrews 9:12](#), "and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption."

Fudge says that eternal redemption is "not an eternal process of redeeming." I see his point. However, Fudge is trying to show that just as someone is not being eternally redeemed, he's not being eternally punished. And again, the same problem arises because eternal redemption is a continual experience, whereas eternal punishment is not - according to him it is nonexistence. He is trying to compare the eternal part of punishment, which he says is nonexistence, with the eternal part of redemption which is continued existence. Therefore, his comparison is flawed. Again, for more information on this, see [Conditionalism and conflating eternal punishment with nonexistence](#)

Eternal Judgment

[Hebrews 6:2](#), "of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment."

Fudge says that eternal judgment is "not an eternal act of judging." He is correct in that God is not eternally pronouncing a judgment. However, I think he's missing the point of the text. Notice it says "eternal judgment." We understand that God is not eternally pronouncing a judgment. But the judgment that God has pronounced his eternal. What is that judgment? Fudge will, of course, assume the eternal judgment means nonexistence. But, since Fudge believes that an unsaved person who dies will suffer punishment before annihilation, he has a problem.

"As is the case with any punishment, once a person completes his duration of suffering, no more judgment can be levied against the person. If the conditionalist says that the punishment is nonexistence, then there are two punishments according to this view of conditionalism: suffering and then annihilation. But, if a person's sin necessitates a certain amount of suffering, and that person completes the law-required sentence, then why does

he suffer an additional judgment of annihilation? It makes no sense. Furthermore, why does not the person go to heaven since he has complied with the requirements of the law regarding punishment for breaking the law? There would be no more wrath to be administered. This would mean that this particular view of conditionalism (living on earth, dying, suffering in the afterlife for a while, then annihilation) would be unjust. Furthermore, it inadvertently accuses God of injustice by having Him administer an additional punishment of annihilation after the punishment according the law has been satisfied."²

So, Fudge is inconsistent and unclear in his quote at the beginning of this article.

Eternal Destruction

[2 Thessalonians 1:9](#), "These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,"

Fudge says that eternal destruction is "not an eternal process of destroying." Well, that would depend on the meaning of the word "destroying." In the conditionalist position, that means nonexistence. But in the counter position, eternal conscious torment, such destruction is an ongoing event. God uses the term destruction in different ways. It can be used of people who are presently lost [[apollumi](#)] but are still alive ([Matthew 10:6](#); [15:24](#); [Luke 15:4](#), [6](#), [8](#); [19:10](#)). In addition, the Jews wanted to destroy [[apollumi](#)] Jesus ([Matt. 2:13](#); [12:14](#); [27:20](#); [Mark 3:6](#); [11:18](#); [Luke 13:33](#); [19:47](#)) yet he would still be alive - even in his death, ([1 Pet. 3:18-20](#)). (See [Soul sleep, Jesus' human nature, and conditionalism](#)) Furthermore, if "eternal destruction" means nonexistence, then how is 'nonexistence' "away from the presence of the Lord"? Nonexistence can't be away from anything... it just isn't anything.

Eternal Punishment

[Matthew 25:46](#), "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."³

Fudge says that eternal punishment is "not an eternal act of punishing." But, that is what the debate is about, isn't it? We are discussing what the nature of that punishment is: nonexistence or existence. Nevertheless, Jesus contrasted eternal punishment with eternal life. It would seem that both are equal in that they are each eternal in duration. But, if the eternal punishment is *not* something experienced, then shouldn't that be the same with eternal life? Of course, that makes no sense. The comparison is obviously not one-to-one. So, what Fudge would be saying is that Jesus would be speaking in two different senses within the same statement. He would saying that eternal punishment is nonexistence without experience, but eternal life is blessing with experience. Is that what Jesus was saying? I don't think so. Fudge's position is problematic since it appears to be accusing Jesus of being inconsistent in how he uses the word "eternal" in relationship to punishment and life. One is the continued experience of the blessing of life, where the other is a onetime act of nonexistence that is not experienced since nonexistence experiences nothing.

Conclusion

Though this particular article isn't of any great value in refuting annihilationism, it does, I believe, demonstrate the lack of proper logical thinking by Edward Fudge. Likewise, I have found that conditionalist arguments are not as cogent as they think. And, as is exceedingly common, they beg the question and assume their position is the right one when texts do not necessitate their conclusions. Sorry Fudge, but quips don't make doctrinal truth.

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- [1.](#)Fudge, Edward William. The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment, Third Edition (pp. 41-42). Cascade Books, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition.
 - [2.](#)Matt Slick, [If the sinner is punished and satisfies the law, then shouldn't he go to heaven?](#)
-

Edward Fudge's teaching that when death occurs the soul is deprived of life, leads to heresy

by [Matt Slick](#)

10/11/2018

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The late Edward William Fudge (d. 2017) was a strong proponent of conditionalism, the idea that upon final judgment, the wicked cease to exist. But he also taught that when the human person dies physically, his soul is deprived of life. This necessarily leads to heresy.

- All these details lead to a single conclusion: “When death occurs, then it is the soul that is deprived of life. Death cannot strike the body or any other part of the soul without striking the entirety of the soul . . . It is deliberately said both that the soul dies ([Judg 16:30](#); [Num 23:10](#); et al.), that it is destroyed or consumed ([Ezek 22:25, 27](#)), and that it is extinguished ([Job 11:20](#)).”⁴⁹ This is the consistent witness of the Old Testament.¹
- "The overwhelming testimony of Scripture leads me to believe that the dead person is thoroughly dead until the resurrection — which, from his or her perspective, seems to be the very next instant."²
- "death is the absence of life."³
- Paul never gives reason to suppose that eternal death is anything other than the absence of life..."⁴

If the human soul is deprived of life, it has no action, no awareness, no attributes, and no person. If we were to consider the examination of a dead human body, we would acknowledge that there is no activity, no awareness, no thought, and no attributes of personhood exhibited at all. Personhood is such things as self-awareness, awareness of others, having a will, being able to contemplate, communicate, have emotions, etc. None of these are present in a lifeless body. Therefore, though the body is physically present, there is no quality of the existence of human personhood. With this, Mr. Fudge's position leads to false doctrine. Let me explain.

Jesus is both human and divine

The correct biblical teaching concerning Jesus is that he has two distinct natures: divine and human. We call this the hypostatic union. There is another, very important doctrine called the *communicatio idiomatum*. This fancy Latin term simply means that the attributes of both natures are ascribed to the single person. In other words, Jesus, the person, claimed the attributes of both humanity and divinity. From the human perspective, he spoke of being distressed ([Luke 12:50](#)), that he was with the disciples ([John 7:33](#)), that he was thirsty ([John 19:28](#)), etc. But he also spoke that he had glory with God the Father before the foundation of the world ([John 17:5](#)) and that he had descended from heaven ([John 3:13](#)). So, we see that the single person of Christ exhibited

attributes of both humanity and divinity. This is proper biblical theology and to deny it is to adopt heresy.

When Mr. Fudge says that upon a person's physical death his soul ceases to have life, then he must be consistent and affirm that Jesus' human nature also ceased to have life. This further means that between Jesus' death and resurrection he was no longer the God-man because there were no attributes of humanity being ascribed to the single person of Christ. That's what it means to have no life. It means no attributes of personhood are being exhibited at all - because they are dead and gone. Therefore, according to Fudge, upon Jesus' physical death, his human nature ceased to have life, ceased to function, ceased to display, ceased to have the attributes of personhood, etc. Therefore, Fudge is denying the true doctrine of the hypostatic union and the communicatio idiomatum of Christ. He promotes heresy.

His doctrine needs to be rejected for the heretical teaching that it really is.

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- [1.](#)Fudge, Edward William. The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment, Third Edition (pp. 27-28). Cascade Books, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition.
 - [2.](https://edwardfudge.com/2012/03/death-as-separation/)<https://edwardfudge.com/2012/03/death-as-separation/>
 - [3.](#)Fudge, Edward William. The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment, Third Edition (p. 169). Cascade Books, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition.

[4.](#)Fudge, Edward William. The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment, Third Edition (p. 211). Cascade Books, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle

Fudge's doctrine of punishment then annihilation has a problem

by [Matt Slick](#)

10/11/2018

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The *late* Edward Fudge (d. 2017), who many proponents of conditionalism appeal to for support of their position, taught that a person is annihilated after he has suffered for his sins for an appropriate amount of time. But this has a problem.

- "...when God destroys both soul and body in hell, the destructive act or process will be based on perfect divine justice in each individual case, and will allow infinite latitude for degrees of conscious punishment, whether differentiated by its kind, its intensity, or its duration."¹
- This "death," not annihilation in some technical literal sense, is the penal consequence of wrongdoing committed during earthly life. We may be sure that the process of dying the second death will encompass whatever type, intensity, and duration of conscious torment divine justice might require."²

So, Fudge is saying that "the destructive or process will be based on perfect divine justice in each person's case..." with "degrees of conscious punishment..." which is the "penal consequence of wrongdoing" and will encompass a "duration of conscious torment divine justice might require." In other words, after the required amount of suffering is completed according to the law (penal), the sinner is annihilated.

The Problem with Edward Fudge's position

But the problem is that Fudge is teaching that a person suffers before he is annihilated and that the suffering is corresponding to his sin. Sin is breaking the law of God ([1 John 3:4](#)). But, once the sinner has paid his due penalty for his sin, why isn't he justified because he has fulfilled the penalty requirement of the law through his suffering? If the annihilationist says that the sinner is not justified because the unbeliever has not trusted Christ, then isn't not trusting in Christ also a sin that is paid for through his suffering? So, why isn't the person saved? Fudge's position is a problem, and it cannot be true.

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- [1.](#)Fudge, Edward William. *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment*, Third Edition (p. 208). Cascade Books, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition.
 - [2.](#)ibid. p. 209
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Is Hell Forever?

Bibliotheca Sacra 152: 607 (1995): 259-272.

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[This is the third and final article in the series, "The Destiny of the Unevangelized," delivered by the author as the W. H. Griffith Thomas Lectures at Dallas Theological Seminary, February 8-11, 1994.]

The view known as annihilationism holds that at some point human beings cease to exist. Annihilationism takes one of three forms.^[1]

1. **Pure mortalism** is the idea that human life is inseparably bound up with the human organism. Thus, with the death and dissolution of that organism, the person also passes out of existence. This understanding that annihilation applies to all persons is not commonly found within Christian theologies.

2. **Conditional immortality**, a view considerably more common within Christian circles, agrees with the preceding view in that humans are naturally mortal, but this second view disagrees with the first view by saying that humans can, under certain circumstances, become immortal, or as Paul put it, "put on immortality" (1 Cor 15:53-54). The essential point, however, is that human beings are not naturally immortal but must have immortality conferred by God.

3. **Annihilationism** proper says humans are naturally immortal, not mortal. Thus, the soul, or more correctly, the person, does not pass out of existence simply because of death; he or she ceases to exist because of God's action. This action occurs either at death, at the general judgment, or at the end of a period of punishment based on each individual's guilt.

Warfield pointed out that these three views do not always appear in pure or unmixed form. Because their advocates are not always careful to keep strictly within the logical limits of one of the three theories, mixed versions of the views are often held.

The overall concept of annihilation has recently received renewed interest, exposition, and defense from somewhat surprising sources. In the past decade a number of rather prominent evangelical theologians and leaders have affirmed they are annihilationists. Among these are Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, Clark Pinnock, John R. W. Stott, Stephen Travis, and John Wenham. At the Consultation on Evangelical Affirmations, held at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in May 1989, debate broke out on this topic and it proved impossible to formulate an article that would articulate the overall views of those present.^[2]

Arguments Advanced in Favor of Annihilationism

A number of arguments are given by those who currently represent this position.

The Issue of Mortality versus Immortality

One argument, which is both theologically and biblically broad, is to reject the idea that humans are somehow inherently immortal, thus moving the discussion toward the position of conditional immortality. The reason for concern about this, Edward Fudge argues, is that if the natural immortality of the soul is accepted, then the options are reduced to an unacceptable few.^[3] He quotes Pusey, who wrote, "If man is admitted to be immortal, and punishment is not endless, there is no other conclusion but that he should be restored."^[4] For those who reject this conclusion and who find either alternative unacceptable, rejection of natural immortality takes on significance.

Part of the argument against inherent immortality is that this idea of the soul is of Greek philosophical, rather than biblical, origin. It has found its way into Christian theology at a number of points. Some, especially those of the Reformed tradition, maintain that immortality is part of the image of God in man and God's life-giving by breathing into man the breath of life.^[5] Critics, however, have claimed increasingly that this doctrine, which has had a rather long and in some periods unchallenged reign in the churches, is not biblical. They say this doctrine is of pagan origin and crept into Christian thinking through Platonic philosophy. When the Bible speaks of immortality, it refers to the future glorified body, rather than the present soul. Thus the basis of confidence in life after death is bodily resurrection, not immortality of the soul.^[6]

While conceding that the early church fathers such as Origen and Augustine believed in the immortality of the soul, Fudge insists that their view differed from that of the Greek philosophers. Their view was not that the soul was inherently immortal. It had come into being at the creative hand of God. Though it survives death, its future existence also depends on God's will. Others, however, such as Justin Martyr and Tatian, openly opposed the pagan doctrine of immortality.^[7]

Fudge maintains that the traditional biblical arguments that man is immortal must be rejected. Immortality, he says, does not follow from the fact that humans have been created in the image of God. This divine image in mankind obviously does not include God's omnipotence or omniscience, so why should it include immortality? If it did, it was certainly lost in the Fall, since Genesis 5:3 states that Adam "became the father of a son in his own likeness, according to his image."

Another argument used to support human immortality is from Jesus' statement, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Matt 22:32). Surely, some say, this must argue for the immortality of at least these three patriarchs. However, the context indicates that Jesus' point was to prove the resurrection, not immortality. The parallel passage in Luke 20:37 makes clear that Jesus was speaking of the resurrection of those who belong to God, not the immortality of every person. Further, expressions in the Bible such as "salvation of the soul" (e.g., 1 Pet 1:9; cf. Mark 8:35) do not argue for a separate immortal soul. These are merely quotations of passages such as Psalms 16:9-11; 49:15; and 73:24, which speak of the psalmist's hope for

abiding fellowship with God, who will not let His own perish. The word "soul," for both Old and New Testament writers, is here simply referring to the person, not to some entity within him.[8]

Fudge then develops this view at some length through examining the biblical data from both Testaments. The Hebrew word נֶפֶשׁ is so rich and varied in its meaning that it is rendered in 45 different ways by the translators. The same terms are applied to both humans and animals. The conclusion to be drawn from such data is that the human person is an indivisible whole. When death occurs, it is the death of the soul, the whole person, not simply the death of the body, with the soul somehow surviving.[9] Similarly the word *yuch* usually denotes the life of a person, not some part of the individual. Sometimes the adjectival form of the word refers to the unspiritual or carnal person in contrast to the spiritual person (1 Cor 2:14-16), or the natural body of this life, contrasted with the spiritual body of the life to come (15:44).[10]

Annihilationism and the Idea of "Destruction"

A second argument used to support the doctrine of annihilation centers around the idea of destruction, together with the concept of its means, namely, the consuming fire. Stott notes that words for "destruction" are often used in relation to the final state of perdition, the most common Greek words being ἀπολλύμι ("to destroy") and ἀπόλεια ("destruction"). When the verb is active and transitive it means to kill, as in the case of Herod's attempt to murder the baby Jesus and the plot of the Jewish leaders to have Him executed (Matt 2:13; 12:14). Jesus told His hearers not to be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul (Matt 10:28; cf. James 4:12). If, then, to kill is to deprive the body of life, it would seem that hell is a deprivation of both physical and spiritual life, in other words, an extinction of being.

When the verb ἀπολλύμι is in the middle voice it means to be destroyed and so to perish, whether physically, as by hunger or snake bite (Luke 15:17; 1 Cor 10:9), or eternally in hell (John 3:16; 10:28; 17:12; Rom 2:12; 1 Cor 15:18; 2 Pet 3:9). Just as believers are those being saved, so unbelievers are οἱ ἀπολλύμενοι ("those who are perishing"). This term occurs in 1 Corinthians 1:18; 2 Corinthians 2:15; 4:3; and 2 Thessalonians 2:10. Jesus said that the broad road leads to destruction (Matt 7:13). Other verses using this verb are Romans 9:22; Philippians 1:28; 3:19; Hebrews 10:39; 2 Peter 3:7; and Revelation 17:8, 11. It would seem strange, then, Stott says, if those who are said to suffer destruction are not actually destroyed. He agrees with Edwards that it is "difficult to image a perpetually inconclusive process of perishing." [11]

The biblical imagery of hell is also referred to by annihilationists in support of their view. The most prominent element in this imagery is, of course, fire. This is commonly understood as teaching that those who are lost will be submitted eternally to punishing flame and will never be consumed by it. Jesus used the expression "the fire of hell" (Matt 5:22; 18:9) and spoke of "eternal fire" (18:8; 25:41). The Book of Revelation refers to "the lake of fire" (20:14-15). Stott suggests that fire is associated in people's minds with "conscious torment" because of their having experienced acute pain from being burned. He maintains, however, that the main function of fire is not to cause pain, but to bring about destruction, as incinerators bear witness. This also fits well with the biblical expression "a consuming fire" and with John the Baptist's warning of the Judge's

"burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt 3:12; cf. Luke 3:17). From this data Stott draws this conclusion:

The fire itself is termed "eternal" and "unquenchable," but it would be very odd if what is thrown into it proves indestructible. Our expectation would be the opposite: it would be consumed for ever, not tormented forever. Hence it is the smoke (evidence that the fire has done its work) which "rises for ever and ever" (Revelation 14:11; cf. 19:3).^[12]

Stott responds to four objections to his understanding of the lake of fire. The first is the vivid picture of hell as a place where "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:48). He points out that Jesus' quotation is from the last verse of Isaiah (66:24), which refers to the dead bodies of God's enemies being consigned to the city's rubbish dump, to be eaten by maggots and burned. While the apocryphal Judith 16:17 applied this to everlasting pain for the nations hostile to God, Jesus, in quoting this verse from Isaiah, did not mention everlasting pain. The worm will not die and the fire will not be quenched - at least not until their work of destruction is done, Stott says. The worm and the fire are everlasting, not the persons subject to them.

A second objection to annihilationism is Jesus' reference to "eternal punishment" in contrast to "eternal life" in Matthew 25:46. If eternal life means that the righteous shall live forever in conscious bliss in the presence of God, does not the parallelism require that wicked unbelievers will forever experience conscious punishment in hell? Stott replies that this interpretation reads into the text what is not necessarily there. Though Jesus said that both life and punishment will be eternal, He did not, at least in this passage, define the nature of either of these. Elsewhere (John 17:3), He spoke of eternal life as conscious enjoyment of God, but it does not follow, Stott argues, that eternal punishment must be a conscious experience of pain at God's hand. "On the contrary, although declaring both to be eternal, Jesus is *contrasting* the two destinies: the more unlike they are, the better."^[13] Pinnock responds in a slightly different way. Like Stott, he says Jesus did not define the nature of either eternal life or eternal punishment in Matthew 25:46. But Pinnock adds that Jesus simply stated that there will be two destinies and leaves it there, so that one is free to interpret this verse as meaning either everlasting conscious torment or irreversible destruction. The text allows both possibilities. All it teaches explicitly, he says, is the *finality* of the judgment itself, not its *nature*.^[14]

A third objection raised against annihilationism is based on the parable, if that is what it was, of the rich man and Lazarus, as found in Luke 16:19-31. Did not the rich man (called Dives, after the Latin word for rich man) declare that he was "in agony in this flame" (vv. 23-24, 28)? However, one must be cautious in interpreting a parable (if it was a parable) that speaks of "Abraham's bosom" as well as hell fire. Also, since the experiences of the rich man and Lazarus occurred immediately after their death, the most natural interpretation of the passage would be that it refers to the intermediate state between death and resurrection. Stott, in fact, believes this is when the lost come to the horrible realization of their fate. And such an interpretation, he says, is surely not incompatible with annihilation. Similarly, since the "torment" mentioned in Revelation 14:10 will be experienced "in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb," that seems to refer to the moment of judgment, not to the eternal state. The smoke, symbolizing the completed burning, and not the torment, will be forever.

Annihilationism and Justice

A fourth objection against annihilationism is the concept of justice, the belief that God will judge people "according to their deeds," as stated in such passages as Revelation 20:12. This implies that each person's penalty will be commensurate with the evil he or she did. This principle was of course followed in the Jewish law courts, in which the *lex talionis* limited punishments to retributions corresponding to the offenses. However, Stott argues that if eternal conscious torment is administered as punishment for sins done in time, is there not a serious disproportion between the wrongdoing and the penalty? Is not God guilty of the same sort of inequity that His law prohibited? While not minimizing the seriousness of sin as rebellion against the Creator, Stott wonders if "eternal conscious torment" is compatible with divine justice as revealed in the Bible. The only possible exception to this, Stott says, would be if somehow one's impenitence also continues throughout eternity.[\[15\]](#)

Pinnock also argues this point. This would be infinite punishment for finite sin, for a finite being cannot commit an infinite sin, even if it is against an infinite Being. The major point, however, as he sees it, is that such unending torture of the wicked would serve no conceivable purpose of God except sheer vengeance and vindictiveness. It would spell endless and total unredemptive suffering, punishment for its own sake. There is no question here of reformation or reeducation of the wicked. There could never be any resulting good beyond the suffering itself. He cites with approval Hans Küng's observation that (quite apart from the point that a merciless God contradicts Jesus' teachings about the Father) this concept is strangely out of harmony with present-day practice. In education and in criminology in many states, retributive punishments without an opportunity for probation are being abandoned. It is thus most inappropriate, and to most persons it is monstrous, that God should administer not only lifelong but also eternal punishment of body and soul.[\[16\]](#)

Stott also argues for his view on the basis of verses that have traditionally been used as the basis for universalism. These include John 12:32; 1 Corinthians 15:28; Ephesians 1:10; Philippians 2:10-11; Colossians 1:20. He is not led to universalism because of these verses, but he raises the question of how the impenitents' eternal existence in hell could be reconciled with the biblical teaching of God's apparent reconciling of all things to Himself in His final victory over evil. How can God in any meaningful sense be said to be all things to all people if a certain number of people continue in rebellion against Him and under His judgment? Stott feels that "it would be easier to hold together the awful reality of hell and universal reign of God if hell means destruction and the impenitent are no more."[\[17\]](#)

Pinnock presents at least two more reasons for his belief in annihilationism. One is the doctrine of God. A God who would torment even the rebellious eternally is cruel and merciless. How can one worship and imitate such a Being? Further, everlasting suffering, especially if linked to soteriological predestination, according to which God predestined persons to that fate, raises the apologetic task connected with the problem of evil to an impossible and hopeless level.[\[18\]](#)

Pinnock also argues that a metaphysical problem is involved in the teaching of eternal conscious torment. An unending hell involves a similarly unending cosmological dualism. Heaven and hell just go on existing together forever. Pinnock feels that it would make better sense metaphysically, as well as biblically, morally, and justice-wise, if hell meant destruction and the wicked simply were no more. Otherwise, the "disloyal opposition would eternally exist alongside God in a corner of unredeemed reality in the new creation."[\[19\]](#)

An Evaluation of Annihilationism

The traditional evangelical view is that those who are not saved will suffer endless punishment in hell. The following response to annihilationism includes criticism of arguments advanced by the annihilationists, and a positive argumentation for the traditional view.

The Philosophical Basis of Annihilationism

It is necessary first to examine the philosophical concept present within the usual form of annihilationism. As stated earlier, annihilationists contend that the idea that the human soul is immortal, and hence cannot cease to be, or cannot be destroyed, even by God Himself, does not derive from biblical sources, but from Greek philosophy, especially Plato. This argument is built on two false assumptions. One is that similarity of two ideas demonstrates a common origin or cause, or that one of these originates from or is caused by the other. The other assumption is the claim that a causal explanation of something adequately accounts for it, or settles the question of its truth.

These two assumptions must now be scrutinized. The overall difficulty with this argument is the lack of specificity and precision in the description of the Greek view. Greek thought had a variety of concepts on any given issue, rather than one monolithic idea. In Platonism, the view most frequently cited, the idea of immortality is related to the concept of the preexistence of the soul. Thus the soul is eternal or immortal in both directions, past and future, having neither beginning nor end. However, this is not true of the Christian view of man. What is usually described as the doctrine of immortality in Christian theology is that the soul is immortal into the future but not into the past. It will never cease to be at any point in the future, but came into existence at some point in the past.

Also the Greeks viewed the soul as having natural or inherent immortality. The biblical view, on the other hand, is of a derived or dependent, and contingent or conditional, immortality. A person's ability to survive forever derives from God. The soul was potentially immortal when created, but it could have become truly immortal only if the requisite conditions were fulfilled, in other words, if the first parents of the human race had obeyed God's command completely. Therefore a causal connection between Greek philosophy and the Bible on the subject of immortality has not been established. There simply must be more specific resemblance to establish any sort of derivation or common origin of the Christian view from the "Greek" view.

Even if there were some sort of derivation or causation, however, it would not account for the Christian view of immortality. It might give a causal explanation of how this belief came into being, but not the actual reason for it. It would not settle the question of the truth of the idea. One who holds that this does suffice would seem to be guilty of the genetic fallacy, of assuming that explaining the existence of an idea also accounts for its truth.

Theological Issues and Annihilationism

God's love. The Scriptures often refer to God's love. But what is its nature? As Pinnock, Stott, and others depict it, His love seems to be a sentimentalized version, in which God would not do anything to cause pain, displeasure, or discomfort to anyone. Thus, endless suffering would be incompatible with divine love.

Is this really the picture of God's love given in Scripture? May it not be that God chooses some actions that cause pain to some persons for the sake of a higher good, namely, the greater joy or welfare of the whole of humanity, or more significantly, the good of the whole of reality, especially, the glory of God Himself?

God's will. Annihilationists also seem to have a truncated understanding of God's will. Pinnock complains that if God does not want anyone to perish, then the idea of eternal conscious suffering for anyone is incredible. One must ask, however, whether there may not be more than one sense of God's will. Are there not situations in Scripture in which God willed to permit persons to do what He really did not wish or did not like? A clear case is Jesus' statement in Matthew 19:8 about divorce in the Old Testament era. God's "wish" and God's "will" are to be distinguished.^[20] Certainly all moral beings periodically make decisions contrary to their wishes. People choose to do things that they do not really like and choose not to do things that they would very much like to do. This distinction, however, does not seem to be part of Pinnock's thinking. If God wants something to happen, and has the power to bring it about, then, Pinnock says, it must surely occur.

God's justice. As already noted, annihilationists argue against eternal conscious suffering on the basis that it is a punishment grossly disproportionate to the offense. How can a just God punish eternally or for an infinite period of time someone who has committed only a finite sin? How can a finite person be guilty of an infinite wrong?

These questions, however, assume that God and man are basically equal partners, and therefore are able to negotiate a mutually acceptable agreement between them. In such a situation, the human might protest against what is to him a disagreeable outcome. Here, however, one person is finite and owes everything to God, the infinite Person, including even life itself. To fail, then, to honor God, obey Him, and accept what He says is indeed an infinite act of ingratitude and of rejection.

Some contend that no sin or combination of sins could be infinite. What must be measured, however, is the effect, which may seem out of all proportion to the act. Thus, one person might make just a tiny pinprick in the body of another, so slight as to be scarcely noticeable. Yet if it is made in a crucial spot or with a contaminated instrument, the effects may prove fatal. The act is then an absolute one, slight though it seems.

Annihilationists, in protesting what they see as the injustice of everlasting suffering as punishment, assume that sin does not have a great effect on God, and so it should not be punished infinitely. But this overlooks the full extent of sin's effect on a perfectly holy God, for whom sin must be exceedingly offensive, since it is a contradiction of His very nature.

Annihilationists also assume that punishment in hell is something God administers by His own deliberate, voluntary, and vindictive action, when He really would not need to do so. May it not be, however, that it is primarily the human person who chooses the eternal punishment, or at least chooses the action that leads to that punishment? Indeed, this is the very point C. S. Lewis proposed as a possibility.^[21] He wrote that what is most characteristic of hell is not physical flame and attendant suffering. Instead what really makes it hell is the absence of God, with the consequent loneliness, anguish, and longing (whereas God's presence is what makes heaven heaven). Thus sin is a human being saying, "God, go away and leave me alone," and hell is God finally saying, in effect, "All right, you shall have what you wish." In the final analysis it is not God who sends individuals to hell, but those persons themselves.

May it not be that for persons to be what they are, so that salvation may be what it is, they must be so constituted as to have the potential of living forever? Perhaps this is one of those necessary matters, such as God's incapability of making triangles without three sides or circles in which all points on the circumference are not equidistant from the center of the circle.

Of course, Pinnock objects to this and similar attempts to minimize in some fashion the severity of hell. One may ask, however, why hell must be understood in the most offensive way possible. It almost seems as if annihilationists are stating the eternal punishment option as unfavorably as possible in order to give rhetorical appeal to their alternate view. This seems, however, to be a less than ideal way of handling a difference. (One of Socrates' opponents or dialogue partners once complained that Socrates stated the opponent's view in the worst possible way.) If true, that is a serious charge, since it suggests an attempt to gain an unfair advantage.

The doctrine of eternal punishment is not well accepted in American society. The idea of individual responsibility is not popular. Though individuals take unwise actions, they are not regarded as having contributed to the outcome of those actions. To suggest that the agent of the action is responsible may seem cold or hardhearted. Reality, as God defines it, is not that way, however. Certain actions bear certain consequences, and justice means that those consequences have to be experienced. God provides for the removal of those eternal consequences for those who repent and accept His provision - and that is grace. Justice, however, does not require that He cancel the inevitable results for those who continue to live independently of Him.

Other Aspects of Annihilationism

As already noted, both Pinnock and Stott have appealed to Bible passages that are generally used by universalists. They feel, for example, that these verses speak of God's victory over all things, of His reconciling all things to Himself. Yet universalists contend that this is not accomplished without the actual restoration of everything, which would preclude the disposal of anyone, as in annihilation. According to annihilationists, eternal punishment would seem to be a matter of God's giving up on some of His children as incorrigible. They say this would certainly not be the triumph of love. However, it would be the surrender of God's love to the fact of failure.

The same problem applies to the question of God's love and justice. Pinnock has argued that such precludes endless punishment. For a universalist such as Nels Ferré, however, the problem is not solved quite so easily. In his thinking, God's love and justice preclude annihilationism. He argues for universal salvation and against annihilation, using terminology and arguments strikingly similar to those of Pinnock. (Actually, to avoid an anachronism, one should say instead that Pinnock's arguments resemble Ferré's.) Ferré contends that if God gives eternal life to some or most, He would then be unjust in allowing or causing some persons to pass out of existence.^[22] That would be a failure of sovereign love. Ferré would probably suggest that an expedient such as annihilation is a case of "taking the hell out of hell." Thus, on both these points the annihilationists may be dealing with a two-edged sword.

Biblical Evidence against Annihilationism

The significant passage in support of eternal conscious punishment is Matthew 25:41-46. The usual argument is that just as Jesus was promising believers everlasting life, unending bliss with Him, He was also threatening unbelievers with everlasting punishment. In an extensive argument Fudge attempts to show that when applied to nouns that speak of a resulting condition (such as punishment), αἰώνιος does not denote eternity as it does when modifying nouns that refer to activities (such as punishing). Yet he does not discuss the matter of parallelism in verse 46, namely, that if in the one case (life) the adjective αἰώνιος means eternal, it must also mean eternal in the other phrase (punishment). The parallelism requires that if life for believers is of everlasting duration, punishment for unbelievers must be also.^[23] Perhaps most impressive, because of its source, is this statement by John A. T. Robinson, a universalist:

The genuine universalist will base nothing on the fact (which is a fact) that the New Testament word for eternal (*aionios*) does not necessarily mean everlasting, but enduring only for an indefinitely long period. For he can apply this signification to "eternal punishment" in Matt 25:46 only if he is willing to give exactly the same sense to "eternal life" in the same verse. As F. D. Maurice said many years ago now, writing to F. J. A. Hort: "I did not see how *aionios* could mean one thing when it was joined with *kolasis* and another when it was joined with *zoe*" (quoted, J. O. F. Murray, *The Goodness and Severity of God*, p. 195). To admit that the two phrases are not parallel is at once to treat them with unequal seriousness. And that a true universalism must refuse to do.^[24]

Another issue in this passage may provide some guidance. The place to which the "goats" are consigned in the judgment of the sheep and goats is "the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels" (v. 41). Revelation gives more information on this future condition of the devil. The beast and the false prophet will be "thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone" (19:20). Then the devil will be cast into the same lake (20:10), and they "will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (v. 10). Then verse 15 states that "if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." While these verses only say explicitly that the devil, the beast, and the false prophet will be tormented forever and ever, no statement suggests that the persons whose names are not written in the book of life have any different fate in the lake of fire. This supports the view that the punishment spoken of in Matthew 25:41, 46 is also everlasting in nature.

Is this fire everlasting, however? According to Revelation 14:11 the smoke from this fire of torment of the beast and the false prophet will be forever. Fudge and others contend that the smoke, not the punishment, is everlasting. However, how there can be smoke without something being burned? If these bodies are burned up, consumed, destroyed, how can there still be smoke? What would produce smoke, unless something was burning? For that matter, why would the lake of fire continue to exist, with nothing left to burn?

Another point needing evaluation is Stott's contention that the contrast between life and punishment requires maximum difference. That means that if the former is eternal, the latter is not. One must ask, however, whether this is really so. On what evidence is that contention based? And if it is valid, what does it really require? It would seem that the greater contrast would be between the eternality of "life" and the eternality of "punishment." Overall, this argument for annihilationism is not overly impressive.

Pinnock's argument from metaphysical dualism is not impressive either. He argues, as noted earlier, that hell cannot be eternal because that would require an ongoing dualism in which opposition to God would exist forever alongside God. However, this dualism as such is not ultimate; it is a derived dualism in which continuation of evil depends on Him. Yet its continuation is not a true dualism in the sense of being an active opposition. It presents no challenge or threat to God. It has been brought into complete and permanent subjugation. Thus equilibrium has been attained or achieved in the universe. This would seem, therefore, not to be a genuine tension for theology.

Luke 16:19-31, on the rich man and Lazarus, is frequently presented in arguing against annihilation. Actually, its application is somewhat narrower. This story actually refutes only the idea that unbelieving humans cease to exist at death. There is no explicit basis for believing in a later annihilation. In fact the opposite would seem to be the case.

The idea of the wicked being obliterated rather than suffering endlessly will continue to appeal to sensitive Christians. Yet emotion cannot be the primary consideration in settling theological issues. In this case the biblical and theological data weigh strongly on the side of eternal conscious punishment of the wicked.

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The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment

By Wayne Jackson, Churches of Christ



The fact that human beings were made in the very image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26-27) should suggest, to those who contemplate issues seriously, that we are more than mere temporal creatures passing through time toward oblivion.

The concept of an eternal future, which involves punishment for those who choose not to serve God, is one that strikes a note of terror in the heart. Given the arrogant disposition of mankind in general, the idea of eternal punishment has met with considerable resistance, even though it is plainly taught in the Scriptures.

Skepticism and Eternal Punishment

Naturally, the world of skepticism has repudiated the idea of everlasting punishment. Although Albert Einstein believed in some sort of a “God” who revealed himself “in the orderly harmony” of the universe (Jastrow 1978, 28) he did not believe in the God of the Bible, for, said he, “I cannot imagine a God who rewards and punishes the objects of his creation” (*Free Inquiry* 1996/97, 31).

Bertrand Russell, Britain’s celebrated agnostic, suggested that one of the reasons he could not be a Christian was because Jesus Christ “believed in hell.” (At least he knew what the Lord believed!) Russell charged that no person “who is really profoundly humane can believe in everlasting punishment” (1957, 17).

In other words, the concept of eternal punishment was not consistent with **his** sense of justice. Though he acknowledged that some punishment was justified in the case of criminals, he opined that **eternal** punishment was unjust.

Of course, no one complains that eternal happiness is unjust in the case of those who have served God only briefly on this earth.

Religious Materialism

One aspect of “materialism” is the theory that man is wholly mortal. He thus does not possess a “soul” (or “spirit”) that will inhabit eternity. Companion to this, of course, is the belief that there is no eternal punishment for those who reject God. Even some religionists who profess a reverence for the Bible repudiate the proposition that there is a part of man that survives death, hence, may be subject to punishment forever.

For example, the Jehovah’s Witnesses allege that the concept of everlasting punishment is an “unreasonable doctrine” that “contradicts the Bible” (*Make Sure Of All Things* 1953, 154-55). To these misguided folks, “hell” is only “a place of rest in hope” (Ibid., 68). Does it not seem strange that Christ would speak of the “danger” of hell (Mt. 5:22) if this state were a mere “place of rest in hope”?

Similarly, Seventh-day Adventists argue that the idea of eternal anguish in hell is not biblical. Rather, they surmise that the wicked simply will be annihilated after an appropriate punishment (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe...* 1988, 369-72).

Materialism and the Restoration Movement

Churches of Christ have not been without their own problems when it comes to a denial of the doctrine of eternal punishment. In 1844 Dr. John Thomas, a physician from England, broke with the Restoration Movement. He organized a group that eventually became known as the Christadelphians. One of the major doctrines of this apostate faction was the belief that unbelievers will remain eternally dead.

Jesse B. Ferguson came to work with the church in Nashville, Tennessee in the winter of 1846. H. Leo Boles described him as a “meteor that flashe[d] across the horizon . . . leaving nothing but darkness in its wake” (1932, 186). Ferguson taught, among other errors, that there is no punishment for evil men after death (West 1949, 261-65). His influence devastated the churches in Nashville.

In 1982, Edward Fudge, who served as an elder for the Bering Drive church in Houston, produced his book, *The Fire that Consumes*. In this volume Fudge denies what he calls the “traditionalist view” of eternal punishment. He asserts that unrighteous people will be raised to judgment, punished for a while, and then banished to “total, everlasting extinction” (1982, 435-36).

Though Fudge’s position has been thoroughly discredited, by writers both in and out of the church (Workman 1984, 492-508; Morey 1984, 102,124-25,206), some, nevertheless, have been charmed by it.

Pepperdine University invited Fudge to present his “conditionalist” doctrine at the 1991 spring lectureship. John Clayton, a popular speaker among churches, gave Fudge’s book an enthusiastic recommendation, while himself confessing:

“I have never been able to be comfortable with the position that a person who rejected God should suffer forever and ever and ever” (1990, 20).

Others also have toyed with this ideology.

During the April, 1988 Pepperdine University Lectureship, F. LaGard Smith argued that God “will destroy [the soul]. Not punish it. Not dangle it. Not torture it. Destroy it.”

After some communication with brother Smith on this matter (see the printed *Christian Courier*, October, 1992), it is my devout prayer that our friend will study himself out of this position eventually, though I must say that, at this time, I have no indication of any inclination in this direction (see Jackson 1998, 18-19).

Biblical Evidence for Eternal Punishment

The biblical doctrine of eternal punishment is as clear as teaching can be. It is naught but human emotionalism that obscures the issue for some. Let us pursue this study under several categories.

The Incorruptible Spirit

Some allege that the idea of man possessing a “soul” (or “spirit”) that survives the body in a conscious state, is a relic of paganism. That is not true. Consider the following:

- Though an enemy may terminate one’s bodily existence, he cannot destroy his soul (Mt. 10:28). This could not have been said if human beings were entirely mortal.
- Peter spoke of the need to clothe one’s “spirit” with “incorruptible” apparel (1 Pet. 3:4). This imagery would hardly be appropriate if the human spirit itself were corruptible.
- In Revelation 6, John saw a vision of martyrs underneath the altar of God. The text specifically affirms that John saw “the souls of them that had been slain” (v. 9). “Soul” cannot be a figure of speech for the entire person, because John saw the “souls of them” that were slain. Moreover, these souls were under the altar of God, but their dead bodies were still on earth. The resurrection had not transpired. Additionally, these souls were conscious, as evinced by the fact that they: spoke (crying out to the Lord); wondered (“How long, O God?”); remembered (their fellow saints still on earth); reasoned (concluding that the punishment of evil men is just); and, received a preliminary reward (white robes) in anticipation of the final victory (vv. 10-11).

The Consciousness of the Wicked

While it may be granted that the faithful survive the death of the body, does that premise hold true for the lost? Are they conscious in their estrangement from the Creator?

- The Psalmist once described a particularly distressing time in his life as being like “Sheol,” which, in this context, represents the state

of punishment for lost people immediately following death. He noted that it was an existence of “pain” where he “found trouble and sorrow” (Psa. 116:3). Each of these terms suggests consciousness.

- Similarly, Jonah characterized his tormenting hours in the great fish’s belly as like being in “Sheol.” He observed that it was an environment of “affliction” (Jon. 2:2).
- Daniel wrote concerning the condemned who are raised from the dust to a state of “shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2).
- Jesus declared that those who die unprepared will be subjected to “eternal punishment” (Mt. 25:46). “Punishment” clearly implies awareness; this is why the New World Translation (Watch Tower Society) changes “punishment” to “cutting-off.” Observe also that the punishment of the unbeliever is as enduring as the “life” (fellowship with God) of the believer.
- Paul does not hesitate to affirm that those who “know not God,” and those who “obey not the gospel,” will “suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might” (2 Thess. 1:9). The term “destruction” does not connote annihilation. Rather, it is “the loss of a life of blessedness after death, future misery” (Thayer 1958, 443).
- The book of Revelation describes the anguished fate of those who experience the “wrath of God.” They are tormented forever and ever (14:10-11).

Biblical Descriptions

There are numerous figures of speech in the New Testament that are designed to stress both the conscious nature of hell’s punishment and its abiding duration. The ultimate fate of the wicked will be like an “eternal fire” (Mt. 25:41); indeed, their “worm dies not [i.e., the gnawing anguish continues on and on] and the fire is not quenched” (Mk. 9:48). Hell is a place of outer darkness where there is weeping and the gnashing of teeth (Mt. 25:30), as God treads the wine press of his holy wrath (Rev. 19:15).

Surely it should be obvious that these are symbols intended to convey the horrors of eternal judgment. The actual punishment will be greater than any figure of speech can portray. A recent writer observes:

A summary of all Scripture that speaks of hell indicates that there is the loss and absence of all good, and the misery and torment of an evil conscience. The most terrifying aspect is the complete and deserved separation from God and from all that is pure, holy, and beautiful. In addition there is the awareness of being under the wrath of God and of enduring the curse of a righteous sentence because of one's sins that were consciously and voluntarily committed (Powell 1988, 953).

Eternal Punishment and Divine Justice

Many have a difficult time reconciling the doctrine of eternal punishment with the character of a benevolent God. Over against this emotional reaction is the sobering testimony of the Bible. Moreover, when all factors are taken into consideration, the problem is not insurmountable. Reflect upon the following points.

- No one will be in hell who does not deserve to be there. God is loving (1 Jn. 4:8), good (Psa. 145:9), and merciful (Eph. 2:4). He will only do that which is right (Gen. 18:25). The Lord does not desire that a single soul should perish (2 Pet. 3:9), but when men choose to live alienated from him, and cast their eternal welfare toward hell, he will honor their decision. Paul wrote concerning those who are “vessels of wrath fitted unto destruction” (Rom. 9:22). Arndt and Gingrich, viewing the verb as a middle voice form, suggest that these “prepared themselves for destruction” (1967, 419; see also Vine 1991). When folks thrust from them the Word of God, they judge themselves unworthy of eternal life (Acts 13:46). Atheists somehow feel that the Lord is obligated to force rebels into his eternal, holy presence, even when they have despised him their entire lives!
- Because Jehovah is holy, he cannot simply overlook sin as if it does not exist (Hab. 1:13); and so, because the Lord is just (Psa. 89:14), evil must be punished (cf. Rev. 16:5). That is why the Father gave his Son as a sacrifice for sin—that he might remain just, and yet be a justifier of those who obey Christ (cf. Rom. 3:24-

26; Heb. 5:8-9). No man can complain about the injustice of hell in the face of the cross!

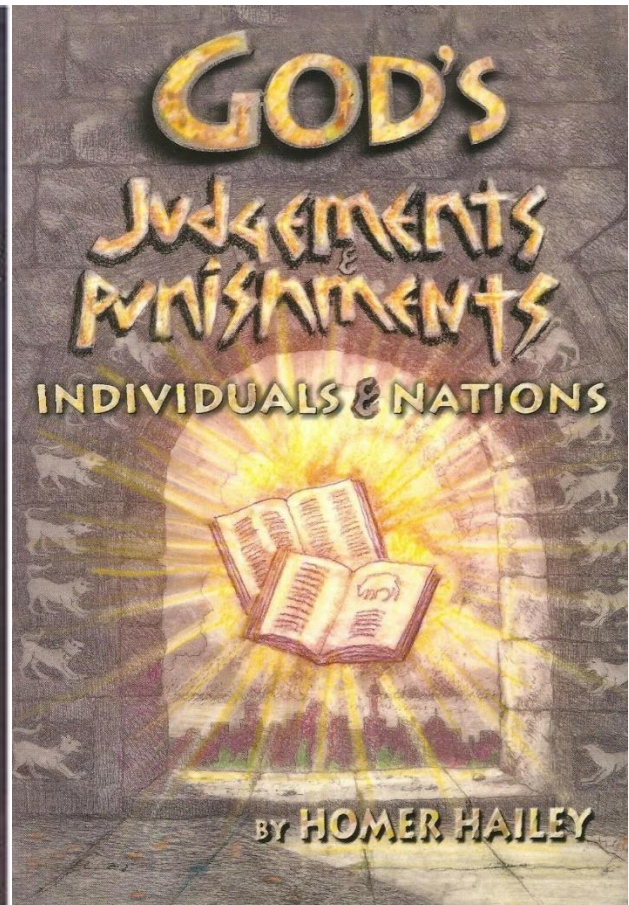
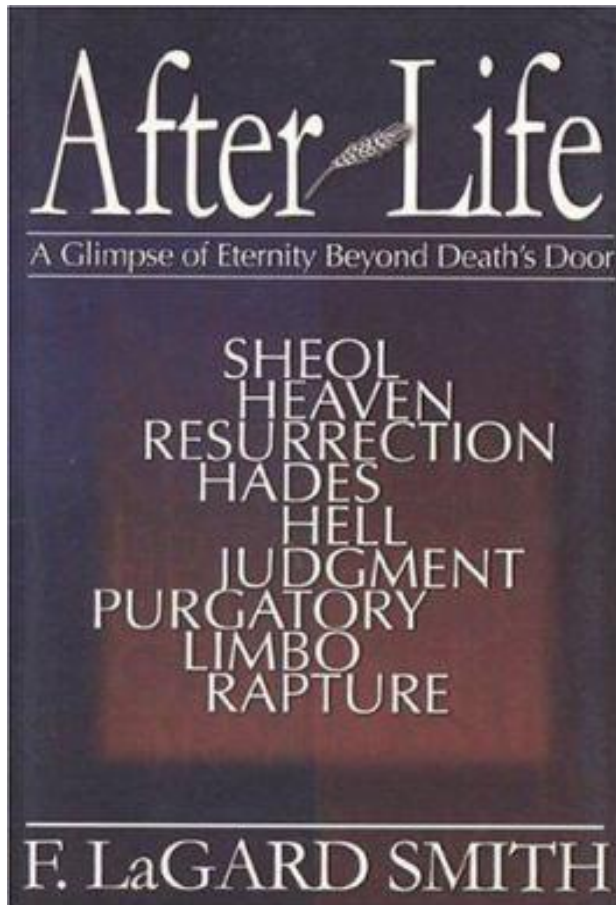
- Even in hell the judgment will be fair. The Scriptures teach that punishment will be proportionate to the degree of one's guilt (cf. Mt. 10:15; 11:20-24; Lk. 12:47-48; Heb. 10:29; Rev. 20:12-13). One will be judged according to his knowledge, ability, and opportunity. God will be equitable!

Conclusion

The doctrine of eternal punishment was taught by Jesus Christ (who said more about hell than heaven), it was acknowledged by the early church, it was endorsed by the "church fathers" (Buis 1957, 53-67), and it was defended by the theologians of the Middle Ages and the Reformation period. However, beginning with the eighteenth century a new wave of "clergymen" within the ranks of "Christendom" began to deny this fundamental tenet of biblical doctrine, and today a significant segment of American society (almost half) no longer believes in hell.

Hedonistic Slogan:
Don't Take Life So Seriously
It's Not Permanent!

Annihilation Analogy:
Don't Take Hell So Seriously
It's Not Permanent!



Afterlife Annihilationist Perspective

- This View Affirms – Both By Precept & Principle
The Bible Teaches – Hell's Absolute Destruction -
Endless Existence Is God's Offer & Man's Option

Round TWO:
WITHIN COMMUNITY

Afterlife Annihilationist Perspective

- This View Affirms – Both By Precept & Principle
The Bible Teaches – Hell's Absolute Destruction -
Endless Existence Is God's Offer & Man's Option

*Within Our Brotherhood Of The Churches Of Christ An Interpretive Hermeneutic
Is Emergent Of Challenge To The Uniform Concept Of Continuous-Consciousness*

Liberal F. LaGard Smith & Conservative Homer Hailey Have Both Taken The Offensive:

- Written By F. L. Smith: "If you have a computer Bible program or concordance, pull up the word *eternal* and be prepared for a shock. In all of its many associations, there is not a single hint of time... To be *eternal* is to have a *lasting nature*." & "Time is not the issue. *Effect is the issue*."
- Smith On Homer Hailey: "What Does Scripture Teach Us About Eternal Punishment? As Homer Hailey began to ask himself these questions, and near the end of his life dug back into the Word as if for the first time, he was drawn inexorably to the conclusion that his previous assumptions over a 97-year-long lifetime were simply not consistent with biblical teaching. That, indeed, God's punishment of the wicked will be as total and complete as the fire which consumed the godless inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah." (From Forward To God's Judgments, H. Hailey, 2003)
- Smith On Matthew Chapter 25, Verse 46: "So it is that when Jesus talks about the great dividing of the sheep from the goats, and says of those on his left 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels,' the point is *destination*, not duration."

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- F. L. Smith On Matthew 10: 28 - “The primary scriptural cornerstone for the case[for the annihilation of the wicked] is Matthew 10: 28. Since Jesus told His disciples, ‘Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But, rather, fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell’.”
- Written By F. L. Smith: “Those whose names are found written in the book [of life] will inherit life with God forever. For those whose names are missing, there is no lasting life whatsoever, tormented or otherwise. Only death. The second and final death... As the greater weight of scriptural evidence indicates, the only option is eternal life versus eternal death. Blessed existence versus non-existence...” After Life, pp. 189, 190

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- Hailey On Matthew 25: 46 - “It is sometimes said that Jesus gave a full and accurate picture of hell. Certainly, it was accurate, but it was not the complete teaching on the subject... The 7 times Jesus used the word *Gehenna*, He used it from the Jewish point of view. He left the universal aspect of the subject to be revealed by the Holy Spirit...”
- *Homer Hailey’s Method Of Analysis*: “Many years ago one of God’s great preachers spoke to a group of us ‘preacher boys’ who were still in the embryonic stage of preaching. He offered the following wise advice: ‘When faced with a difficult passage of scripture or lesson, take a sheet of paper (or use the blackboard if in a sermon), draw a line down the center, and on the left side write, What Is Said, and on the right side, What Is Not Said. Then proceed with what the text says and what it has not said.’ He added, ‘You will find the obstacles and objections on the side of what is not said.’ This is the methodology that will be followed in this investigation.” Judgments, pg. 131

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Applying This Method Homer Hailey Outlines:

- @ {Hebrews 12: 29 – Numbers 16 – Deuteronomy 4: 24} - & - What Is Not Said:
That They Will Burn Evermore!
- @ {Jude 6 & 7 – II Peter 2: 6} - & - What Is Not Said: Nothing About Burning
Continuous, Forever, Or Again!
- @ {Matthew 10: 28; & 18: 8} - & - What Is Not Said: The Soul Burns Eternally!
- @ II Thessalonians 1: 8, 9 - & - Not Said: How The Destruction Is To Be Executed!
- @ {Revelation 14: 9 – 11 & 19: 20 – 21 & 20: 10, 14, 15 & 21: 8} & What Is Not Said:
The Duration Of The Torment Or That The People Are Tormented Ever & Ever Or
That Any Are Cast Besides These Or That These Share The Same Punishment!

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- ***Homer Hailey Says On Chaff, Tares, & Dead Branches -***
These Three Substances Have Three Characteristics In Common:
1) They all represent spiritually lost individuals; those who had refused or
rejected the Messiah and His message. 2) All three are combustible. They
can be burned up. 3) All three were burned up, or consumed in the fire of
judgment. Reading Matthew 3: 11ff, 13: 24ff, & John 15 – the same lesson is
taught in all three examples; Chaff is the waste from the wheat that has no
life in it – darnel are dried weeds – broken branches are dead and lifeless.

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Bert Thompson & Wayne Jackson Of Apologetics Press Have Answered For The Defense:

- Liberal F. LaGard Smith and now Conservative Homer Hailey – both respected writers in the religious world – have accepted the heretical argument of their erstwhile brother of the previous generation – Edward Fudge: “The Fire That Consumes”.
- These three writers in their works are all weak on word studies – i.e. “olam” & “aionios” – both terms properly understood in the light of context.
- None of these writers cite a single Greek lexicographer as a source defending their word usage in interpretation of “eternal” – especially as applied in Matthew 25: 46.
- In fact, the eight major Greek resource references disagree with them entirely.
- Moreover, they are guilty of applying primary Hebrew meaning to secondary Greek.

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- Furthermore, by their interpretation of limited punishment for Hell’s lost – in several instances – they have – by implication – made heaven’s reward temporal too.
- Finally, they err on Matthew 10: 28 in a manner similar to both Seventh-Day Adventists & Jehovah’s Witnesses; They also tend to ignore the parallel passage in Luke 12: 4 – 6.
- Both Sides Accuse The Other Of Taking Comparisons To Hell Too Far – Thompson & Jackson think this the case as regards Gehenna - Sodom & Gomorrah - Chaff, Tares, & Withered Branches.
- Linking The Latter Illustration With Hebrews 12: 29 & The Image Of God As A Consuming Fire Is Considered Especially Inappropriate Crossing The Line Between Rigorous Exegesis & Allegorized Eisegesis!

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Bert Thompson & Wayne Jackson Of Apologetics Press Have Answered For The Defense:

- The Concept Of Death In Every Context Is Of Simple Separation – 1st Death Is Separation Of Body & Soul – 2nd Death Is The Soul’s Separation From God!
- In 2003, Wayne Jackson Correctly States: “The dogma of annihilation is not an innocent view with harmless consequences. It is a concept that undermines the full force of that fearful warning of which the Almighty God would have men be aware. There is many a rebel who would gladly indulge himself in a lifetime of sin for an eternal nothingness.” {Moral Disobedience- Cost Calculable= Measured Conformance}
- In 1998, Wayne Jackson Wrote Rightly: “Those that contend that the wicked will be annihilated are in error. But is the issue one of importance? Yes! ... Any theory of divine retribution which undermines the full consequence of rebelling against God has to be most dangerous!”

(c) Heartlight <http://www.heartlight.org> by Phil Ware

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Bert Thompson & Wayne Jackson Of Apologetics Press Have Answered For The Defense:

- **Both Wayne Jackson & Bert Thompson Agree With LaGard Smith As He Said On An Earlier Occasion:**
- “[Afterlife] issues become a litmus test of the legitimacy of underlying theological assumptions. Whenever any afterlife scenario lacks coherence with other clear biblical teaching regarding what happens after death, red flags are raised immediately as to the validity of any doctrines upon which that afterlife theology is based.” {From Debate Over Doctrine We Discuss Next!}

LaGard Smith's New Book: 'After Life'

By Wayne Jackson, Churches of Christ

LaGard Smith believes there must be a “radical” correction in the teaching of most Christians today (see **Radical Restoration**, Cotswold, 2001). His ongoing quest to achieve that goal is pursued in his latest book, **After Life**. Therein he challenges what he calls the “orthodox understandings” pertaining to death and eternity.

While this book does address certain sectarian views, e.g., Watchtowerism, Mormonism, Millennialism (rapture theory), and Catholicism (purgatory/limbo), these topics appear to be merely the “salad” that accompanies the “main course,” namely, an assault upon some of the most universally-held, end-time views of Christian history. Consider the following brief points.

1. The author argues that “human mortality is *not* the result of sin”; rather, death is but a natural consequence of having been made “of dust.” This suggests that death is an extension of divine benevolence, and that God intended this experience from the beginning. Supposedly, passages that relate death to sin refer only to *spiritual* death.

The problem with this theory, which the author admits bucks “centuries of theological consensus,” is that the “dust-to-dust” destiny of man clearly results from the “curse” placed upon humanity for its rebellion. That is the explicit testimony of Moses (see Gen. 3:19; cf. Rom. 5:12). One can only marvel at the arrogance of one who believes that he has an almost unique understanding of a biblical theme that has eluded the greatest minds of Christian history.

2. Also advanced is the notion that all the dead are *unconscious* between the time of one's demise and that of the Judgment Day. The case of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-30), which demonstrates the contrary, is dismissed as a “parable” due to certain figures of speech employed in the narrative, e.g.,

Lazarus' "finger," and the rich man's "tongue" (that are *necessary* symbols in conveying ideas related to the spirit realm).

However, this narrative does not bear the characteristic marks of a parable. Note that the persons are identified by name; that format never occurs in a parable elsewhere in the Bible. See: "Are the Dead Conscious?" and "Are the Dead "Asleep"?"

Passages that refer to death as "sleep" are applied to the "soul," rather than the body – as is the actual case. Daniel was very clear that the part of man that "sleeps" is that which is deposited in the "dust of the earth" (cf. 12:2).

Smith affirms that the condition of the lost and the saved in Hades is *identical*. Or, as he illustrated it – Hitler and "Mother Theresa" presently are experiencing the same status! Is it not obvious that the illustrious "scholar in residence" at Lipscomb University believes that "Mother Theresa" was redeemed by her "good works," irrespective of her obedience to Christ?

3. The author contends that Christ will banish the wicked to hell, but "not with on-going torment. "Rather, "sooner or later," those cast into hell will cease to exist. Logically, this theory is flawed; it suggests that the "punishment" actually is *non-punishment*. If hell's "destruction" is "annihilation," and if one enters "destruction" at death, then one is "annihilated" at death, and there is no actual punishment. A *non-entity* cannot be punished. See: "The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment".

It is alleged that the adjective "eternal" speaks of the *nature* of the punishment, rather than its *duration*. But the expression "eternal God" (Rom. 16:26), affirms the Lord's unending existence, and "eternal life" is everlasting in duration (Mt. 25:46). In terms of afterlife reality, "eternal" is not "temporal" (2 Cor. 4:17-18).

This volume is a serious disappointment from a talented man who produced some helpful books in days gone by, but who, in recent years, has revealed a rebellious and radical disposition that is tragic indeed.

“God’s Judgments & Punishments”

(A Review of Homer Hailey’s book, “God’s Judgments And Punishments”)

by Jim R. Everett

1. [INTRODUCTION](#)
2. [GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE](#)
3. [SODOM AND GOMORRAH \(JUDE 7; 2 PETER 2:6-10\)](#)
4. [MARK 9:48; ISAIAH 66:18-24; MATTHEW 3:12](#)
5. [PAUL ON ETERNAL PUNISHMENT — ROMANS 2:6-8](#)
6. [2 THESSALONIANS 1:6-10](#)
7. [BOOK OF REVELATION — REVELATION 14:9-11](#)
8. [REVELATION 20:10-15; 21:8](#)
9. [CONCLUSION](#)

INTRODUCTION

Such is the title of the last book of brother Hailey’s illustrious career. Brother Hailey was writing excellent, resourceful material well past his 70th birthday. However, if I live to be 70, I will probably quit writing. That is not to denigrate others who write so ably when they are much older. I suspect that my mental faculties will be diminished and I would hate to put something in writing that is not a product of clear thinking.

Brother’s Hailey’s writings have reached far beyond his life and will continue to influence the thinking of myriads of minds. In the many years that I heard him teach and preach he made God’s prophets come alive by a very vivid presentation of God’s justness in dealings with nations — you could almost hear the rattling of the chariot wheels and the crack of the whip. In all those years, never once do I remember him remotely alluding to a denial of individual, eternal punishment. In fact, his earlier comments on [Rev 20:10](#), are exactly the opposite of what he argues in this work. He makes an excellent argument on pp. 398-399, of his Revelation commentary that will be quoted later in this material. However, in the Preface to his book on God’s Judgments, he refers to his comments on [Rev. 20:10](#) -- “*The comment on Revelation 20:10 in my Commentary on Revelation is correct to an extent. But it is not the full exegesis of the verse.*” (p. xv) — but he did not answer his own argument! And, it seems that he forgot what he wrote many years before as found in “Hailey’s Comments,” pp. 708-711. His thinking and reasoning on “The Nature of Eternal Punishment” there are very sound and irrefutable.

It is regrettable that in his later years he would produce a work that is being used by men like Stanley Pahyer and Edward Fudge to promote their error. And, though LeGard Smith endorsed brother Hailey’s book, he was careful to praise only the part dealing with God’s punishment of the nations and not the second part that deals with the soul annihilation theory. At least, with brother Hailey, one never had a problem knowing where he stood.

A deceased author cannot reply, so reviewing his material requires a fair and honest assessment of his arguments. However, even as one shows respect for those who have passed from this life, it is critical to expose the fallacy of reasoning. And, even as I undertake this distasteful task, I feel like “*Who am I?*” that I should take issue with one whose knowledge far surpassed my own? However, the greatest of men are not immune to weaknesses that affect thinking processes. Knowing brother Hailey as I knew him, I know that he believed he was right and that he taught what he taught in harmony with his conscience. Brother Hailey frequently pointed out to his audiences that he didn’t care what brother so-in-so believed or taught on a subject — it was what “The Book” taught that mattered to him. He would not want anyone to accept his position because of who he was — that would be an insult to him. In referencing his arguments in this work, he says, “*On the other hand, if my reasoning or deductions are illogical, then the error will be on my part and I will gladly retract my interpretation.*” (Preface, p. xv). But these remarks did not appear until after his death. His arguments are deficient and his interpretations not true to “The Book” but he has no opportunity to retract them. It is my conviction that if his mind had remained as reasonable as it was in earlier years, he would never have written this book.

In my judgment a denial of eternal punishment will become a real issue within a few years. Recently, I wrote a tract entitled [“Watering Down Hell”](#) which was first published in a series of articles in Biblical Insights. In that material I answered the basic arguments brother Hailey makes, because those arguments are common to all those who hold the annihilation view of individual punishment; however, brother Hailey gives a little different twist to some of the arguments. For instance, he affirmed that *“their worm dieth not”* ([Isa 66:18-24](#); [Mk 9:48](#)) referred to the persecution of God’s people under the new covenant. And, contrary to the belief that man’s soul is conditionally immortal, he believes [Lk 16:19-34](#) to be truth and not a myth. It seems, without realizing it, he develops a greater inconsistency than other conditional immortalists do. Men like Fudge are forced to a certain consistency upon accepting death as annihilation — Fudge’s position demands that if man’s soul is not immortal, then when he dies, he ceases to exist. And, in seeking consistency, Fudge alludes to a belief that if Christ had not been raised, then he would have ceased to exist. Brother Hailey does not go that far.

In his Introduction, he laid out what would be a two-pronged approach in his book. First, he notes that man is limited in understanding eternal things since he can only reason in a mundane, time-frame reference. To this I would certainly acquiesce and have so affirmed in other materials. But his conclusion is that since Gehenna, eternal fire, the lake of fire, and other such expressions describe things metaphorically, because they are beyond our comprehension, then we must not interpret them to mean that men will be punished eternally. If that were the case, then he should also have affirmed that since eternal life is spoken of metaphorically and is beyond our comprehension, then we could not affirm that it is eternal in duration. Brother Hailey mentions that Heaven is spoken of as having a street of gold and that is not literally true but he seems to overlook the fact that though eternal truths are conveyed in a symbolic way, it does not deny the reality of existence. Heaven is described symbolically just as Hell is described symbolically — we fathom neither fully. But to affirm that since Hell is described symbolically; then Hell cannot mean eternal existence in punishment, necessarily means that since Heaven is described symbolically; then Heaven cannot mean eternal existence in the presence of God.

Next, brother Hailey follows a procedure he said he was first taught as a young man of taking a piece of paper and noting on one side what a passage says and then on the other side what it doesn’t say — not a bad procedure for anyone to follow but care must be exercised so that one does not force an interpretation into the process. For instance, in passages that deal with figures such as the vine and branches, wheat and tares, etc., there must be a consistency maintained in the figures. It would be a distortion of the figure to affirm that branches lived after they were cut off and burned or tares survived their being plucked up. The passages deal with physical vegetation and not the spirits of men. If we followed brother Hailey’s process, we would have to put on the right side of the page that the passage does not say that branches live for ever. And, based on that we would have to conclude that *“eternal life”* is only age lasting — only as long as a disciple lives. Physical branches and wheat do not live eternally and cut off branches and chaff are consumed by fire. His objection to eternal punishment from the parables (vine and branches, wheat and tares, wheat and chaff) by which Jesus paralleled physical truths with eternal truths demands a distortion of the physical part of the parable. Both reward and punishment are taught but the duration of neither is described in these parables.

As an illustration of the fallacy of requiring more of figures than is intended, Calvinists try to explain away passages that clearly demonstrate the fallacy of *“once saved always saved.”* One argument on the proverb Peter used ([2 Pet 2:20-22](#)) is that dogs are always dogs and hogs are always hogs. They affirm that the reason that the sow returned to her wallowing in the mire was because she was a sow, which meant that the person Peter described only pretended to be saved, but really was not. Based on that approach to scripture interpretation, we might say, *“Peter didn’t say that a sow or a dog changed into a sheep.”* I realize there is other pertinent information in the whole context but in considering the “proverb” just as a metaphor, this kind of sophistry requires a twisting of the illustration. This is a common equivocation employed by those who take issue with *“eternal punishment.”*

GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

After looking at passages in the Old Testament where people on the earth were consumed by the earth opening or burned by fire, brother Hailey’s conclusion under his category of “WHAT IS NOT SAID,” was, *“That they all burn forever.”* However, the references in context to which he referred apply to the physical existence of men while on earth — they passed from existence on the earth; their bodies being consumed either by the earth itself or by fire from heaven. Even brother Hailey’s statement verifies that truth — *“These illustrations reveal the meaning of ‘consume,’ and what the scriptures mean by the phrase ‘Our God is a consuming fire.’ It meant total and complete destruction from the face of the earth,”* (p. 138). Nothing, in these passages, however, addresses the eternal punishment of their souls, unless, perhaps, by implication from the teaching of other passages that deal with the eternal destiny of the wicked.

SODOM AND GOMORRAH (JUDE 7; 2 PETER 2:6-10)

In his classification on the right side of the page, “WHAT IS NOT SAID”, brother Hailey wrote, *“Nothing about continuous burning, or of being burned again in the future,”* (p. 146), yet he contradicts that observation by affirming on p. 179 that the wicked will be raised and cast into the lake of fire. Brother Hailey does not elaborate on this passage but his conclusion conforms to others who hold that view. His position presents a necessary inconsistency. By saying that since Sodom and Gomorrah suffered the vengeance of “eternal fire” which was the annihilation of the cities and their inhabitants, it must necessarily follow that there will be no resurrection of the wicked, for if they have been annihilated by fire and brimstone, and that was their eternal punishment, then they are burned up and for ever gone. On the one hand he argues for *“the vengeance of eternal fire”* being the destruction of the cities that took place in just a few minutes — *“If they serve as an example, what do they teach except that those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire are to exist no more?”* (p. 142). On the other hand, he believes that the unrighteous will be raised to suffer *“eternal punishment”* when their resurrected bodies will experience the second death. For instance, in his comments on [Rev. 20:10](#) (pp. 178-179), he references [Lk. 16:19-31](#), as a true representation of the state of the dead and that the evil begin their conscious suffering in Hades. That necessarily means that the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah went into Hades after they were destroyed by *“eternal fire.”* But, if it was *“eternal punishment”* when fire and brimstone consumed them and they existed no more, then how can it be *“eternal punishment”* at their resurrection? And, if physical destruction equals eternal punishment, one can never affirm the resurrection of the wicked, for at the moment they are consumed that is their eternal punishment!!! Some annihilationists accept that conclusion. Others, however, like brother Hailey who have a greater respect for Scripture, realize the quandary that postulation puts them in by virtue of Jesus’ affirmation in [Jn 5:28-29](#) and other passages, so they theorize that the wicked will be raised and then cast into their physical Gehenna and killed again. Obviously, the physical cities and people were destroyed by the fire and brimstone; however, if Jude’s picture does not reach beyond the events recorded in Genesis 18-19, then there would be no need to describe the fire as *“eternal fire,”* because any fire would have accomplished the destruction of physical things.

MARK 9:48; ISAIAH 66:18-24; MATTHEW 3:12

To minimize the duration of eternal punishment as taught by Jesus, brother Hailey’s unique interpretation of [Mk 9:48](#) is that the expression *“their worm dieth not”* refers to the persecution of the faithful righteous during the present reign of the Messiah (pp. 154-156). There are a couple of fallacies in the way he ties passages together in this section. For instance, he mixes [Mt 3:12](#) with [Mk 9:48](#), and said, *“He characterized the fire as ‘not quenched’ with the ‘unquenchable fire’ of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:12),”* and from this concludes that God’s wrath *“burns up.”* While both passages mention *“unquenchable fire”* they are different in the figures presented. It would have been inconsistent with the figure Jesus used in [Mt 3:12](#) for him to have said that fire keeps on burning the chaff. The plausibility of his interpretation that the phrase, *“their worm dieth not,”* refers to the persecution of the righteous under the present reign of the Messiah, is destroyed by one simple fact. In Jesus’ statements in [Mk 9:43-48](#), it is Gehenna that is the anticipated, eternal future of those who live for the pleasures of the world — it is there that *“their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched”* and not the present reign of the Messiah.

PAUL ON ETERNAL PUNISHMENT — ROMANS 2:6-8

I will here bypass comments on the general context of Romans and accountability to law by brother Hailey and address the particular points of controversy that are found in ch. 2:6-8. Paul here defends the justness of God. He makes a specific application to the eternal judgment of men — God will be absolutely, perfectly fair to all men in the final judgment. In Paul’s assessment of God’s righteousness, there is a balance of contrasts that must be observed. God will render to those who by patient continuance in well doing, eternal life. The balance in contrast to *“eternal life”* is an application to all those, both Jew and Gentile without respect of persons, who do evil — they will receive *“tribulation and anguish.”* *“Tribulation”* is a word that means “affliction,” and “anguish” is a word that is also translated by “distress.” Both words appropriately describe conscious feelings experienced. Jesus used the same

kind of balance in contrasts in [Mt 25:46](#), and by choosing the word “everlasting” to describe both, he necessarily gave a qualification, of DURATION to both. In both expressions there are quantitative as well as qualitative concepts. But annihilation of the wicked is not an appropriate balance in contrasts to eternal life for the righteous — if the righteous experience glory, honor and peace for eternity, then by a balance of contrasts, the wicked experience affliction and distress for the same period of time.

Brother Hailey observed here that “...*the judgment of the final day will bring terrible suffering to the wicked*,” (p. 162). That, within itself, is an acknowledgement of conscious anguish of some duration. But annihilation is not suffering — it is non-existence. Or, perhaps, we might conclude from his statement that God is going to lengthen, for some time, his indignation and wrath at the final judgment — that he is going to prolong life in the body of the wicked so they can suffer more — that in some way, the terrible fires of Gehenna will not immediately consume the bodies of the wicked? How long is it, theoretically, supposed to take for the wicked to suffer terribly? To argue for the lengthening of duration for the suffering of the unrighteous is to destroy the most commonly held position of annihilationism; that is, that the body will be burned up immediately and; therefore, the wicked will be extinguished forever. Brother Hailey vacillates between his studied conclusions earlier in his life and an inability to correlate information later in life — intermixing the two without being conscious of the contradictions. Here he presents an unconscious incongruity, because when God is supposed to kill the wicked, then, once they have been killed there is no consciousness, because there is no existence; hence, there can be no affliction and anguish.

2 THESSALONIANS 1:6-10

Brother Hailey’s comments here focus primarily on the word “*destruction*” by a brief definition and a comparison with other passages where the word is used. One simple fact he seemed to have missed is that by Paul’s attaching the word “*eternal*” to “*destruction*” it would not reasonably be interpreted as “annihilation,” for if the word “*destruction*” by itself, in this context, means “annihilation” then it would necessarily be eternal in nature — it would be redundant to call it “*eternal*” annihilation. But “*eternal*” destruction is associated in this context with a time when the wicked will be punished with eternal separation from the presence of the Lord (v. 9). Logically, in order for them to be separated from the presence of the Lord, they must exist. It cannot be said of non-existent souls that they are separated from the presence of the Lord. Furthermore, the punishment of the wicked with eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord, is offered as an explanation of God’s righteousness in v. 6. There it is said that God would recompense affliction to those who were afflicting them — affliction cannot be recompensed to the non-existent.

In [1 Tim 6:9](#), which also contains the word “*destruction*” — “...*hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition*” — brother Hailey comments, “*A drowned man is no longer conscious, but is dead.*” Obviously, he is no longer conscious of this world’s existence; however, brother Hailey believes that even a drowned man continues to exist. Then he connects [Rm 9:22](#), where Paul uses the figure of men who are vessels of wrath fit for destruction and says, “*A vessel destroyed in one’s wrath is no longer a vessel, but a pile of fragments.*” The word “*destruction*” (apoleia) suggests not the loss of being but the loss of well being — while the vessel no longer exists as a vessel it does exist in fragments.

BOOK OF REVELATION — REVELATION 14:9-11

[Rev. 14:9-11](#) — “...*If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever; and they have not rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.*” Brother Hailey does not refute his previous argument on the text, for it is irrefutable --

“It should be observed that “they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.” Torment (from basanizo) conveys the idea of torture, severe distress, and pain of body and mind. The torment of the locusts “was as the torment of a scorpion, when it striketh a man” (9:5); and those who worshiped the beast would be tormented with fire and brimstone, and the smoke of their torment would ascend for ever and ever (14:10f). And now the devil and his former helpers suffer the torment of the lake of fire and brimstone for ever and ever.

There are many who question the eternal duration of this torment, but these must explain away biblical teaching. Jesus said that at the judgment those on His left hand would be told, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels and these shall go away into eternal punishment; but the righteous into eternal life" (Matt. 25:41, 46). Both the punishment and the life are eternal. In Revelation it is said of these two groups that those before the throne "serve him day and night" (7:15), and the wicked "have no rest day or night" (14:11), and that with the devil they are tormented (25:41, 46), a torment which is "day and night, for ever and ever." There is no day there, for it is "outer darkness" (Matt. 22:13; 25:30). Since the day is in heaven and the night in hell, and since the one group serves Him day and night while the other group is tormented night and day, it follows that the night endures as long as the day. But since God is the light of the eternal day, the day (and, consequently, the night) will never end. The period of this torment, "for ever and ever," is the same in duration as God, for He lives "for ever and ever" (4:9). If there shall be total annihilation of the devil and the wicked it is not revealed." (Revelation Commentary, pp. 398-399)

Notice significant parts of these statements in this context:

1. *"If any man..."* — There are parts of Revelation that deal with destruction of a nation under the symbol of the beast and the harlot. However, this context deals with the eternal state of individuals who embrace the idolatry of the nation.
2. *"...he shall be tormented..."* — To be tormented necessarily requires existence.
3. *"the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever..."* — Brother Hailey's position in his book makes a very subtle change in the wording here to explain away the time frame reference *"for ever and ever."* He refers back to David's statement about *"the smoke of (God's) nostrils and the fire out of his mouth (which) devoured,"* (Psa. 18:8). Then says, *"It is the smoke of His wrath that continues for ever and ever; He never changes,"* (p. 175). Notice that brother Hailey's answer shifts from what is happening to the worshippers of the beast to what comes from God — a change that significantly distorts the meaning of the text.
4. *"...and they have no rest day nor night who worship the beast..."* In order for this language to be accurate, there must be existence of the wicked in eternity. It cannot be said of non-existent ones that they have no rest day or night.
5. This is said of the same individuals of v. 9-10 who worship the beast and upon whom the wrath of God is poured out. These are the same ones who shall be tormented with fire and brimstone. The language of the angel would make no sense, if the ones who worship the beast were annihilated and non-existent.

REVELATION 20:10-15; 21:8

This is an interesting section in that it puts brother Hailey at odds with Fudge, though Fudge commends brother Hailey's book for a *"careful and honest hearing"* and then says, *"Readers blessed with a Berean spirit (Acts 17:10-11) will give it nothing less."* Perhaps Fudge is not so blessed, for brother Hailey clearly affirms, not only the existence of the evil after death, but, a continued existence in torment in Hades as proven by [Lk 16:19-31](#) (pp. 178-179). Brother Hailey says of Luke's account, *"It should be viewed as historically true for persons known only to Jesus and those of the unseen realm. However, the truth is the same, both teach the same lesson. One of the lessons learned is that the torment of the damned begins in Hades at the death of the individual. It is consummated in the resurrection and the final judgment when the individual is cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death (Rev 20:14-15)."*

In explaining 21:8, brother Hailey says it refers to spiritual death associated with the sins enumerated in the verse (p. 179). He then explains spiritual death by referencing [Eph 2:1](#); [Col 2:13-14](#) — *"made alive when ye were dead through your trespasses and sins"* and the woman who gives herself to pleasure as being *"dead while she liveth" (1 Tim. 5:6)*. His conclusion is that spiritual death is extinction, as will be true of death and Hades, but that conclusion does not logically follow from his premises. Notice that man is not EXTINCT when he is spiritually dead in sins nor is the woman giving herself to pleasure NON-EXISTENT. Death (thanatos) by definition means "separation." Physical death is separation of body and soul ([Jas 2:26](#)) but, as brother Hailey affirms, the soul continues to exist. Unlike what happens to death and Hades at the end of time, whose purposes have ended as time has ended, the second death is not extinction — it is eternal separation from God. And the *"lake of fire"* for individuals can signify nothing less than what is associated with torment and torment necessarily argues for conscious existence.

CONCLUSION

If brother Hailey is correct and hell is nothing more than a moment of suffering ending in total extinction, then eternal punishment is an irrelevant fantasy, invented by man. But everyone who sets his hand so to affirm finds himself beset by grave inconsistencies that eventually require him to question the very source of all inspired truth that he, himself, uses to defend his position -- but worse — in time, if he is logically consistent, he will deny man's cherished hope for eternal life. Without an anchor for his soul, he is then set adrift with no nobler purpose in life than selfish indulgence and no worse anticipation of punishment for his wrongs than, in a moment, being snuffed out into non-existence.

Author: [Jim R. Everett](#)

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“Our God is a Consuming Fire”

by [Kyle Butt, M.Div.](#)

In an effort to bolster the idea that the punishment of the wicked in the afterlife will be annihilation, proponents of annihilationism frequently have focused on the biblical terms “consume” and “consuming.” Since the Bible does indeed say that “our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29), and since the words “consume” and “consuming” can, and sometimes do, refer to the annihilation of physical matter, then many annihilationists have asserted that God will annihilate the souls of wicked humans. Homer Hailey, in his posthumously published book, *God's Judgements and Punishments*, has an entire chapter titled “Our God—A Consuming Fire.” In that chapter, he deals almost entirely with the Old Testament usage of the terms “consume” and “consuming.” Concerning these terms, he remarked:

The word needing a clear definition is “consume” or “consuming.” The English word is translated from so many Hebrew words, and the Hebrew words are translated by so many English words, that it is difficult to find a precise definition for “consume.” It is best therefore to learn its meaning from usage and examples (2003, p. 136).

Hailey then proceeded to the burning bush passage, in which Moses approached the bush that “burned with fire” but “was not consumed” (Exodus 3:2). Hailey concluded: “In this instance, ‘consumed’ meant ‘burned up’ ” (p. 136). He then cited an example of a burnt offering being “consumed” on the altar (Leviticus 9:23-24) as evidence to suggest that “consumed” means to burn up.

After listing these non-human subjects of consumption, Hailey listed several Old Testament examples in which sinful humans are said to have been “consumed”: “Let sinners be consumed out of the earth. And let the wicked be no more” (Psalm 104:35); “But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of Jehovah shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; in

smoke shall they consume away” (Psalm 37: 20). Hailey also listed the rebellion of Korah, where God told Moses and Aaron to get away from the rebels “that I may consume them in a moment” (Numbers 16:21). And later in the same context, God sent a plague among the people in which God made the same comment about consuming them as He did concerning the rebels in verse 21.

When it came time to summarize his chapter, Hailey placed two columns at the top of the final page, one titled “What is Said,” and the other titled “What is Not Said.” In the “What is Said” column, he listed Hebrews 12:29, Numbers 16 and Deuteronomy 4:24. Then he listed the “means of consuming,” and recorded the Earth swallowing the rebels with Korah, the plague, and fire arriving from heaven. In the “What is Not Said” column, the entire text under the column is one line that reads: “That they all burn forever” (p. 139). He obviously was attempting to lead the reader to conclude that consume and consuming must mean annihilation.

Is it correct to understand that the biblical use of the words “consume” and “consuming” **must** entail that the souls of the wicked will be annihilated? Simply put, no. First, in order to conclude that the words imply annihilation, Hailey provided examples like the burning bush and the burning of an offering that do refer to the item being consumed—burned up completely. Conspicuously missing, however, are those examples in which the item that is consumed is **not** burned up completely. The Hebrew words translated “to consume” can mean any number of things, including: “to eat, devour, slay, to be wasted, to be destroyed, to feed, exterminate, to cause to cease, be accomplished, and exhaust, among others” (see “*Akal*,” 1999; “*Kalah*,” 1999). Are there examples in which the terms “consume” and “consuming” do **not** insinuate total incineration? Certainly. For instance, in Jeremiah 14, the Lord commented that He by no means would accept the idolatrous Israelites, and then stated: “But I will consume them by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence” (14:12). Would their being consumed necessitate that their bodies would be completely burned into nonexistence? The text answered that question when it stated that the bodies of those consumed would “be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; they will have no one to bury them” (14:12). The consuming taking place in Jeremiah obviously did not entail a complete burning up, but instead a punishment of physical death in which the bodies of those who were consumed would still remain for some time to decay in the open streets.

Again, in Genesis 31:15, Rachel and Leah, in their discussion of their father’s behavior, commented: “Are we not considered strangers by him? For he has sold us, and also completely consumed our money.” Did they mean to say that their money had been burned and annihilated into nonexistence? No. Rather, it had been spent or wasted, and thus no longer was of use to them.

Genesis 31:40 serves as a final example of the various ways the word “consumed” can be used. In this text, Jacob describes the hardships he endured during his tenure with Laban.

In that discussion, Jacob stated: “There I was! In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes.” Was Jacob completely burned up or annihilated during the day? Not in any sense. Interestingly, the same Hebrew word is used in Genesis 31:40 that is used in Deuteronomy 4:24—which was cited by Hailey, and from which his Hebrews 12:29 quote is taken. It is evident, then, that the words “consume” and “consuming” do not **necessarily** connote complete annihilation, but can, and often do, make reference to a state of waste and ruin, or, as in Jacob’s case, pain, suffering and hardship.

It also is interesting to note that, among the examples given by Hailey that supposedly imply the annihilation of those things (or people) which were consumed, are the individuals who were consumed in the rebellion of Korah in Numbers 16. Yet in the New Testament, Jude offered divinely inspired commentary on certain sinful individuals, stating: “Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah” (vs. 11). Jude further commented that these sinners were “raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever” (vs. 13). Therefore, these sinners had “perished in the rebellion of Korah,” and yet their souls were not completely consumed or annihilated, but had a reservation in a place where there was “blackness of darkness **forever**.” From the New Testament commentary offered by Jude, it is evident that those consumed in the rebellion of Korah did not go out of existence altogether, but that their physical lives were ended and their souls awaited a punishment in darkness forever.

Once again, an appeal to incomplete word studies in an attempt to force the idea of annihilationism on the biblical text is speculative and unfounded, to say the least. The overwhelming evidence of Scripture explicitly states and implicitly teaches that the souls of the wicked will be punished in the fires of hell forever—without respite.

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Christian Periodicals

Special Article Series

SPIRIT	REFERS TO	SOUL
Genesis 6:17; 7:15; Ecclesiastes 3:19	Breath	Job 41:21
Genesis 7:22	Animal/Human Life	Genesis 9:4; 37:21 Matthew 2:20; 6:25
Ecclesiastes 12:7; 1 Corinthians 5:5	Entities Separate from the Body	Isaiah 10:18; Matthew 10:28
Mark 2:8; 1 Corinthians 2:11; 14:15	Seat of Man's Intellect	Hebrews 12:3; Philippians 1:27
Genesis 41:8; Proverbs 16:18; 17:22; Mark 8:12; Acts 18:25; 1 Corinthians 4:21; 2 Corinthians 2:13	Feelings and Emotions	Exodus 23:9; Psalm 42:1-6; Proverbs 12:10; Matthew 26:38; Luke 2:35; Acts 4:32; 17:16; 2 Peter 2:8
Genesis 1:2; 6:3; Matthew 12:18; John 4:24	God's Nature	Leviticus 26:11; Matthew 12:18; Hebrews 10:38
Psalms 51:10,17; Luke 1:46-47; John 4:24; Romans 1:9	Man's Place of Inner Worship and Reverence Toward God	Psalms 42:1-2,4-6; 103:1; 146:1; Matthew 22:37
Psalms 31:5; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Zechariah 12:1; Luke 8:55; 23:46; Acts 7:59; 1 Corinthians 5:5	Part of a Person that Lives on after Death of the Body	Genesis 35:18; 1 Kings 17:21-22; Psalms 41:4; 49:15; Micah 6:7; Matthew 10:28; Hebrews 10:39; James 1:21; 5:20; 1 Peter 1:9,22; 3 John 2; Revelation 6:9

The Origin, Nature, and Destiny of the Soul [Part I]

by Bert Thompson, Ph.D., Churches of Christ

EDITOR'S NOTE: Part II of this five-part series appeared in the March issue. Part III appeared in May issue. Part IV appeared in the June issue. Part V appeared in the July issue.]

Throughout the whole of human history, man has struggled to find answers to any number of important (yet often difficult) questions that have to do with his origin, existence, nature, and destiny. Such queries as “Whence have I come?,” “Why am I here?,” and “Where am I going?” routinely intrigue and enthrall each of us as members of the human race. Securing clues to the exact makeup of the creature known popularly as *Homo sapiens* always has been one of mankind’s keenest intellectual pursuits. And along the way, perhaps no topic has perplexed us, or piqued our interest, as much as that pertaining to the origin, nature, and destiny of the soul.

Contemplate, if you will, the concept of the soul and the issues that spring from it. What is the definition of a soul? If the soul actually exists, what is its origin? Do humans possess a soul? Do animals? If souls do, in fact, exist, are they purely temporal—thus living only as long as our corporeal nature exists? Or are they immortal—surviving the death of the physical body? What is the difference, if any, between the “soul” and the “spirit”? What is the ultimate destiny of the soul? And what part does the soul play in the biblical statement that men and women were created “in the image of God” (Genesis 1:27)? These are the kinds of issues that I would like to investigate in this series of articles.

The subject of the soul—including its origin, nature, and destiny—has long been controversial. Some people believe that there is no such thing as a soul. Certain individuals advocate the position that only humans possess a soul, but that it ceases to exist at the death of the body. Others seek to maintain that both humans and animals possess a soul, and that those souls likewise die when the physical body dies. Still others are convinced that both animals and humans possess an immortal soul. And finally, there are those who have concluded that humans possess an immortal soul, but that animals do not. What, then, is the truth of the matter?

Science certainly cannot provide the answers to such questions, for they lie far beyond the purview of the scientific method. In her best-selling book, *The Fire in the Equations*, award-winning science writer Kitty Ferguson addressed this very issue. While discussing the efforts of several renowned, modern-day scientists (like eminent physicists Stephen Hawking, Paul Davies, and others) to uncover what they view as a grand, unified “Theory of Everything,” she asked:

Is there anything else? We needn’t get spooky about it. Part of the “anything else” might be human minds and personalities. Can we entirely account for our self-awareness, our minds, personalities, intuitions, and emotions, by means of a physical explanation? This is a matter of enormous significance for many of the questions we are asking in this book, and we will return to it frequently. If we are super-complex computing machines—the sum of our physical parts and their mechanical workings, which in turn exist as a result of the process of evolution—then science may ultimately be able to tell us everything there is to know about us. Even if no computer can ever assimilate the human mind, science may find another complete physical explanation. But **we have at present no scientific reason to rule out the possibility that there is more to self-awareness, our minds, and our personalities than any such explanation can encompass.** Is there such a thing as the soul? If there is, does its existence begin and end with our material existence? Despite some impressive advances in the field of artificial intelligence, and an increasing understanding of the way our minds work, certainly no-one would claim to be able to say at present, except on faith, whether science will

eventually be able to assimilate the phenomena of self-awareness, mind, and personality into the materialistic picture. **If science can't, then there is truth beyond the range of scientific explanation.** Another part of the “anything else” may be what we call the supernatural. Perhaps it is simply figments of imagination, psychological events, not so much to be explained by science as to be explained away. Or perhaps these are real events which are at present unexplainable because we lack complete understanding of the full potential of the physical world. If either is the case, then the supernatural ought eventually to fall into the realm of scientific explanation. However, **if the supernatural world exists**, and if it is inherently beyond testing by the scientific method, **then there is truth beyond the range of scientific explanation.** There may indeed be more in heaven and earth than is dreamed of in our science (if not our philosophy) [1994, pp. 82-83, emp. added].

I would like to seize upon Ferguson's “if...then” proposition as I begin this examination of the origin, nature, and destiny of the soul. Her argument—one that far too few scientists (or science writers) are even willing to consider—is that **if the supernatural exists, then there is truth beyond the range of scientific explanation.** The available evidence **does** establish, in fact, that the supernatural exists and that there is “truth beyond the range of scientific explanation.” As famed NASA astrophysicist (and self-proclaimed agnostic) Robert Jastrow put it: “That there are what I or anyone would call supernatural forces at work is now, I think, a scientifically proven fact” (1982, p. 18). While I do not have the space here to present such evidence, I have done so elsewhere (see Thompson, 1995a, 1995b, Thompson and Jackson, 1982, 1992). The existence of the supernatural (i.e., God) may be doubted by some and ridiculed by still others, but that does not alter the evidence that establishes its reality.

Thus, whenever questions of spiritual importance are under consideration—as they are when discussing the existence, origin, nature, and destiny of the soul—the only reliable source of information must by necessity be the One Who is the Originator and Sustainer of the soul. God, as Creator of all things physical and spiritual (Genesis 1:1ff., Exodus 20:11), and Himself a Spirit Being (John 4:24), is the ultimate wellspring of the soul. The Bible, then, as God's inspired Word (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21), must be the preeminent authority on this subject. In the great long ago, the psalmist wrote: “The sum of thy word is truth; and every one of thy righteous ordinances endureth forever” (119:160). Speaking as a member of the Godhead, Christ said: “Sanctify them in truth; thy word is truth” (John 17:17).

We—if we would know the truth about the soul—must examine that Word in an in-depth fashion and be prepared to accept what it says. Only then can we obtain the answers to the many questions on this vital topic that have perplexed and plagued us through the millennia.

DEFINITION OF THE SOUL

If you and I were having a conversation and I mentioned the word “banana,” likely you would have absolutely no difficulty understanding my meaning. Your thought processes immediately would conjure up a long fruit—with a yellow outer covering and a light beige, inner soft body—that grows on trees and is useful as food for both humans and animals. But were I to ask you to define the term “foil,” without seeing the word in context you could not possibly know what I meant. I might be referring to: (1) a noun that is used to define a fencing sword; (2) a noun that indicates a thin, shiny metal used by cooks in kitchens all over the world; or (3) a verb that is used as a synonym for “defeat.” However, if I were to say, “I covered the turkey with foil prior to placing it in the oven,” you would know immediately what I had in mind.

The same is true of the definition of the word “soul.” Minus its context, it is difficult, if not impossible, to define accurately. Speaking from the vantage point of a language scholar who had studied the Hebrew and Greek texts for over sixty years, Guy N. Woods once suggested that “...there is no pat and easy answer to the question, ‘What is the soul?’ ” (1980, 122[6]:163). Why is this the case? First, the word “soul” in modern English usage is represented by various words in the

Hebrew and Greek languages in which the Bible originally was written. Second, those Hebrew and Greek words can have a number of different meanings in their original contexts. Robert Morey has noted:

These terms are not technical words in the sense that they have one consistent meaning throughout Scripture. They display unity and diversity by being synonymous at times when referring to the immaterial side of man, and at other times, referring to different functions or ways of relating. It is obvious that we should not impose 20th-century standards of consistency and linguistic preciseness to a book which was written thousands of years ago... (1984, p. 44).

Third, the matter of the progressive nature of God's revelation to man must be considered. While it certainly is true that the Lord possesses a constant, unchanging nature (Malachi 3:6; James 1:17), His revelation of that nature and His will for mankind was a progressive process that was adapted to man as he matured spiritually through the ages. This explains why, in the course of human history, God sometimes tolerated in man both attitudes and actions that were less than what the divine ideal intended. This, of course, does not mean that the Holy God vacillates in His ethics or morality; rather, it simply means that—because of His infinite love—He dealt gently and compassionately with man in the particular state of spiritual maturation in which He found him at the time (cf. Acts 14:15-16 and 17:30-31). As God progressively revealed more and more of both His nature and His will, He did so in a manner, and in terms, that fit the occasion. In addressing the failure of some to comprehend and appreciate the importance of this concept, Morey observed that certain words, therefore,

...may have a dozen different meanings, **depending on the context and the progressive nature of revelation**. The failure to avoid reductionistic and simplistic definitions is based on the hidden assumption that once the meaning of a word is discovered in a single passage, this same meaning must prevail in every other occurrence of the word.... The resistance to the idea that what soul meant to Moses was probably not what it meant to David or Paul is based on their unconscious assumption that the Bible is one book written at one time. Thus as we approach the biblical term which describes the immaterial side of man, we will not attempt to develop artificial definitions based upon the absolutizing of the meaning of a word in a single passage but recognize that a contextual approach will reveal a wide range of meanings (1984, pp. 44-45, emp. added).

The word "soul" does indeed enjoy a "wide range of meanings." In order to understand those meanings, it is necessary to examine how the word is employed within the various contexts in Scripture where it appears.

Use of the Word "Soul" in Scripture

The word for "soul" in the Bible (Hebrew *nephesh* [from *naphash*, to breathe]; Greek *psuche*) is used in at least four different ways (see Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, pp. 901-902; Thayer, 1958, p. 677). First, the term is employed simply as a synonym for a person. Moses wrote: "All the souls (*nephesh*) that came out of the loins of Jacob were seventy souls (*nephesh*)" (Exodus 1:5; cf. Deuteronomy 10:22). In legal matters, the word soul often was used to denote an individual. The Lord told Moses: "Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, 'If a soul (*nephesh*) shall sin through ignorance against any of the commandments of the Lord concerning things which ought not to be done'..." (Leviticus 4:2). When Jacob was speaking of himself in Genesis 49:6, he used the expression, "O my soul (*nephesh*)"—which meant simply "me." Numbers 9:6 records that "there were certain men, who were unclean by reason of the dead body (*nephesh meth*) of a man, so that they could not keep the Passover on that day" (cf. Number 6:6 and Ecclesiastes 9:5). In the New Testament, the word *psuche* is employed in the same manner. In Acts 2:41, Luke recorded that "there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls (*psuchai*)." In Peter's first epistle, when he addressed the topic of the Genesis Flood, he referred to the fact that "few, that is

eight souls (*psuchai*), were saved by water” (3:20). In each of these instances, actual people—individually or collectively—were under discussion.

Second, the word soul is used to denote the form of life that man possesses in common with animals and that ceases to exist at death. In their *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Brown, Driver, and Briggs noted that *nephesh* often is employed to mean “life principle” (1907, p. 659). In the King James Version, *nephesh* is translated as “soul” in the Old Testament 472 times, as “life” 118 times, and as “creature” 8 times; *psuche* is translated as “soul” in the New Testament 59 times and as “life” 39 times (Morey, 1984, pp. 45,55). In addressing the use of the word “soul” in such passages as Genesis 2:7 and 1:20, Woods wrote:

...the word **soul** from the Hebrew *nephesh* occurs, for the first time in the sacred writings, at Genesis 1:20, where it is assigned to fish, birds, and creeping things. (See also, another similar usage in Genesis 1:30.) As thus used, it is clear that the soul in these passages does not refer to anything peculiar to the constitution of man. It signifies, as its usage denotes, and the lexicons affirm, **any creature that breathes**, in all of these early occurrences in the book of Genesis. Nor is it correct to conclude that the phrase **breath of life** in the statement of Moses (“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul”) sums up, or was designed to denote the **whole** constitution of man. The word “life” here is, in the Hebrew text, plural, literally **breath of lives** (*nishmath khay-yim*). It occurs, in similar form, in three other instances in the early chapters of Genesis (6:17; 7:15; 7:22). In the first of these the phrase is *ruach khay-yim*; in the second the same; in the third, *nishmath-ruach khay-yim*, and out of the four instances where the phrase, the **breath of lives**, occurs in our translation the last three are applied to the beasts, birds and creeping things. It follows, therefore, that the phrase “breath of life” does not designate anything peculiar to man. And in view of the fact that the word “soul,” from the Hebrew *nephesh*, is similarly extended to include the animal world, birds and creeping things, it may not be properly limited to man... (1985, 127 [22]:691, emp. and parenthetical comment in orig.).

In Genesis 1:20,24, and 30, God spoke of the *nephesh hayyah*—literally “soul breathers” or “life breathers” (often translated as “living creatures” or “life”—cf. Leviticus 11:10; grammatically the phrase is singular but it bears a plural meaning). The writer of Proverbs observed in regard to animals: “A righteous man regardeth the life (*nephesh*) of his beast; But the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel” (12:10). Hebrew scholar Hugo McCord therefore noted:

Then the translators realized that the first meaning of *nephesh* is “breath,” and so Genesis 1:20,24,30 and Genesis 2:7 all fit together in understanding Moses as saying that all animals and man too are breathers. Breathers, coupled with *hayyah*, “living,” the translators thought, would be well translated, in the case of animals, as “living creatures,” and in the case of man as a “living being” (1995, 23[1]:87-88).

In Exodus 21:23, Moses commanded: “But if any harm follow, then thou shalt give life (*nephesh*) for life (*nephesh*).” He later wrote that “the life (*nephesh*) of the flesh is in the blood” (Leviticus 17:11,14). Blood often is said to be the seat of life because when blood is shed, death ensues (cf. Deuteronomy 12:23). In speaking of God’s retribution upon the Egyptians during the time of the Exodus, the psalmist wrote: “He spared not their soul (*nephesh*) from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence” (78:50). In this particular instance, the Egyptians’ souls represented their physical life and nothing more. Ezekiel later observed: “The soul (*nephesh*) that sinneth, it shall die” (18:20).

In the New Testament, the principle is the same. Christ observed in regard to humans: “Therefore I say unto you, be not anxious for your life (*psuche*), what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body” (Matthew 6:25). God told Joseph: “Arise and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead that sought the young child’s life” (*psuche*, Matthew 2:19). In the book of Revelation, John spoke of the fact that “there died the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, even they that had life (*psuchas*); and the third part of the ships was destroyed” (8:9; cf. 16:3, *psuche*). Many a follower of Christ was said to have risked his or

her life (*psuche*) for the Lord. In Acts 15:25-26, Luke recorded that Barnabas and Paul were “men that have hazarded their lives (*psuchas*) for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Earlier, John recorded Peter as saying to the Lord: “I will lay down my life (*psuchen*) for thee” (John 13:37-38). In Philippians 2:30ff., Paul spoke of “Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow-worker and fellow-soldier...hazarding his life (*psuche*) to supply that which was lacking in your service toward me.” And in Luke 14:26, one of the conditions of discipleship was to hate one’s own life (*psuche*)—that is, to be willing to deny oneself to the point of losing one’s life for Christ (cf. Luke 9:23; Revelation 12:11).

Third, the idea of the soul is used to refer to the varied emotions or inner thoughts of a man—a fact that explains why *nephesh* is translated “heart” (15 times) or “mind” (15 times) in the Old Testament (KJV) and why *psuche* is translated as “heart” (1 time) and “mind” (3 times) in the New. Man was called to love God with all his heart and with all his soul (*nephesh*; Deuteronomy 10:6). The soul (*nephesh*) is said to weep (Job 30:16; Psalm 119:28) and to be exercised in patience (Job 6:7-11). From the soul (*nephesh*) originate knowledge and understanding (Psalm 139:14), thought (1 Samuel 20:3), love (1 Samuel 18:1), and memory (Lamentations 3:20). In His discussion with a lawyer, Jesus said: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul (*psuche*), and with all thy mind” (Matthew 22:37). In Acts 4:32, Luke recorded how, on one occasion, “the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul (*psuche*).” In a similar fashion, “soul” also is employed to refer to the lower, physical nature of mankind. In his first letter to the Christians at Corinth, Paul wrote that “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God” (2:14). In addressing the specific intent of this passage, Woods noted that the phrase “natural man” is literally

the soulish man, since the adjective “natural” [*psuchikos*—BT] translates a form of the Greek word for soul, which may be expressed in English as **psychical**. Thus, this usage is supported by etymology and required by the context. See, especially, Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 1:18-28 and 2:6-16 (1980, 122[6]:163, emp. in orig.).

Fourth, the word soul is used in Scripture to designate the portion of a person that is immortal and thus never dies. As early as the book of Genesis, the Bible sets forth such a concept. For example, in commenting on Rachel’s untimely death at the birth of her son, Moses wrote: “And it came to pass, as her soul (*nephesh*) was departing (for she died), that she called his name Ben-oni: but his father called him Benjamin” (Genesis 35:18). On one occasion while the prophet Elijah was at the house of a widow in the city of Zarephath, the woman’s son fell ill and eventually died. But the text indicates that Elijah “cried unto Jehovah..., ‘O Jehovah my God, I pray thee, let this child’s soul (*nephesh*) come into him again’ ” (1 Kings 17:21). When the psalmist prayed to Jehovah for forgiveness, he cried: “O Jehovah, have mercy upon me: heal my soul (*nephesh*); for I have sinned against thee” (41:4). In his discussion of the ultimate fate of those who dared to trust in earthly riches rather than in the supreme power of the God of heaven, the psalmist lamented that such people were “like the beasts that perish.... But God will redeem my soul (*nephesh*) from the power of Sheol” (49:15).

Many years later, Christ warned His disciples: “And be not afraid of them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul (*psuche*) and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). In His discussion with the Sadducees in Matthew 22, the Lord quoted from Exodus 3:6 where God said to Moses: “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Christ then went on to state (22:32): “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living”—a fact that the Sadducees’ opponents, the Pharisees, already accepted as true (cf. Acts 23:8). Yet when God spoke with Moses (c. 1446 B.C.) about the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, those three men had been dead and in their tombs for literally hundreds of years.

Since from Christ’s own words we know that “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living,” the point is obvious. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob still must have been living. But how? The solution to the

seeming problem, of course, lies in the fact that while their **bodies** had died, their immortal **souls** had not. When the apostle John was allowed to peer into the book “sealed with seven seals” (Revelation 5:1), he “saw underneath the altar the souls (*psuchas*) of them that had been slain for the word of God” (Revelation 6:9). Each of these passages is instructive of the fact that there is within man a soul that never dies.

Use of the Word “Spirit” in Scripture

During his tenure as associate editor of the *Gospel Advocate*, Guy N. Woods penned a “Questions and Answers” column in which he dealt with difficult Bible questions, topics, or passages. When one querist wrote to ask: “What is the difference between the soul and the spirit of man?,” Woods responded as follows:

Though it is characteristic of most people today to use these terms interchangeably the scriptures very definitely differentiate them. “For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of **soul** and **spirit**, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12.) Since the sacred writers provided for “the dividing of soul and spirit,” in those instances where they differ, so ought we and so we must if we are to entertain biblical concepts of these words.

The word “spirit,” when denoting the human entity (from the Greek word *pneuma*), is a specific term and designates that part of us which is not susceptible to death and which survives the dissolution of the body. (Acts 7:59.) It is infused in us directly from God and is not a product of human generation. (Hebrews 12:9.) “Soul,” from the Greek word *psuche*, however, is a generic word and its meaning must be determined, in any given instance, from the context in which it appears (1980, 122[6]:163, emp. added).

In my above discussion on the use of the word “soul” in Scripture, I examined the various ways in which the Hebrew and Greek terms for soul are employed. I now would like to examine the various ways in which the Hebrew and Greek terms for “spirit” are employed within the sacred text.

The Hebrew term for “spirit” is *ruach* (from *rawah*, to breathe). In their *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Brown, Driver, and Briggs noted that *ruach* has nine different meanings, depending on the specific context. *Ruach* may refer to: (1) the Holy Spirit; (2) angels, both good and evil; (3) the life principle found within both man and animals; (4) disembodied spirits; (5) breath; (6) wind; (7) disposition or attitude; (8) the seat of emotions; and (9) the seat of mind and will in men (1907, pp. 924-925). In the Old Testament of the King James Version, *ruach* is translated variously as the Spirit of God (i.e., Holy Spirit) 105 times, man’s spirit 59 times, spirit (an attitude or emotional state) 51 times, spirits (angels) 23 times, wind 43 times, and several other items (Morey, 1984, p. 51).

The word *ruach*, like *nephesh*, has a wide range of meanings. First, it seems originally to have referred to the wind, which was viewed as being invisible and immaterial (Gen. 8:1). Second, since God is invisible and immaterial like the wind, He is described as “spirit” (Isa. 63:10). Third, since the angels of God are invisible and immaterial, they are called “spirits” (Ps. 104:4, KJV; cf. Heb. 1:14). Fourth, since the life principle which animates man and animals is invisible and immaterial, it is also called “spirit” (Gen. 7:22). In this sense it was viewed as the “breath” of life which departs at death. Fifth, since man has an invisible and immaterial self or soul which transcends the life principle by its self-consciousness, man’s “mind” or “heart” is called his “spirit” (Ps. 77:6; Prov. 29:11, KJV). The invisible side of man which is called “spirit” cannot be reduced to the mere principle of physical life or the breath of the body because man’s transcendent self is contrasted to those things in such places as Isa. 42:5. Also, man’s self-awareness as a cognitive ego obviously transcends the life principle which operates in animals. At death, this transcendent ego or disincarnate mind is called a “spirit” or a “ghost” (Job 4:15). This is parallel to *rephaim* or disembodied spirit (Job 26:5). Thus at death, while the life principle or breath of life ceases to exist in man or animals, the higher self or spirit of man ascends at death to the presence of God (Ps. 31:5; Eccles. 12:7).... Sixth, since attitudes and dispositions such as pride, humility, joy, or sorrow are invisible and immaterial, they are described as being someone’s “spirit” (Prov. 11:13; 16:18). The Holy Spirit is described as the “sevenfold Spirit” in the sense

that He gives people the disposition, attitude, or spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, fear and holiness (Isa. 11:2; cf. Rom. 1:4; Rev. 3:1) [Morey, pp. 52-53].

The Greek term for “spirit” is *pneuma* (from *pneo*, to breathe). In their *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, language scholars Arndt and Gingrich noted that *pneuma* has seven different meanings, depending on the specific context. *Pneuma* may refer to: (1) wind or air; (2) that which gives life to the body; (3) disincarnate souls; (4) human personality or ego which is the center of emotion, intellect, and will; (5) a state of mind or disposition; (6) an independent, immaterial being such as God or angels; and (7) as God—as in the Holy Spirit of God, the spirit of Christ, etc. (1957, pp. 680-685). In his *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Thayer provided five definitions for *pneuma* (1958, pp. 520-524). In the King James Version of the New Testament, *pneuma* is translated variously as Spirit (Holy) 165 times, Ghost (Holy) 88 times, spirits (good/evil, angels) 55 times, spirit (man’s) 45 times, spirit (attitude) 22 times, spirits or ghosts (man’s disincarnate soul) 7 times, spiritual (adjectival use) 23 times, life and wind 1 time each (Morey, pp. 60-61).

The word *pneuma* in its various forms is found 406 times in the New Testament.... First, the New Testament writers carry on the precedent set by the translators of the Septuagint by using the Greek words for wind such as *animas* instead of *pneuma*. The only instance where *pneuma* definitely refers to the wind is in John 3:8 where there is a poetic play upon the sovereign movement of the divine Spirit and the wind. Second, *pneuma* refers to the life principle which animates the body. This is actually a very rare usage in the New Testament. For example, the false prophet who accompanied the Antichrist in the last days will make an idol “alive” (Rev. 13:15). Third, *pneuma* is used to describe the immaterial nature of God and angels (John 4:24; Heb. 1:14). Christ defined a “spirit” or “ghost” as an immaterial being (Luke 24:39). Fourth, *pneuma* refers to the disposition which characterizes a person, such as pride, humility, fear, etc. (1 Pet. 3:4). Fifth, *pneuma* is used to describe the disincarnate spirit or soul of man after death (Matt. 27:50; Luke 24:37, 39; John 19:30; Acts 7:59; Heb. 12:23; 1 Pet. 3:19).... Sixth, man’s transcendent self, or ego, is also called *pneuma* because of its immaterial and invisible nature (1 Cor. 2:11). It is described as the center of man’s emotions, intellect and will (Mark 8:12; Mark 2:8; Matt. 26:41). Since man’s *pneuma* transcends his mere physical life, it is frequently contrasted to his body, or flesh (Matt. 26:41; Mark 14:38; Luke 24:39; John 3:6; 6:63; 1 Cor. 5:5; 7:34; 2 Cor. 7:1; Gal. 5:17; 6:8,9; James 2:26). It is man’s *pneuma* which ascends to God at death (Acts 7:59) [Morey, pp. 61-62].

Since *ruach* and *pneuma* both derive from roots meaning “to breathe,” it should not be surprising that on occasion they are used synonymously, as the information in the following table documents.

Writing in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* about both the similarities and the differences between the Old Testament words *nephesh* and *ruach* as compared to their New Testament counterparts *psuche* and *pneuma*, J.I. Marais noted:

In the NT *psuche* appears under more or less similar conditions as in the OT. The contrast here is as carefully maintained as there. It is used where *pneuma* would be out of place; and yet it seems at times to be employed where *pneuma* might have been substituted. Thus in Jn. 19:30 we read: “Jesus gave up His *pneuma* to the Father,” and, in the same Gospel (Jn. 10:15), “Jesus gave up His *psuche* for the sheep,” and in Mt. 20:28 He gave His *psuche* (not His *pneuma*) as a ransom... (1956, 5:2838).

While the “spirit” (*pneuma*) is recognized as man’s individual possession—that which distinguishes one man from another and from inanimate nature—on occasion the same may be said of the soul (*psuche*; cf. Matthew 10:28 and Revelation 6:9-11). The *pneuma* of Christ was surrendered to the Father in death; His *psuche* was surrendered, His individual life was given, “a ransom for many.”

SPIRIT	REFERS TO	SOUL
Genesis 6:17; 7:15; Ecclesiastes 3:19	Breath	Job 41:21
Genesis 7:22	Animal/Human Life	Genesis 9:4; 37:21 Matthew 2:20; 6:25
Ecclesiastes 12:7; 1 Corinthians 5:5	Entities Separate from the Body	Isaiah 10:18; Matthew 10:28
Mark 2:8; 1 Corinthians 2:11; 14:15	Seat of Man's Intellect	Hebrews 12:3; Philippians 1:27
Genesis 41:8; Proverbs 16:18; 17:22; Mark 8:12; Acts 18:25; 1 Corinthians 4:21; 2 Corinthians 2:13	Feelings and Emotions	Exodus 23:9; Psalm 42:1-6; Proverbs 12:10; Matthew 26:38; Luke 2:35; Acts 4:32; 17:16; 2 Peter 2:8
Genesis 1:2; 6:3; Matthew 12:18; John 4:24	God's Nature	Leviticus 26:11; Matthew 12:18; Hebrews 10:38
Psalm 51:10,17; Luke 1:46-47; John 4:24; Romans 1:9	Man's Place of Inner Worship and Reverence Toward God	Psalms 42:1-2,4-6; 103:1; 146:1; Matthew 22:37
Psalm 31:5; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Zechariah 12:1; Luke 8:55; 23:46; Acts 7:59; 1 Corinthians 5:5	Part of a Person that Lives on after Death of the Body	Genesis 35:18; 1 Kings 17:21-22; Psalms 41:4; 49:15; Micah 6:7; Matthew 10:28; Hebrews 10:39; James 1:21; 5:20; 1 Peter 1:9,22; 3 John 2; Revelation 6:9

Synonymous Use of Spirit and Soul in the Old and New Testaments

His life “was given for the sheep.” In Acts 2:27, Luke quoted Psalm 16:10 regarding Christ’s physical death: “Because thou wilt not leave my soul unto hades, neither wilt thou give thy Holy One to see corruption.” The word that Luke used for “soul” is *psuche*, which is employed here not only as the Greek counterpart to the Hebrew *nephesh*, meaning body, but representing specifically a *nephesh meth*—a dead body (cf. Numbers 6:6, 9:6, and Ecclesiastes 9:5). Thus, Christ’s body was not abandoned to hades.

Hades is used in Scripture to refer to at least three different places: (a) the general abode of the spirits of the dead, whether good or evil (Revelation 1:18; 6:8; 20:13-14); (b) a temporary place of punishment for the wicked dead (Luke 16:23; Revelation 20:13); and (c) the grave (1 Corinthians 15:55; cf. Acts 2:27). In Psalm 16:10 (the passage quoted by Luke in Acts 2:27), the writer stated: “Thou wilt not leave my soul (*nephesh*) to sheol.” In the Old Testament, sheol also is used to refer to three different places: (a) the unseen abode for spirits of the dead (Job 14:13-15; Ezekiel 26:20; Jonah 2:2); (b) a temporary place of punishment for the wicked dead (Psalm 9:17); and (c) the grave (Davidson, 1970, p. 694; Harris, et al., 1980, 2:892; cf. Numbers 16:30-37 where the conclusion of the rebellion of Korah [and those sympathetic with him] against Moses is described in these words: “The earth opened its mouth, and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. So they, and all that appertained to

them, went down alive into sheol.”). In Acts 2:27 (hades) and Psalm 16:10 (sheol), the context seems to require the latter usage—i.e., the grave. Thus, both David and Luke were making the point (to paraphrase): “You will not leave my body in the grave, nor will you allow your Holy One to see decay.” In fact, just four verses later, the inspired writer referred back to David’s declaration and commented that “he foreseeing this spake of the resurrection of the Christ, that neither was he left unto hades, nor did his flesh see corruption” (2:31).

In referring to the death of the physical body, Solomon wrote that “the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything” (Ecclesiastes 9:5). The psalmist addressed the same point when he wrote: “The dead praise not Jehovah, Neither any that go down into silence” (115:17) and “His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish” (146:4). When Christ yielded up His soul/life (*psuche*; cf. *nephesh*, Psalm 16:10), His dead body was headed for the grave and therefore was in the condition that it could “know not anything” and “praise not Jehovah.” [The spirit (*pneuma*) that had vacated the body was alive and well in Paradise (Greek *paradeisos*, Luke 23:43). Paul addressed this principle when he said that Christ’s disciples always should be “of good courage, and willing rather to be **absent from the body**, and to be **at home with the Lord**” (2 Corinthians 5:8; cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:14).] Woods observed:

Death, mortality, corruptibility, decay, destruction are never affirmed of the spirit. It is, in the nature of the case, impossible for a spirit to die. The scriptures affirm deathlessness of the angels; and the angels do not die because they are angels, but because they are spirits (1985, 127[22]:692).

Yet it also is impossible for a soul to die (Matthew 10:28; Revelation 6:9-11).

However, as Hebrews 4:12 documents, there are times when the words spirit and soul are **not** used synonymously. The word spirit sometimes refers to wind or air (Genesis 3:8; 8:1; John 3:8); the word soul does not. The word spirit sometimes refers to demons (Mark 5:2; Luke 9:39); the word soul does not. The word soul sometimes refers to both the inner and outer man (i.e., a whole person; Exodus 1:5; Ezekiel 18:20; Acts 2:41; Romans 13:1); the word spirit does not. The word soul sometimes refers to a corpse (Numbers 5:2; 6:6; Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:27); the word spirit does not. The word soul on one occasion refers to an odor, fragrance, or perfume (Isaiah 3:20); the word spirit does not.

Thus, while it is true that on some occasions the words “soul” and “spirit” are used interchangeably, in other instances they are employed in a non-synonymous fashion. As Woods observed, under certain conditions within Scripture “lexically, logically, and actually these terms differ and must not be confused” (1985, 127[22]:692). In any study of these two terms as they occur within God’s Word, the context and intent of the writers are the deciding factors that must be considered and respected.

[to be continued]

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The Origin, Nature, and Destiny of the Soul [Part II]

by Bert Thompson, Ph.D.

THE ORIGIN AND SOURCE OF MAN'S IMMORTAL NATURE

Biblical teaching regarding man acknowledges that he is composed of two distinct parts—the physical and the spiritual. We get an introduction to the origin of the **physical** portion as early as Genesis 2:7 when the text states: “Jehovah God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul (*nephesh chayyah*).” It is important to recognize both what this passage is discussing and what it is not. Genesis 2:7 is teaching that man was given **physical life**; it is **not** teaching that man was instilled with an **immortal nature**. The immediate (as well as the remote) context is important to a clear understanding of the intent of Moses’ statement. Both the King James and American Standard Versions translate *nephesh chayyah* as “living soul.” The Revised Standard Version, New American Standard Version, New International Version, and the New Jerusalem Bible all translate the phrase as “living being.” The New English Bible translates it as “living creature.”

The variety of terms employed in our English translations has caused some confusion as to the exact meaning of the phrase “living soul” or “living being.” Some have suggested, for example, that Genesis 2:7 is speaking specifically of man’s receiving his immortal soul and/or spirit. This is not the case, however, as a closer examination of the immediate and remote contexts clearly indicates. For example, the apostle Paul quoted Genesis 2:7 in 1 Corinthians 15:44-45 when he wrote: “If there is a **natural body**, there is also a **spiritual body**. So also it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living soul.’ The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.” The comparison/contrast offered by the apostle between the first Adam’s “natural body” and the last Adam (Christ) as a “life-giving spirit” is critical to an understanding of Paul’s central message (and the theme of the great “resurrection chapter” of the Bible, 1 Corinthians 15), and must not be overlooked in any examination of Moses’ statement in Genesis 2:7.

There are six additional places in the Old Testament where similar phraseology is employed, and in each case the text obviously is speaking of members of the animal kingdom. In Genesis 1:24, God said: “Let the earth bring forth living creatures (*nephesh chayyah*) after their kind.” Genesis 1:30 records that God provided plants as food “to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life (*nishmath chayyah*).” When the Genesis Flood covered the Earth, God made a rainbow covenant with Noah and with every living creature (*nephesh chayyah*) that was in the ark with Him (Genesis 9:12). God pledged that He would remember the covenant that He made with every “living creature” (*nephesh chayyah*; Genesis 9:12), and therefore He never again would destroy the Earth by such a Flood. The rainbow, He stated, would serve as a reminder of that “everlasting covenant” between God and every living creature (*nephesh chayyah*, Genesis 9:15). The final occurrence of the phrase is found in Ezekiel’s description of the river flowing from the temple in which every living creature (*nephesh chayyah*) that swarms will live (47:9).

Additionally, the Bible declares: “For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; and man hath no preeminence above the beasts” (Ecclesiastes 3:19). Does this mean, therefore, that man possesses only a material nature and has no immortal soul/spirit? No, it does not! In speaking to this very point, Jack P. Lewis wrote:

It would seem that arguments which try to present the distinctiveness of man from the term “living soul” are actually based on the phenomena of variety in translation of the KJV and have no validity in fact. Had the translators rendered all seven occurrences by the same term, we would have been aware of the fact that both men and animals are described by it. To make this observation is not at all to affirm that the Old Testament is materialistic. We are concerned at this time only with the biblical usage of one term. Neither is it to deny a distinction in biblical thought between men and other animals when one takes in consideration the whole Old Testament view. Man may perish like the animals, but he is different from them. Even here in Genesis in the creation account, God is not said to breathe into the animals the breath of life; animals are made male and female; there is no separate account of the making of the female animal; they are not said to be in God’s image and likeness; they are not given dominion. Man is the crown of God’s creation (1988, p. 7).

When Dr. Lewis suggested that “man may perish like the animals,” he captured the essence of the passage in Ecclesiastes 3:19. It is true that both men and beasts ultimately die, and that in this regard man “hath no preeminence above the beasts.” Yet while both creatures are referred to as *nephesh chayyah*, the Scriptures make it clear that God did something special in reference to man. Genesis 1:26-27 records: “And God said, Let us make man **in our image, after our likeness**. ...And God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.” Nowhere does the Bible state or imply that animals are created in the image of God. What is it, then, that makes man different from the animals?

The answer, of course, lies in the fact that man possesses an immortal nature. Animals do not. God Himself is a spirit (John 4:24). And a spirit “hath not flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39). In some fashion, God has placed within man a portion of His own essence—in the sense that man possesses a spirit that never will die. The prophet Zechariah spoke of Jehovah, Who “stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit (*ruach*) of man within him” (12:1). The Hebrew word for “formeth,” *yatsar*, is defined as to form, fashion, or shape (as in a potter working with clay; Harris, et al., 1980, 1:396). The same word is used in Genesis 2:7, thereby indicating that both man’s physical body and his spiritual nature were formed, shaped, molded, or fashioned by God. The authors of the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* noted:

The participial form meaning “potter” is applied to God in Isa. 64:7 where mankind is the work of his hand. When applied to the objects of God’s creative work, the emphasis of the word is on the forming or structuring of these phenomena. The word speaks to the **mode of creation** of these phenomena only insofar as the act of shaping or forming an object may also imply the **initiation of that object** (Harris, et al., 1980, 1:396, emp. added).

As the Creator, God “initiates” the object we know as man’s immortal nature (i.e., his soul or spirit). Solomon, writing in Ecclesiastes, noted that “the dust returneth to the earth as it was, and the spirit returneth unto **God who gave it**” (12:7, emp. added). Man’s physical body was formed of the physical dust of the Earth. Would it not follow, then, that his spiritual portion would be formed from that which is spiritual? When the writer of Hebrews referred to God as “the Father of our spirits” (12:9), he revealed the spiritual source of the soul—God.

WHEN DOES MAN RECEIVE HIS IMMORTAL NATURE?

When does man receive his soul/spirit? In one of the most illustrative passages within the Bible on this topic, James wrote: “The body apart from the spirit is dead” (2:26). This brief but important observation—offered by inspiration on the part of the Bible writer—carries tremendous implications. Without the presence of the spirit (*pneuma*), the physical body cannot live. There is, however, an important corollary to James’ assessment. If the body is living, **then the spirit (*pneuma*) must be present!**

But when does life actually begin? The answer, quite simply, is that it begins **at conception**. When the male and female gametes join to form the zygote that eventually will grow into the fetus, it is at that very moment that the formation of a new body begins. It is the result of a **viable** male gamete joined sexually with a **viable** female gamete which has formed a zygote that will move through a variety of important stages.

The first step in the process—which eventually will result in the highly differentiated tissues and organs that compose the body of the neonatal child—is the initial mitotic cleavage of that primal cell, the zygote. At this point, the genetic material doubles, matching copies of the chromosomes move to opposite poles, and the cell cleaves into two daughter cells. Shortly afterwards, each of these cells divides again, forming the embryo. [In humans and animals, the term “embryo” applies to any stage after cleavage but before birth (see Rudin, 1997, p. 125).]

As the cells of the embryo continue to divide, they form a cluster, or ball, of cells. These divisions are accompanied by additional changes that produce a hollow, fluid-filled cavity inside the ball, which now is a one-layer-thick grouping of cells known as a blastula. Early in the second day after fertilization, the embryo undergoes a process known as gastrulation in which the single-layer blastula turns into a three-layered gastrula consisting of ectoderm, mesoderm, and endoderm surrounding a cavity known as the archenteron. Each of these layers will give rise to very specific structures. For example, the ectoderm will form the outermost layer of the skin and other structures, including the sense organs, parts of the skeleton, and the nervous system. The mesoderm will form tissues associated with support, movement, transport, reproduction, and excretion (i.e., muscle, bone, cartilage, blood, heart, blood vessels, gonads, and kidneys). The endoderm will produce structures associated with breathing and digestion (including the lungs, liver, pancreas, and other digestive glands) [see Wallace, 1975, p. 187].

Within 72 hours after fertilization, the embryo will have divided a total of four times, and will consist of sixteen cells. Each cell will divide before it reaches the size of the cell that produced it; hence, the cells will become progressively smaller with each division. By the end of the first month, the embryo will have reached a length of only one-eighth of an inch but already will consist of millions of cells. By the end of the ninth month, if all proceeds via normal channels, a baby is ready to be born. As one biologist (and author of a widely used secular university biology textbook) noted: “As soon as the egg is touched by the head of a sperm, it undergoes violent pulsating movements which unite the twenty-three chromosomes of the sperm with its own genetic complement. From this single cell, about 1/175 of an inch in diameter, a **baby** weighing several pounds and composed of trillions of cells will be delivered about 266 days later” (Wallace, 1975, p. 194, emp. added).

Is it alive? Of course it is alive. In fact, herein lies one of the most illogical absurdities of arguments set forth by those who support and defend abortion. They opine that the “thing” in the human womb is not “alive.” If it is not alive, why the need to abort it? **Simply leave it alone!** Obviously, of course, from their perspective that is not an option because, as everyone knows, in nine months that growing, vibrant, developing fetus results in a **living, human baby**. The truth of the matter is that human life begins at conception and is continuous, whether intrauterine or extrauterine, until death. Consider the following important scientific facts regarding the living nature of the fetus.

(1) The baby’s heart starts beating 18-25 days after conception.

(2) By the age of two months, the heart beats so strongly that a doctor actually can listen to it with a special stethoscope.

(3) At about this same time, brain activity can be recorded by use of an electroencephalogram. Brain waves are readily apparent.

(4) By the age of two months, everything is “in place”—feet, hands, head, organs, etc. Upon close examination, fingerprints are evident. Although less than an inch long, the embryo has a head with eyes and ears, a simple digestive system, kidneys, liver, a heart that beats, a bloodstream of its own, and the beginning of a brain.

(5) The unborn child hiccups, sucks his thumb, wakes, and sleeps.

(6) The unborn child responds to touch, pain, cold, sound, and light.

Is the child alive? Do you know any **dead** creature that attains such marvelous accomplishments?

But is the fetus growing in the uterus actually **human**? It is the result of the union of the **human** male gamete (spermatozoon) and the **human** female gamete (ovum)—something that certainly guarantees its humanness. [The *Washington Post* of May 11, 1975 contained an “Open Letter to the Supreme Court”—signed by 209 medical doctors—which stated: “We physicians reaffirm our dedication to the awesome splendor of **human life—from one-celled infant to dottering elder.**”]

And how, exactly, does God view this unborn yet fully human child? He said to the prophet Jeremiah: “Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee, and **before thou camest forth out of the womb**, I sanctified thee” (Jeremiah 1:5, emp. added). Jehovah knew the prophet—even while he was *in utero*—and viewed him as a living person. Further, God already had “sanctified” Jeremiah. If his mother had aborted the baby, she would have killed someone that God recognized as a living person.

The same concept applied to the prophet Isaiah who said: “Listen, O isles, unto me, and hearken ye peoples, from afar; **Jehovah hath called me from the womb**; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name.... And now, saith Jehovah that **formed me from the womb** to be his servant...” (Isaiah 49:1,5, emp. added). Jehovah not only viewed Isaiah as a person prior to his birth, but even called him by name.

David, in Psalm 139:13-16, provided one of the clearest and most compelling discussions on the nature and importance of life *in utero* when he wrote:

For thou didst form my inward parts: Thou didst cover me in my mother’s womb. I will give thanks unto thee; For I am fearfully and wonderfully made: Wonderful are thy works; And that my soul knoweth right well. My frame was not hidden from thee, When I was made in secret, And curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see mine unformed substance; And in thy book they were all written, Even the days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was none of them.

The phrases, “I was made in secret” and “curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth,” refer to the psalmist’s development in the womb (see Young, 1965, p. 76). Notice also that David employed the pronouns “me,” “my,” and “I” throughout the passage in reference to his own prenatal state. Such usage clearly shows that David was referring to himself, and one cannot talk about himself without having reference to a living human being. The Bible thus acknowledges that David was a human being while he inhabited his mother’s womb (and prior to his birth).

Job, who was undergoing a terrible life crisis, cursed the day he was born when he said: “Why did I not **die from the womb**? Why did I not give up the ghost when my mother bore me?” (3:11). It is clear that if the fetus had **died** in the womb, prior to that it must have been **living**. Something (or someone) cannot die if it (or they) never lived. It also is of interest to observe that in Job 3:13-16, the patriarch listed several formerly-living-but-now-dead people with whom he would have had something in common if he had died *in utero*. Included in the list—along with kings and princes—was the child who experienced a “hidden untimely birth” (i.e., a miscarriage). Job considered the

miscarried child to be in the same category as others who once lived but had died. Obviously, the Holy Spirit (Who guided the author of the book of Job in what he wrote) considered an unborn fetus as much a human being as a king, a prince, or a stillborn infant.

In the Old Testament, even the accidental termination of a pregnancy was a punishable crime. Consider Exodus 21:22—"If men strive together, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart, and yet no harm follows; he shall be surely fined, according as the woman's husband shall lay upon him...but if any harm follows, then thou shalt give life for life." The meaning of the passage is this: If the child was born prematurely as the result of this accident, but "no harm follows" (i.e. the child survived), then a fine was to be exacted; however, if "harm follows" (i.e., either mother or child died), then the guilty party was to be put to death. Look at it this way. Why would God exact such a severe punishment for the accidental **death** of an unborn child—if that child were not **living**?

The same understanding of the fetus as a living child is found within the pages of the New Testament. The angel Gabriel told Mary that "Elisabeth thy kinswoman, she also hath conceived a **son** in her old age" (Luke 1:36, emp. added). Please note that the conception resulted in neither an "it" nor a "thing," but in a **son**. In Luke 1:41,44, the Bible states (in speaking of Elisabeth, who was pregnant with John the Baptist) that "the babe leaped in her womb." The word for "babe" in these passages is the Greek term *brephos*, and is used here for an unborn fetus. The same word is used in both Luke 18:15 and Acts 7:19 for young or newborn children. It also is used in Luke 2:12,16 for the newborn Christ-child. *Brephos* therefore can refer to a young child, a newborn infant, or even an unborn fetus (see Thayer, 1958, p. 105). In each of these cases a living human being must be under consideration because the same word is used to describe all three.

The fact that the zygote/embryo/fetus is living (an inescapable conclusion supported by both weighty scientific and biblical evidence) thus becomes critically important in answering the question, "When does man receive his immortal nature?" When James observed that "the body apart from the spirit is dead" (2:26), the corollary automatically inherent in his statement became the fact that **if the body is living, then the spirit must be present**. Since at each stage of its development the zygote/embryo/fetus is living, it must have had a soul/spirit instilled at conception. No other view is in accord with both the biblical and scientific evidence.

[to be continued]

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The Origin, Nature, and Destiny of the Soul [Part III]

by Bert Thompson, Ph.D.

It is one thing to suggest that man possesses a soul or spirit. It is another to suggest that he receives such at conception. And it is still another to suggest that the soul/spirit survives the death of the physical body. [Since I previously documented the fact that on occasion within Scripture the words “soul” and “spirit” may be used synonymously, in order to avoid complicating the subject matter unnecessarily from this point on, I will employ them as such, rather than continuing to use the somewhat cumbersome “soul/spirit” designation.] As I mentioned in my introduction to this series, there are a number of different views regarding the immortal nature of the soul.

Among those who accept the existence of the soul, there are some who are quite willing to believe that all men have such a spirit residing within them, but who are quite unwilling to believe that such is immortal, preferring to believe instead that this spiritual part is **purely temporal** (and thus lives only as long as our corporeal nature exists). Conversely, there are some who posit the idea that all humans not only possess an immortal soul, but that the souls of **all people** (regardless of their actions on Earth) will survive the death of the physical body in order to ultimately inhabit the heavenly realm with God. Others believe that while all men do indeed possess a soul, **only the soul of the faithful child of God** has an immortal nature. That is to say, the souls of those who die outside of Christ are not immortal and perish when the body dies, while the soul of the Christian goes on into eternity. Still others believe that the souls of **both** the faithful child of God **and** the person outside of Christ are immortal—thereby surviving the death of the physical body in order to eventually inhabit either heaven (a place of eternal reward) or hell (a place of eternal punishment). Who is correct? What is the truth of the matter?

“TEMPORAL” SOULS?

Concerning the position that all men possess a soul, but that such is purely temporal and incapable of surviving the physical death of the body, Gilbert Thiele, a professor at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, wrote:

We think it is consequently fair to say, to put it very bluntly, that when a man dies he is dead. The Bible when examined in its length and breadth knows of no disembodied condition in which man lives, temporarily, and certainly not permanently; it knows of neither a temporary nor a permanent human immortality as such (1958, p. 18).

Such a position, however, “to put it very bluntly,” is indefensible in light of the multifarious teachings of Scripture. There are too many passages (e.g., Acts 7:59, Revelation 6:9, Matthew 10:28, et al.—discussed in Parts I & II of this series) which teach that the soul does, in fact, partake of an immortal nature. More will be said on this later.

UNIVERSALISM

The idea that all humans possess an immortal soul, and that each and every one of those souls will survive the death of the physical body in order to inhabit the heavenly realm with God (regardless of their actions on Earth), is known as **universalism**. According to this view, all people will be saved; none will be lost. Advocates of this theory teach that since God is love (1 John 4:8), as well as a Sovereign Who desires mercy rather than sacrifice (Matthew 9:13), then divine punishment must be viewed as merely remedial. God’s loving, longsuffering nature, they suggest, cannot tolerate the loss of even one of His creatures since He is “not willing that any should perish” (2 Peter 3:9).

This view may be somewhat unusual, but it is by no means new. Origen, a well-known, third-century preacher (c. A.D. 185-254) was among the first to espouse it, and he has been joined by a parade of the famous (and not so famous) in the days since. The great poet, Alfred Lord Tennyson, in his poem, *In Memoriam*, advocated universalism. Scottish theologian and University of Glasgow divinity professor, William Barclay, was one of the concept's most ardent twentieth-century defenders. In his book, *The Plain Man Looks at the Apostles' Creed*, he wrote:

It seems to us that if God is the God who is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and if the total impression of the Gospel is true, we may dare to hope that when time ends God's family will be complete, for surely we must think in terms, not of a king who is satisfied with a victory which destroys his enemies, but of a Father who can never be content when even a single child of his is outside the circle of his love (1967, p. 239).

When you stop to think about it, it should not be at all surprising that such a view should receive widespread support. After all, it is a most comforting position. In his book, *How Can a God of Love Send People to Hell?*, British author John Benton addressed the inherent appeal of universalism when he wrote:

I am sure that there is a part in all of us which would like to believe that that was true. If not, we are in danger of becoming very hard and unloving people indeed. We sympathize with the emotions which draw some people in the direction of universalism. But, in all honesty, it is impossible to interpret Jesus as teaching universalism (1985, p. 38).

I agree wholeheartedly with both parts of Benton's assessment. First, surely there is a twinge of desire in every human heart that would like to see everyone end up in heaven on the Day of Judgment. What an invigorating and refreshing belief—to entertain the hope that not a single human would lose his or her soul to the netherworld, but instead would walk the golden streets of heaven with God throughout all eternity. Second, however, in all honesty, it is impossible to interpret Jesus as teaching universalism. No amount of wishful thinking on our part can avoid the force of His arguments, or those of His inspired writers, on the subject of the final destination of those who live in rebellion to Heaven's will in the here and now.

Generally speaking, there are two distinct views regarding the mechanics of ultimate, universal salvation. First, there is the idea that entails the "remedial suffering" of which I spoke earlier. Prominent theologian Carl F.H. Henry referred to this notion when he wrote: "Hell itself is transformed from the ultimate state of the lost into a means of grace—a neo-Protestant purgatory of sorts" (1967, p. 27). Second, there is the idea known as "transcendentalism," which one writer expressed as follows:

This idea held that every soul is a part of the "oversoul" of the universe. To use a common metaphor, man is a spark of the universal flame and will eventually return to it to be absorbed into the One Soul of all time.... Hell, according to this nebulous theory, is a training school for fragments of the Eternal Self which must be disciplined into final merger. The soul of man is only a spark of the divine flame and will finally be reabsorbed into it (Woodson, 1973, p. 60).

In both views, "hell" becomes simply a repository of the souls of people who need either: (a) a "second chance"—a fact brought to their attention by a little temporary "remedial suffering"; or (b) a brief period of disciplining/chastising to help them "shape up before they ship out" to the eternal joys of heaven. Such fanciful theories, of course, are not found within Scripture. Rather, they represent little more than wishful thinking on the part of those who, like universalists, hope to avoid the eternality of Hell that is associated in the Bible with God's divine mode, and term, of punishment. Anyone who suggests that repentance, reparation, and redemption are possible **after death** (as both of these ideas plainly teach) simply does not understand the bulk of the Bible's teaching on such matters. The writer of the book of Hebrews wrote: "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment" (9:27). The Lord Himself explained in Matthew 25:31-46

exactly what would happen to the wicked (whom He termed “goats,” as opposed to the righteous, whom He labeled “sheep”) on that great Judgment Day: “And these shall go away into **eternal punishment**, but the righteous into **eternal life**” (v. 46). Not much comfort for the universalist in these passages, is there?

In order to bolster their belief system, on occasion universalists have appealed to passages of Scripture that refer to God’s concern for “all” men, or which show that the gift of life has been given to “all” people. Numerous statements from Paul, for example, have been quoted in potential support of universalism, including: (a) Romans 5:18 (“through one act of righteousness the free gift came unto **all** men to justification of life”); (b) Romans 11:25-26 (“**all** Israel shall be saved”); (c) 1 Corinthians 15:22 (“in Christ **all** shall be made alive”); and (d) 2 Corinthians 5:14 (“the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for **all**”). In his book, *Eternal Hope*, liberal theologian Emil Brunner wrote:

That is the revealed will of God and the plan for the world which He discloses—a plan of **universal salvation**, of gathering all things into Christ. We hear not one word in the Bible of a dual plan, a plan of salvation and its polar opposite. The will of God has but one point, it is unambiguous and positive. It has one aim, not two (1954, p. 182, emp. added).

John A.T. Robinson, a bishop in the Church of England, wrote in a similar vein:

In a universe of love there can be no heaven which tolerates a chamber of horrors, no hell for any which does not at the same time make it hell for God. He cannot endure that—for that would be the final mockery of His nature—and He will not (1949, p. 155).

Brunner and Robinson, however, are dead wrong. It is clear—when the passages from Paul’s inspired pen are examined in their appropriate context—that they are not teaching the false concept of universalism. While the apostle taught that the Gospel of Christ is **universally available**, he did not teach that the Gospel would be **universally accepted**! In fact, he taught quite the opposite. In 2 Thessalonians 1:8, Paul referred to the fact that one day the Lord would return “from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that **obey not the gospel** of our Lord Jesus.” Interestingly, in the very next verse he wrote that such people “shall suffer punishment, **even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord** and from the glory of his might.” Not much support here for universalism either, is there?

Universalism is an erroneous view that must be rejected, not only because it contradicts plain Bible teaching on the eternal fate of the wicked, but also because it makes a mockery of Christ’s commission to His followers (whether in His day or in ours) as presented in Matthew 28:19-20. His command was: “Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you.” But, as Benton has pointed out:

If everyone is saved, then Jesus’ commission to his followers to preach the gospel and make disciples is pointless. People are going to be saved anyway. Universalism suffers from fatal defects. It is an alluring theory, but it does not fit the New Testament. Christianity is founded on the teachings of Christ and if we want to know what Christianity stands for, we must be prepared to face squarely what Jesus taught (1985, p. 38).

Indeed we must! But suggesting that all men everywhere will be saved—regardless of the lives they lead or the obedience to God’s Word that they do or do not render—is tantamount to saying that Christ erred when He said that at His Second Coming He will “render unto every man **according to his deeds**” (Matthew 16:27, emp. added). If universalism is true, He likewise was mistaken when He taught that “every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words **thou shalt be condemned**”

(Matthew 12:36-37, emp. added). Similarly, Paul was wrong when he reminded first-century Christians: “So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Romans 14:12).

True, universalism is an “alluring theory”—no doubt due in large part to the fact that it stresses only the goodness of God and none of His other equally important traits. Paul, however, “shrank not from declaring the **whole counsel** of God” (Acts 20:27, emp. added). Rather, he proclaimed: “Behold then the goodness and severity of God: toward them that fell, severity; but toward thee, God’s goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off” (Romans 11:22). As David Brown observed:

One of the great obligations of the church in getting lost men to see the error of their ways and obey the gospel is to preach the truth of the Bible regarding Hell and who is going there. To preach only the goodness of God is to omit part of the whole counsel of God (1999, p. 166).

And from the beginning of the Old Testament (e.g., Deuteronomy 4:2) to the end of the New (e.g., Revelation 22:18), the injunctions against altering, adding to, or deleting from God’s Word are serious indeed. Universalism—as a doctrine that alters, adds to, and deletes from God’s Word—should be (in fact, must be!) rejected.

ANNIHILATION FOR THE WICKED/ ETERNITY IN HEAVEN FOR THE RIGHTEOUS?

It hardly should surprise or shock us that atheists, agnostics, and infidels of every stripe have long rejected the notion (associated with the concept of an immortal soul) of an unending penalty for wickedness. First, they reject the idea of the existence of the soul itself and, second, they find the idea of eternal punishment utterly abhorrent. As Brown noted: “One should not think it strange when men imagine doctrines that release them from the eternal consequences of a sinful life. What doctrine of the Bible has escaped corruption in the fertile imagination of rebellious men?” (1999, p. 161). Prominent British atheistic philosopher Antony Flew stated:

I must confess that this subject of the doctrine of hell is one about which I find it very difficult to maintain my supposed national British calm and reserve. But let me, with what restraint I can muster, say that if anything can be known to be monstrously, inordinately wrong and unjust, it is the conduct of which this God is said to assume. If anything can be known to be just quite monstrously, inordinately, unquestionably unjust and evil, it is the conduct of a Being creating conscious creatures, whether human or animal, in the full knowledge, and with the intention, that these creatures should be maintained by His sustaining power eternally in infinite and unlimited torment. I speak of this with what little restraint I can muster because, if anything seems clear to me about good and evil, just and unjust, it is clear to me that this is monstrous (1977, pp. 84-85).

The famous nineteenth-century American agnostic, Robert G. Ingersoll (1833-1899), wrote:

This idea of hell was born of ignorance, brutality, fear, cowardice, and revenge. This idea testifies that our remote ancestors were the lowest beasts. Only from the dens, lairs, and caves, only from the mouths filled with cruel fangs, only from hearts of fear and hatred, only from the conscience of hunger and lust, only from the lowest and most debased could come this cruel, heartless, and bestial of all dogmas... (as quoted in Lewis, 1983, p. 90).

Ingersoll then went on to say:

The idea of hell is born of revenge and brutality. I have no respect for any human being who believes in it. I have no respect for any man who preaches it. I dislike this doctrine. I hate it, despise, and defy it. The doctrine of hell is infamous beyond words (as quoted in Stacey, 1977, p. 59).

In his widely circulated essay, *Why I Am Not a Christian*, English agnostic philosopher Bertrand Russell commented: “I must say that I think all this doctrine, that hell-fire is a punishment for sin, is a doctrine of cruelty. It is a doctrine that put cruelty into the world and gave the world generations of cruel torture...” (1967, p. 18).

But what about those who believe in God and who accept as genuine the existence of the soul? Some among that number believe that while all men do indeed possess a soul, **only that of the faithful child of God has an immortal nature**. That is to say, the souls of those who die outside of Christ are not immortal and thus perish when the body dies, while the soul of the Christian goes into eternity (i.e., heaven). Others believe that the souls of **both** the faithful child of God **and** the person outside of Christ are immortal—thereby surviving the death of the physical body in order to eventually inhabit either a place of eternal reward (heaven) or a place of eternal punishment (hell). Which position is correct?

To be sure, there have been those who have taught that **only** the souls of the faithful are immortal, while those of the unfaithful perish at their physical death (a concept known as annihilationism). And again, this is not a new doctrine. In the July 1852 issue of *Christian Magazine*, a popular preacher from Nashville, Tennessee by the name of Jesse B. Ferguson asked:

Is Hell a dungeon dug by Almighty hands before man was born, into which the wicked are to be plunged? And is the salvation upon the preacher’s lips a salvation from such a Hell? For ourself, we rejoice to say it, we never believed, and upon the evidence so far offered, never can believe it (1852, p. 202).

In an article titled “Fire, Then Nothing” written in *Christianity Today* 135 years later, denominational scholar Clark Pinnock suggested that the souls of the wicked are annihilated at physical death (1987). In his book, *The Fire That Consumes*, Edward W. Fudge taught the same concept when he wrote: “The wicked, following whatever degree and duration of pain that God may justly inflict, will finally and truly die, perish and **become extinct for ever and ever**” (1982, p. 425, emp. added). Interestingly, Fudge’s book drew rave reviews from certain quarters.

John N. Clayton, a self-proclaimed former-atheist-turned-Christian who lectures frequently on Christian evidences, and who is known chiefly for his numerous compromises of the Genesis account of creation, edits a small, bi-monthly journal titled *Does God Exist?* In the September/October 1990 issue, he reviewed *The Fire That Consumes* and said:

One of the most frequent challenges of atheists during our lectures is the question of the reasonableness of the concept of hell. Why would a loving, caring, merciful God create man as he is, **knowing** that man would sin, reject God, and be condemned to eternal punishment? I have had to plead ignorance in this area because I had no logical answer that was consistent with the Bible.... I have never been able to be comfortable with the position that a person who rejected God should suffer forever and ever and ever (1990a, p. 20, emp. in orig.).

Clayton first described Fudge’s book as “an exhaustive, scholarly study of the subject of hell,” then confidently affirmed that it “will open many new viewpoints to any thinking reader,” and finally concluded by saying: “**I recommend this book highly** to the serious student of the Bible who is not afraid to have some traditions challenged” (pp. 20-21, emp. added). Strangely, in the 1990 edition of his book, *The Source*, Clayton recommended Fudge’s volume as one that contained “reasonably accurate **scientific** material”—even though the book deals solely with **theological** matters (1990b, pp. 190-191). At his weekend seminars on Christian evidences, Mr. Clayton routinely makes available a handout in which he recommends certain books that he believes would be of benefit to each of the seminar participants. Fudge’s book is included on that handout. And, in the 1991 edition of the *Teacher’s Guide* that accompanies his *Does God Exist? Christian Evidences Intermediate Course*, Clayton offered the following suggestion in regard to lesson number six:

One approach that is very useful, although somewhat controversial, is Edward Fudge's book *The Fire That Consumes*. Fudge deals with the subject of this lesson and takes the position that hell is the destruction of the soul (1991, p. 25, emp. added).

In April 1988, while speaking on the subject of "A Christian Response to the New Age Movement" at the annual Pepperdine University lectures in Malibu, California, best-selling author F. LaGard Smith asked the members of his audience:

I also wonder if you feel as uncomfortable as I do in our traditional view of hell. Do you readily accept the traditional view of hell that says God sort of dangles you over the fires that burn day and night?... Is that what hell is all about? Haven't you struggled with the idea of how there can be a loving God and anywhere in his presence permit that to exist? Doesn't it seem like cruel and unusual punishment? (1988).

In that same lecture, Smith strenuously argued that God will "destroy it [the soul—BT]. Not punish it. Not dangle it. Not torture it. **Destroy it!**" (1988). Three years later, in October 1991, Wayne Jackson (as editor of the *Christian Courier*) wrote LaGard Smith to ask him about his position on the destiny of the souls of the wicked. Within a week, Smith replied via a five-page, handwritten letter in which he admitted that he believed in "the possibility that part of the ultimate punishment of the wicked is total destruction of their souls" (as quoted in Jackson, 1993, p. 65; see Jackson, 1998, 33[9]:35 for a discussion of, and response to, Smith's subsequent claim that he has been "misunderstood" in regard to his views on the annihilation of the soul).

Another advocate of the view that the souls of the wicked will be annihilated is Alan Pickering who, in the 1980s, presented seminars around the country under the title of "Sharpening the Sword." In December 1986, he spoke at the Central Church of Christ in Stockton, California and advocated the view that the souls of the wicked, after a limited period of punishment, will cease to exist. As he had done with LaGard Smith, Wayne Jackson (who lives in Stockton) wrote Pickering to inquire if the material available on audio tape from his lectures did, in fact, accurately represent his views. In a subsequent telephone conversation a few days later, Mr. Pickering acknowledged that it did, and even went so far as to state that the concept of eternal conscious punishment for the wicked was a "slap in the face of God." He then challenged Wayne to a public debate on the matter—a challenge he later retracted when his offer was accepted (see Jackson, 1987, 23[8]:31).

In addition to those mentioned above, well-known creationist Robert L. Whitelaw defended the annihilationist position in his work, *Can There be Eternal Life Apart from Christ?*, when he wrote of those who die outside of Christ:

Yet nowhere among all the pillars of theological orthodoxy...do we find a work of solid exegesis proving the notion of man's innate immortality to be the teaching of the Bible, based on the whole counsel of Scripture.... Search Scripture as you will, there is no hint of any other kind of life or existence beyond Judgment Day for any being, human or demonic.... We have shown that nowhere in Scripture does God describe the state of lost mankind after Judgment Day as "life," "living," or even unconscious existence (1991, pp. 2,11).

The list of prominent religionists who have supported, and continue to support, the annihilationist position could be extended with ease. What, then, should be our response to this curious dogma?

At the outset, we should acknowledge clear biblical instruction that the soul of the faithful child of God will enjoy eternity forever in heaven. Such a concept is established beyond doubt in both the Old and New Testaments. As early as the book of Genesis, we read that Abraham "was gathered to his people" (25:8). Obviously, this cannot mean that Abraham was buried with his ancestors since "his people" were buried in Ur of the Chaldees and in Haran. Abraham, on the other hand, was buried in the cave of Machpelah (25:9). The same words were used of Aaron (Numbers 20:24,26) and Moses (Numbers 27:13; 31:2; Deuteronomy 32:50). Certainly, in their individual cases this cannot

possibly have reference to their interment in some sort of family tomb or burial plot. Gesenius, in his *Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, noted that “this being gathered to one’s people, or fathers, is expressly distinguished both from death and from burial” (1979, p. 67).

When David’s son (born as a result of his adultery with Bathsheba) died shortly after birth, the shattered sovereign said:

While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, “Who knoweth whether Jehovah will not be gracious to me, that the child may live?” But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I **shall go to him**, but he will not return to me (2 Samuel 12:22-23, emp. added).

Amidst his much suffering, the patriarch Job said:

But as for me I know that my Redeemer liveth, and at last he will stand upon the earth: And after my skin, even this body, is destroyed, **then without my flesh shall I see God**; Whom I, even I, shall see, on my side, and mine eyes shall behold, and not as a stranger (Job 19:25-27, emp. added).

When Elijah raised the widow’s son from the dead (1 Kings 17:21-22), Scripture states:

And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto Jehovah, and said, “O Jehovah my God, I pray thee, let this child’s soul come into him again.” And Jehovah hearkened unto the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived.

Because of the fact that we have access to later revelation, such as that contained in James 2:26 which states that “the body apart from the spirit is dead,” we understand that in 1 Kings 17 the word soul (*nephesh*) is employed to speak of the immortal nature of the young man (i.e., his soul/spirit). His body was dead due to the fact that his spirit had departed. Elijah prayed that it be returned, and it was, which certainly precludes its annihilation. In His discussion with Martha concerning life after death, Jesus said: “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live; and **whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die**” (John 11:25-27, emp. added; cf. Revelation 6:9).

On one occasion while he was serving as king of Israel, the Philistines were amassing for war, “and when Saul saw the host of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly. And when Saul inquired of Jehovah, Jehovah answered him not” (1 Samuel 28:5). Saul, therefore—in violation of both God’s law (Deuteronomy 18:10) and Israelite law (1 Samuel 28:9)—sought out a “medium” whom he hoped could “conjure up” Samuel’s long-departed spirit (1 Samuel 28:3 records that “Samuel was dead, and all Israel had lamented him, and buried him in Ramah”), from whom he intended to seek counsel and comfort. The medium (known as “the witch of Endor”) somehow contacted Samuel, and expressed her fear at the sight of his disembodied spirit (1 Samuel 28:12). Samuel’s response documents the fact that he did not relish a call back to this world: “Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up?” (28:15). If his immortal nature had been annihilated at his death, how, then, was he able to return (and even to complain about having to do so)? Remember also that the spirits of Moses and Elijah not only joined Christ on a mountaintop in Palestine, but spoke to Him as well (Luke 9:30-31). If those spirits had ceased to exist at their owners’ demise, how could they have done either?

That death is **not** total annihilation is clear from the words of Christ in John 5:28-29: “The hour cometh in which **all** that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and **shall come forth**.” In Luke 8:55, the account is recorded of Christ raising Jairus’ daughter from the dead. The text reads as follows: “And her spirit (*pneuma*) returned, and she rose up immediately.” If her spirit had been annihilated, it hardly could have “returned.” And, at the risk of repeating myself, I would like to point out that Christ’s discussion with the Sadducees (as recorded in Matthew 22) must not be overlooked in this context. On that occasion, the Lord quoted from Exodus 3:6 where God had said

to Moses: “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Yet as Christ went on to state (and as the Sadducees accepted as true), “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (22:32). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been dead and in their graves for many years. Since we know from Christ’s own words (and the inability of the Sadducees to offer any rebuttal whatsoever) that “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living,” the point is obvious. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob still must have been living. How so? The answer, of course, lies in the fact that while their bodies had died, their souls had not. And since their immortal nature lived on, it could not have been annihilated at their physical demise.

On one occasion during Jesus’ earthly ministry, He discussed the importance of the soul with His disciples when He said: “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:36-37). Indeed, if the immortal nature of man is annihilated at the death of the body, what was Christ’s point? Would not a man benefit by exchanging “annihilation” for the “whole world”?

What did Christ mean, then, when He warned: “Be not afraid of them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28)? As D.M. Lake observed, at the very least this “does imply a transcendental reality that is in some cases independent of the body. This seems to be the force of Jesus’ statement [in] Matthew 10:28” (1976, 5:497). The “destruction” of which Jesus spoke was described by the apostle John as the “second death.”

The devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where are also the beast and the false prophet; and they shall be tormented day and night **for ever and ever**.... And they were judged every man according to their works. And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, even the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10-14, emp. added).

The eternal nature of that second death is evident from John’s description of the wicked men who “shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God...and shall be tormented with fire and brimstone...and **the smoke of their torment goeth up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day and night**” (Revelation 14:10-11, emp. added).

Furthermore, the position that **only** the souls of the faithful are immortal, while those of “lost mankind” are annihilated at their physical death, is both terribly wrong and squarely at odds with the teachings of God’s Word. The Scriptures plainly indicate that the disobedient are to be subjected to eternal punishment. In Matthew 25:46, Jesus said that the wicked would “go away into **eternal** punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” In his second epistle to the Christians at Thessalonica, Paul wrote specifically of “them that know not God” and “obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” as those “who shall suffer punishment, even **eternal** destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might” (1:8-9). In addressing this point, Wayne Jackson wrote:

There is, however, no punishment, or suffering, apart of consciousness. And yet, consciousness (knowledge, awareness) is a characteristic of the spirit (1 Cor. 2:11). One must necessarily infer, therefore, that the spirit (our soul) of man will exist in an eternal conscious state. Jesus once said regarding the traitor Judas that it would have been better for that man had he never been born (Mark 14:21). If Judas did not exist before his earthly life, and yet was to be annihilated eventually, how does the Lord’s statement make sense? How is non-existence better than non-existence? (1991, 27[5]:19).

Additionally, the New Testament account (recorded in Luke 16) that describes Christ’s discussion of two men who died under different circumstances merits serious consideration here. One, Lazarus, went to Abraham’s bosom (a synonym for paradise). The other, an unnamed rich man, found himself in the portion of hades where, he exclaimed, “I am tormented in this flame” (16:22-24). Thus, the spirits of the two men, upon leaving their bodies, were alive, conscious, and even able to converse—

although they were in two significantly different places. One was “comforted,” one was “tormented,” and a great gulf separated them (Luke 16:26). When the rich man requested that Lazarus be allowed to return to Earth to warn his five brothers not to follow him to such a terrible place, Abraham denied his request and responded: “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded **if one rise from the dead**” (16:31). The key phrase here, of course, is “if one rise from the dead.” Abraham did not say that such was **impossible**; rather, he indicated that it was **inappropriate**. There is a vast difference in the two. Lazarus **could** have returned, but was not allowed to do so. The simple fact of the matter is that Abraham’s spirit, Lazarus’ spirit, and the rich man’s spirit all continued to exist beyond the grave. That the rich man found himself in a place (and state) of torment demolishes the idea that the souls of the wicked do not survive this life. That the souls of the wicked endure torment “for ever and ever, and have no rest day and night” (Revelation 14:10-11) demolishes the idea that the souls of the wicked are annihilated at any point following the death of the physical body.

Some, of course, have lamented that since the account in Luke 16 is “only” a parable, neither its message nor its implications may be taken literally. Such a notion, however, overlooks several important points regarding the nature of the text itself. First, notice that Christ referred to two of the three people **by name**. He mentioned both Abraham and Lazarus. As Tim Rice has observed:

Those of the “parable” philosophy who disparage of an eternal hell’s existence think that the rich man was a fictional character. They even ignore the fact that Lazarus’ name is the **only proper name ever used in a parable** (if this be a parable). The key to the question of whether this account is strictly imagery is not just the consideration of the rich man or Lazarus, but Abraham! In Matthew 22:32, Jesus Himself claimed that Abraham continued to live in the spiritual realm. The narrative of the rich man and Lazarus places Lazarus in the presence of a literal Old Testament figure, Abraham, who was existing in some realm at that time (1987, 15[1]:6, parenthetical comment in orig., emp. added).

Second, what, exactly, was Christ’s point in relating this account? Was He attempting to deceive his hearers? Was He merely trying to “scare” them into submission to Heaven’s will? Rice has inquired:

If the covetous do not really enter a realm where they can think, remember, and where they desire relief and are bound from salvation by a great gulf, why would Jesus con his hearers by discussing such a realm? The thrust of his narrative was to make his hearers avoid the position in which the rich man found himself, i.e., torment (1987, 15[1]:6).

Third, compare the condition of the rich man (as depicted by Christ) with a similar passage also from the lips of the Lord. That covetous fellow described his horrible fate when he remarked: “I am tormented in this **flame**” (Luke 16:24, emp. added). In Matthew 25:41, the Lord said to those who were doomed: “Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal **fire** which is prepared for the devil and his angels.” Acknowledging what Christ taught in Matthew 25, upon what basis could we draw the conclusion that He was teaching anything different in Luke 16? Was He not attempting to warn His hearers in both instances of a **literal** place where they (**literally!**) did not want to go?

Fourth, Jesus was not in the habit of using the “abstract” in His parables. Rather, He used substantive examples of events that were based on the everyday lives of His audience. When He presented for His audience’s consideration the parables of the sower (Matthew 13:3-23), the tares (Matthew 13:24-30), or the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10), He was speaking about things that literally could have happened. Similarly, the things He discussed in the account of the rich man and Lazarus could have happened, since additional passages (e.g., Matthew 25, Jude 7, et al.) confirm the existence of a spirit realm such as the one described by the Lord in Luke 16. As Rice has noted: “Even if this account **were** a parable, the realm described is real” (15[1]:6, emp. in orig.). David Brown reasoned in a comparable fashion.

If, for the sake of argument, we admit that Luke 16:19-31 is a parable, annihilationists can get no solace from such an admission. Why is this the case? It is because all parables teach the truth. Now, what is the

truth taught in the case of the “Rich man and Lazarus”? At death wicked men go into torment, and saved men into a place of comfort and rest. However, we do not admit that the passage is a parable. It bears no marks of a parable. Quite the contrary when the passage is analyzed. Please note that Jesus emphatically declared in no uncertain terms, “There was a certain rich man....” Question: Was there? Jesus answers, “There was....” Our Lord declared in no uncertain terms, “...there was a certain beggar named Lazarus....” Question: Was there? Jesus answers, “There was....” These two men lived on earth, died, and according to their conduct on earth, went to their respective places in the hades world to await the end of the world, the resurrection, and the Judgment. Our Lord selected them to teach us a lesson regarding what transpired at death for the wicked and the blest (1999, pp. 170-171).

Furthermore, there are several other important points that practically leap off the pages of Scripture, and that need to be examined in this particular context. First, those who argue for the ultimate annihilation of the souls of the wicked apparently have failed to comprehend both the abominable, repulsive nature of man’s sin against God and the inestimable, unspeakable price Heaven paid to redeem rebellious man from its clutches. Second, they seem not to have grasped the necessity or purpose of punishment in God’s grand plan. Third, they evidently have overlooked (or ignored) the straightforward teaching of the Scriptures on the eternal fate of the wicked. And fourth, they appear to have missed the telling fact that every single argument made against the existence of an eternal Hell likewise can be leveled against the existence of an eternal heaven. Each of these deserves close scrutiny.

[to be continued]

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The Origin, Nature, and Destiny of the Soul [Part IV]

by Bert Thompson, Ph.D.

THE NATURE OF MAN'S SIN AGAINST GOD

Of all the living beings that dwell on planet Earth, one solitary creature was made “in the image of God” (Genesis 1:26-27). Mankind was not created in the physical image of God, of course, because God, as a Spirit Being, has no physical image (John 4:24; Luke 24:39; Matthew 16:17). Rather, mankind was fashioned in the spiritual, rational, emotional, and volitional image of God (Ephesians 4:24; John 5:39-40; 7:17; Joshua 24:15; Isaiah 7:15). Humans are superior to all other creatures on Earth. No other living being has been given the faculties, capacities, potential, capabilities, or worth that God instilled in each man and woman. Indeed, humankind is the peak, the pinnacle, the apex of God’s creation. In its lofty position as the zenith of God’s creative genius, mankind was endowed with certain responsibilities. Men and women were to be the stewards of the entire Earth (Genesis 1:28). They were to glorify God in their daily existence (Isaiah 43:7). And, they were to consider it their “whole duty” to serve the Creator faithfully throughout their brief sojourn on this planet (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Unfortunately, however, as the first man and woman, Adam and Eve used their volitional powers—and the free moral agency based on those powers—to rebel against their Maker. Finite man made some horribly evil choices, and thereafter found himself in the spiritual state designated biblically as “sin.” The Old Testament not only pictures in vivid fashion the entrance of sin into the world through Adam and Eve (Genesis 3), but also alludes to the ubiquity of sin throughout the human race when it says: “There is no man that sinneth not” (1 Kings 8:46). Throughout its thirty-nine books, the Old Covenant discusses over and over sin’s presence amidst humanity, as well as its destructive consequences. The great prophet Isaiah reminded God’s people:

Behold, Jehovah’s hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, so that he will not hear (Isaiah 59:1-2).

The New Testament is no less clear in its assessment. The apostle John wrote: “Every one that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4). Thus, sin is defined as the act of transgressing God’s law. In fact, Paul observed that “where there is no law, neither is there transgression” (Romans 4:15). Had there been no law, there would have been no sin. But God **had** instituted divine law. And mankind freely chose to transgress that law. Paul reaffirmed the Old Testament concept of the universality of sin when he stated that “all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

As a result, mankind’s predicament became serious indeed. Ezekiel lamented: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (18:20a). Once again, the New Testament writers reaffirmed such a concept. Paul wrote: “Therefore, as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned” (Romans 5:12). He then added that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Years later, James would write: “But each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed. Then the lust, when it hath conceived, beareth sin: and the sin, when it is full-grown, bringeth forth death” (James 1:15-16). As a result of mankind’s sin, God placed the curse of death on the human race. While all men and women must die **physically** as a result of Adam and Eve’s sin, each person dies **spiritually** for his or her own sins. Each person is responsible for himself, spiritually speaking. The theological position which states that we inherit the guilt of Adam’s sin is utterly false. We do not inherit the **guilt**; we inherit the **consequences**. In Ezekiel 18:20, the prophet went on to say:

The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.

The reality of sin is all around us, and its effects permeate every aspect of our lives. Disease and death were introduced into this world as a direct consequence of man's sin (Genesis 2:17; Romans 5:12). Many features of the Earth's surface that allow for such tragedies as earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, violent thunderstorms, etc., can be traced directly to the Great Flood of Noah's day (which came as the result of man's sin; Genesis 6:5ff.). The communication problems that man experiences, due to the multiplicity of human languages, are traceable to ambitious rebellion on the part of our ancestors (Genesis 11:1-9). Man generally is without the peace of mind for which his heart longs (consider the number of psychiatrists in the Yellow Pages!). Isaiah opined: "They have made them crooked paths; whosoever goeth therein doth not know peace" (59:8; cf. 57:21). By sinning, man created a yawning chasm between himself and God (Isaiah 59:2). In his book, *Created in God's Image*, Anthony Hoekema addressed this chasm when he wrote:

Sin is always related to God and his will. Many people consider what Christians call **sin** mere imperfection—the kind of imperfection that is a normal aspect of human nature. "Nobody's perfect," "everybody makes mistakes," "you're only human," and similar statements express this kind of thinking. Over against this we must insist that, according to Scripture, sin is always a transgression of the law of God.... Sin is therefore fundamentally opposition to God, rebellion against God, which roots in hatred to God.... [T]hough fallen man still bears the image of God, he now functions wrongly as an image-bearer of God. This, in fact, makes sin all the more heinous. Sin is a perverse way of using God-given and God-reflecting powers (1986, pp. 169,171, emp. in orig.).

The well-known British writer, C.S. Lewis, expressed this very fact in a most unforgettable manner via a personal letter to one of his friends when he wrote:

[I]ndeed the only way in which I can make real to myself what theology teaches about the heinousness of sin is to remember that every sin is the distortion of an energy breathed into us.... We poison the wine as He decants it into us; murder a melody He would play with us as the instrument. We caricature the self-portrait He would paint. Hence all sin, whatever else it is, is sacrilege (1966, pp. 71-72).

Unless remedied, this rebellion, this sacrilege, will result in man's being unable to escape what the Son of God Himself called the "judgment of hell" (Matthew 23:33)—the end result of which is eternal separation from God throughout all eternity (Revelation 21:8; 22:18-19).

The key phrase in the above discussion, of course, is **unless remedied**. The question then becomes: Has Heaven provided such a remedy? Thankfully, the answer is "yes." One thing is certain, however. God had no **obligation** to provide a means of salvation for the ungrateful creature that so haughtily turned away from Him, His law, and His beneficence. The Scriptures make this apparent when they discuss the fact that angels sinned (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6), and yet "not to angels doth he give help, but he giveth help to the seed of Abraham" (Hebrews 2:16). The rebellious creatures that once inhabited the heavenly portals were not provided a redemptive plan. But man was! Little wonder, then, that the psalmist was moved to ask: "What is **man**, that thou art mindful of him?" (8:4, emp. added).

Why would God go to such great lengths for mankind, when His mercy was not even extended to the angels that once surrounded His throne? Whatever answers may be proffered, there can be little doubt that the Creator's efforts on behalf of sinful man are the direct result of pure love. As a God of love (1 John 4:8), He acted out of a genuine concern, not for His own desires, but rather for those of His creation. And let us be forthright in acknowledging that Jehovah's love for mankind was completely **undeserved**. The Scriptures make it clear that God decided to offer salvation—our "way home"—even though we were ungodly, sinners, and enemies (note the specific use of those terms in Romans 5:6-10). The apostle John rejoiced in the fact that: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us" (1 John 4:10). God's love is universal, and thus not discriminatory in any

fashion (John 3:16). He would have all men to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4)—**if they would be** (John 5:40)—for He is not willing that **any** should perish (2 Peter 3:9). And, further, Deity's love is unquenchable (read Romans 8:35-39 and be thrilled!). Only man's wanton rejection of God's love can put him beyond the practical appropriation of Heaven's offer of mercy and grace.

Did God understand that man would rebel, and stand in eventual need of salvation from the perilous state of his own sinful condition? The Scriptures make it clear that He did. Inspiration speaks of a divine plan set in place even "before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:20). After the initial fall of man, humankind dredged itself deeper and deeper into wickedness. When approximately a century of preaching by the righteous Noah failed to bring mankind back to God, Jehovah sent a global flood to purge the Earth (Genesis 6-8). From the faithful Noah, several generations later, the renowned Abraham descended, and, through him, the Hebrew nation. From that nation, the Messiah—God-incarnate—one day would come.

Some four centuries following Abraham, the Lord, through His servant Moses, gave to the Hebrews the written revelation that came to be known as the Law of Moses. Basically, this law-system had three purposes. First, its intent was to define sin and sharpen Israel's awareness of it. To use Paul's expression in the New Testament, the Law made "sin exceeding sinful" (Romans 7:7,13). Second, the law was designed to show man that he could not save himself via his own effort, or as a result of his own merit. The Law demanded perfect obedience, and since no mere man could keep it perfectly, each stood condemned (Galatians 3:10-11). Thus, the Law underscored the need for a **Savior**—Someone Who could do for us what we were unable to do for ourselves. Third, in harmony with that need, the Old Testament pointed the way toward the coming of the Messiah. He was to be Immanuel—"God with us" (Matthew 1:23). Jehovah left no stone unturned in preparing the world for the coming of the One Who was to save mankind.

One of God's attributes, as expressed within Scripture, is that He is an absolutely **holy** Being (cf. Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8). As such, He simply cannot ignore the fact of sin. The prophet Habakkuk wrote: "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong" (1:13). Yet, another of God's attributes is that He is absolutely **just**. Righteousness and justice are the very foundation of His throne (Psalm 89:14). The irresistible truth arising from the fact that God is both holy and just is **that sin must be punished!** If God were a cold, vengeful Creator (as some infidels wrongly assert), He simply could have banished mankind from His divine presence forever, and that would have been the end of the matter. But the truth is, He is not that kind of God! Our Creator is loving (1 John 4:8), and "rich in mercy" (Ephesians 2:4). When justice is meted out, we **receive what we deserve**. When mercy is extended, we **do not receive what we deserve**. When grace is bestowed, we **receive what we do not deserve**.

Thus, the problem became: How could a loving, merciful God pardon a wickedly rebellious humanity? Paul addressed this very matter in Romans 3. How could God be just, and yet a justifier of sinful man? The answer: He would find someone to stand in for us—someone to receive **His** retribution, and to bear **our** punishment. That "someone" would be Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He would become a substitutionary sacrifice, and personally would pay the price for human salvation. Paul wrote: "Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). In one of the most moving tributes ever written to the Son of God, Isaiah summarized the situation as follows:

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.... He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (53:4-6,12).

Paul reminded the first-century Christians in Rome:

Scarcely for a righteous man will one die: for peradventure for the good man some one would even dare to die. But God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:7-8).

Jehovah's intent was to extend grace and mercy freely—on the basis of the redemptive life and death of His Son (Romans 3:24ff.). Though part of the Godhead, Christ took upon Himself the form of a man. He came to Earth as a human being (John 1:1-4,14; Philippians 2:5-11; 1 Timothy 3:16), and thus shared our full nature and life-experience. He even was tempted in all points exactly as we are, yet He never yielded to that temptation and sinned (Hebrew 4:15).

There was no happy solution to the justice/mercy dilemma. There was no way by which God could remain just (justice demands that the wages of sin be paid), and yet save His Son from death. Christ was abandoned to the cross so that mercy could be extended to sinners who stood condemned (Galatians 3:10). God could not save sinners by fiat—upon the ground of mere authority alone—without violating His own attribute of divine justice. Paul discussed God's response to this problem in Romans 3:24-26:

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, in his blood...for the showing of his righteousness...that he might himself be just and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus.

Man's salvation was no arbitrary arrangement. God did not decide merely to consider man a sinner, and then determine to save him upon a principle of mercy. Sin placed man in a state of antagonism toward God. Sinners are condemned because they have violated God's law, and because God's justice cannot permit Him to ignore sin. Sin could be forgiven only as a result of the vicarious death of God's Son. Because sinners are redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ, and not because of their own righteousness, they are sanctified by the mercy and grace of God. Our sins were borne by Jesus on the cross. Since Christ was tested, tempted, and tried (Isaiah 28:16), and yet found perfect (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22), He alone could satisfy Heaven's requirement for justice. He alone could serve as the "propitiation" (i.e., an atoning sacrifice) for our sins. Just as the lamb without blemish that was used in Old Testament sacrifices could be the (temporary) propitiation for the Israelites' sins, so the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29) could be the (permanent) propitiation for mankind's sins. In the death of the Lamb of God, divine justice was satisfied; in the gift of Christ, Heaven's mercy and grace were extended. When humans became the recipients of heaven's grace, the unfathomable happened. God—our Justifiable Accuser—became our Vindicator. He extended to us His wonderful love, as expressed by His mercy and grace. He paid our debt so that we, like undeserving Barabbas (Matthew 27:26), might be set free. In this fashion, God could be just and, at the same time, Justifier of all who believe in and obey His Son. By refusing to extend mercy to Jesus as He hung on the cross, God was able to extend mercy to mankind—if mankind was willing to submit in obedience to His commands.

THE NECESSITY AND PURPOSE OF PUNISHMENT

But what if God does not exist? Or what if He does, but mankind is **unwilling to submit to Him**? What then? First, of course, if there is no Creator, if everything ultimately springs from natural causes and this life is all there is, what would it matter **how** man acts? If he is merely the last in a long chain of evolutionary accidents, why should his conduct be of any concern at all? The late, eminent evolutionist of Harvard University, George Gaylord Simpson, considered this point and concluded:

Discovery that the universe apart from man or before his coming lacks and lacked any purpose or plan has the inevitable corollary that the workings of the universe cannot provide any automatic, universal, eternal, or absolute ethical criteria of right and wrong (1951, p. 180).

Matter—in and of itself—is impotent to evolve any sense of moral consciousness. If there is no purpose in the Universe, as Simpson and others have asserted, then there is no purpose to morality or ethics. But the concept of a purposeless morality, or a purposeless ethic, is irrational. Unbelief therefore must contend, and, in fact, does contend, that there is no ultimate standard of moral/ethical truth, and that, at best, morality and ethics are relative and situational. [Morality is the character of being in accord with the principles or standards of right conduct. Ethics generally is viewed as the system or code by which attitudes and actions are determined to be either right or wrong.] That being the case, who could ever suggest (correctly) that someone else's conduct was "wrong," or that a man "ought" or "ought not" to do thus and so? The simple fact of the matter is that infidelity cannot explain the origin of morality and ethics. If there is no God, man exists in an environment where "anything goes." Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky, in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), had one of his characters (Ivan) say that in the absence of God, everything is allowed. French existential philosopher Jean Paul Sartre later wrote:

Everything is indeed permitted if God does not exist, and man is in consequence forlorn, for he cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside himself.... Nor, on the other hand, if God does not exist, are we provided with any values or commands that could legitimize our behavior (1961, p. 485).

Sartre contended that **whatever** one chooses to do is right, and that value is attached to the choice itself so that "we can never choose evil" (1966, p. 279). Thus, it is impossible to formulate a system of ethics by which one objectively can differentiate "right" from "wrong." Agnostic British philosopher Bertrand Russell admitted as much when he wrote in his *Autobiography*:

We feel that the man who brings widespread happiness at the expense of misery to himself is a better man than the man who brings unhappiness to others and happiness to himself. I do not know of any rational ground for this view, or, perhaps, for the somewhat more rational view that whatever the majority desires (called utilitarian hedonism) is preferable to what the minority desires. These are truly ethical problems but I do not know of any way in which they can be solved except by politics or war. All that I can find to say on this subject is that **an ethical opinion can only be defended by an ethical axiom, but, if the axiom is not accepted, there is no way of reaching a rational conclusion** (1969, 3:29, emp. added).

If there is no objective ethical axiom—no moral right or wrong—the concept of violating any kind of "law" becomes ludicrous, and punishment therefore would be futile. If no law or standard has been violated, with what justification may punishment then be enacted? Yet the concepts of moral right or wrong, and ethical obligation, are experienced by all men to a greater or lesser degree. Even though Simpson argued that "man is the result of a purposeless and materialistic process that did not have him in mind," he was forced to admit that

[G]ood and evil, right and wrong, concepts irrelevant in nature except from the human viewpoint, become **real and pressing features** of the whole cosmos as viewed morally because **morals arise only in man** (1951, p. 179, emp. added).

Some have objected, of course, and suggested that there are serious differences in various cultures regarding what is perceived as right and wrong. Charles Baylis, in an article on "Conscience" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, mentioned this objection and called attention to such differences as those between conscientious objectors to war versus volunteers, and cannibals versus vegetarians (1967, 1/2:190). This misses the point, however. C.S. Lewis observed that although there may be differences between moralities, those differences have not "amounted to anything like a total difference" (1952, p. 19). They clearly would not, as Baylis suggested, "differ radically." As Lewis went on to remark, a totally different morality would consist of something like (to choose just two examples) a country where people were admired for running away from battle, or a person who felt proud for double-crossing those who had been kindest to him. Yet as Thomas C. Mayberry has noted: "There is broad agreement that lying, promise breaking, killing, and so on, are generally wrong" (1970, 154:113). Atheistic philosopher Kai Nielsen even admitted that to inquire, "Is murder evil?,"

is to ask a self-answering question (1973, p. 16). Why is this the case? In his book, *Does God Exist?*, A.E. Taylor wrote:

But it is an undeniable fact that men do not merely love and procreate, they also hold that there is a difference between right and wrong; there are things which they **ought** to do and other things which they **ought not** to do. Different groups of men, living under different conditions and in different ages, may disagree widely on the question whether a certain thing belongs to the first or the second of these classes. They may draw the line between right and wrong in a different place, but at least they all agree that there is such a line to be drawn (1945, p. 83).

Paul wrote in Romans 2:14-15:

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another.

Although the Gentiles (unlike their Jewish counterparts) had no **written** law, they nevertheless had a law—a **moral** law—and they felt an obligation to live up to that law. Their conscience testified in regard to certain moral obligations in agreement with the law—urging them to do right and discouraging them from doing wrong.

But why was this the case? How is it that “morals arise only in man” and thus become “real and pressing features” of the Cosmos? Why did the Gentiles feel an obligation to uphold a certain ethical law? Who, or what, was the source of that law “written in their hearts”? The answer to such questions, of course, can be found only in the acknowledgment that the Creator of the Cosmos and the Author of that ethical law are one and the same—God!

Because of Who He is (Sovereign Creator), and because of what He has done (redeemed sinful man), He has the right to establish the moral/ethical laws that men are to follow, and to establish the punishment for any violation of those laws that might occur. I repeat: If there was no law, then there could be no sin—since where there is no objective standard there can be no right or wrong. If there is no sin, then there is no moral responsibility incumbent upon man. But if no moral responsibility is required of us, why, then, do we find courts and prisons spanning the globe?

Punishment for infractions of this moral/ethical code, however, can take any one of three forms—preventative, remedial, or retributive. Preventative punishment is a penalty exacted in order to deter others from acting in a similar unlawful fashion (e.g., soldiers who refused to obey a legitimate order from a superior officer being court-martialed). Remedial punishment is intended as a penalty to evoke improvement in the person(s) being punished (e.g., an employer requiring an employee to remain after his shift is over because of being a slacker on the job). Retributive punishment is a penalty meted out because, quite simply, it is deserved (e.g., a student being suspended from school for verbally abusing a teacher).

All three types of punishment are biblical in nature. Preventative punishment was evident in the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira after they lied about their donation to the church (Acts 5; note verse 11: “And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all that heard these things”). Remedial punishment can be observed in passages like Hebrews 12:6-7, where the writer told the saints:

For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. It is for chastening that ye endure; God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father chasteneth not?

Retributive punishment is evident in God’s instructions to Noah after the Flood: “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God made he man.” Granted, at

times the various types of punishment may (and often do) overlap. Forcing disobedient soldiers to endure a court-martial, and then sending them to prison, not only will have a beneficial effect on others (preventative punishment), but hopefully will deter those who broke the law from ever doing so again (remedial punishment).

In employing retributive punishment, however, God will “pay back” the wicked. Paul, in referring to God’s words in Leviticus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 32:35, reminded the first-century Christians who were undergoing severe persecution: “‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay,’ saith the Lord” (Romans 12:19). In writing his second epistle to the Christians at Thessalonica, Paul assured them that God was just, and that

It is a righteous thing with God to recompense affliction to them that afflict you, and to you that are afflicted rest with us, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus: who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might (2 Thessalonians 1:6-9).

When the writer of the book of Hebrews cried out, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (10:31), he was attempting to warn us against having to endure the retributive punishment of God. The famous British preacher, Charles H. Spurgeon, once said:

When men talk of a little hell, it is because they think they have only a little sin, and they believe in a little Savior. But when you get a great sense of sin, you want a great Savior, and feel that if you do not have him, you will fall into a great destruction, and suffer a great punishment at the hands of the great God (as quoted in Carter, 1988, p. 36).

Those who suggest that no “good God” ever could condemn people’s souls to eternal punishment obviously have failed to grasp the “great sense of sin” of which Spurgeon spoke. Nor do they understand the horrible price Heaven paid to offer sanctification, justification, and redemption to sinful mankind. As Paul stated the matter in Romans 5:10:

But God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, shall we be saved from the wrath of God through him. For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

As Jesus hung on the cross dying for sins that He did not commit—in order to pay a debt that He did not owe, and a debt that we could not pay—He raised His voice and implored: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). One writer described Christ’s words as “among the most shocking in Scripture” (Peterson, 1995, p. 214). Why? The word “forsaken” is defined as to “abandon, desert,” and is used here of “being forsaken by God” (Bauer, et al., 1979, p. 215). Imagine the Son of God—abandoned, deserted, and forsaken **by His own Father** in order to pay the price for **our** sins!

Christ suffered the wrath of God so that mankind would not have to endure that wrath. In the Garden of Gethsemane, as Peter drew his sword to defend his Lord, Jesus turned to him and asked: “The cup which the Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11). What was this “cup”? And why did it bring such anguish to Christ’s soul? The Old Testament provides the answer. In Jeremiah 25:15ff., the prophet wrote:

For thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, unto me: “Take this cup of the wine of wrath at my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it. And they shall drink, and reel to and fro, and be mad, because of the sword that I will send among them.”

When the evil nations to whom Jeremiah spoke drank of the “cup of God’s wrath,” they were destroyed—never to rise again—because God’s anger at their evil ways was so intense (vss. 26-27). The psalmist referred to the same cup of wrath when he wrote:

But God is the judge: He putteth down one, and lifteth up another. For in the hand of Jehovah there is a cup, and the wine foameth; it is full of mixture, and he poureth out of the same. Surely the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall drain them, and drink them (75:7-9).

Peterson observed in regard to these two passages:

This is the cup from which our holy Savior recoiled. A cup for “all the wicked of the earth” (Ps. 75:8), this cup, full of the wine of God’s wrath (Jer. 25:15), should never have touched Jesus’ sinless hands. That is why he was “overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death” (Matt. 26:38) and prayed three times for the Father to take it away. On the cross the son of God drank to the dregs the cup of God’s wrath for sinners like you and me.... And he did so willingly! (1995, p. 216).

At the cross, we catch a glimpse of the enormity of our sin and its offense to God. Christ—forsaken by His Father—suffered the retributive punishment that should have been ours. We deserved it; He did not. At the cross, we stare deeply into the vast chasm of human sin, and within it we see nothing but that which is vile and dark. But it is also at the cross where we stare deeply into the mysterious, unfathomable, incomprehensible love of God, and within it see a holy and righteous Sovereign Who, while abandoning and deserting His own Son, stubbornly refused to abandon and desert us. As Peterson went on to say:

Viewed in the light of the Father’s everlasting love for him, Jesus’ cry of abandonment in Matthew 27:46 is almost impossible to understand. **The eternal relations between Father and Son were temporarily interrupted!** The preceding verse hints at this when it tells us that darkness covered the land of Israel from noon until 3 p.m.; **a profound judgment was taking place** (1995, p. 214, emp. added).

Elizabeth Browning set these eternal truths into poignant poetic form when she wrote: Yea, once
Immanuel’s orphaned cry his universe hath shaken.
It went up single, echoless, “My God, I am forsaken!”
It went up from the Holy’s lips amid His lost creation,
That, of the lost, no son should use those words of desolation.

Once again, I say: Those who claim not to understand how God could send sinful men into eternal punishment simply do not comprehend either the abominable, repulsive nature of man’s rebellious crime against God or the inestimable, unspeakable price Heaven paid to redeem rebellious man from Satan’s clutches. Guy N. Woods wrote:

Those who would palliate the punishment or seek to shorten its duration by pointing to the love, long-suffering, and patience of God, ignore other attributes of deity, and disregard the fact that his goodness is evidenced just as much in his characteristics of justice and truth as in his love and long-suffering. As a matter of fact, love and long-suffering are valid only when the principles of justice and truth are also operative in the divine government. To promise punishment and then to unilaterally cancel it is impossible to One who is not only the God of love but also the God of truth! He will not do so because he cannot do so, and maintain his character. God cannot impeach his own veracity, since “it is impossible for God to lie.” (Hebrews 6:18.) Were he to cease to be just and truthful, he would cease to be good. The effort to emphasize some of the attributes of the great Jehovah to the neglect of others, or to array some against others, is to compromise the divine character (1985, 127[9]:278).

I must confess that in my most private and contemplative moments, I have reflected on the meaning and seriousness of the moving passage found in Hebrews 10:28-29.

A man that hath set at nought Moses’ law dieth without compassion on the word of two or three witnesses. Of **how much sorer punishment**, think ye, shall he be judged worthy, **who hath trodden under foot the**

Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

And in those same private, contemplative moments, I confess that I also have wondered (viewing this matter from what is, admittedly, a purely human standpoint—as the proud, earthly father of two precious, irreplaceable, sons): If I gave “only” one of **my** sons’ lives (God had “only” one!) in order to save a wicked wretch who was my enemy in the first place—and that enemy then not only spurned the unique, exquisite, priceless gift of my son’s blood, but mocked the supreme sacrifice that both my son and I had gone to such great lengths to make on his behalf—what kind of retributive punishment would I devise for such a one?

[to be continued]

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The Origin, Nature, and Destiny of the Soul [Part V]

by Bert Thompson, Ph.D.

BIBLE TEACHING ON HELL

As one examines the various means through which men have attempted to circumvent the idea of the existence of hell, it is evident that there is no shortage of such theories. From universalism on the one hand to annihilationism on the other, men have done their best to disgorge the concept of eternal punishment from their minds. Some even have suggested that the only “hell” men experience is that of their own making here on Earth. Such a notion is standard fare in the vernacular of our day. For example, people speak of the fact that “war is hell.” They complain that, as they endure the vicissitudes of life, they are “going through hell.” John Benton noted:

When people’s personal lives go wrong, when they get caught up in bitterness and anger, when perhaps there is vicious language and even violence in the family home, we sometimes speak of people creating “hell on earth....” The psychological agony of guilt or the deep pain of bereavement are spoken of colloquially as being “like hell” (Benton, 1985, p. 42).

In his book, *Hell and Salvation*, Leslie Woodson observed: “The reference to man’s hard lot in life as ‘going through hell’ has become so commonplace that the modern mind has satisfied itself with the assumption that hell is nothing more” (1973, p. 30).

Believe whatever we will, say whatever we please: the simple fact is that none of these descriptions fits the biblical description of hell. And certainly, Jesus never spoke of hell in such a fashion. When He warned us to “fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28) and spoke of those who “shall go away into **eternal** punishment” (Matthew 25:46), He was not referring to some sort of temporary, earthly misery resulting from war, bereavement, or the like. Furthermore, the idea that “hell” is represented by whatever “pangs of guilt” we may experience from time to time during this life is a foolish assertion indeed. As one writer summarized the matter:

[I]t is a well-known fact that the more one sins the more callous he may become until he has “seared his conscience as with a hot iron” (II Tim. 4:2). **If this theory is true then it follows that the righteous suffer greater punishment than the wicked.** A wicked person can destroy his “hell” by searing his conscience. However, a righteous man will be sensitive to sin and will feel the pangs of guilt when he sins. And, the more devout he is the more sensitive he is about sin. Again, **if this theory is true the worse a man is the less he will suffer.** To escape hell one simply would plunge himself into unrestrained sin and harden his heart. Obviously this doctrine is false (Ealey, 1984, p. 22, emp. added).

The book of Job makes clear that, on occasion, the righteous do suffer terribly—while the wicked appear to prosper. At times, the psalmist even grew envious of the prosperity of the wicked, and wondered if it really was to his benefit to strive to be righteous (Psalm 73:2-5, 12-14). Absolute justice is a rarity in the here and now, but is guaranteed at the Judgment yet to come (Matthew 25:31-46). We would do well to remember that the “Judge of all the Earth” **will** “do that which is right” (Genesis 18:25). We also should remember:

It is significant that the most solemn utterances on this subject fall from the lips of Christ himself. In the New Testament as a whole there is a deep reserve on the nature of the punishment of the lost, though of course the act of final judgment is prominent. But with Christ himself the statements are much more explicit (Carson, 1978, p. 14).

The urgent question then becomes: What did Christ and His inspired writers teach regarding hell? What does the Bible say on this extremely important topic?

The word “hell” (which occurs 23 times in the King James Version of the Bible) translates three different terms from the Greek New Testament—*hades*, *tartaros*, and *géenna*. While each has a different meaning, on occasion the KJV translators chose to translate each as “hell.” Was this an error on their part? Considering the way the word was used in 1611, no, it was not. Robert Taylor addressed this point when he wrote:

Hell in 1611 referred to the place of the unseen, the place that was beyond human eyesight, the place that was covered. In that day men who covered roofs were called hellers—they put coverings on buildings or covered them (1985, p. 160).

According to Brown, “this was a correct rendering in 1611 because the word ‘Hell’ in Elizabethan English also meant an unseen place (e.g., Matthew 16:18; Luke 16:23; Acts 2:27,31; et al.)” [1999, p. 171].

The actual origin of the Greek *hades* (transliterated as *hades* in the English) is not well known. Some scholars have suggested that it derives from two roots: *a* (a negative prefix depicting “not”) and *idein* (a word meaning “to see”). Thus, according to *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*, *hades* would evoke the idea of “not to be seen” (1958, p. 11). W.E. Vine advocated the view that *hades* meant “all receiving” (1991, p. 368). The exact meaning of the term, however, must be determined via an examination of the context in which it is used. *Hades* occurs eleven times in the Greek New Testament. On ten occasions (Matthew 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27,31; Revelation 1:18; 6:8; 20:13-14) the KJV translates it as “hell.” [In such occurrences, most recent versions (e.g., the ASV, NKJV, et al.) transliterate the Greek as “hades.”] Once (1 Corinthians 15:55), *hades* is translated as “grave.”

The Greek *tartaros* is the noun (translated into English via the Latin *tartarus*, cf. ASV footnote on 2 Peter 2:4) from which the verb *tartaros* (aorist participle of *tartaroo*) derives. Ralph Earle observed that the term signified “the dark abode of the wicked dead” (1986, p. 447). Originally, it seems to have carried the idea of a “deep place”—a connotation that it retains in both Job 40:15 and 41:23 in the Septuagint. The Greek poet, Homer, wrote in his *Iliad* of “dark Tartarus...the deepest pit” (8.13). The word *tartaros* occurs only once in the Greek New Testament (2 Peter 2:4), where it is translated “hell” (“God spared not angels...but cast them down to hell”). In writing of this singular occurrence, R.C.H. Lenski remarked: “The verb does not occur elsewhere in the Bible; it is seldom found in other writings. The noun ‘Tartarus’ occurs three times in the LXX [Septuagint—BT], but there is no corresponding Hebrew term. The word is of pagan origin...” (1966, p. 310).

The Greek *géenna* is the predominant term used in the New Testament to depict hell. The word “represents the Aramaic expression *ge hinnom*, meaning ‘Valley of Hinnom’ (Neh. 11:30; cf. Josh. 15:8), and for this reason the word is commonly transliterated into English as *Gehenna*” (Workman, 1993, p. 496). Several sites have been suggested for the “valley of Hinnom” (or Valley of the Son of Hinnom, Vos, 1956, 2:1183; Earle, 1986, p. 447), but most authorities now believe that it was located on the south side of Jerusalem. In the Bible, the valley is mentioned first in Joshua 15:8. Centuries later, the apostates of Judah used it as a place to offer child sacrifices to the pagan god Molech (2 Chronicles 28:3; 33:6). When good king Josiah ascended the throne and overthrew the practice of idolatry, he “defiled” the place called Topheth (a name signifying something to be abhorred and spit upon) in the Valley of Hinnom (2 Kings 23:10). The valley came to be reviled for the evil that had occurred there, and eventually turned into a smoldering garbage dump that served the entire city of Jerusalem. Years later, it even was used as a potter’s field (as is evident from the many rock tombs that are known to rest at its lower end). A perpetual fire burned, to prevent the spread of contagion, and worms and maggots performed their unseen, unsavory tasks amidst the

debris and decay (see Morey, 1984, p. 87; cf. Foster, 1971, pp. 764-765). J. Arthur Hoyles graphically described the grisly goings-on:

Here the fires burned day and night, destroying the garbage and putrefying the atmosphere from the smell of rotten flesh or decaying vegetation. In time of war the carcasses of vanquished enemies might mingle with the refuse, thus furnishing patriotic writers with a clue as to the destiny of their own persecutors. They were destined to be destroyed in the fires that were never quenched (1957, p. 118).

By the second century B.C., the term *géenna* began to appear in Jewish literature as a symbolic designation for the place of unending, eternal punishment of the wicked dead. As Gary Workman noted:

It is natural, therefore, that when the New Testament opens *Gehenna* would be the primary term for hell. It is so recorded eleven times from the lips of Jesus and is also used once by James. It was not to the literal Valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem that they referred, nor anything similar to it, but rather to “the *Gehenna* of fire” in a realm beyond the grave. Both Jewish and Christian historians confirm that the prevailing view of Jews at the time of Christ (except the Sadducees who denied even the resurrection) was that of eternal punishment for the wicked. And since Jesus never attempted to correct Pharisaic thinking on the duration of *Gehenna*, as he did with eschatological errors of the Sadducees (Matt. 22:29), this is weighty evidence for the meaning he intended to convey by his use of the term (1993, pp. 496-497).

The word *géenna* occurs twelve times in the Greek New Testament. In nine of these (Matthew 5:29-30; 10:28; 23:15,33; Mark 9:43,45; Luke 12:5; James 3:6—KJV), it is translated as “hell.” Three times (Matthew 5:22; 18:9; Mark 9:47—KJV) it is translated as “hell fire.” David Stevens has pointed out: “It is also significant that eleven of the twelve times that the word *gehenna* is used, it is used by the Lord himself! Thus, it is evident that what we know about *gehenna*, we learn from the Lord himself ” (1991, 7[3]:21).

There exists a diversity of views regarding the usage of these terms in Scripture. For example, some scholars have suggested that *hades* (or the Old Testament *sheol*) is a generic term for **the abode of the dead, whether good or evil**, while they await the final Judgment—a view with which I concur. Thus, *hades* is composed of two compartments: (1) the abode of the spirits of the righteous (known either as paradise—Luke 23:43, or Abraham’s bosom—Luke 16:22); and (2) the abode of the spirits of the wicked (Tartarus—2 Peter 2:4, or “torment”—Luke 16:23) [Davidson, 1970, p. 694; Denham, 1998, p. 609; Harris, et al., 1980, 2:892; Jackson, 1998, 33[9]:34-35; Stevens, 1991, 7[3]:21; Thayer, 1958, p. 11; Zerr, 1952, p. 17].

On the other hand, some scholars suggest that *hades* should not be used as an umbrella term to refer to the general abode of the dead. Rather, they suggest that after death, there exists: (1) the grave for the physical body (*sheol*, physical abyss, physical *hades*); (2) the abode of the spirits of the righteous (paradise, Abraham’s bosom, the “third heaven”); and (3) the abode of the spirits of the wicked (Tartarus, spiritual abyss, spiritual *hades*) [see McCord, 1979, 96[4]:6]. Still others have advocated the belief that *gehenna*, *tartarus*, and *hades* are synonyms representing exactly the same thing—“the place of all the damned” (Lenski, 1966, p. 310).

There is one thing, however, on which advocates of each position agree wholeheartedly, and on which the biblical text is crystal clear: after death and the Judgment, *gehenna* (hell) will be the ultimate, final abode of the spirits of the wicked. But what, exactly, will hell be like?

Hell is a Place of Punishment for Bodies and Souls of the Disobedient Wicked

The Scriptures speak with clarity and precision on the topic of hell as a place of punishment appointed for the disobedient wicked. The psalmist wrote by inspiration: “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God” (9:17). Jesus taught that at Judgment, the wicked will “depart” into punishment “prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41; cf. Matthew 25:46 where Jesus employed the Greek term *kolasis*, which means punishment, torment, suffering, and chastisement [see Brown, 1999, p. 173]). When John described those who would join the devil in hell’s horrible abyss, he referred to “the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and liars” (Revelation 21:8). Paul said that those who inhabit hell with Satan will be those who “know not God” and who “obey not the gospel of Christ” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

In discussing gehenna in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Geerhardus Vos addressed the verses that deal with hell, and then stated: “In all of these it designates the place of eternal punishment of the wicked, generally in connection with the final judgment.... Both body and soul are cast into it” (1956, 2:1183). E.M. Zerr commented: “*Gehenna* is the lake of unquenchable fire into which the whole being of the wicked (body, soul and spirit) will be cast after the judgment” (1952, p. 17). Hell is a place of contempt and shame (Daniel 12:2), as well as torment and anguish (Luke 16:23-24). It is a place of “outer darkness” (Matthew 8:12; 25:30) where punishment and suffering occur (Matthew 25:46; Revelation 14:11) that will involve both body and soul (Matthew 10:28).

Hell is a Place of Conscious Sorrow, Torment, Pain, and Suffering

From such vivid descriptions, it is quite evident that the wicked will be in a state of **consciousness**. In fact, John wrote that Satan and his human cohorts would be “cast **alive** into the lake of fire that burneth with brimstone” (Revelation 19:20). That is to say, the Bible definitely teaches “**the persistence of personality** after physical death” (Warren, 1992, p. 32, emp. added). When Christ described hell as a place of “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 22:13), He overtly emphasized the fact that its inhabitants will endure **conscious** sorrow. Hell is a place of such terrible suffering (2 Thessalonians 1:9) that the apostle John referred to it as the “second death” (Revelation 20:14-15; 21:8). Benton summarized this well:

Hell...is to be shut out of God’s presence, cut off from all that is good and wholesome. It is to be cut off from all love, all peace, all joy for ever. Jesus explains that once people realize this, once they realize what they have missed, the effect upon them will be devastating. “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” It is an unspeakably sombre picture. Men seldom weep, but in hell men weep uncontrollably. Jesus speaks of the place being totally characterized by tears.... In hell people do not just weep; they gnash their teeth. Having been shut out of the presence of God into the eternal blackness, permanently deprived of all that is wholesome and good, in bitter anger men and women grind their teeth in speechless rage. As they realize that once and for all, “I’ve been shut out!” they are overcome with a sense of eternal loss which leads to a depth of anger and fury that they find impossible to express in words (1985, pp. 47-48).

In addressing the consciousness of those in hell, Wayne Jackson wrote:

Punishment implies **consciousness**. It would be absurd to describe those who no longer exist as being “punished.” The wicked will be “tormented” with the fire of Gehenna (cf. Rev. 14:10-11). Torment certainly implies awareness (cf. Rev. 9:5; 11:10) [1998, 33[9]:35, emp. in orig.].

And torment there will be! When, in Revelation 20:10, John wrote of this torment, he employed the Greek word *basanisthesontai*, the root of which (*basanizo*) literally means “to torment, to be harassed, to torture, to vex with grievous pains” (Thayer, 1958, p. 96; cf. Matthew 8:6 regarding the one “tormented” [*basanizomenos*] with palsy).

Previously, John spoke of those who inhabit hell as experiencing the “wine of the wrath of God, which is prepared unmixed in the cup of his anger” (Revelation 14:10). Imagine—experiencing the undiluted wrath of God! In the next verse, John lamented: “The smoke of their torment [notice: **not** the smoke of their annihilation!—BT] goeth up for ever and ever.” Little wonder, then, that the writer of Hebrews referred to the second death as “a sorer punishment” than any mere physical death (10:29).

Hell is Eternal in Nature

Surely, one of the most horrific aspects of hell is its eternal nature. Throughout the Bible, words like “eternal,” “forever and forever,” “unquenchable,” and “everlasting” are used repeatedly to describe the duration of the punishment that God will inflict upon the wicked. As the “Judge of all the earth,” God alone has the right to determine the nature and duration of whatever punishment is due to the wicked. And He has decreed that such punishment will be eternal in nature (Matthew 25:46; Revelation 14:10-11). That may not agree with our mind-set, or appeal to our sensitivities, but it is God’s word on the matter nevertheless.

I once heard of a newspaper in Detroit, Michigan that ran a story about a man who (ironically) had been transferred from Hell, Michigan to a city by the name of Paradise. The news headline read: “Man Leaves Hell for Paradise!” Such an event might occur in **this** lifetime, but you may rest assured that it will not happen in the **next** (Luke 16:19-31). When Dante, in his *Inferno*, depicted the sign hanging over hell’s door as reading, “Abandon all hope, ye who enter here,” he did not overstate the case.

Some, of course, have objected to the concept of **eternal** punishment because of such passages as Mark 12:9 (where Jesus foretold in a parable that God would “destroy” those who killed His beloved Son) and Matthew 10:28 (where Jesus told His disciples to fear Him who was able to “destroy” both soul and body in hell). But the belief that the soul will be annihilated is based, not on an understanding, but a **misunderstanding**, of the passages in question. In addition to referring to destruction, the Greek term *apollumi* employed in these two portions of Scripture (and approximately 90 more times elsewhere in the New Testament), also can mean “lose,” “perish,” or “lost.” As Vine pointed out: “The idea is not extinction but ruin, loss, not of being, but of well-being” (1991, p. 211). Thayer defined *apollumi* as it appears in Matthew 10:28 as “to devote or give over to eternal misery” (1958, p. 64).

Granted, it would be more comforting for the wicked to believe that at the end of this life they simply will be punished “for a little while” and then “drop out of existence,” rather than to have to face the stark realization of an eternal punishment in the fires of hell. But comforting or not, the question must be asked: Is such a belief in compliance with biblical teaching on this subject?

While it is true that, on rare occasions in Scripture, words such as “everlasting” and “forever” may be used in a non-literal sense (i.e., the thing being discussed is not strictly eternal—e.g. Exodus 12:14 and Numbers 25:13), they **never** are used in such a sense when describing hell. The word *aionios* occurs some seventy times in the Greek New Testament where it is translated by such English terms as “eternal” or “everlasting” (e.g., “eternal fire,” Matthew 18:8, 25:41, Jude 7; “eternal punishment,” Matthew 25:46; “eternal destruction,” 2 Thessalonians 1:9; and “eternal judgment,” Hebrews 6:2). In his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Vine wrote of *aionios*:

Moreover, it is used of persons and things which are in their nature, endless, as, e.g., of God (Rom 16:26); of His power (I Tim. 6:16), and of Him (I Peter 5:10); of the Holy Spirit (Heb. 9:14); of the redemption effected by Christ (Heb. 9:12), and of the consequent salvation of men (5:9);...and of the resurrection body (II Cor. 5:1), elsewhere said to be “immortal” (I Cor. 15:53), in which that life will be finally realized (Matt. 25:46; Titus 1:2) [1966, p. 43].

Thayer stated that *aionios* means “without end, never to cease, everlasting” (1958, p. 112).

In his inspired discussion about the coming fate of false teachers, Jude assured the first-century Christians that those who perverted the truth **would** be punished. To illustrate his point, he reached back to Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24-25) as an example of those “suffering the punishment of eternal fire” (v. 7). G.L. Lawlor commented on Jude’s illustration as follows:

Jude says these cities, their sin, and their terrible destruction lie before us as an example, *deigma*. Better, perhaps, the word might be rendered “sign,” that is, to show us the meaning and significance of something, i.e., this awful sin and God’s catastrophic judgment. The cities were destroyed by fire and brimstone, but the ungodly inhabitants are even now undergoing the awful torment of everlasting punishment. These cities are an example, they lie before us as a sign, to show the certainty of divine punishment upon an apostasy of life dreadful almost beyond description (1972, p. 70).

But what did Lawlor mean when he said that the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah “are even now undergoing the awful torment of everlasting punishment”? His point is this. The Greek *hupochousai* (rendered “suffering”) is a present participle and “shows that they were enduring ‘eternal fire’ even as Jude wrote! The primary force of the present tense in the Greek, especially as connected with a participial construction as here, is that of **continuous** action” (Denham, 1998, p. 607, emp. added). Greek scholar M.R. Vincent wrote regarding this point: “The participle is present, indicating that they are suffering to this day the punishment which came upon them in Lot’s time” (1946, 1:340). Brown remarked: “This grammatical construction simply means that Jude is saying that the inhabitants of the two cities not only suffered, but they continue to suffer. What a warning to those in rebellion to God!” (1999, p. 176).

The Jews (and Jewish Christians) of Jude’s day would have understood that point because they knew and understood the significance attached to gehenna. Alfred Edersheim, who stood without equal as a Hebrew/inter-testamental period scholar, devoted an entire chapter of his monumental work, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, to the rabbinical and New Testament evidence on the subject of eternal punishment. His conclusion was that the Jews in the time of Christ understood gehenna as referring to a place of eternal, conscious torment for the wicked (1971, pp. 791-796). Eminent religious historian Phillip Schaff (1970, 2:136) reported that, except for the Sadducees (who believed in neither a resurrection for the righteous nor the wicked), the Jews of Christ’s day consistently held to a view of personal, eternal, conscious punishment—a truly important point for the following reason.

During His ministry, Jesus was quite outspoken against those things that were wrong or misleading. In Matthew 22:23-33 He chastised the Sadducees severely regarding their erroneous views about the lack of a future existence. Yet, as noted earlier, He **never opposed** the Jewish concept of eternal punishment of the soul. Had the Jews been in error regarding the afterlife, surely the Son of God would have corrected them in as public a manner as He did on so many other points of Scripture. Instead, He **repeatedly reaffirmed** such a concept. His silence speaks volumes!

No Hell...No Heaven

When Christ spoke to the people of His day about the ultimate fate of humanity in eternity, He stated that the wicked would “go away into everlasting (*aionios*) punishment, but the righteous into eternal (*aionios*) life.” As Denham has pointed out: “The word rendered ‘eternal’ is the same Greek

word *aionios*, rendered earlier as ‘everlasting’ ” (1998, p. 615). The Lord’s double use of the term *aionios* is critically important in this discussion. J.W. McGarvey addressed this fact when he wrote:

Whatever this Greek word means in the last clause of this sentence it means in the first; for it is an invariable rule of exegesis, that a word when thus repeated in the same sentence must be understood in the same sense, unless the context or the nature of the subject shows that there is a play on the word. There is certainly nothing in the context to indicate the slightest difference in meaning, nor can we know by the nature of the subject that the punishment spoken of is less durable than the life. It is admitted on all hands that in the expression “everlasting life” the term has its full force, and therefore it is idle and preposterous to deny that it has the same force in the expression “everlasting punishment.” The everlasting punishment is the same as the everlasting fire of verse 41. The punishment is by fire, and its duration is eternal (1875, pp. 221-222).

There can be absolutely no doubt that the Lord intended to teach two specific states of conscious future existence. In fact, as James Orr observed in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*: “The whole doctrine of the future judgment in the NT presupposes survival after death” (1956, 4:2502). Writing in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Joachim Guhrt stated that since “God’s life never ends, i.e., that everything belonging to him can also never come to an end,...even perdition must be called *aionios*, eternal” (1978, pp. 830,833). In this same vein, Guy N. Woods commented: “Our heavenly Father is described as ‘the everlasting God.’ (Romans 16:26.) Hell will be the inhabitation of the wicked so long as God himself exists” (1985, 127[9]:278). George Ladd thus noted:

The adjective *aionios* does not of itself carry a qualitative significance, designating a life that is different in kind from human life. The primary meaning of the word is temporal. It is used of fire, punishment, sin, and places of abode; and these uses designate **unending duration** (1974, p. 255, emp. added).

But that is only a portion of the Lord’s message. Orr went on to observe: “Here precisely the same word is applied to the punishment of the wicked **as to the blessedness of the righteous....** Whatever else the term includes, it connotes duration” (1956, 4:2502, emp. added). When he discussed the definition and meaning of the word *aionios* in *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Herman Sasse noted that when the word is used “as a term for eschatological expectation,” if it conveys “eternity” for the rewards of the righteous it also must convey “the sense of ‘unceasing’ or ‘endless’ ” (1964, 1:209). Therefore, “however long then the righteous will experience the blessedness of **eternal** life is just how long the wicked will suffer **everlasting** punishment...” (Denham, 1998, p. 615, emp. in orig.).

In his intriguing book, *Hell on Trial—The Case for Eternal Punishment*—Robert Peterson wrote the following under the chapter titled “The Case for Eternal Punishment”: “Jesus places the fates of the wicked and the righteous side by side.... The parallelism makes the meaning unmistakable: the punishment of the ungodly and the bliss of the godly both last forever” (1995, p. 196). Gary Workman spoke to this very point when he observed:

New Testament writers used *aion* and *aionios* 141 times when speaking of eternity to convey the idea of unceasing, endless, and perpetual. If the word means “without end” when applied to the future blessedness of the saved, it must also mean “without end” when describing the future punishment of the lost (1992, 23[3]:33).

Benton elaborated:

The same word *aionios*, “eternal,” is used to describe both heaven and hell. If we take the position that hell is capable of termination then, to be consistent, we must believe that the same is true of heaven. But, from the rest of the Bible, that is plainly not the case. Heaven is **for ever**. We must stay with the plain meaning of the word “eternal.” Both heaven and hell are without end (1985, p. 55, emp. in orig.).

These writers are correct. The fact that Christ made a special point of repeating *aionios* in the same sentence requires that we “stay with the plain meaning of the word.” Hoekema therefore concluded:

The word *aionios* means without end when applied to the future blessedness of believers. It must follow, unless clear evidence is given to the contrary, that this word also means without end when used to describe the future punishment of the lost.... It follows, then, that the punishment which the lost will suffer after this life will be as endless as the future happiness of the people of God (1982, p. 270).

Those who are willing to accept Christ’s teaching on heaven should have no trouble accepting His teaching on hell. Yet some do. Their refusal to accept biblical teaching on the eternal nature of the wicked, however, is not without consequences. John Benton accurately summarized the situation.

Disregarding the doctrine of eternal damnation tends to make us doubt eternal salvation.... Though Revelation 21-22 proclaims the final fate of the wicked—existence in the lake of fire (21:8) and exclusion from the city of God (22:15)—these chapters trumpet more loudly the final destiny of the redeemed (1995, p. 217).

But does it **really** matter **what** a person believes in this regard? Wayne Jackson answered that question when he wrote: “Those who contend that the wicked will be annihilated are in error. But is the issue one of importance? Yes. **Any theory of divine retribution which undermines the full consequences of rebelling against God has to be most dangerous**” (1998, 33[9]:35, emp. added).

Since both heaven and hell are described via the same, exact terminology in Scripture, once the instruction of the Lord and His inspired writers on the subject of an eternal hell has been abandoned, how long will it be before the Bible’s instruction on the eternal nature of heaven likewise is abandoned? Have we not witnessed the effects of this type of thinking before? Those who started out to compromise the first chapter of Genesis eventually compromised other important facets of biblical doctrine as well (e.g., biblical miracles, Christ’s virgin birth, the Lord’s bodily resurrection, etc.). For many, rejecting the biblical concept of the eternity of hell may well represent the first steps on the slippery slope that eventually will lead to compromise in other areas of Scripture. Surely it would be better by far to echo the heartfelt sentiments of Joshua when he told the Israelites that while they were free to believe whatever they wished, or to act in any manner they chose, “as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah” (Joshua 24:15).

CONCLUSION

The latter part of this series has dealt at length with the concept of the souls of the wicked inhabiting an eternal hell, but has had relatively little to say about the concept of the souls of the righteous inhabiting an eternal heaven. Actually, this should not be all that surprising. The very idea of hell has met with violent opposition—for good reason. No one **wants** to go to hell. Thus, the Good Book’s teaching on heaven is accepted far more readily than its teaching on hell.

The simple fact of the matter, however, is that God created man as a dichotomous being who consists of both a body and a soul. When eventually each of us has “shuffled off this **mortal** coil” (to quote Shakespeare), our **immortal** soul will return to God Who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Infidelity, of course, always has objected strenuously to the concept of “life after death.” The very idea seems preposterous to unbelievers—just as it did to King Agrippa in the first century when Paul asked the pagan monarch: “Why is it judged incredible with you, if God doth raise the dead?” (Acts 26:28).

Indeed, why should it be difficult to believe that an omnipotent God could raise the dead? For the God Who created the Universe and everything within it in six days, and Who upholds “all things by the word of his power” (Hebrews 1:3), how difficult could it be to raise the dead? As Blaise Pascal,

the famed French philosopher once remarked: “I see no greater difficulty in believing the resurrection of the dead than the creation of the world. Is it less easy to reproduce a human body than it was to produce it at first?” (as quoted in Otten, 1988, p. 40).

Writing in the book of Revelation, the apostle John described in unforgettable language the destiny of the righteous when this world finally comes to an end: “Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them” (21:3, RSV). Thousands of years earlier, God’s pledge to Abraham had foreshadowed just such a covenant relationship. Moses recorded: “And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you” (Genesis 17:7, NKJV). Paul spoke of the fact that “if ye are Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, heirs according to promise” (Galatians 3:29), and referred to those who serve Christ faithfully as “heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:7). James rejoiced in the fact that those who were “rich in faith” would be “heirs of the kingdom which he promised to them that love him” (James 2:5). The writer of the book of Hebrews spoke of Christ as having become “unto all them that obey him, the author of eternal salvation” (5:9).

No doubt that is exactly what John had in mind when he went on to say in Revelation 21: “He that overcometh shall inherit these things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son” (vs. 7). God will be Father to the man or woman who demonstrates faith in Him, perseveres to the end, and lives in humble obedience to His divine will. Such is the promise of sonship to believers. God will welcome those who believe in and obey His Son as “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17), and will—according to His promise—bestow upon them all the riches and blessings of heaven.

In the next verse, however, John went on to paint a picture of stark contrast when he described the ultimate end of the impenitent wicked:

But for the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death (Revelation 21:8).

What diametric alternatives—enjoying eternal happiness as a son or daughter of God, or enduring eternal pain in “the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone”!

The good news, of course, is that no one **has** to go to hell. When Christ was ransomed on our behalf (1 Timothy 2:4), He paid a debt He did not owe, and a debt we could not pay, so that we could live forever in the presence of our Creator (Matthew 25:46). God takes no joy at the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 18:23; 33:11). Nor should we. As one writer eloquently stated it: “No one who has been snatched from the burning himself can feel anything but compassion and concern for the lost” (Woodson, 1973, p. 32).

As we begin to comprehend both the hideous nature of our sin, and the alienation from God resulting from it, we not only should exhibit a fervent desire to save ourselves “from this crooked generation” (Acts 2:40), but we also should feel just as passionate about warning the wicked of their impending doom (Ezekiel 3:17-19).

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The Eternality of Hell [Part I]

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It hardly surprises God-fearing men and women that unbelievers of all sorts reject the notion of an unending penalty for wickedness. Since atheists, agnostics, and infidels of every stripe do not believe in the existence of heaven or an immortal soul, they certainly do not give the idea of an eternal hell much thought (other than to criticize the notion). It is somewhat surprising to many Bible believers, however, to learn that a growing number of people who believe in God, and who accept as genuine the existence of the soul, are rejecting the idea of an eternal punishment for those who live and die outside the body of Christ. What Edward Fudge espoused over twenty years ago in his volume, *The Fire That Consumes*, and what more recently published works by such writers as Homer Hailey and F. LaGard Smith espouse, is the idea that “the wicked, following whatever degree and duration of pain that God may justly inflict, will finally and truly die, perish and become extinct for ever and ever” (Fudge, 1982, p. 425). Allegedly, as best-selling author Smith wrote in the foreword of Hailey’s book, *God’s Judgements & Punishments*, “total destruction rather than conscious, ongoing punishment is the dreaded fate which awaits the wicked” (Hailey, 2003, p. 10). “In hell...those who have rejected God and have refused to believe in his Son will be totally wiped out! Completely eradicated. Their existence will come to an abrupt end” (Smith, 2003, p. 184). According to Smith and other annihilationists, the choice for mankind is simple: “Blessed existence versus non-existence” (Smith, p. 190).

ANNIHILATION—OR UNENDING PUNISHMENT?

To those familiar with Jesus’ statement recorded in Matthew 25:46, it would seem that the question of whether or not the wicked will one day be annihilated, or punished forever in hell, is rather easy to answer. After explaining to His disciples how God will separate the righteous from the wicked at the Judgment (Matthew 25:31-45), Jesus concluded by telling them that the wicked “shall go away into **eternal punishment**: but the righteous into **eternal life**” (25:46, ASV). For many Christians, this verse settles the issue: the wicked will not be extinguished by God after the Judgment, but will suffer unending punishment. The righteous, on the other hand, will enjoy the bliss of an unending life with God in heaven.

Recognizing the fact that if “eternal” means “unending” in Matthew 25:46, then their whole theory about what happens to the wicked after the Judgment crumbles, certain annihilationists have alleged that the word eternal has nothing whatsoever to do with time or the unending duration of the afterlife. F. LaGard Smith, just prior to his discussion of (what he calls) “The Tormenting Conundrum of Hell” (chapter 8), stated:

If you have a computer Bible program (or an antiquated concordance!), pull up the word *eternal* and be prepared for a shock. **In all of its many associations, there is not a single hint of time....** To be *eternal* is to have a *lasting nature*. To have the kind of qualities which endure despite the passing of time (if, in fact, there is any time at all) [p. 162, italics and parenthetical items in orig., emp. added].

To say, then, that we will have eternal life in heaven says **nothing** about *how long* we will live in heaven. It’s already begun before we get there! The point is that life in heaven will be a qualitatively *different kind of life* from the one we have known in earth’s space and time (p. 163, italics in orig., emp. added; see also Hailey, pp. 132-133).

With such an interpretation in place for the word “eternal” (and specifically for the phrase “eternal life”), Smith seemingly laid the groundwork for his interpretation of “eternal fire/punishment.” He confidently declared:

“Eternal fire” bespeaks the *nature* of hell’s fire, not its *duration*.... [W]hen we hear Jesus speaking about “eternal fire,” there’s no reason to think in terms of clocks or calendars. Time is not the issue. *Effect* is the issue (p. 174, italics in orig.).

“Eternal punishment” will no more be punishment throughout an endless eternity than was the immediate, devastating punishment suffered by the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (p. 175).

Although Smith seems to think that he has presented a convincing case about the annihilation of the wicked in hell through **his** definition of the word “eternal,” he actually never gave a precise definition of Greek words translated “eternal” or “everlasting.” In the introduction to his book, Smith admitted: “The afterlife, by its very nature, is a subject which calls for careful study of the text.... [T]here are the necessary word studies to be done, so that we can be confident we’re not confusing linguistic apples and oranges” (p. 9). Unfortunately for the reader, Smith omitted vital, fundamental word studies, and as a result, caused mass confusion for the reader.

First, he failed to cite even one Greek lexicographer in his defense of the word eternal “in all its many associations” **not** having “**a single hint of time**” (p. 162, emp. added). Perhaps the reason for Smith’s omission of relevant material from Greek dictionaries is that such word studies overwhelmingly disagree with his premise. Notice how the following eminently respected Greek scholars have defined the two New Testament Greek words (*aion* and *aionios*) that commonly are translated “forever,” “eternal,” or “everlasting,” especially when they are connected with ideas that relate to the invisible world.

- The first two definitions of the word *aion* provided by Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich are as follows: (1) “a long period of time, without ref. to beginning or end” and (2) “a segment of time as a particular unit of history, *age*.” Three definitions are then provided for *aionios*: (1) “pert. to a long period of time, *long ago*,” (2) “pert. to a period of time without beginning or end, *eternal* of God;” and (3) “pert. to a period of unending duration, *without end*” (Danker, et al., 2000, pp. 32-33, italics in orig.).
- According to Thayer, *aion* is used in the New Testament numerous times simply to mean “forever” (1962, p. 19). He then defined *aionios* in the following three ways: (1) “without beginning or end, that which always has been and always will be;” (2) “without beginning;” and (3) “without end, never to cease, everlasting” (p. 20).
- Of *aionios* (the Greek word used twice in Matthew 25:46 to describe both “punishment” and “life”), W.E. Vine wrote: “describes duration, either undefined but not endless, as in Rom. 16:25; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 1:2; or undefined because endless as in Rom. 16:26 and the other sixty-six places in the N.T.” (1940, 2:43).
- Of the word *aionios*, R.C.H. Lenski asked, “[I]f this Greek adjective does not mean ‘eternal,’ which Greek adjective does have that meaning? Or did the Greek world, including the Jewish (Jesus spoke Aramaic) world, have no words for eternity or eternal?” (1943, p. 997).
- According to A.T. Robertson: “The word *aionios*...means either without beginning or without end or both. **It comes as near to the idea of eternal as the Greek can put it in one word**”(1930, 1:202, emp. added).
- The first definition Hermann Sasse provided for *aion* in the highly regarded *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* is “in the sense of prolonged time or eternity” (1964, 1:198). Later, when discussing *aionios* “as a term for the object eschatological expectation,” he indicated that it likewise is used to mean “unceasing” or “endless,” while sometimes extending beyond the purely temporal meaning (1:209; see also Carson, 1996, p. 523).

- Writing in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* under the subject heading of **time**, Joachim Guhrt stated that *aion* is “primarily a designation for a long period of time [either ending or unending—EL/KB].... Eternity is thus not necessarily a timeless concept, but the most comprehensive temporal one which the experience of time has produced” (1978, p. 826). Although Guhrt admitted that when *aionios* is used in the gospel of John (to form “eternal life”), it can be used in a qualitative sense, nevertheless “there is also a temporal sense, so that eternal (*aionios*) indicates the quantity of this life” (p. 832; see also Robertson, 1932, 5:49-50).
- Finally, James Orr wrote in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* that

the reply...that *aionios*...denotes quality, not duration, cannot be sustained. Whatever else the term includes, it connotes duration.... [I]t can hardly be questioned that “the aeons of the aeons” and similar phrases are the practical New Testament equivalents for eternity, and that *aionios* in its application to God and to life (“eternal life”) includes the idea of unending duration.... When, therefore, the term is applied in the same context to punishment and to life (Matt. 25:46), and no hint is given anywhere of limitation, the only reasonable exegesis is to take the word in its full sense of “eternal” (1956, 4:2502).

When Smith commented on the word eternal, saying, “In all of its many associations, there is not a single hint of time” (p. 162), he placed himself at odds with the most respected Greek lexicographers and scholars of the past century. Any attempt to explain away eternal punishment by redefining the Greek words for eternal will fail because eternal “describes duration” (Vine, 2:43).

Second, even without delving into various Greek dictionaries to find the meaning of the word *aionios* (translated “eternal” or “everlasting” in Matthew 25:46), one easily could grasp the primary meaning of the word simply by noting two contrasts that Paul made in two of his epistles. First, in 2 Corinthians 4:18, he indicated that the antithesis of the spiritual things that are “eternal,” are the physical “things which...are **temporary** (*proskaira*)” [viz., that which endures for a time or season]. Later, in his letter to Philemon, he wrote that “perhaps” his servant Onesimus “departed for a **while**” so that he (Philemon) “might receive him **forever**” (Philemon 15). Paul suggested that perhaps Onesimus had abandoned his master for a season/hour (*horan*), so that their relationship might become one that prevailed in both this life and in the unending life to come. In each of these passages, Paul contrasted the temporary with the eternal—that which comes to an end, with that which is unending.

Third, Bible translators obviously believed that *aionios* denotes duration, else surely they would have chosen to use English words other than “everlasting” or “eternal” in their respective translations of this Greek word. According to the fourth edition of *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, the English word “everlasting” means exactly what it sounds like it means: “1. Lasting forever; eternal. 2a. Continuing indefinitely or for a long period of time,” and in its noun form, “eternal duration” (2000, pp. 616-617). The word “eternal” is similarly defined: “1. Being without beginning or end; existing outside of time.... 2. Continuing without interruption; perpetual...” (p. 611; see also *Merriam-Webster’s* definition of these words). Why have English Bible translators been translating *aionios* as “everlasting” or “eternal” for the past four centuries? Because they understood that this word denotes duration, and specifically, when dealing with the future state of the righteous and the wicked, an unending, unceasing duration. Considering that the Greek words *aion* and *aionios*, and the English words everlasting and eternal, all obviously signify duration, one is bewildered as to how Smith could allege that in the word eternal, “[i]n all of its many associations, there is not a single hint of time” (p. 162). Talk about confusing apples with oranges!

Though Smith's definition of eternal is troubling, his attempt at explaining away Matthew 25:46 (in light of his doctrine of annihilationism) is even more perplexing. Having just previously indicated that "eternal" says **nothing** about duration (pp. 162-163,174), he then proceeded to argue that "the Hebrew word *olam* and the Greek word *aionios*, both of which mean the same as 'eternal' " (p. 174), **do** indicate some kind of duration, but not always an ongoing, unending duration. He gave eight examples from the Old Testament where "eternal" (*olam*) means "all the days of life" [as when a servant pledged allegiance to his master, had his ear pierced to the door, and was not discharged **as long as he lived** (cf. Deuteronomy 15:17; see Gesenius, 1847, p. 612)]. He then connected Matthew 25, verses 41 and 46, to his discussion of *olam*, saying:

So it is that when Jesus talks about the great dividing of the sheep from the goats, and says of those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels," the point is *destination*, not *duration*. Likewise, when Jesus says, "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life" (Matthew 25:41,46), he's speaking of the kind of punishment—namely *destruction*—which has everlasting consequences (p. 175, italics in orig.).

Such was Smith's explanation of Matthew 25:46. At first, he alleged that "eternal" is **not** about time (pp. 162-163,174). Then he alleged that it **was** about time, though not always unending in its nature (p. 174). Finally, he stated that "eternal" is **not** about duration, but destination (p. 175). To say the least, we find his reasoning extremely confusing.

When all of the evidence is considered, Smith's comments regarding Matthew 25:46 and the word "eternal" are nothing more than a tenuous attempt to propagate an extremely dangerous doctrine. As we have documented, "eternal" **does** imply duration. Furthermore, simply because the Old Testament Hebrew word for eternal (*olam*) often involved an eventual ending, does not mean that "eternal" is to be understood in that sense in every case in the New Testament (and certainly not in Matthew 25:46).

Admittedly, there are instances in the Old Testament where the Hebrew word *olam* means something other than eternal (cf. Exodus 12:24; 29:9; 40:15; Joshua 14:9). As Smith noted, the example of the slave who served his master "forever" (Deuteronomy 15:17) does not mean he will serve him for eternity. The context demands that we interpret the word *olam* ("forever") in this verse (and numerous others in the Old Testament) to mean something other than performing the action everlastingly (cf. Exodus 40:15; Leviticus 16:34; 1 Chronicles 16:17). In this case of the "eternal" slave, *olam* was used to mean "as long as the slave lived on Earth."

In other Old Testament passages, however, the Hebrew word for eternal clearly **is** used to mean unending in its duration. When Abraham called on the name of the Lord (Genesis 21:33), He called on the "Eternal" (*olam*) God. The psalmist praised the God Who is "from everlasting to everlasting" (90:2; cf. Micah 5:2), and Solomon, near the end of Ecclesiastes, wrote of man's place in the next life as being an "eternal home" (12:5). When the psalmist wrote, "My days are like a shadow that lengthens, and I wither away like grass. But You, oh Lord, shall endure forever (*olam*)" (Psalm 102:11-12), he quite obviously was contrasting the shortness of human life with the duration of God's existence. The psalmist went on to say that God's "years would have no end" (Psalm 102:27). According to Daniel 12:2, "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting (*olam*) life, some to shame and everlasting (*olam*) contempt." *Olam* was used in these cases to convey the idea of eternal in **duration**.

In fact, the *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon* gives the following definition for the word *olam*: (1) long duration, antiquity, futurity, for ever, ever, everlasting, evermore, perpetual old, ancient, world; (1a) ancient time, long time (of past); (1b) (of future); (1b1) forever, always;

(1b2) continuous existence, perpetual; (1b3) everlasting, indefinite or unending future, eternity (see “*Owlam*,” 1999).

Like so many words throughout Scripture that have more than one meaning, *olam* and *aionios* must be understood in light of the contexts in which they are found. Take, for example, the use of the word “day” (Hebrew *yom*; Greek *hemera*) in Scripture. Depending on the context in which it is found, it can mean: (1) the period opposite of night (Genesis 1:5); (2) a literal 24-hours (cf. Joshua 6:1-16); (3) a period of time in the future (not necessarily a literal 24 hours—cf. Matthew 7:22; 2 Peter 3:10); or (4) the total days of Creation (Genesis 2:4). When questions arise about the kind of days experienced during the Creation week, one is compelled to examine the specific context of Genesis 1. When he does, an overwhelming amount of evidence points to these days being literal 24-hour days just as we experience today. (Perhaps most noteworthy is the fact that each of these days is described as having both an “evening” and a “morning”—1:5,8,13,19,23,31.) Similarly, the word “eternal” also must be understood in light of its immediate and remote contexts.

Although Smith saw fit to indoctrinate his readers on how the Hebrew word for eternal (*olam*) frequently is used to mean something other than eternal in duration, he completely neglected to mention any of the numerous Old Testament passages where *olam* is used to mean a **literal** forever (as noted above—Genesis 21:33; Ecclesiastes 12:5; et al.). Why mention one usage, but ignore the other? Furthermore, it seems quite inappropriate for someone to comment on a **New Testament** verse like Matthew 25:46 (originally written in **Greek**), and basically deal only with how that corresponding **Hebrew** word is used in the **Old Testament**, all the while neglecting the overwhelming majority of instances in the New Testament where the word means “unending.”

The word *aionios* is used seventy times throughout the New Testament. Three times it is used to describe God’s eternal nature (Romans 16:26; 1 Timothy 6:16; Hebrews 9:14). It is found over forty times in the New Testament, in reference to the unending happiness of the righteous (e.g., John 10:28; Romans 5:21; 6:23; 1 John 1:2). And five times it is used in reference to the punishment of the wicked (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Jude 7). In Matthew 25:46, the word appears twice—once in reference to “eternal punishment,” and once in reference to “eternal life.” Simply put, if the punishment mentioned in this verse is temporary, then so is heaven. Contextually, the two are linked. Just as Jesus expected His disciples to understand heaven as a place of permanent, unending happiness for conscious souls of people, He likewise intended for them to understand hell as a place of permanent, unending torment for conscious souls. The fact that Christ made a special point of repeating *aionios* in the same sentence requires that we stay with the plain meaning of the word. Both heaven and hell will be eternal (unending!) in duration.

Matthew 25:46 serves as a death knell to the theory of annihilationism. Those who teach the limited duration of hell either refrain altogether from commenting on this particular verse, or the comments they make, like Smith’s, are disorderly and void of evidentiary support. In Homer Hailey’s work on God’s judgments (in which half of the book was dedicated specifically to defending the position that hell is not eternal), **he never once** gave a clear explanation of this verse. The only comment he offered that might remotely be considered an “explanation” of Matthew 25:46 is found on page 153, where it follows immediately after his only quotation of this verse. Hailey wrote:

It is sometimes said that Jesus gave a full and accurate picture of hell. Certainly, it was accurate, but it was not the complete teaching on the subject. Much would be added by the Holy Spirit through Paul and Peter, and through John in Revelation. The seven times Jesus used the word **Gehenna**, He

used it from the Jewish point of view. He left the universal aspect of the subject to be revealed by the Holy Spirit (2003, emp. in orig.).

Certainly the Holy Spirit inspired others to write on this subject. But that does not mean that what Jesus said about “eternal punishment” is wrong (or not worthy of comment). How can someone write a book titled *God’s Judgements & Punishments*, yet never explain the Lord’s comments on “eternal punishment”?

Even after granting annihilationists the fact that *aionios* can extend at times beyond the meaning of duration, and also may be used on occasion in a qualitative sense (see Guhrt, 1978, p. 832), as we have already seen, “the temporal sense is rarely forfeited” (Carson, 1996, p. 523). First and foremost, the word has to do with **duration**. Moreover, whenever *aion* is brought into the discussion, the case against annihilationism is strengthened considerably. If God “lives for ever (*aion*) and ever (*aion*)” (Revelation 1:18; 10:6; 15:7), and glory is to be given to Him “for ever and ever” (Revelation 1:6; 4:9-10; 5:13; 7:12), and if the saved “shall reign for ever and ever” with the Lord in heaven (Revelation 22:5), then the wicked assuredly “will be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Revelation 20:10; cf. Revelation 14:11). “Forever and ever” is “the formula of eternity” (Vincent, 1889, 2:418). Without a doubt, it denotes duration, even when describing the punishment of the wicked in hell. As Moses Stuart concluded in his book, *Exegetical Essays on Several Words Relating to Future Punishment*:

[I]f the Scriptures have not asserted the endless punishment of the wicked, neither have they asserted the endless happiness of the righteous, nor the endless glory and existence of the Godhead. The one is equally certain with the other. Both are laid in the same balance. They must be tried by the same tests. And if we give up the one, we must, in order to be consistent, give up the other also (1830, p. 57).

TAKING COMPARISONS TO HELL TOO FAR

Sodom and Gomorrah

Another argument of the annihilationist goes something like this: (1) Sodom and Gomorrah were burned to ashes, and were completely annihilated; (2) in the New Testament, hell is likened to Sodom and Gomorrah; thus (3) hell will not be eternal. Those who attempt to explain away the Bible’s teaching on the eternality of hell are well known for making such an argument. Immediately after quoting 2 Peter 2:6 and Jude 7, where the inspired writers compared the future judgment of the unrighteous to the condemnation of Sodom and Gomorrah, F. LaGard Smith asked if hell’s fire was indeed an “[e]ternal fire...that keeps on burning its victims forever?” (p. 173). His answer:

Not if Sodom and Gomorrah are anything to go by. The fate of those two abominable cities stands as the quintessential illustration of a **consuming** fire. In the wake of that catastrophic fire—however long it burned—nothing was left of the two cities, not even a trace! For anyone still insisting that hell is all about ongoing torment in fire and brimstone, serious thought needs to be given to a specific day in history when fire and brimstone literally rained down on the wicked. To be sure, there would have been suffering in the process—undoubtedly even some “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” But their suffering would not have lasted long (p. 173, emp. in orig.).

Two pages later, he stated matter of factly: “‘Eternal punishment’ will no more be punishment throughout an endless eternity than was the immediate, devastating punishment suffered by the people of Sodom and Gomorrah” (p. 175). Is Smith right? Will the destruction

of those in hell after the Judgment be exactly like the one-time physical annihilation of Sodom and Gomorrah?

What Smith and others who hold to the theory of annihilationism seem to forget is that analogies are meant to be carried only so far. When Jesus compared His disciples to sheep (John 10), He obviously did not mean that His followers are the most senseless people on Earth. Rather, He was stressing that His disciples are dependent upon Him to direct their paths in the way of righteousness, just as sheep are dependent upon the leadership of a shepherd to keep them from harm. Biblical comparisons that are pressed beyond their intended design produce needless (and sometimes dangerous) misunderstandings of Scripture. Those who teach that the command in the parable of the tares to allow both the wheat and the tares to “grow together until the harvest” (Matthew 13:30) somehow prevents the church from exercising discipline upon wayward members, have overextended Jesus’ parable. Such an interpretation stands at odds with what Jesus and Paul taught elsewhere (cf. Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14-15). Likewise, those who point to the earthly comparisons that Jesus and the inspired writers made with the ultimate punishment of the unrighteous in hell have carried the analogies too far.

The physical punishment that Sodom and Gomorrah suffered for their heinous sins was destruction of their **physical** lives. “The Lord rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah...out of the heavens” (Genesis 18:24). For the next 2,000 years, this unique fiery judgment served as a constant reminder to the descendants of Abraham of God’s hatred toward sin. Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, and Zephaniah all reminded their Hebrew brethren of this devastating event, as they communicated God’s wrath upon sinners. It seems only natural then, that when Jesus and the apostles and prophets of the first century chose to illustrate the spiritual “everlasting destruction” (2 Thessalonians 1:9) of the souls of the unrighteous in hell, they compared it to the infamous physical destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The devastating event that had occurred over 2,000 years earlier was one of the best **earthly** examples that God’s messengers could use to convey the idea of the type of judgment, pain, and suffering that eventually would be brought upon the unrighteous.

The comparison of Sodom and Gomorrah’s temporal destruction with that which the souls of the unrighteous will experience spiritually in hell was meant to be about the **type** of judgment and punishment suffered, not the **duration** of the punishment. Like the judgment of the immoral citizens of these two cities of old, the eventual punishment upon all of the unrighteous will be final, deliberate, devastating, and hot—like the fire and brimstone that devastated the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. However, whenever spiritual truths are illustrated using earthly examples there are limitations—at least two of which are apparent in this instance. First, unlike the kind of fire that burned in Sodom and Gomorrah, which caused excruciating **physical** pain to those who dwelt in those cities, the “fire” of hell will torment **spiritual** bodies (cf. Luke 16:24). It obviously will be a different kind of “fire” than what we see upon the Earth, because heaven and hell are not physical places, but spiritual. Second, and perhaps most important, the New Testament explicitly teaches that the fiery destruction of the unrighteous in hell differs from that of Sodom and Gomorrah in that the flames of hell will burn forever. Whereas “Sodom...was overthrown **in a moment**” by fire (Lamentations 4:6, emp. added), the fire and destruction of hell is described in the New Testament as “unquenchable” (three times—Matthew 3:12; Mark 9:43,48) and as “eternal” (six times—Matthew 18:8; 25:41,46; Mark 3:29; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Jude 7). If the Bible nowhere used such terminology to describe the punishment of the wicked in hell, then we might come to the same conclusion Smith and others have in regard to the annihilation of the wicked. The truth of the matter, however, is that God conspicuously and purposefully revealed the significant difference between the type of **temporary** flames that consumed Sodom and Gomorrah, and the **unending** flames that burn in hell, by using such terms as “eternal” and “unquenchable.” Jesus even used the term “eternal” in reference to hell in the

same sentence He used the word to describe heaven (Matthew 25:46). How much clearer could He have made it that heaven and hell are both eternal in duration? If God wanted to get across to mankind that hell is a place of everlasting torment, what else should He have done than what He did?

But someone might ask, “How is ‘eternal’ used in Jude 7 in reference to the punishment of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah if their punishment was simply temporary? Is the word ‘eternal’ used in a different sense in this passage?” Although Sodom and Gomorrah’s “suffering...of eternal fire” (Jude 7) is used by proponents of the theory of annihilationism to assert that the wicked will not suffer forever in hell, “the term ‘suffering’ (*hupechousai*—literally to ‘hold under’) is a present-tense participle, which asserts that the ancient citizens of the twin cities were suffering **at the time that this letter was penned**. The ‘eternal fire’ was not that which was rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah, but that into which they entered at death to suffer eternally” (Jackson, 2003, 39:30, emp. in orig.; see also Hiebert, 1989, p. 239). The immoral inhabitants of these cities suffered a one-time physical death by fire, and currently are suffering in torment while awaiting their sentence to hell (cf. Luke 16:19-31).

Additional evidence from Jude shows that the example of Sodom and Gomorrah was in no way intended to be construed to teach annihilationism. Within the immediate context of the passage, after mentioning Sodom and Gomorrah, the inspired Jude said: “Likewise also these dreamers...” (vs. 8). He next recorded a compendium of sins of which “these dreamers” were guilty. Then, in verse 13, just six verses from the statements concerning the wicked twin cities, Jude commented that these sinners were “wandering stars for whom is reserved **the blackness of darkness forever**” (emp. added). His point was clear: just as the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah once suffered earthly destruction, and were at present enduring continuing punishment (as evinced by the present-tense participle), those wicked men during the time of Jude could look forward to the same darkness and punishment for no less time than “forever.”

Chaff, Tares, and Withered Branches

Other biblical comparisons to the punishment of the wicked that some offer as proof of its temporality include the chaff mentioned by John the Baptizer (Matthew 3:11-12), as well as the tares and the withered vine branches discussed by Jesus (Matthew 13:24-30,36-43; John 15:1-10). Allegedly, since all three of these combustible components “burn up” when cast into fire, rather than burn continually, then there is no existence for any wicked soul beyond that of being “burned up.” After expounding on these three illustrations of hell, Homer Hailey asked (in a chapter he wrote titled “Examples of Eternal Punishments”): “Considered strictly from the words of Jesus, and what He intended to teach, **is there anything** in these figures from which we can conclude that one who is cast into the fire continues consciousness or suffers beyond the point of having been burned up?” (p. 144, emp. added).

Although Hailey meant for this to be a rhetorical question with the “obvious” answer being “no,” **there is something** that indicates the punishment continues forever and ever; John said that Jesus “will burn up the chaff with **unquenchable (*asbestos*) fire**” (Matthew 3:12, emp. added). This fire differs from that of normal flames in that it is perpetual. Greek lexicographers Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich defined *asbestos* as “inextinguishable” fire, and then listed “eternal” (*aionios*; Matthew 18:8; 25:41) as its closest synonym (2000, p. 141). If the wicked are annihilated in hell, one is forced to ask what possible purpose “unquenchable fire” serves? Why have an “inextinguishable” fire for “extinguishable” souls? Why should the fire burn forever if its **purpose** comes to an end? Furthermore, since Jesus used the word “unquenchable,” it is evident that His parallels to physical materials burning were incomplete, and needed to be qualified in order for His point to be communicated.

A second thought regarding the three above-mentioned comparisons to hell is that “their illustrative value, in terms of punishment, is limited. They are strictly material objects; human beings are not!” (Jackson, 2003, 39:30). Any physical example that inspired men used to give their audience a glimpse into the future punishment of the wicked fails to give an adequate picture of the unending **duration** of hell. Obviously, the duration of hell is not what John and Jesus attempted to illustrate with those particular analogies. Furthermore, if the punishment of the wicked is not eternal, because the chaff, tares, and withered vine branches to which this punishment is compared are not eternal, then pray tell, will the righteous be annihilated as well? After all, in the parable of the tares, the wheat represented the righteous, whom Jesus said “will shine forth **as the sun**” in heaven (Matthew 13:43, emp. added). If the Sun is a physical object that will be extinguished when Jesus returns, then, using the “logic” of annihilationists, shouldn’t the righteous be annihilated as well? Peter wrote:

The **heavens** and the earth...**are reserved for fire until the day of judgment** and perdition of ungodly men. ...The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which **the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat**; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since **all these things will be dissolved**, what manner of persons 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 dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat**? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:7,10-13, emp. added).

Since all that are in the physical heavens (**including the Sun**) “will be dissolved” at the coming of the day of God, and since the kingdom of heaven will be illuminated by the glory of God instead of the Sun (Revelation 21:23; 22:5), then clearly when Jesus compared the souls of the righteous to the Sun, He was not referring to the Sun’s temporary existence in the heavens. The eventual **extinction** of the Sun was not the point of comparison with the righteous. The comparison is of the Sun’s “brilliance and splendor” (Lenski, 1943, p. 540), which the saints will acquire from “the glory of God” (Revelation 21:23) after being separated from those who will be cast “into outer darkness” (cf. Matthew 22:13; 25:30). In contrast to the righteous who will “reign **forever and ever**” in the presence of the Lamb (Revelation 22:5), the wicked will burn “day and night **forever and ever**” (Revelation 20:10) in “the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41).

Gehenna

A final picture of the wicked’s punishment can be derived from an understanding of the Greek word *gehenna*. This word appears twelve times in the New Testament, and literally means “Valley of the Sons of Hinnom” (Danker, et al., 2000, p. 191)—the name given to the valley south of the walls of Jerusalem. This valley was notoriously connected to the sinful, horrific practice of child sacrifice associated with the pagan god Molech. Josiah, the righteous king of Judah, in his efforts to restore true worship, ransacked the pagan worship arena and “defiled Topheth, which is the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire to Molech” (2 Kings 23:10; cf. 2 Chronicles 28:3; 33:6). As a result, the valley became a refuse dump for discarding filth, dead animals, and other garbage (see Jeremiah 7:32).

Allegedly, since all that was thrown into this earthly model of hell was “ultimately consumed” (see Smith, 2003, p. 176), then the wicked who will be cast into “hell fire” (Matthew 5:22) likewise will be annihilated. This is yet another comparison to hell that has been pressed beyond its intended design. The **length of time** in which humans, animals, and garbage burned in the valley of Gehenna is **not** the emphasis of the comparison. The burning dump in the valley of Gehenna served as a great example of what hell will be like for the damned,

because it had been a place of **fiery torment** in the days when children were **tortured by fire** in the idolatrous worship of Molech. It then was decimated and polluted by King Josiah so as to make it an undesirable place to live, work, or perform religious ceremonies, even for the heathens. Jews associated this place with sin and suffering, which “led to the application of its name, in the Greek form of it, to the place of final and eternal punishment” (McGarvey, 1875, p. 55).

One must recognize that no earthly example can ever perfectly parallel “eternal punishment,” because nothing physical lasts forever. Every earthly example that gives mankind some insight into the hideousness of hell, falls short in this aspect. That which once burned in the valley of Gehenna has been consumed. The burning fire of this repugnant valley has long been quenched. Hell’s fire, on the other hand, “shall never be quenched” (Mark 9:43), the figurative “worm” that eats on the flesh of hell’s inhabitants “does not die” (Mark 9:48), and the wicked who find themselves in hell (due to their rejection of the grace of God) “shall suffer the punishment of **eternal destruction**” (2 Thessalonians 1:9, emp. added, RSV).

In many of the instances in which a physical example is given to illustrate the horrors of hell, it is of extreme interest that Jesus and the inspired writers added descriptive words like “unquenchable” and “eternal” to denote the difference between the physical illustration and the spiritual reality of the future spiritual punishment.

[\[to be continued\]](#)

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The Eternality of Hell [Part II]

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DOES DESTRUCTION IMPLY ANNIHILATION?

According to F. LaGard Smith, "The primary scriptural cornerstone for the case [for the annihilation of the wicked—EL/KB] is Matthew 10:28" (2003, p. 167). Since Jesus told His disciples, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But, rather, fear Him who is able to **destroy** both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28), His statement supposedly proves that hell is merely a picture of complete extermination of the souls of the wicked. Annihilationists, including both Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses, have (mis)used Matthew 10:28 for centuries to propagate their error. In his book, *After Life*, Smith cites this particular verse more than any other verse from Scripture. Surely, annihilationists allege, Jesus would not have employed the word "destroy" in this verse if He did not mean extermination.

The phrase “to destroy” in Matthew 10:28 is derived from the Greek word *apollumi*, which is used 92 times in the New Testament. It is translated by such terms as perish, destroy, lose, and lost. While it is true that occasionally *apollumi* is used to mean death (Matthew 2:13; 8:25; 26:52), most often it simply signifies the idea of suffering a loss of well-being and the loss of being blessed. In Luke 15, Jesus spoke of the shepherd’s lone sheep that was “lost” (*apollumi*), but not annihilated (vs. 6). In that same chapter, He told of the father’s prodigal son who was “lost” (*apollumi*), not extinguished (vss. 24,32). The wineskins of which Christ spoke in Matthew 9:17 did not pass into nonexistence, but were “ruined” (*apollumi*). Jesus did not come to seek and to save those who did not exist; rather He came to save those who were alive physically, but ruined spiritually by sin [i.e., lost (*apollumi*)—Luke 19:10]. Paul stated that the Gospel is “veiled to those who are perishing” (*apollumi*) in sin, not to those who are exterminated by sin. Considering the fact that even when *apollumi* is used to mean “death” (Matthew 2:13; 8:25; 26:52), total annihilation of the person is not under consideration (for the soul still would be alive). Therefore, one can rightly conclude that there is not a single instance in the New Testament where *apollumi* means “annihilation” in the strictest sense of the word. The Scriptures clearly teach that those who, at Judgment, will be “destroyed” because of their wickedness, will be like the “beast” who will “go to perdition” (*apoleia*, Revelation 17:8,11) in “the lake of fire and brimstone,” where they will be, not annihilated, but “tormented day and night forever and ever” (Revelation 17:8,11; 20:10). “Destruction” does not equal “annihilation.”

Respected Greek scholars also disagree with the annihilationist’s position that the Greek term underlying our English word “destroy” in Matthew 10:28 means “annihilation.” W.E. Vine, in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, explained: “The idea is not extinction but ruin, loss, not of being, but of well-being” (1940, 1:302). Specifically, in regard to Matthew 10:28, he stated: “of the loss of well-being in the case of the unsaved hereafter” (1:302). A.T. Robertson added: “ ‘Destroy’ here is not annihilation, but eternal punishment in Gehenna” (1930, 1:83). In the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, professor Albrecht Oepke commented on the meaning of destroy, stating that it is “definitive destruction, not merely in the sense of extinction of physical existence, but rather of an eternal plunge” into Hell (1964, 1:396). Lexicographer Joseph Thayer agreed with these assessments, saying that “destroy” in Matthew 10:28 means “metaphorically, to devote or give over to eternal misery” (1962, p. 64). [NOTE: Considering that the publisher’s introduction to the fourth edition of Thayer’s lexicon indicates “Thayer was a Unitarian” who denied such things as “the eternal punishment of the wicked” (p. vii), it is logical to conclude that his definition of *apollumi* could only be the result of an informed knowledge of the word’s true meaning.]

Even when we use the word “destroy” in modern times, frequently something other than annihilation is intended. Suppose a married couple involved in a violent car wreck survived the accident and returned to the scene the next day with a newspaper reporter to see the wreckage. If the couple spoke of their badly mangled car as being “destroyed,” would anyone think that the newspaper reporter would be justified in writing a story about how the couple’s car allegedly “went out of existence” during the wreck? To ask is to answer. When a sports journalist covers a high school basketball game and writes about the Clearwater Cats “destroying” the Blue Horn Bombers, will any person even slightly familiar with the English language understand “destroy” in the article literally to mean “annihilate”? Certainly not. Even in twenty-first-century English, “to destroy” frequently means something other than “to exterminate.”

In the well-known parallel text to Matthew 10:28, Luke recorded: “My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to **cast into hell**; yes, I say to you, fear Him!” (Luke 12:4-5, emp. added). To be destroyed is equivalent to

being cast into hell. Since the New Testament indicates that hell is the place of “everlasting fire” (Matthew 25:41) “that shall never be quenched” (Mark 9:43, 48), and is the future abode of the wicked where they will suffer “everlasting punishment” (Matthew 25:46), we can know that to be destroyed in hell (Matthew 10:28) is equivalent to suffering eternal misery.

Paul used the unique phrase “eternal destruction” in his second letter to the church at Thessalonica (1:9). The Greek word translated “destruction” in this verse, however, is *olethros*, not *apollumi*. *Olethros* appears a total of four times in the New Testament, three of which refer to the “destruction” of those who rebel against God (1 Thessalonians 5:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; 1 Timothy 6:9). Like *apollumi*, *olethros* does not connote annihilation. In 1 Timothy 6:9, Paul used *olethros* to describe the miserable spiritual condition of those who lust after riches. These individuals were not annihilated, but were in a state of “ruin” (NASV, RSV, NIV) because they had “strayed from the faith” (vs. 10). Regarding the appearance of *olethros* in 1 Thessalonians 5:3, Gary Workman asked: “[I]f the fate of the ungodly is sudden annihilation at the second coming of Christ (1 Thess. 5:3), how are they going to stand before his seat? (2 Cor. 5:10)” [1992, 23:32]. Furthermore, “[S]ince that destruction is ‘sudden,’ there could not be any torment at all—which is contrary to Bible teaching” (p. 32). In fact, in 2 Thessalonians 1:9

[t]he expression “everlasting destruction” is used in apposition to “suffer punishment” (literally meaning, “to experience just payment”). A part of the “deserved” aspect is that of “affliction.” Note that verse 6 says “...God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you....” “Affliction” implies conscious suffering; it stands in opposition to the concept of annihilation.... As Gerstner observed: “Extermination is not affliction; it is the prevention of affliction” (Jackson, 2003a, 39:31).

There simply is no solid evidence to justify interpreting “eternal destruction” as “annihilation.” Paul used *olethros* in this verse to mean “the loss of a life of blessedness after death, future misery,” not extermination (Thayer, 1962, p. 443; cf. Wuest, 1973, p. 41). The wicked face “**eternal ruin**”

DOES DEATH IMPLY ANNIHILATION?

Throughout the New Testament, the fires of hell are depicted as being the “second death.” The picture painted in Revelation 20 tells of a burning lake of fire into which the devil and all his cohorts will be cast, including wicked humans whose names are not written in the Book of Life. Verse 14 of chapter 20 declares: “Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.” The inspired writer James remarked that if one of the brethren turns away from Christ, then if someone turns the wayward brother back, he will “save a soul from death” (James 5:20). James’ statement speaks directly to the fact that the sinning soul is destined for spiritual death. In John 6, Jesus described Himself as the bread that came down from heaven. Those who eat this “living” bread will “live forever” and not die (John 6:48-51, 58). All who will not eat this living bread will die. Jesus’ comments here clearly refer to the second death in hell.

What Does the Word “Death” Mean?

All those involved in the debate of afterlife issues understand that hell is called the second death, and that a person’s soul is said to die in hell. But what does the word **death** actually mean? Those who advocate annihilationism have put forth the idea that the word **death** must mean “to go out of existence.” Along these lines, Smith wrote:

Those whose names are found written in the book [of life—EL/KB] will inherit life with God forever. For those whose names are missing, there is no lasting life whatsoever, tormented or otherwise. Only death. The second and final death.... As the greater weight of scriptural evidence indicates, the only option is eternal life versus eternal death. Blessed existence versus non-existence (pp. 189,190).

From statements peppered throughout his book, and especially from the final two parallel sentences in this quotation, it is obvious that Smith defines the word **death** as nonexistence.

In truth, however, the concept of death as used in the Bible does not mean non-existence, but rather “separation.” In regard to physical death, it refers to the separation of the soul from the physical body. In regard to spiritual death, it connotes separation of the soul from God.

The *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon* gives the following primary definition of the Greek word that is translated “death” (*thanatos*): “(1) the death of the body (1a) that separation (whether natural or violent) of the soul and the body by which life on earth is ended” (see “*Thanatos*,” 1999). The fact that physical death is viewed in the Bible as separation is evident from several Scriptures. The inspired writer James offered a clear picture of this idea of death when he wrote: “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26). According to James, faith separated from works is a dead faith, in the same way that a body which is separated from the soul is a dead body. Notice that a body separated from a soul is not a nonexistent body. On the contrary, the body still exists and lies lifeless, but is separated from the soul and thus presumed to be dead.

The narrative describing Rachel's death in Genesis provides further evidence that the Bible depicts physical death as the separation of the soul from the body. As Rachel was giving birth to Benjamin, her labor became so intense that her life was in danger. The text reads: “Now it came to pass, when she was in hard labor, that the midwife said to her, ‘Do not fear; you will have this son also.’ And so it was, as **her soul was departing** (for she **died**), that she called his name Ben-Oni; but his father called him Benjamin. So Rachel **died** and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)” [Genesis 35:17-19, emp. added]. Rachel's death occurred when her soul departed (i.e., leaving her physical body). Her body continued to exist for some time and was buried, but it was recognized as a **dead** body as soon as it was separated from Rachel's soul, not when the body eventually decayed in the tomb. Here again, the biblical picture of death revolves around the concept of separation, not nonexistence.

Luke 8 contains additional evidence that separation of the soul and physical body is the actual meaning of physical death. Jairus came to Jesus pleading for the life of his sick daughter. While en route to the house, someone came from Jairus' house, explaining that the girl had already died. Jesus encouraged Jairus not to doubt, and continued toward the house. Arriving at the ruler's house, Jesus sent everyone out except Peter, James, John, and the parents of the child. He approached the child's dead body, took her hand and said, “Little girl, arise.” Immediately after this comment, the text states: “Then her spirit returned, and she arose immediately” (Luke 8:40-55). Note that both the girl's body and her spirit existed at the time Jesus entered the room. Her body, however, was dead because her spirit had departed from it. When her spirit returned to her body, it was made alive again. Once more, the biblical text presents the idea that the concept of death is not one of nonexistence, but of separation.

John 19:30 offers another example that establishes physical death as separation of the soul and body. In the final moments of Christ's life during the crucifixion, after all of the prophecies had been fulfilled, Christ cried, “It is finished.” Immediately following this last cry,

the Lord bowed His head, and “He gave up His Spirit.” At this point, when His soul departed from His body, He was dead. Joseph and Nicodemus buried the dead (still existent) body of Christ in a new tomb, while the soul of Christ had departed.

Even after looking at these several biblical examples, some annihilationists might continue to argue that physical death still means “nonexistence,” because those who die no longer exist in the physical world. But notice **what** the Bible describes as dead—**the body**. James stated that “the body without the spirit is dead.” The body continues to exist for some time, but is said to be dead immediately when the soul leaves it. And the spirit is **not** said to be “dead.”

While the idea that physical death is defined by separation and not nonexistence is clear from the Bible, the idea that spiritual death is defined by a soul’s separation from God and not by a soul’s nonexistence is even more clearly set forth in Scripture. In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, he wrote: “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world.... But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ...” (Ephesians 2:1-2,4-5). When the Ephesians committed sins in their unsaved condition, they were described as “dead.” Obviously, however, they were not nonexistent. Instead, they were separated from God by those sins. In fact, verse twelve of the same chapter says that during their time of sinfulness, they were “without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” The Ephesians were spiritually dead in their sins. This spiritual death was a separation from God, Christ, and hope, yet it was **not** a state of nonexistence. In chapter 4 of the same epistle, Paul told the brethren that they should “no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God” (Ephesians 4:17-18). The sinful Gentiles described here were in the same state of spiritual death the Ephesians were in prior to their becoming Christians. That death was an alienation (or separation) from the life of God, yet, here again, it was not a state of nonexistence.

The inspired apostle Paul also wrote to Christians in Colossae, declaring, “And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (Colossians 2:13). Paul obviously did not mean that the Colossians had been physically dead in their sins. Neither did he intend to assert the nonsensical idea that at one time, while they were sinning, their souls were in a state of nonexistence. On the contrary, their souls existed, but were separated from God because of their sins, and thus they were labeled as dead. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah explained this principle clearly when he wrote: “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear, but your iniquities have **separated** you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:1-2, emp. added).

Paul presents very clearly in 1 Timothy 5:6 the concept that spiritual death is separation from God, not nonexistence. In this chapter, Paul instructed the young Timothy about which widows should receive assistance from the church treasury. In his discussion, Paul mentioned widows who trusted in God and continued in prayer. He contrasted those widows with one who “lives in pleasure” or indulgence of the flesh. Concerning such a widow, he wrote: “But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives.” As is the case throughout the New Testament, individuals who live in sin are considered spiritually dead. They are referred to as dead by the Holy Spirit because they have separated themselves from God via their sin. The sinning widow continued to exist physically, and her soul continued to exist, yet she was called dead. The biblical picture of spiritual death is not one of nonexistence, but one of a miserable existence separated from God.

The antithesis of death is “life” (*zoe*). As we have seen from numerous passages, one way that the word **life** is used in the Bible is to describe the state in which the physical body is joined or connected to the soul of a person. Furthermore, spiritual **life**, the opposite of spiritual **death**, is used in the New Testament to describe the condition in which a separated soul is brought back to, and joined with, its Creator. Paul described this condition when he wrote: “And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, **yet now He has reconciled** in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and irreproachable in His sight” (Colossians 1:21-22, emp. added). Sin alienates a person from God and leads to spiritual death. God, through Christ, allows those dead, separated souls to be cleansed of that sin and have spiritual life, which reconciles them to Him. That is why John wrote: “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:12).

It is evident, then, from a close look at the Scriptures that the word **death** does not mean a state of nonexistence—either in the physical realm or the spiritual realm. The Bible describes bodies that were dead, yet still very much in existence. The inspired record describes individuals who were spiritually dead, yet existing in that dead condition nonetheless. The misguided ploy to define “the second death” (Revelation 20:11; 20:6,14; 21:8) as a state of nonexistence is merely a failed attempt to avoid the actual meaning of the biblical text. The second death describes nothing more (or less) than the total separation of wicked, unsaved souls from the God Who created them.

Of all those wicked people who will ask “in that day” (i.e., the Day of Judgment), “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?” (Matthew 7:22), Jesus, the righteous Judge (John 5:22; 2 Timothy 4:8), will declare (sentencing them to a second death), “I never knew you; **depart from Me**, you who practice lawlessness!” (Matthew 7:23, emp. added). Of those evil people who neglect the needy, He will say, “**Depart from Me**, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41, emp. added).

“Eternal destruction” awaits those who are cast away “**from** the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thessalonians 1:9, emp. added). As both Jesus and the apostle Paul declared, the second death is not annihilation, but eternal separation “from the presence of the Lord.” Death in no way implies a state of nonexistence.

HOW CAN A LOVING GOD PUNISH PEOPLE ETERNALLY?

It seems obvious that the idea of annihilationism did not originate from a straightforward reading of the biblical text. After looking at the way biblical verses must be bent, stretched, ripped out of context, and twisted to support the concept of annihilationism, one cannot help but wonder why this idea is so attractive to certain well-educated individuals. While we do not have the space here to examine all of the reasons for the acceptance of this false doctrine, one very pertinent motive for accepting annihilationism does surface regularly in the writings and lectures of those who adhere to annihilationism

In April 1988, while speaking on the subject of “A Christian Response to the New Age Movement” at the annual Pepperdine University lectures in Malibu, California, F. LaGard Smith asked the members of his audience:

I also wonder if you feel as uncomfortable as I do in our traditional view of hell. Do you readily accept the traditional view of hell that says God sort of dangles you over the fires that burn day and night?... Is that what hell is all about? Haven't you struggled with the

idea of how there can be a loving God and anywhere in his presence permit that to exist? Doesn't it seem like cruel and unusual punishment? (1988).

Notice his line of reasoning. Smith is “uncomfortable” with the “traditional view” of hell. What does he suggest has caused this cognitive dissonance on his part? He states that eternal punishment in hell seems (to him) like “cruel and unusual punishment.” Smith does not believe that a “loving God” could permit eternal torture of impenitent sinners. Fifteen years later, in his book, *After Life*, Smith was even more assertive in his view that God is “not a twisted, cruel God who tortures the wicked, dangling them over licking flames” (p. 183). Do not miss his point. According to Smith, **if God punishes the wicked eternally in a flaming fire (rather than annihilating them), then God is both “twisted” and “cruel.”**

Smith's complaints bear a striking resemblance to the countless attacks that have been made upon the God of the Bible by skeptics and infidels. The renowned agnostic, Bertrand Russell, once stated:

There is one very serious defect to my mind in Christ's moral character, and that is that He believed in hell. I do not myself feel that any person who is really profoundly humane can believe in everlasting punishment (1957, p. 17).

Russell's self-defined sense of humanness balked at the idea of an everlasting punishment, which he offered as one of his primary reasons for rejecting Christ (since Jesus taught on an everlasting hell). Russell further noted:

Christ certainly, as depicted in the Gospels, did believe in everlasting punishment, and one does find repeatedly a vindictive fury against those people who would not listen to His preaching.... I really do not think that a person with a proper degree of kindness in his nature would have put fears and terrors of that sort into the world.... I must say that I think all this doctrine, that hell-fire is a punishment for sin, is a doctrine of cruelty. It is a doctrine that put cruelty into the world and gave the world generations of cruel torture; and the Christ of the Gospels, if you could take Him as His chroniclers represent Him, would certainly have to be considered partly responsible for that (pp. 17-18).

Smith and Russell both “feel” that there exists an irreconcilable moral dilemma between a loving God and an eternal Hell. Due to this belief, Russell felt compelled to reject **the Christ** of the gospel accounts who forcefully presents, to any unbiased reader, the idea of an eternal hell. On the other hand, Smith, not willing to reject the Christ of the Gospel, rejects the **eternal hell** presented in the New Testament. Both have rejected a facet of New Testament teaching based on a subjectively perceived moral dilemma.

That dilemma, however, has been created more from a sense of emotional discomfort than from an honest study of the Bible and God. As J.P. Moreland accurately stated when questioned about the eternality of conscious punishment, many people “tend to evaluate whether it's [eternal punishment—EL/KB] appropriate, based on their feelings or emotional offense to it” (as quoted in Strobel, 2000, p. 172). He went on to state: “The basis for their evaluation should be whether hell is a morally just or morally right state of affairs, not whether they like or dislike the concept” (p. 172). The alleged moral dilemma presented by Smith and Russell is one that is based on emotions, not on accurate assessments of morality and justice. Upon further investigation, there proves to be no dilemma at all. Allow us to explain.

God is Love

It would be extremely difficult for a person to read the Bible and miss the fact that God is described as a loving and caring Creator. In 1 John 4:7-8, the writer declared that love issues directly from God and that, in fact, “God is love.” First John 4:16 states: “And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.” Throughout the Scriptures, God’s love for His creatures is repeated time and time again. One of the most familiar passages of Scripture, known even to the masses, is John 3:16, which declares: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

It is here, however, that a very important point must be made. Our “politically correct” society has influenced many people to believe that a loving person would never cause harm or discomfort to the object of his love. In an interview with Lee Strobel, J.P. Moreland addressed this issue when he observed:

Yes, God is a compassionate being, but he’s also a just, moral, and pure being. So God’s decisions are not based on modern American sentimentalism.... People today tend to care only for the softer virtues like love and tenderness, while they’ve forgotten the hard virtues of holiness, righteousness, and justice (as quoted in Strobel, p. 174).

What does the Bible mean when it says that “God is love”? In today’s society, the concept of love quite often is misunderstood. Many people seem to think that a “loving person” is one who always tries to keep others out of **every** pain or discomfort. Punishment often is looked upon as an “unloving” thing to do. But that is not the case. In fact, a loving person sometimes will **cause** pain to others in order to accomplish a greater good. For instance, suppose a mother tells her 4-year-old son to stop putting the hair dryer into his little sister’s bath water, but the child continues his mischievous and dangerous activity? Is it not likely that the boy will be punished? Maybe he will get a swift swat on the leg, or have to sit in the corner of a room. The physical pain or mental discomfort inflicted on the child is for his own good and/or the good of his sister. This mother loves her children, but still punishes them. In fact, the Proverbs writer stated that a parent who **does not discipline** his/her child (which includes corporal punishment) simply **does not love** that child (Proverbs 13:24; cf. 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15).

God is Just

God is hardly a one-sided Being. He has many different attributes that need to be considered. Yes, one of those attributes is His love. But another is His justice. Psalm 89:14 states that “righteousness and justice” are the foundation of God’s throne. Deuteronomy 32:3-4 declares: “For I proclaim the name of the Lord: ascribe greatness to our God. He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He.”

What is justice? Justice is the principle that crime must be punished. It is not difficult to recognize justice. Suppose a certain judge in a large U.S. city let every murderer walk away from his courtroom without any punishment. Even though many of the murderers had killed several people in cold blood, the judge would just wave his hand, pat the murderer on the shoulder, and say something like, “I am feeling very loving and generous today, so you are free to go without any punishment.” The judge obviously would not be administering justice, and he should promptly be relieved of his position. In the same way, if God did not provide punishment for the sinful actions that humans commit, then justice could not be the foundation of His throne.

It can be shown, then, that a loving person could punish those that he loves, and that justice demands that some type of punishment or penalty must be endured or paid for actions that break the law. But the problem still remains that **eternal** punishment seems to some to be too harsh and permanent to come from a loving God.

There is one other principle of justice that needs attention at this juncture. Punishment almost always lasts longer than the actual crime. When a gunman walks into a bank, shoots two tellers, robs the bank, and is successfully apprehended, tried, and found guilty, his punishment is of a much longer duration than his crime. The actual shooting and looting might have taken only three minutes to accomplish, but he most likely will pay for those three minutes by spending the remainder of his life in prison. Those who contend that hell will not be eternal say that forever is “too long.” But once a person concedes that punishment can (and generally does!) last longer than the crime, his argument against an eternal hell becomes self-defeating. Once a person admits that the punishment can last longer than the crime, it is simply a matter of who gets to decide how long the punishment should be.

Skeptics, infidels, and others admit that punishment can be longer than the crime, but then they contest that “forever” is too long. Who says forever is too long? Would a hundred years be too long to punish a child molester? What about two hundred? It soon becomes obvious that determinations of “too long” are arbitrarily made by those (like skeptics and infidels) who want to reject the God of the Bible or (like annihilationists) the hell of the Bible.

In his debate with renowned atheistic philosopher, Antony Flew, Thomas B. Warren pressed this point masterfully. Before one of the debating sessions, Warren gave Flew a list of questions to be answered (a facet of the debate that was agreed upon before the debate started). One of the questions was a “true or false” question that read as follows: “It is not possible that the justice of God would entail any punishment for sin.” To this question Flew answered “false,” indicating that it is possible that the justice of God could entail some punishment for sin. The next “true or false” question offered by Warren stated: “It is possible that this infinite justice of God might entail at least one minute of punishment when this life is over”—to which Flew answered “true.” Warren then commented:

He answered “true.” Now note, it might entail at least one minute of punishment and not be out of harmony—the basic concept of God would not be self-contradictory. What about two minutes, Dr. Flew? What about three minutes, four minutes, an hour, a day, a year, a month, a hundred years, a million years? Where do you stop? Would a billion years be long enough? Could God punish a man a billion years and still be just and loving? You can see that he has given up tonight.... He has shown his inability to answer these questions in harmony with the atheistic position and the implications which follow from it. He himself is on record as saying when a man cannot do that, then it is clear that he holds a false position (Warren and Flew, 1977, p. 150).

Once the point is conceded that a loving God could punish sin with at least one minute of punishment after this life, then the only question left to answer is: Who is in the best position to determine how long punishment should be? Would it not be a righteous judge who knew every detail of the crime, including the thoughts and intents of the criminal? God is exactly that. He is not motivated by selfishness, greed, or other vice, but sits on a throne of righteousness (Psalm 89:14). Furthermore, He knows **all** the facts of the case (Proverbs 15:3) and the intents and thoughts of the lawbreakers (Psalm 44:21). Only God is in a position to determine how long sin should be punished.

Furthermore, it is ironic that those who are claiming that “forever” is “too long” to punish people for sins, have themselves sinned. Of course a person who is guilty of sin is going to want to lessen the punishment of that sin. Once again we must ask, would a person guilty of

sin be in a better position to determine how long sin should be punished than a sinless, perfect God (1 John 1:5)? To ask is to answer.

Yet again, the idea that eternity is “too long” only tugs at human emotions when dealing with punishment, never with reward. Who would argue that heaven cannot be eternal because God would be unjust to reward us for “too long.” On the contrary, the eternality of heaven and hell stand and fall together. And both are deeply rooted in the justice and mercy of God. When Jesus spoke to the people of His day about the ultimate fate of humanity in eternity (as we discussed earlier), He stated that the wicked would “go away into **everlasting** (*aionios*) punishment, but the righteous into **eternal** (*aionios*) life” (Matthew 25:46). The Greek word rendered “eternal” in the English, is the same Greek word (*aionios*) rendered earlier as “everlasting.” Observe that precisely the same word is applied to the **punishment** of the wicked as to the **reward** of the righteous. Those who are willing to accept Christ’s teaching on heaven should have no trouble whatsoever accepting His teaching on hell.

WHY DO AFTERLIFE QUESTIONS MATTER?

One pertinent question that should properly be addressed in any discussion of this nature is simply, “What does it matter?” Why should these questions be discussed at length? In answer to such appropriate questions, it must be stated that God, through His inspired Word, saw fit to include these issues in the list of “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). That fact alone is enough to justify such a discussion.

But that is not the only reason afterlife issues are of utmost importance. In a discussion regarding Roman Catholicism’s unofficial doctrine of limbo, F. LaGard Smith wrote:

[A]fterlife issues become a litmus test of the legitimacy of underlying theological assumptions. Whenever any afterlife scenario lacks coherence with other clear biblical teaching regarding what happens after death, red flags are raised immediately as to the validity of any doctrines upon which that afterlife theology is based (p. 242).

Smith correctly noted that what a person believes about the afterlife often stems from that person’s beliefs about God and the Bible—what Smith calls his or her “underlying theological assumptions.” Interestingly, an outstanding case of this statement’s validity can be seen in Smith’s own dealings with afterlife issues.

As was quoted earlier, Smith stated that God is “not a twisted, cruel God who tortures the wicked, dangling them over licking flames” (2003, p. 183). When one dissects such a statement, he can view Smith’s primary “underlying theological assumption,” which becomes evident via the following syllogism. First, any God Who “tortures the wicked, dangling them over a licking flame” is “twisted and cruel.” But the God of the Bible is not “twisted and cruel.” Therefore, the God of the Bible could not, and would not, torture the wicked by dangling them over a flame that lasts forever. Notice that his “underlying theological assumption” is that any God Who would torture the wicked in everlasting fire is twisted and cruel. Because of his assumption, Smith must twist the Scripture in a way that would not allow for God to punish the wicked forever in hell.

The problem with Smith’s argument is that he **falsely assumes** that a God Who punishes people forever in hell is twisted or cruel. As we have shown, eternal punishment of the wicked in unending flames does not violate any of the attributes of God, including His love. It is the case that a loving, just, righteous God could cast the wicked into an eternal hell, where they would be punished by fire forever, and still be a loving God. Smith’s views on the

afterlife have been shaped by this false assumption, and thus are built upon a faulty foundation.

What is worse, since the assumption is false, the implications of Smith's argument impugn the very nature of God. Follow the logic. If any God Who tortures the wicked by "dangling them over licking flames" is "twisted and cruel," and if the Bible teaches that God does, in fact, torture the wicked in licking flames unendingly, then the God of the Bible must by necessity be both "twisted" and "cruel."

It is no wonder that Smith so adamantly defends his position that the Bible does not teach that the wicked will be punished forever in hell fire. He, like so many other annihilationists, has painted himself into a corner. If the Bible does, in fact, teach that the wicked will be punished forever in hell then all those who have stated that any God Who would allow such is "twisted and cruel," have in reality accused the God of the Bible of being "twisted and cruel"—an extremely dangerous accusation to make, to be sure (since the Bible **does** teach that God **will** punish the wicked forever in hell).

Make no mistake about it: a person's beliefs about afterlife issues are of utmost importance to that person's spiritual well-being and future eternal destination. As Wayne Jackson correctly stated:

The dogma of annihilation is not an innocent view with harmless consequences. It is a concept that undermines the full force of that fearful warning of which the Almighty God would have men be aware. There is many a rebel who would gladly indulge himself in a lifetime of sin for an eternal nothingness (Jackson, 2003b).

It is ironic that the picture of nonexistence painted by annihilationists and described as hell, is almost identical to the picture of nonexistence painted by Buddhists and labeled as the ultimate reward (also called Nirvana). Buddhists' "heaven" closely resembles many annihilationists' idea of hell!

Does it really matter what a person believes in this regard? Jackson again spoke to that question when he wrote:

Those who contend that the wicked will be annihilated are in error. But is the issue one of importance? Yes. **Any theory of divine retribution which undermines the full consequences of rebelling against God has to be most dangerous** (1998, 33[9]:35, emp. added).

CONCLUSION

Those who argue that a "loving God" cannot punish impenitent sinners for eternity, simply have neglected to realize the heinousness of sin. What could possibly be so bad that it would deserve an eternity of punishment? God's divine answer to that is simple—unforgiven sin. Adam and Eve's sin brought into the world death, disease, war, pestilence, pain, and suffering. The cumulative weight of the sin of mankind from that day until the Day of Judgment was, and is, **so overwhelming** that it cost God the lifeblood of His only Son.

To see the atrociousness of sin, cast your eyes back 2,000 years to the excruciating violence, mockery, and torture perpetrated on the only human ever to live a perfect life without sin—Jesus Christ (Hebrews 4:15). Does God **want** the wicked to be punished for eternity in hell? Absolutely not! Scripture, in fact, speaks expressly to that point. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing

that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Paul wrote that God “desires all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel recorded the words of God concerning the wicked: “ ‘Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?’ says the Lord God, ‘and not that he should turn from his ways and live?’ ” (Ezekiel 18:23).

The answer to that rhetorical question is a resounding “No.” God does not **want** the wicked to die in their sin and be lost forever in eternal punishment. He will not, however, override the freewill of humans, and **force** them to accept His free gift of salvation. Nor will He contradict His own revealed Word in order to save those who have not obeyed the gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:8) by coming into contact with the saving blood of Christ (Ephesians 1:7). The Scriptures are crystal clear on these important points.

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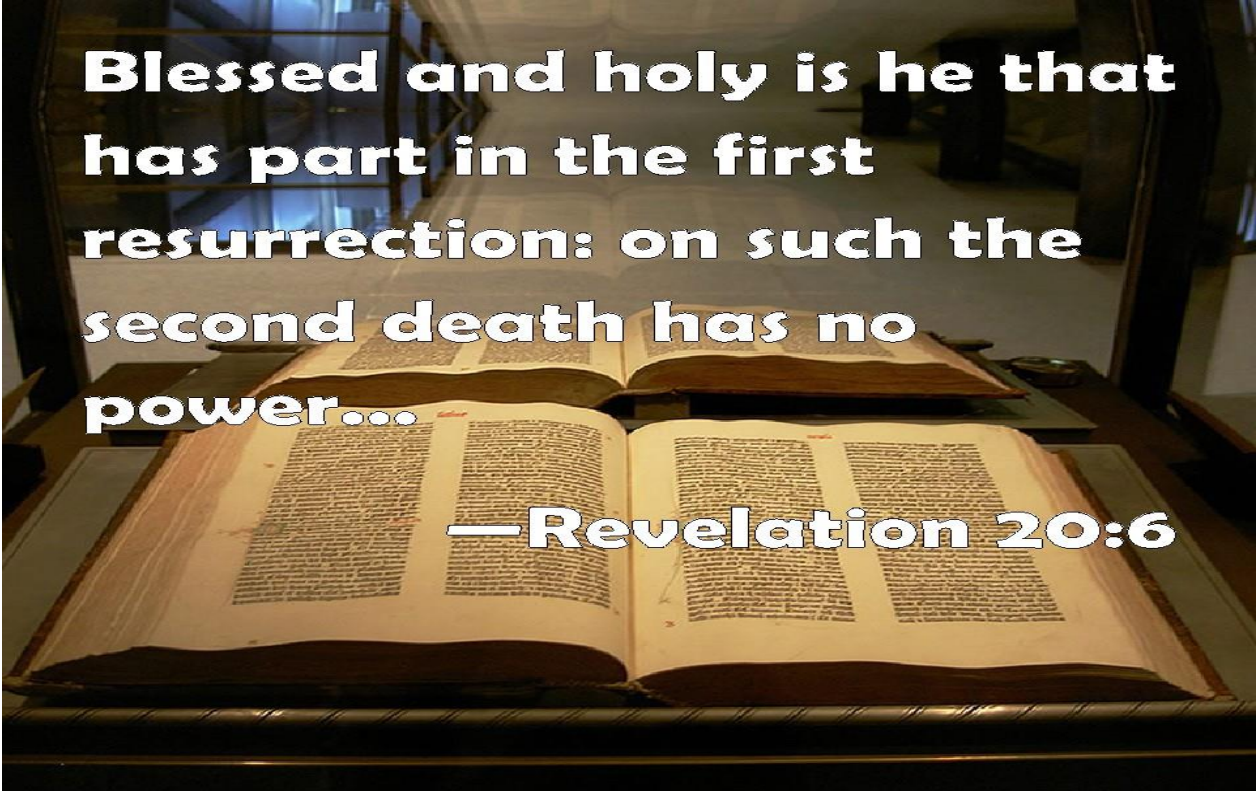
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An open Bible is shown from a slightly elevated perspective, resting on a dark surface. The pages are filled with dense, handwritten text in two columns. The lighting is warm, highlighting the texture of the paper and the ink of the script. Overlaid on the upper half of the image is a quote in white, bold, sans-serif font.

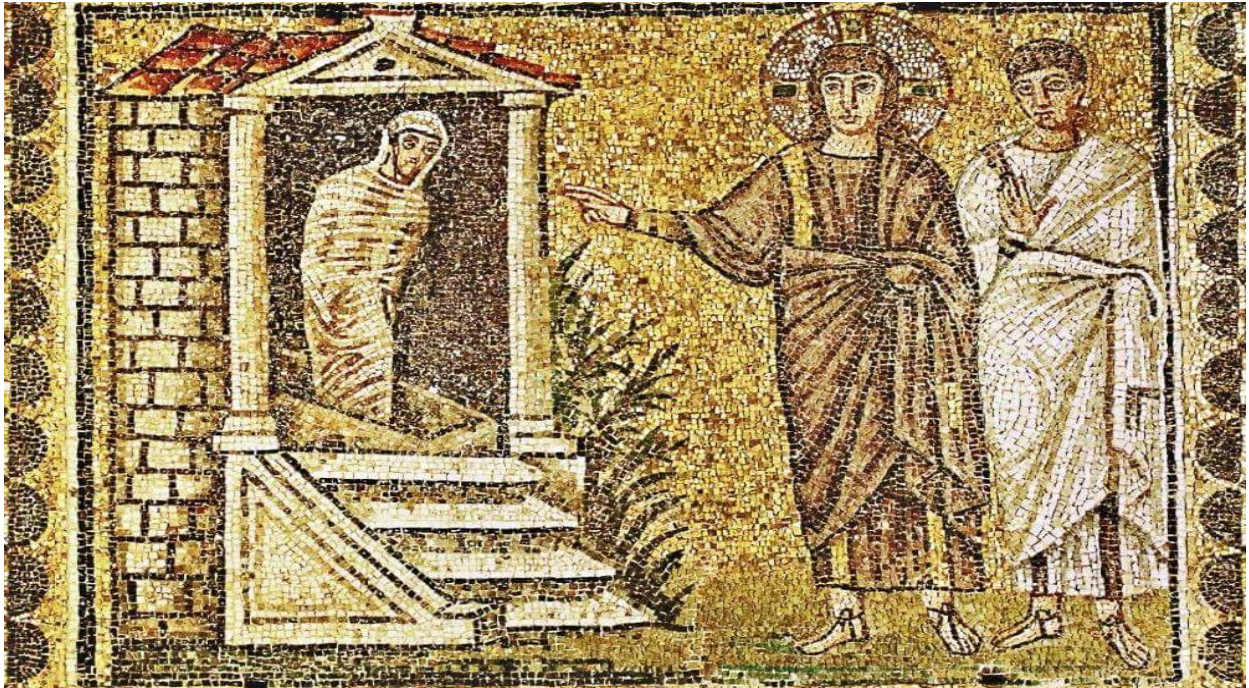
**Blessed and holy is he that
has part in the first
resurrection: on such the
second death has no
power...**

—Revelation 20:6

An open Bible is shown from a slightly elevated perspective, resting on a dark surface. The pages are filled with dense, handwritten text in two columns. The lighting is warm, highlighting the texture of the paper and the ink of the script. Overlaid on the upper half of the image is a quote in white, bold, sans-serif font.

**And death and hell were
cast into the lake of fire.
This is the second death.**

—Revelation 20:14



THE FIRST DEATH

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches

He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death

Revelation 2:11



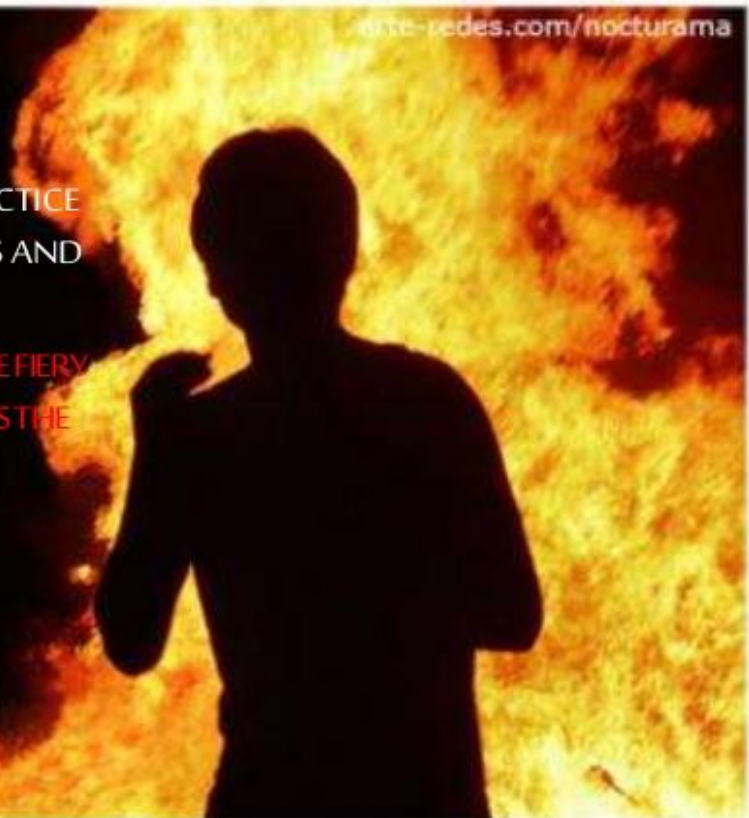
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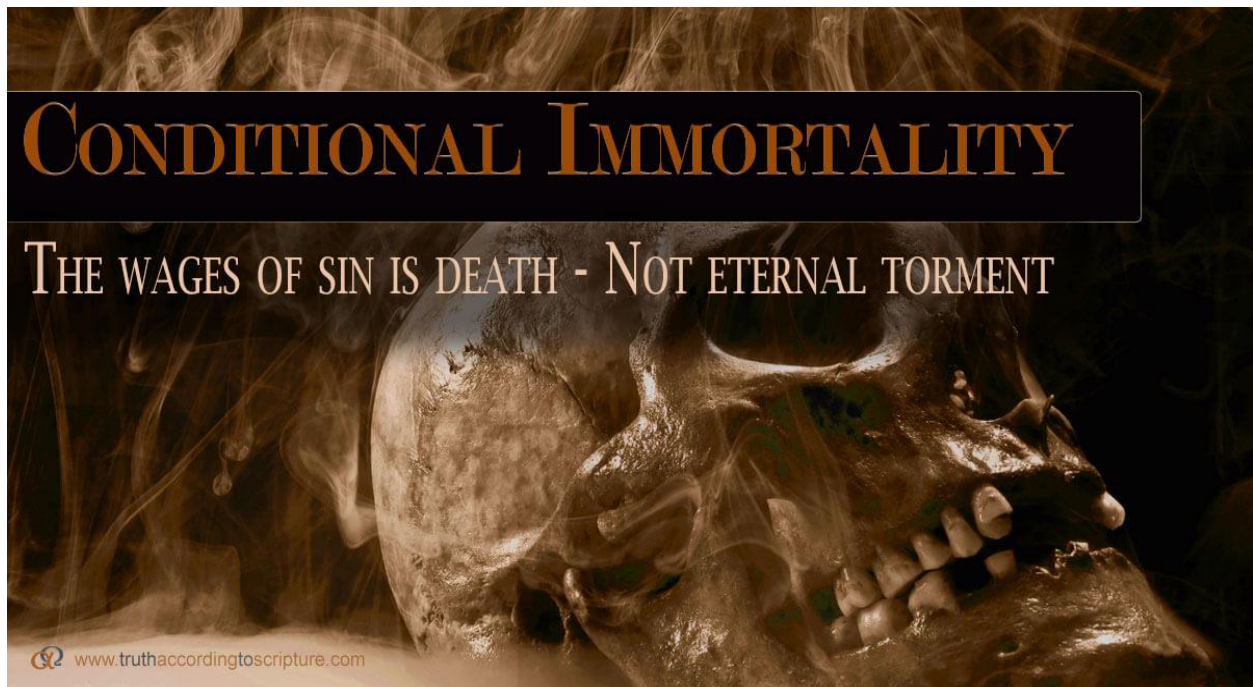
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MURDERERS, THE SEXUALLY
IMMORAL, THOSE WHO PRACTICE
MAGIC ARTS, THE IDOLATERS AND
ALL LIARS—

THEY WILL BE CONSIGNED TO THE FIERY
LAKE OF BURNING SULFUR. THIS IS THE
SECOND DEATH."



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False Ideas Regarding Death

by Wayne Jackson, Churches of Christ

Each day of our existence we are reminded of the grim reality of death. It haunts us. We know so little about it. In fact, we know almost nothing regarding this ultimate physical experience, except for what is revealed in the Bible. But the biblical information is limited, and so false notions about death permeate society's thinking. The following discussion represents a brief survey of some of these erroneous concepts.

Death Is an Illusion

Mary Baker Eddy, founder of "Christian Science," alleged that "there is no death" (n.d., 575). She contended that death is but an "illusion." How can a rational person subscribe to such a notion? We mention this more as a matter of oddity than anything else. Mrs. Eddy's tombstone is an eloquent argument against this absurd doctrine.

Death Is Nothing More than the Ultimate Biological Reality

To the atheist, death is no more than the cessation of earthly life. But death is much more than a mere biological phenomenon. Just as life is a gift from God ([Acts 17:25](#)), so death is a divine punishment for sin. This does not mean, of course, that every time someone dies such is the consequence of his or her personal sin. Even innocent babies die.

But the fact is, God warned grandfather Adam that death would be the result of disobedience ([Genesis 2:17](#)), and Paul reaffirmed this divine truth: "*Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned*" ([Romans 5:12](#)).

In a manner of speaking, Adam stood as the representative of the human race. When the first man violated Heaven's law, humanity was cursed with the penalty of having to suffer the consequence of that initial transgression — though not the personal guilt. The truth is, the entire creation has been blighted as a result of sin (cf. [Romans 8:20-22](#)).

Skeptics ridicule the biblical narrative regarding the commencement of death. It is viewed as an absurd myth that belongs in the Stone Age (Allen 1990, 108). But no infidel can explain why death occurs. If life had the ability to "jump-start" itself, as evolution's theory of spontaneous generation asserts, why can't it sustain itself within the individual? And is it not remarkable that evolution—supposedly a progressive, refining process—has not been able to eliminate death? If "natural selection" is working toward a higher evolutionary pinnacle, why doesn't science observe an increase in human vitality? Actually, just the reverse is true. The history of biological life is a record of degeneration, not regeneration (see Jackson 1994, 2-3). Why haven't we evolved immortality? Death is an argument that no materialist can answer!

Why hasn't modern medicine been able to make significant advancement in human longevity over the past three thousand years? In David's day, men lived to three-score and ten years—

perhaps with strength to four-score — on average (cf. [Psalm 90:10](#)). We have not improved these statistics with our twentieth-century medical technology. Some people are paying thousands of dollars to have their bodies frozen, in the hope that science will discover a cure for the cause of their demise. They aspire to be ultimately thawed in order to resume an eternal earthly existence. What futility! Mortality points strikingly to God.

Death Is Merely a Transition to a New Mode of Earthly Existence

In India, four hundred million Hindus believe in reincarnation. This is the idea that the human soul passes through a series of earthly phases, i.e., bodies human or animal—depending upon the particular ideology—before finally attaining release from this chain of events. In recent years, New Age zealots in this country (e.g., Shirley MacLaine) have popularized the idea of the transmigration of the soul. Recent polls suggest that more than half of the American public believes in the possibility of these experiences. However, with the exception of a few miraculous cases back in history (e.g., the resurrection of Lazarus), "it is appointed unto men once to die" ([Hebrews 9:27](#)). Each human being will give an account to the Lord for the deeds done in his "body"—not bodies ([II Corinthians 5:10](#)). Bible teaching contradicts the idea of reincarnation.

Death Is the Termination of Human Existence

Suicide has reached epidemic proportions in America. Self-murder is becoming an increasingly popular way to "end it all." But the fact is, death ends only one's earthly existence, not his personal existence. Biblical evidence makes it abundantly clear that at the point of death, the spirit of a person merely leaves the body ([James 2:26](#)). Separation, however, is not the same as extinction.

Scriptural information indicates that in death the soul of man enters the Hadean realm (cf. [Revelation 1:18](#); [20:13-14](#)). The narrative regarding the rich man and Lazarus forcefully reveals that death does not terminate human existence ([Luke 16:19-](#)

31). Too, Christ promised the penitent thief that the two of them would be together again in Paradise that very day, following their respective deaths ([Luke 23:43](#)). Every biblical passage which speaks of the coming judgment argues for the continuity of human existence.

Death Is a State of Non-conscious Existence

While the Bible speaks of death as a "sleep," that term is used only of the disposition of the body. Scripture knows nothing of "soul-sleeping." The part of man which "sleeps" in death is that which is deposited in the dust of the ground ([Daniel 12:2](#)). This involves only the body, not the soul. Again, both the rich man and Lazarus were conscious following their deaths ([Luke 16:19-31](#)). Moreover, those souls who had been martyred for the cause of Christ, as depicted in [Revelation 6:9-11](#), were obviously conscious as they cried out for divine justice on their behalf. (For further study, see [Are the Dead Conscious?](#)).

Death Involves the Continuity of Human Family Relationships

Our Mormon friends subscribe to the doctrine of "celestial" marriage. This is the notion that marriage is not for time only, it is for eternity as well — for those who reach the highest degree of exaltation (Smith 1952, section 132). But this dogma is woefully at variance with the testimony of Jesus. Certain Sadducees posed a problem for the Lord: A woman had been married successively to seven brothers during her lifetime. Whose wife would she thus be in the resurrection? Christ responded: "You do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as angels in heaven" ([Matthew 22:29-30](#)). The marriage relationship does not obtain in heaven.

There Is No Recognition after Death

Some allege that there will not be any remembrance of earthly relationships in heaven. Supposedly, heaven's citizens could not be happy with the awareness that unredeemed loved ones are not there. However, the Bible presents solid evidence that

there will be recognition in the celestial region. The Old Testament patriarchs fully expected to be reunited with their redeemed loved ones ([Genesis 25:8; 37:35; II Samuel 12:23](#)). The Lord promised that we will fellowship with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven ([Matthew 8:11](#)). Will one know when that promise is realized? If so, then the patriarchs will be recognized. And if we will know them, it is certain they will know each other! I have discussed this topic at greater length elsewhere (Jackson 1987, 1-3).

Death Constitutes a Period of Probation and Preparation

A number of religious groups advocate concepts which suggest the possibility of preparation for eternity after death. Roman Catholicism, for example, has the doctrine of purgatory—the place where souls are supposedly purged of sin before they enter heaven. Mormonism advocates the notion of "baptism for the dead." Charles T. Russell, founder of the "Jehovah's Witnesses," argued that salvation is not "confined to the present life" (1912, 9ff). But there is no truth in these vain hopes.

After death, there is only the prospect of judgment — not a further opportunity for obedience ([Hebrews 9:27](#)). In the parable of the virgins, Jesus taught that in whatever condition one goes to "sleep," i.e., dies, in exactly that same state he will meet the bridegroom ([Matthew 25:1-13](#)). Moreover, there is a permanent, impassible chasm between the place of punishment and that of reward, and no man can cross it ([Luke 16:26](#)). There is no post-mortem plan of salvation. Now is the day of redemption ([II Corinthians 6:2](#)).

It Is Possible to Communicate with the Dead

According to recent surveys, more than half of all Americans believe they have been in contact with someone who has died. But the Bible teaches that the dead have no knowledge at all as to what is transpiring upon this earth ([Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6](#); cf. [Isaiah 63:16](#)). If the rich man of Luke 16 could have communicated with his brothers on earth, he surely would have

done so ([Luke 16:27-31](#))<, but he was powerless to reach them. The fact of the matter is, the Scriptures condemn even an attempt to contact the dead (cf. [Deuteronomy 18:10-12](#); [Leviticus 19:31](#); [20:6, 27](#)).

Death Is the Final and Permanent State of the Body

The ancient Sadducees denied the ultimate resurrection of the human body ([Matthew 22:23](#)). Their modern counterparts, the advocates of "realized eschatology," are similarly deceived. Max King alleges that the resurrection discussed in 1 Corinthians 15 is merely a "resurrection" of the Christian cause from a period of intense Jewish persecution, and that such resurrection was fulfilled in A.D. 70 with the fall of Judaism (1987, 429ff). A more perverted concept cannot be imagined.

The Bible affirms that our resurrection from the dead on the "last day" (cf. [John 11:24](#)) will be analogous to the Lord's bodily resurrection (see [I Corinthians 15:20](#); cf. [Philippians 3:20](#)). Actually, Paul puts the denial of a future bodily resurrection in the same category as a repudiation of the resurrection of Christ himself ([I Corinthians 15:13-16](#)). What are the consequences of proclaiming such a heresy?

How tragic that there are so many false ideas regarding death. It is incumbent upon the serious Bible student to study the sacred Scriptures so that he does not fall into any of these fallacious views.

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“The Avenging of the Apostles & Prophets”

(1985) by Arthur M. Ogden, pgs. 132,133 & 365:

“He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death. The **second death** is the eternal separation that shall take place at the end of time when the wicked are cast into the lake of fire and brimstone (Revelation 20: 14; 21: 8). Since the second death pertains only to the hereafter, it must be contrasted with **the overcomer** obtaining the **ultimate** victory. Overcomers are exempt from the second death. Observe also that only those who have part in **the first resurrection** are exempt from **the second death** (Revelation 20: 5 – 6). This being the case, the first resurrection is the victorious resurrection of the soul in paradise where the soul continues to live and reign with Christ until the end of time. In this respect, we might further add that, if there is a second death, there must be a first, and if there is a first resurrection there must be a second. The overcomers were not promised release from the second death; Hebrews 9: 27 - ‘It is appointed unto man once to die’. It is from this death that the faithful Christian seeks to be raised by **the first resurrection** to continue his life with Christ as a soul in paradise (Rev. 5,6; 2nd Corinthians 5: 8; Philippians 1: 23). Those who fail to overcome continue to be tormented in death (Revelation 16: 24), having no part in the first resurrection, where they shall remain until the second or bodily resurrection when they shall be raised to appear before God in [final] judgment and to be assigned their part in the lake of fire and brimstone which is **the second death.**”

The Second Death — Separation or Annihilation?

By Wayne Jackson, Churches of Christ

There appears to be a growing tendency by a minority element associated with “Christendom” to contend that the fate of the wicked will be utter annihilation (non-existence), as opposed to a conscious suffering in an eternal hell. This departure from biblical truth has been gradual but steady.

In his book, **Repent or Perish** (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1990), noted theologian John Gerstner has a chapter entitled, “The Conservative Revolt Against Hell” (pp. 29-65). Therein, he shows how the earlier champions of “neo-orthodoxy” (e.g., Bultmann and Tillich) rejected the scriptural doctrine of hell, and that the influence of those leaders has had a “trickle-down” effect on numerous others in varying degrees. Some have opted for the dogma of “universalism” (the idea that *all mankind* will be saved ultimately); others argue for the “extinction” theory (the notion that the lost will finally cease to exist). Each group claims biblical support for its ideology.

Rarely, until relatively recent times, has this error made its way into the bosom of genuine Christianity. In 1982, however, Edward Fudge, a Texas preacher-turned-lawyer, produced his book, **The Fire That Consumes** (Houston: Providential Press). It attempted to prove that hell will involve the total extinction of the condemned. Since then, others have joined the Fudge chorus, singing the praises of “annihilation.” The late Homer Hailey, just before his death at the age of 97, produced a small work advocating the extermination doctrine. F. LaGard Smith of Lipscomb University (Nashville, Tennessee) has asserted the “extinction” position (**After Life**, Nashville: Cotswold, 2003).

Recently, Star Publications (Fort Worth, TX) published a small work titled, **Immortality: Only In Christ** (2002). In this brief presentation, the author vigorously contends that the “second death” mentioned in the book

of Revelation constitutes the event “in which [wicked] man is annihilated” (p. 44), though the author confesses that he does not know how long the annihilation process will take (p. 37).

In a brief article, such as this one, we cannot respond to the multiple errors that burden this anti-biblical theory. We will, however, comment upon the contention that “the second death” is a biblical expression for the *extermination* of the condemned.

Death

The concept of “death,” or the state of being “dead,” is a prevailing theme in the New Testament. These terms are found collectively some 250 times. Though the use of the words may vary, depending upon the context, the underlying sense of “death” is that of “separation” —not “annihilation.”

Physical Death

The physical death process involves the separation of the human spirit or soul from the physical body. The death of Rachel, Jacob’s wife, was described as her “soul” departing from her “body” (Gen. 35:18). At the point of death, the body returns to the dust, but the spirit returns to God (Eccl. 12:6-7) —who will deal with it appropriately (Gen. 18:25).

The death of the body is biblically defined by the departure of the spirit (Jas. 2:26). Scholars have noted that for the “vast mass of mankind” death has never been viewed as nonexistence (J.S. Clemens, **Hastings Dictionary of the Bible**, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989, p. 181).

Spiritual Death

Spiritual death is the condition of being alienated from Jehovah. Since sin separates a person from God (Isa. 59:1-2), the state of being estranged from the Creator is depicted metaphorically as the person being dead. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, that very “day” they died (Gen. 2:17; cf. 3:8,23), i.e., they were separated from fellowship with the Lord (though other implications likely are involved as well; see 3:19).

Prior to their conversion, the Ephesian saints had been spiritually “dead” (Eph. 2:1), i.e., alienated from the Lord (2:12-13). It is possible to be “dead” spiritually while alive physically. Paul declared that the widow who devotes herself to pleasure is “dead,” even though she is alive (1 Tim. 5:6). Christ wrote a letter to the church in Sardis wherein he described a significant portion of these disciples as “dead” (Rev. 3:1), that is they had drifted from Christian fidelity.

The “Second Death”

The *second death* is an ultimate and eternal separation from God. The expression is found four times in the book of Revelation (2:11; 20:6,14; 21:8). J.H. Thayer defined the “second death” as “the miserable state of the wicked dead in hell” (**Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament**, Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1958, p. 283).

This condition is characterized as the *second* death because it follows physical death; it is designated as *death* because it is the terminal *separation* from the Lord (Mt. 7:23; 25:41; 2 Thes. 1:9). Try substituting the term “annihilation” for “death” in the Revelation passages and see what sort of sense it makes, e.g., “the second annihilation.” The very expression represents an absurdity. There is absolutely no biblical evidence that “hell” will involve the extermination of either Satan, evil angels, or wicked humans (Mt. 25:41,46; Rev. 14:9-11; 20:10).

Conclusion

The dogma of annihilation is not an innocent view with harmless consequences. It is a concept that undermines the full force of that fearful warning of which the Almighty God would have men be aware. There is many a rebel who would gladly indulge himself in a lifetime of sin for an eternal nothingness.

Does Death Imply Annihilation?

by [Kyle Butt, M.Div., Churches of Christ](#)

In the New Testament, the fires of hell are described as the “second death.” The picture painted in Revelation 20 tells of a burning lake of fire in which the devil and all his cohorts will be cast, including wicked humans whose names are not written in the Book of Life. Verse 14 of chapter 20 declares: “Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.” The inspired writer James remarked that if one of the Christians turns away from Christ, and someone turns the wayward brother back, he will “save a soul from death” (James 5:20). James’ statement speaks to the fact that the sinning soul is destined for spiritual death. In John 6, Jesus described Himself as the bread that came down from heaven. Those who eat this “living” bread will “live forever” and not die (John 6:48-51,58). All who will not eat this living bread will die. Jesus’ comments here clearly refer to the second death in hell.

WHAT DOES THE WORD “DEATH” MEAN?

All those involved in the debate about afterlife issues understand that hell is called the second death, and that a person’s soul is said to die in hell. But what does the word **death** actually mean? Those who advocate annihilationism put forth the idea that the word **death** must mean “to go out of existence.” Along these lines, F. LaGard Smith wrote:

Those whose names are found written in the book [of life—KB] will inherit life with God forever. For those whose names are missing, there is no lasting life whatsoever, tormented or otherwise. “Only death...[t]he second and final death....” As the greater weight of scriptural evidence indicates, the only option is eternal life versus eternal death. Blessed existence versus non-existence (2003, pp. 189,190).

From statements peppered throughout his book, and especially from the final two parallel sentences in this quotation, it is obvious that Smith defines the word **death** as nonexistence.

In truth, however, the concept of death as used in the Bible does not mean nonexistence; rather, it means “separation.” In regard to physical death, it refers to the separation of the soul from the physical body. In regard to spiritual death, it connotes separation of the soul from God.

The *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon* gives the following primary definition of the Greek word that is translated “death” (*thanatos*): “(1) the death of the body (1a) that separation (whether natural or violent) of the soul and the body by which life on earth is ended” (“Thanatos:2505,” 1999). That physical death is viewed in the Bible as separation is evident from several scriptures. The inspired writer James offered the clearest picture of this idea of death when he wrote: “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26). According to James, faith that is separated from works is a dead faith in the same way that a body which is separated from the soul is a dead body. Notice

that a body separated from a soul is not a nonexistent body. On the contrary, the body still exists and lies lifeless, but is separated from the soul and thus presumed dead.

The narrative describing Rachel's death in Genesis provides further evidence that the Bible depicts physical death as the separation of the soul from the body. As Rachel was giving birth to Benjamin, her labor became so intense that her life was in danger. The text reads: "Now it came to pass, when she was in hard labor, that the midwife said to her, 'Do not fear; you will have this son also.' And so it was, as **her soul was departing** (for she **died**), that she called his name Ben-Oni; but his father called him Benjamin. So Rachel **died** and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)" (Genesis 35:17-19, emp. added). Rachel's death occurred when her soul departed, leaving her physical body. Her body continued to exist for some time and was buried, but it was recognized as a **dead** body as soon as it was separated from Rachel's soul, not when the body eventually decayed in the tomb. Here again, the biblical picture of death revolves around the concept of separation, rather than nonexistence.

Luke 8 contains additional evidence that separation of the soul and physical body is the meaning of physical death. Jairus came to Jesus pleading for the life of his sick daughter. While en route to the house, someone came from Jairus' house explaining that the girl had already died. Jesus encouraged Jairus not to doubt, and continued toward the house. Arriving at the ruler's house, Jesus sent everyone out except Peter, James, John, and the parents of the child. He approached the child's dead body, took her hand and said, "Little girl, arise." Immediately after this comment, the text states: "Then her spirit returned, and she arose immediately" (Luke 8:40-55). Note that both the girl's body and her spirit existed at the time Jesus entered the room. Her body, however, was dead because her spirit had departed from it. When her spirit **returned** to her body, it was made alive again. Here again, the biblical text presents the idea that the concept of death is not one of nonexistence, but of separation.

John 19:30 provides another example that establishes physical death as separation of the soul and body. In the final moments of Christ's life during the crucifixion, after all of the prophecies had been fulfilled, Christ cried, "It is finished." Immediately following this last cry, the Lord bowed His head, and "He gave up His Spirit." At this point, when His soul departed from His body, He (i.e., His body) was dead. Joseph and Nicodemus buried the dead (still existent) body of Christ, while the soul of Christ had **departed**.

Even after looking at these biblical examples, some annihilationists might continue to argue that physical death still means "nonexistence," because those who die no longer exist in the physical world. But notice what the Bible describes as dead—the body. James says that "the body without the spirit is dead." The body continues to exist for some time, but is said to be **dead** immediately when the soul leaves it. And the spirit is **not** said to be "dead."

While the idea that physical death is defined by separation and not nonexistence is clear from the Bible, the idea that spiritual death is defined by a soul's separation from God and not by a soul's nonexistence is even more clearly set forth in Scripture. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he wrote: "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world.... But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ..." (Ephesians 2:1-2,4-5). When the Ephesians committed sins in their unsaved condition, they were described as "dead." Obviously, however, they were not nonexistent. They were separated from God by those sins. In fact, verse 12 of the same chapter says that during their time of sinfulness, they were "without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." The Ephesians were spiritually dead in their sins. This spiritual death was a separation from God, Christ, and hope, yet it was not

a state of nonexistence. In chapter four of the same epistle, Paul told the brethren that they should “no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God” (Ephesians 4:17-18). Those sinful Gentiles described here were in the same state of spiritual death as the Ephesians were before they became Christians. That death was an alienation (or separation) from the life of God, yet, here again, it was not a state of nonexistence.

The inspired Paul also wrote to Christians in Colossi, declaring, “And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (Colossians 2:13). Paul obviously did not mean that the Colossians had been physically dead in their sins. Neither did he intend to assert the nonsensical idea that at one time, while they were sinning, their souls were in a state of nonexistence. On the contrary, their souls existed, but were separated from God because of their sins, and thus they were labeled as dead. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah explained this principle clearly when he wrote: “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor his ear heavy, that it cannot hear, but your iniquities have **separated** you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:1-2, emp. added).

Paul presents very clearly in 1 Timothy 5:6 the idea that spiritual death is separation from God, not nonexistence. In this chapter, Paul instructed the young Timothy about which widows should receive assistance from the church treasury. In his discussion, Paul mentioned widows who trusted in God and continued in prayer. He contrasted those widows with one who “lives in pleasure” or indulgence of the flesh. Concerning such a widow, he said: “But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives.” As is the case throughout the New Testament, individuals who live in sin are considered spiritually dead. They are called dead by the Holy Spirit because they have separated themselves from God by their sin. The sinning widow continued to exist physically, and her soul continued to exist, yet she was called dead. The biblical picture of spiritual death is not one of nonexistence, but one of a miserable existence separated from God.

The antithesis of death is “life” (*zoe*). As we have seen from numerous passages, one way that the word “**life**” is used in the Bible is to describe the state in which the physical body is joined or connected to the soul of a person. Furthermore, spiritual **life**, the opposite of spiritual **death**, is used in the New Testament to describe the condition in which a separated soul is brought back to, and joined with, its Creator. Paul described this condition when he wrote: “And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, **yet now He has reconciled** in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and irreproachable in His sight” (Colossians 1:21-22). Sin alienates one from God, and leads a person into spiritual death. God, through Christ, allows those dead, separated souls to be cleansed of that sin and have spiritual life, which reconciles them to Him. That is why John wrote: “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:12).

It is evident, then, from a close look at the Scriptures that the word “**death**” does not mean a state of nonexistence, either in the physical realm or the spiritual realm. The Bible describes bodies that were dead, yet still very much in existence. The inspired record describes individuals who were spiritually dead, yet existing in that dead condition nonetheless. The misguided ploy to define “the second death” (Revelation 20:6,14; 21:8) as a state of nonexistence is simply an attempt to get around the actual meaning of the biblical text. The second death describes nothing more or less than the total separation of wicked, unsaved souls from the God Who created them. Of all the wicked who will say to the Lord “in that day” (i.e., the Judgment Day), “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?” (Matthew 7:22), Jesus, the righteous

Judge (John 5:22; 2 Timothy 4:8), will sentence them to their second death, declaring, "I never knew you; **depart from Me**, you who practice lawlessness!" (Matthew 7:23, emp. added). Of those wicked who neglect the needy, He will say, "**Depart from Me**, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41, emp. added). "Eternal destruction" awaits those who are cast away "**from** the presence of the Lord and **from** the glory of His power" (2 Thessalonians 1:9, emp. added). As both Jesus and the apostle Paul declared, the second death is not annihilation, but eternal separation "from the presence of the Lord." Death in no way implies a state of nonexistence.

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The Resurrection of the Wicked

By Wayne Jackson, Churches of Christ



The Pharisees constituted the “straitest” sect of the Jewish religion in the time of Christ (Acts 26:5), but they were not without their own theological flaws. For one thing, they denied that the wicked dead would be raised from the grave.

In his discussion of the Pharisees, the Jewish historian Josephus declared that the Pharisees “believe that souls have an immortal vigor in them,” and that there will be eternal rewards and punishments for both the obedient and disobedient, corresponding to how one has lived upon the earth — whether “virtuously or viciously.” But only the righteous “shall have the power to revive and live again,” i.e., be raised from the dead (*Antiquities* 18.1.3).

The Sadducees, of course, denied the resurrection of the body outright (Mt. 22:23; Acts 23:8).

Biblical Evidence

To the contrary, the scriptures teach there shall be a resurrection of both classes. Five examples of testimony should be sufficient to make the point.

Daniel's Prophecy

Daniel the prophet wrote: "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2).

The term "sleep" has to do with the disposition of the body (not the soul) during the state of death. In this case, both those destined to "everlasting life," and those who will suffer "shame and everlasting contempt," are to "awake."

The significance of "awake" clearly is that of a resurrection of the body. There is no way this passage can be taken seriously and one fail to acknowledge there will be a general resurrection of both the faithful and the unfaithful.

Testimony of Christ

Christ himself declared:

"Marvel not at this: for the hour comes, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment [damnation—KJV]" (Jn. 5:28-29).

The Savior foretells a universal resurrection.

All are to be raised at the same hour, and that event specifically will involve those who enter into life, as well as those who are to encounter judgment, signifying "the last judgment, the damnation of the wicked" (Thayer, 362).

This is eternal estrangement from the Creator.

Add to this the fact that Christ warned:

“And be not afraid of them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mt. 10:28).

A significant point about this passage, from our current perspective, is the fact that Christ speaks of “hell” (**gehenna**) as the eternal abode of the wicked with its “unquenchable fire.”

In that connection, the Lord refers to the condemned as having both body and soul, along with hands, feet, and eyes (Mk. 9:43-48).

Paul’s Defense of the Gospel

In a defense of the Christian Way before certain Jewish dignitaries, Paul set from this proposition:

“But this I confess unto you, that after the Way which they call a sect, so serve I the God of our fathers, believing all things which are according to the law, and which are written in the prophets; having hope toward God, which these also themselves look for, that there shall be a resurrection both of the just and unjust” (Acts 24:14-15).

Again, it is perfectly transparent that the “unjust” will be resurrected from the grave.

John’s Final Message of Hope

In the twentieth chapter of Revelation there is a record of John’s vision on Patmos. He sweeps forward to the day of Judgment. In connection with that event, the apostle writes that

“[T]he sea gave up the dead that were in it; and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works” (Rev. 20:13).

The distinction drawn between “death” and “Hades” reveals that both the bodies and souls of every person were in view.

The Righteous are Emphasized

Though the resurrection of the lost is obviously a solid teaching of the scriptures, the Bible student must admit that there is far less emphasis on the raising of the damned than there is on the resurrection of the saved.

For example, the resurrection of God's faithful people is treated in one entire chapter, 1 Corinthians 15, with considerable supplementation as well in 1 Thessalonians 4:13ff.

But this imbalance of material is actually to be expected.

The entire thrust of the Bible is one emphasizing the joy, peace, contentment, and everlasting reward in serving the Creator. The fate of human rebels is but a tragic appendage to the otherwise beautiful purpose of a loving God.

The Essence of a Resurrection

There is one important observation to be made before proceeding further. The term "resurrection" is translated from the Greek word **anastasis**. It is derived from two roots — **ana**, "up," and **histemi**, "to cause to stand."

A resurrection, therefore, is the rising up of that which has been laid down. The body that dies and is laid to rest (or burned, drowned, etc.) will be the same body in identity that comes forth again.

Of course the resurrected body will be of a different essence, as Paul indicates in 1 Corinthians 15:42ff — though in that context he particularly focuses on the resurrection of the believer's body.

Two points are important to keep in mind. First, each body will retain its own individuality ("each seed a body of its own" — 1 Cor. 15:38).

Second, there will be an identity continuum between the old body and the new body. Otherwise, the term "resurrection" becomes meaningless.

The thrust of this article is to consider the resurrection of the doomed.

The Resurrected Body of the Wicked

Though it certainly is not a pressing issue, it is a matter of some interest as to the nature of the bodies of those to be raised from the dead to spend eternity — body and soul — in hell.

Let us consider this matter briefly, since the scriptures teach that the resurrected body (of both saved and lost) will bear a just portion of the consequence of the life one has lived upon the earth.

While the Bible does not address this matter in considerable detail, there are descriptions in certain texts that allow a degree of respectful speculation — if pursued in moderation.

Shame and Contempt

It is in connection with the resurrection of the body that the wicked are said to suffer “shame” and “everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2). Exactly what this effect will be, one cannot say precisely. It does seem, however, at least to include the fate of the body.

The Hebrew term for “shame” is **harapot**, signifying “reproaches,” in the sense of being victim of the reproaches of others.

The word “contempt” suggests the idea of, “to repel from oneself,” thus “something abhorrent” (see: Brown, *et al.*, 357, 201; Wood, 318).

These terms do not reflect the notion of attractive creatures! There will be no “handsome hunks” or “glamour girls” in hell. The text paints a nightmare sort of picture. Dante’s *Inferno* does not do justice to the horrid environment.

Ruined or Destroyed

In Matthew 10:28 Christ spoke of both body and soul being “destroyed” in hell. “Destroyed” is from the term **apollumi**, an intensified verbal form hinting of “utter destruction.”

Annihilationists interpret this as meaning “going out of existence,” but the word does not imply that, as the consultation of a Greek concordance will

reveal. Homer employed the term of a city demolished or laid waste (*Iliad* 5.648).

In the New Testament the term might be used of old, cracked wineskins (Mt. 9:17), fading beauty (Jas. 1:11), spoiled food (Jn. 6:27), or a lost sheep (Lk. 15:4).

“The idea is not extinction but ruin, loss, not of being, but of well-being” (Vine, 211).

The term clearly seems to indicate that the body of the wicked will reflect a **ruined condition**. The beauty of its earthly design is egregiously diminished, if not extinguished altogether. There is no bodily “redemption” (Rom. 8:23) for the rogue!

One can only imagine how horrible the scenes of hell could be.

Painful

The resurrected bodies of the unrighteous will be susceptible to pain, together with whatever “conscience” and “memory” torments they will experience (cf. Lk. 16:27-28).

The Worm Doesn’t Die

By means of a dramatic metaphor, Jesus describes the punishment of hell as a condition “where their worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched” (Mk. 9:48). The term “worm” (**skolex**) denoted that type of worm that preys on dead bodies (Thayer, 580).

In addition, the present tense form of the verb “die” together with the negative “not” demonstrate that the gnawing anguish will neither decrease nor end.

The imagery unquestionably brings the agony of the doomed person’s resurrected body into sharp focus.

Contrasted With the Righteous

There also are certain conclusions to be drawn in the contrasts between the resurrected just and the unjust. For example, Daniel wrote:

“And they that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever” (Dan. 12:3).

To this Jesus adds:

“Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Mt. 13:43).

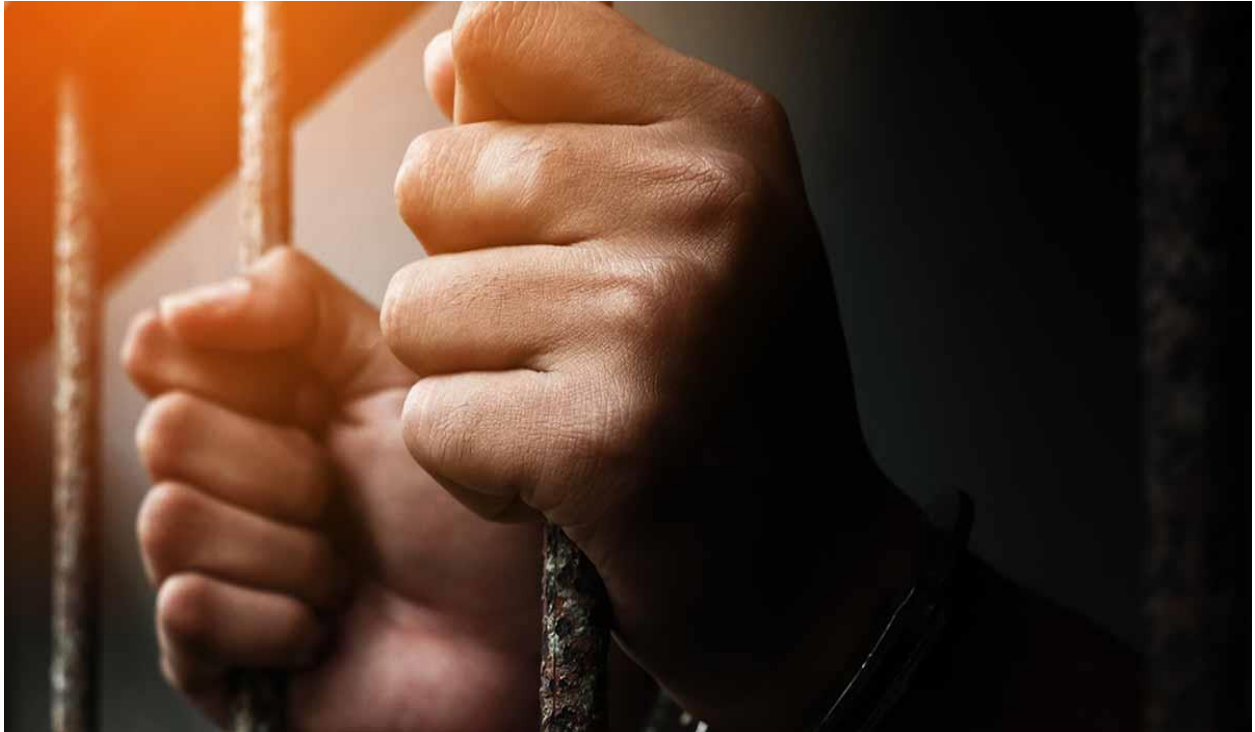
The resplendent bodies of the godly will stand in bold contrast to the ominously dark countenances of the wretched. For the ungodly there will be no “celestial” or “glorified” body (1 Cor. 15:40, 43). And, as noted already, there will be no body “redemption” as affirmed by Paul on behalf of the godly (Rom. 8:23).

How forlorn the lost will be as they contemplate their disenfranchised state, when Christ raises his people to

“fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subject all things unto himself” (Phil. 3:21).

The Wages of Sin and the Free Gift of God

By Wayne Jackson, Churches of Christ



It is a text of dual emphases. The one is darkly foreboding, the other magnificently exhilarating. Paul wrote:

For the wages of sin is death; but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6:23).

The Roman Letter

It cannot be determined exactly when the church in Rome was established. Perhaps those Jews and proselytes who were present in Jerusalem on Pentecost (Acts 2:10) migrated back to the Imperial City and planted the cause of Jesus. By the time Paul penned the epistle to the Romans (perhaps a quarter of a century later), the glowing reputation of this church was known throughout the empire (Romans 1:8).

The letter is doctrinal (chapters 1-11), practical (chapters 12-15) and personal (chapter 16).

Preliminary to a consideration of the text soliciting our special focus, we should reflect upon the material that prepares the way for its presentation. Consider the gist of the first six chapters of this inspired document:

- **Chapter 1:** An indictment of the obtuse and wicked Gentile world is issued.
- **Chapter 2:** A complaint is made against the inconsistent Jews.
- **Chapter 3:** All are victims of sin, but there is a plan for salvation through Christ.
- **Chapter 4:** Salvation is not achieved through a graceless system of law.
- **Chapter 5:** The universal consequence of sin is death.
- **Chapter 6:** God's saving plan is accessed by means of obedient faith.

A survey of these chapters will lay the foundation for understanding 6:23.

Sin Defined

There are three significant terms in the initial phrase of the text that must be explored. These are: "sin," "wages," and "death."

Missing the Mark is Sin.

Sin is represented by various biblical expressions in both Testaments of the Bible. The word itself derives from original terms (Hebrew, *hata'*; Greek, *hamartano*), that portray the image of missing a mark or target (cf. Judg. 20:16; Rom. 3:23).

These words imply several things. There is a target or **standard** of spiritual and moral excellence at which one must aim. As fallible human beings, we frequently **miss the standard**, either purposely or through ignorance (cf. Heb. 9:7, ASVfn). In either case, we sin, and sin **condemns** even if it is **only one sin** (Jas. 1:15; note the definite article [ASV]).

Rebellion is Sin.

A rebellious temperament is the root of many a sin. The prophet Samuel declared, “Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as idolatry and teraphim” (1 Sam. 15:23).

Jeremiah once described the disposition of wayward Israel as follows: “They are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, who **refused to hear** my words” (Jer. 11:10).

One cannot but be reminded of the hardened Jews whom Stephen encountered, and who, rather than reverently consider his teaching, “stopped their ears,” then murdered God’s messenger (Acts 7:57-59).

Neglect is Sin.

Sin is more than simply doing wrong. It also embraces the idea of **purposefully neglecting** one’s duty to the Creator. James expressed it in this fashion: “He who knows to do good, and does not do it, to him it is sin” (Jas. 4:17).

One scholar has observed that those here in view “cannot take refuge in the plea that they have done nothing positively wrong; as Scripture makes abundantly clear, sins of **omission** are as real and serious as sins of **commission**” (Moo 1985, 158).

So many are known to whine, “I know I should, but I’m just weak.” The rationalization of weakness will not produce forgiveness. There must be an appropriate seeking of pardon and a serious attempt to change one’s conduct.

Presumption is Sin.

David once petitioned the Lord: “Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be upright, and I shall be clear from great transgression” (Psa. 19:13). Several things may be said regarding this sobering text.

First, the presumptuous sin appears to be in contrast to the hidden faults mentioned just previously. The former are sins committed in ignorance. Who could possibly keep up with the slips he makes unawares? These are sins nonetheless and require forgiveness.

Second, presumptuous sins are of a different sort. The original Hebrew term is undergirded by such ideas as the haughty attitude of one who is insolent and who scorns the sovereignty and authority of God (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1981, 267).

A New Testament word that illustrates this arrogant disposition is **ethelothreskeia**, a compound term from **ethelo** (“will”) and **threskeia** (“worship”), hence is rendered “will-worship” (Col. 2:23). It is a **self-initiated** action reflected in a mode of worship that either is “forbidden or unbidden” (Vine 1991, 881).

J. H. Thayer depicted it as “worship which one devises and prescribes for himself, contrary to the nature of the faith which ought to be directed by Christ” (1958, 168).

Violating the Conscience is Sin

Paul admonishes that when a Christian engages a certain action, he must “be fully assured in his own mind” (Rom. 14:5) that what he is doing does not violate his own conscience.

The conscience is a sensitive instrument and is a person’s most valuable endowment in nudging him in the proper direction as he grows in knowledge. The conscience is not the final arbiter of right and wrong (Prov. 14:12). It must be educated. Yet, in its proper place, it is a prized gift from God, and the Christian must guard against it becoming hardened (cf. Eph. 4:19; 1 Tim. 4:2).

This is why, at the conclusion of the chapter, Paul cautions that any practice that violates of one’s conscience is sin, even in religiously or ethically neutral matters. One must be able (in the case of eating meat) to eat or drink “of faith,” i.e., with a clear conscience (Rom. 14:23).

Here is an important point. A clear conscience does not make a wrong act right, but a violated conscience can make a right act (in its basic nature) **wrong** for that individual.

The Wages of Sin

The Greek term **opsonion** is found only four times in the New Testament. Twice it is employed of a soldier's pay (Lk. 3:14; 1 Cor. 9:7), once of the support Paul received from certain churches—a support that should have come from Corinth, but didn't (2 Cor. 11:8)—and, finally, in a figurative sense for the **consequence** of sin (Rom. 6:23).

The word suggests the idea of that which one has **earned**. Thus, morally it **must be paid** if justice is to prevail. It hints that there is a very high price tag attached to sin.

The text under consideration has a narrow focus, namely the “wages” of sin earned by the human family as the result of sin's introduction into earth's environment by our original parents.

Before we concentrate on that, however, it is worth mentioning that the cost of rebellion against God has had even a broader range of consequence.

- Angels that rebelled against their Creator paid a horrible price (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6; Heb. 2:16).
- The “whole creation” labors under the degenerative process that leads to death (Rom. 8:20-22; Heb. 1:10-12).
- The earth itself especially bears the scars of sin's ravaging blows—in the curse of Eden and the aftermath of the global deluge of Noah's day (Gen. 3:17-19; 6-9; 2 Pet. 3:5-6).

Our point of emphasis, however, is primarily upon the effect of sin on those creatures who were made in Jehovah's spiritual image (Gen. 1:26-27). Our text in Romans employs a solitary term—“death.” **Death!**

Death: The Grim Reaper

In biblical parlance, “death” always conveys some absolutely inflexible truths:

- Death is never associated with the concept of **non-existence**.
- Death is never viewed as a strictly **natural** biological process. It is portrayed as the **penalty** for sin.
- Death always carries the idea of a **separation**—whether in a physical sense or a spiritual sense.

Physical Death

Normal physical death may be described in two ways.

First, it is the cessation of the body’s biological processes as a result of progressive degeneration (Jn. 11:14, 39; Acts 2:27; 2 Cor. 4:16; 5:1).

Second, death signals that the spirit, or soul, has left the human body. The body apart from the spirit is dead (Jas. 2:26; cf. Acts 9:39; 2 Pet. 1:14).

Physical death is the consequence of humanity’s reckless venture into sin. All have sinned (Rom. 3:23), either in fact or in prospect (children will sin as they mature). Hence, all will experience death (Rom. 5:12) with the exception of those who are alive at the time of Christ’s return (1 Cor. 15:51; 1 Thess. 4:15). (See [The Divine View of Death](#).)

Spiritual Death

Spiritual death is the state of being separated from fellowship with God by virtue of a life of sin. All accountable people who have not been reconciled to their Creator by means of Christ’s redemptive plan, are dead spiritually (Isa. 59:1-2; Eph. 2:1; 1 Tim. 5:6; Rev. 3:1).

Only by the process of the **new birth** can one be made alive again in the **spiritual** sense (Jn. 3:3-5; Rom. 6:4, 11, 13; Eph. 2:4; cf. 5:26).

The Second Death

The second death is an **eternal separation** from God in that horrible abode known as hell. In referring to the judgment of the ungodly, Jesus depicted it in this fashion: “Depart from me” (Mt. 7:23; 25:41; Lk. 13:27).

Paul described the destiny of the wicked as the “eternal destruction **from the face of the Lord** and from the glory of his might” (2 Thess. 1:9). The same state is called a death (Rom. 1:32), which was not merely capital punishment, as evidenced by the fact that not all the sins catalogued in the previous context warranted the death sentence (see Cottrell 1996, 1.166-167).

James spoke of the condemned soul who is rescued from death (Jas. 5:20), which, of course, cannot refer to physical death. The book of Revelation uses the expression “second death” several times (Rev. 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8), which is the obvious equivalent of the “lake of fire” (Rev. 20:10).

Thayer defined this sense of “death” as “the miserable state of the wicked dead in hell” (283). R. A. Torrey once described the second death as “not mere non-existence, but wrong, wretched, debased, devilish existence” (1933, 306).

The Free Gift of God

The first clause of Romans 6:23 is separated from the second clause by the adversative particle **de**, rendered “but.” The apostle will now show the other side of the redemptive coin.

There are five different words in the Greek Testament that reflect varying shades of meaning with respect to a gift. The word here used is **charisma** (found seventeen times in the New Testament), the verbal form of which is **charizomai** (found twenty-three times). It is a lovely word signifying “that which is freely and graciously given” (Danker and Bauer 2000, 1081).

It is, however, a mistake of unfathomable magnitude that so many have adopted the view that this gift does not require a **willing recipient** who happily acknowledges that the gift may be undergirded by conditions.

Let us illustrate this principle with examples from the Bible itself.

First, Christ himself was a gift from God to humanity: “For God so loved the world that he gave **didomi** his only Son” (Jn. 3:16). But that gift was not unconditional, for the apostle continues, “that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have life everlasting.”

In the larger context of John’s gospel, belief and obedience are synonyms (cf. Jn. 3:36, ASV, ESV). Furthermore, elsewhere John makes it clear that Christ “came unto his own, and they that were his own **received him not**. But as many as **received** him, to them he **gave** the right to become children of God” (Jn. 1:11-12). A gift does not exclude possible conditions.

Second, since there are valuable lessons to be learned from Old Testament precedents (Rom. 15:4), let us give consideration to the conquest of ancient Jericho:

Jehovah informed Joshua, “I have **given** into your hand Jericho and the king thereof” (Josh. 6:2; cf. v. 16). Yet specific instructions were provided as to how the Israelites were to take the city (Jn. 6:3ff).

The writer of Hebrews declared that the city was not taken until after the divine instructions were obeyed (Heb. 11:30). In that connection, Rahab was spared because she was **obedient**, in contrast to the citizens of Jericho who were disobedient (Heb. 11:31; cf. Jas. 2:25).

Anyone with a modest level of reasoning ability can deduce that a gratuitous gift and the obedient **reception** of the gift does not imply a contradiction.

An incident in the ministry of Paul illustrates the same principle. On that long and harrowing voyage to Rome (Acts 27:1ff), the apostle had been informed by an angel that God had “granted” (**charizomai**) to him the lives of his sailing mates.

Subsequently, however, when the inmates of the damaged vessel began abandoning ship, Paul warned that there was a condition to the preservation of their lives: “**Except** these **remain** in the ship, **you cannot be saved**” (Acts. 27:31).

A **gift** can be **conditional**!

Third, Christ emphasized that though eternal life is God’s gift there is human initiative to be exercised in obtaining such (i.e., obedience is required): “**Work** not for the food which perishes, but [work] **for** the food which abides unto **eternal life**, which the Son of man **shall give** unto you” (Jn. 6:27).

Finally, it should be observed that those enamored with the Augustine-Calvin theory of the perseverance of the saints—namely, that a child of God can never forfeit his salvation—contend that whenever God provides a gift, such is **irrevocable**. Mounce attempts to apply Romans 11:29 to the matter of salvation (2006, 284), but there are enormous problems with that view.

First, as seen in the shipwreck illustration above, God threatened to withdraw the gift of sailor safety if the inmates of the vessel did not conform to his condition.

Second, the context of Romans 11:29 does not deal with the matter of salvation. Rather, it refers to God’s use of the nation of Israel as the conduit through whom his Son would come (cf. Cottrell, 2.291-292; Cranfield 1990, 581).

Third, the office of an apostle was a gift of God (Eph. 4:8, 11), yet Judas forfeited his apostolic office and was lost (Acts 1:20b, 25).

Eternal Life

The “free gift” of this remarkable text is that of eternal life. But what is eternal life? It is the opposite of the second death (see above). It is an eternal relationship with God, overflowing with a depository of blessings beyond the scope of present full representation or appreciation.

It is not merely everlasting existence (though that is involved). Instead, it is a **quality** of living that can only be defined in terms of its relationship with the Godhead. Again, as Torrey observed: “Life is defined in the Bible not merely as **existence**, but as **right existence**—knowing the true God and the life manifested in Christ” (306; emphasis added).

Two important things must be emphasized at this point.

- Eternal life or “eternal salvation” is conditioned upon one’s obedience to the Lord (Jn. 3:36, ASV, ESV; Heb. 5:8-9).
- Fidelity must be maintained if one ultimately is to enter heaven (Heb. 3:12-19; 6:4-8; 10:26-31).

In Christ Jesus our Lord

It is particularly important to notice the prepositional phrase that sets forth the sphere in which eternal life is found. It is “in Christ,” an expression found eighty-nine times in the New Testament (fifteen times in Romans).

The phrase signifies “ingrafted as it were in Christ, in fellowship and union with Christ, with the Lord” (Thayer 211). In God’s great plan of human redemption, there is no salvation apart from the atoning work of Christ, and no personal accessing of forgiveness apart from obedience to the Savior (Acts 4:12; Heb. 5:9; cf. 2 Tim. 2:10).

In this very chapter, entrance into that redemptive relationship is explicitly detailed:

Or are you ignorant that all we who were **immersed into Christ** Jesus were **immersed into his death**? We were buried therefore with him through immersion **into death** [i.e., the benefits of his death]: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4).

In another text, the apostle states the same general truth in slightly different language:

For you are all sons of God, through **the** faith [article in Greek text; objective faith, i.e., the gospel system], in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were **immersed into Christ** did put on Christ (Gal. 3:27).

The sphere of salvation is the in-Christ relationship. The mode of entrance is the culminating act of immersion in water (cf. Acts 2:38; 22:16).

The terms “Christ,” “Jesus,” and “Lord” emphasize Jesus’ role as the promised Old Testament “Messiah” (Anointed One), the Lord’s function as Savior (Mt. 1:21), and his lordship (i.e., authority [Mt. 28:18, ASV]) over all (Jn. 17:2).

Conclusion

Romans 6:23 is a gold mine of information. It instructs, warns, and promises. Study this text carefully. Passively yield to it. Teach it vigorously.

BOOK CHAPTER: DEATH, THE WAGES OF SIN

ADVENTISTS, Russelites, and all other opposers of the Bible doctrine of endless punishment lay great stress upon the term “death.” They have written books, tracts, and papers against eternal damnation, arguing that everlasting punishment is everlasting annihilation. To prove this, they freely quote all the texts that can be found stating that death is the result and wages of sin. In fact, this is their main argument. Say they: “Christ paid the sinner’s penalty. If that penalty is eternal torment, then Christ must suffer eternal torment. But that penalty is death, and Christ paid that penalty by dying.” This, to the uninformed, may look like argument, and to some it appears to be unanswerable; but when viewed in the light of the Holy Spirit and eternal truth, its fallacy is easily seen. Taking their logic, what have we? The wicked will be annihilated, burned up root and branch, eternally obliterated. That is the penalty for sin. So Christ, to pay the sinner’s penalty, must be annihilated, burned up, eternally obliterated. No more Christ.

But does not the Bible teach that the sinner shall die? Yes. “Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” Jas. 1:14-15. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” Ezek. 18:4. “The wages of sin is death.” Rom. 6:23. False teachers assume the very thing to be proved, namely, that death must necessarily mean annihilation, utter extinction of being. This is folly.

Before these texts can be wrested in defense of the annihilation theory, three things must be proved: (1) that they apply exclusively to the state of the guilty beyond the judgment; (2) that the term “death” in these texts signifies a cessation of the soul’s conscious being; (3) that the death of a thing blots it out of existence. Materialists can not sustain any of these propositions. With their failure to do so, their doctrine falls.

1. *The death of the sinner is not applied exclusively to his future state, but is a present condition, and realization.* God told Adam, “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” Gen. 2:17. The penalty of death was to fall on them, not beyond the judgment, nor thousands of years in the future, but in the very day of their sin. “In *the day* that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” The devil said, “Ye shall not surely die”; and Adventists and all Materialists have taken up the same falsehood, and they deny that Adam did die that day. But the divine testimony stands unbroken—namely, that on the very day that Adam transgressed the law of God, he died—not a physical death, for he lived many years after he was driven from Eden. Physical death, it is true, came upon Adam as a result of the fall (see Gen. 3:17-19; 1 Cor. 15:21-22); but the sense in which he died on the day of his sin was that his soul was cut off from union with God. He died a spiritual death,

became dead in sin. Sin separates the soul from God (Isa. 59:1-2); it cuts man off from the grace of divine life. His soul is alienated from God, brought under the dominion of sin. That state of man in sin is called “death”; and this death of the soul begins in the very day sin is committed.

The soul is the volitional part of man’s being. “The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul.” Micah 6:7. It is that part of us which is responsible to God. It sins, and it must be converted—saved. “Converting the soul.” Psa. 19:7. “The salvation of your souls.” 1 Pet. 1:9. It is that part of man which receives spiritual life from God in regeneration. “Hear, and your soul shall live.” Isa. 55:3.

Adam’s sin not only brought him under the dominion of sin and into a state of spiritual death, but affected the whole human race. “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Rom. 5:12. “Death by sin came upon all men.” “Death reigned from Adam to Moses.” Rom. 5:14. Since the law could not give life (Gal. 3:21), death reigned from Adam until Christ. He came “that they might have life.” John 10:10. Since Christ came, when people get saved they “pass from death unto life.” 1 John 3:14.

So death—the state of the sinner, the wages of sin—is in part a present condition and state of the soul. This fact overthrows all the argument in favor, of annihilation based on the word “death.”

“But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” Jas. 1:14-15. When an individual allows lust to conceive in his heart, it (lust) will bring forth sin; and sin, when it is finished (committed), brings forth death. Just as soon as a man yields to the evils of lust, he commits sin. Death is the immediate result. Hear Paul’s testimony: “I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.” Rom. 7:9. The time when he was alive was during his infancy, before he had knowledge of good and evil. When he arrived at the years of accountability and obtained a knowledge of the law or commandment, sin revived, and he died— “*I died.*” The very first sin that Paul committed produced death to his soul; hence he was dead.

All sinners are “dead in trespasses and sins.” Eph. 2:1. “Even when we were dead in sins.” Eph. 2:5. “And you, being dead in your sins.” Col. 2:13. “He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.” 1 John 3:14. “To be carnally minded is death.” Rom. 8:6. “Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead.” Eph. 5:14. “She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.” 1 Tim. 5:6. “Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.” Rev. 3:1. Jude speaks of some people “twice

dead, plucked up by the roots.” Jude 12. All these scriptures, with many more, clearly prove that death is a present condition of every sinner.

“The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” When? In the day that it sins. Paul says that when he sinned, he died. Lo! the sinner is now sleeping, dead. The Bible says so. The whole unregenerated world is in this life *dead, abiding in death*. The present dead state of sinners is the result of sin, a part of its wages. If they fail to repent and obtain spiritual life in this world through Jesus Christ, they will in the eternal world continue in the same state of death that is now their sad condition.

2. *Death does not mean annihilation—utter extinction of being.* In the very day Adam sinned, he died. Gen. 2:17. Was he annihilated that day? No; he lived a natural life for nine hundred and thirty years. Gen. 5:5. When Paul came to a knowledge of God’s commandment, he died— “*I died.*” Was he then blotted out of existence? No; he lived to persecute the church of God and to finally preach the gospel of Christ. Multiplied scriptures teach that all sinners are now dead, abiding in death, some of them “twice dead.” Are all these annihilated? No; the world is full of them; they live all around us. Yet the Bible declares they are dead. So the death of the sinner, the wages of sin, does not mean a blotting out of existence. This fact utterly refutes and overthrows the Russelite and Adventist idea based upon the word “death”—namely, that utter extinction of life will be the eternal portion of the impenitent.

But these blind teachers ask, “Can a person be dead and still living?” Yes; “she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.” 1 Tim. 5:6. Dead, yet living. Not only is this true of the sinner here, but it will be true hereafter. The prodigal son in a far country was dead, yet living right on. Luke 15:32 The same will be true of the wicked hereafter. If annihilation is what is meant by the second death in the lake of fire and brimstone, then all will receive the same punishment, all be blotted out. The Bible, however, teaches that some will have “greater damnation” in hell than others; that some will receive “few stripes,” others “many”; that a “much sorer punishment” awaits the backslider than awaits the one who was never saved. All this proves the contrary of blotting out of existence. In the case of annihilation, all would receive the same doom.

3. *Annihilation is no punishment.* To blot the wicked out of existence would be the opposite of everlasting punishment, eternal damnation, torment forever and ever, which the Scriptures so plainly teach will be the eternal future of the ungodly. When the wicked are brought before the judgment-seat of Christ in “shame and everlasting contempt,” and their guilty consciences lash them as they writhe beneath his piercing gaze, then to be suddenly blotted out of existence would be a blessing to them, a glorious relief from their awful punishment. Instead of

annihilation being a punishment, it would be a relief—an eternal relief from punishment; because, if unconscious, they would cease to suffer. Were they to be eternally unconscious, be no more, they would not suffer everlasting punishment, or torment, which the Bible so plainly declares they will.

Some say that the punishment of the wicked will consist in the awful thought of missing the enjoyment of heaven, and in going into utter extinction of life. If that be true, and the torments that they will suffer consist in such thought while they stand in judgment, then that torment and sense of punishment will last only until they are blotted out—just the few moments that they stand before God. When once blotted out, they can not suffer or be tormented. Could a bit of ashes with no consciousness, no feeling, no life, suffer? Incredible! Preposterous! But the Bible declares that the lost will be “tormented forever and ever,” suffer “everlasting punishment” “in everlasting fire.”

To accept the annihilation theory is to make the truth a lie. But the truth is not a lie; it will stand eternally. To blot the wicked out of existence would, I repeat, be to them a relief and favor, instead of punishment. Thousands in this life, suffering the pangs of a guilty conscience, have committed suicide, expecting thus to get out of misery. To get out of punishment, they took their own lives. We can hardly pick up a newspaper without seeing an account of some one's taking his life to get out of punishment and misery. To blot the wicked out of existence forever, so that they would never realize conscious suffering, would be to give them the greatest possible relief. Instead of being tormented forever and ever in the damnation of hell, as the Bible so plainly teaches, they would be relieved from such punishment by going into an unconscious state, yea, by no longer having any existence. Remember that when blotted out, a thing is no more. That which no longer exists is a nonentity. The moment a thing is blotted out of existence all its suffering ceases. If the wicked shall be blotted out in the day of judgment, never to have consciousness again through all eternity, then all their misery, torment, woe, suffering, and punishment will forever cease at the instant they are annihilated. This is the very opposite of what the Bible teaches; namely, everlasting punishment.

4. *The death of the soul incurred by sin is not a cessation of the soul's conscious existence or being.* That this death is the opposite of conscious suffering, I shall prove to be utterly false. In giving the Scriptural meaning of the term “death” as applied to the sinner both in this world and in that which is to come, Webster defines it thus: (1) “Separation or alienation of the soul from God; a being under the dominion of sin, and destitute of grace and divine life; called spiritual death.” (2) “Perpetual separation from God; and eternal torments; called the second death.”

These express exactly the Scriptural application of the term “death” to the sinner, both here and hereafter. The death of the soul incurred by sin is not a cessation of its conscious being, but an alienation from God, from his approving smile, and favor—the normal sphere of the soul’s happiness—a state where the soul is cut off from union with God, where it no longer partakes of his divine life. This is the wages of sin.

The death of the soul, the wages of sin, is in part a present condition. Every sinner is declared in the Bible to be dead. Not less than one hundred clear texts prove this fact. The same state of death that he is now in will be his eternal state. But is the dead sinner unconscious? is he blotted out of existence? is he annihilated? No; he lives among us; he has an existence. His soul is also conscious. It sins, and condemnation rests on it. It is sensitive toward God. “Dead while she liveth.” 1 Tim. 5:6.

Though the sinner, as the Bible says, is now dead, some “twice dead,” yet he passes through conscious suffering, suffers remorse of conscience, suffers the guilt of his crime. This is the present experience of tens of thousands. Just so in the eternal world. As soon as a man sins, he, like Paul, dies. Rom. 7:9. As long as he continues in sin he “abideth in death.” If such persons refuse to come to Christ “that they might have life” they will go into the eternal world dead in sin. In this world they have a chance of life; but once they pass into eternity, all chance is forever cut off, and they are doomed to suffer an eternal separation from God; doomed to abide in their present state of death.

This eternal separation from God is termed the “second death,” in “a lake of fire and brimstone.” But as they have a conscious existence now and suffer under the guilt of a defiled conscience, so will they in the future suffer the torments of a guilty conscience forever, and remain eternally separated from God. In that unquenchable fire “their worm dieth.”

But can a dead man still exist and suffer? Yes; all sinners are now dead men. Gen. 2:15-17; Isa. 59:1-2; Rom. 5:12; Jas. 1:14-15; Rom. 7:9; Eph. 2:1; Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13; 1 John 3:14; Rom. 8:6; 1 Tim. 5:6; Rev. 3:1; Jude 12; Eph. 5:14; John 5:24-25. Yet they have a conscious existence. They also suffer the torments of a guilty conscience. See Gen. 4:8-13; 1 Sam. 28:15; Matt. 27:3-5; John 8:9. And though this will be true of them in the eternal world, as well as here, yet it adds not a feather’s weight of evidence against the Bible doctrine of everlasting punishment. The torments of the guilty in the lake of fire is termed “the second death”; that torment will last forever and ever. Rev. 21:8; Rev. 20:10.

With the resurrection of all the dead from their graves, the last enemy, physical death, will be destroyed. 1 Cor. 15:21-26. The state of both the righteous and the wicked beyond that day will be eternal. With physical death destroyed, those will enter life eternal; these, eternal damnation. The Bible speaks of a time when “men shall seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.” Rev. 9:6. “They have no rest day or night,” in the “mist of darkness forever.”²

² Riggle, H. M. (2005). [*Hell and Everlasting Punishment*](#). James L. Fleming.

Why Would a Loving God Send Us to Hell?

By Wayne Jackson, Churches of Christ

The late Bertrand Russell, a renowned British agnostic, wrote a small publication titled, *Why I Am Not A Christian*. One of the reasons he cited for his unbelief was that Jesus Christ taught that there is an eternal hell for the wicked.

Russell could not harmonize Christ's doctrine about hell with the biblical position of a just and benevolent God; hence, he rejected the teaching of Jesus and inclined toward the belief that there is no God. Russell, who lived a life of reckless abandon, echoed the sentiments of Cain: "My punishment is greater than I can bear." On that basis, he became a determined opponent of true religion.

The problem of reconciling eternal retribution with the goodness of God also has had a significant impact on the religious world. Many religions, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, and the World Wide Church of God (Armstrongism), have rejected the doctrine of the eternal punishment of the wicked. Even the churches of Christ have had their advocates of this erroneous viewpoint (see Fudge, Smith).

Ad Hominem Arguments

An ad hominem argument (meaning, "to the man") is the type of reasoning that focuses on an opponent's inconsistency. Let us, at the outset of this discussion, utilize this form of argument in response to the "no hell" theory.

First, a major premise of the "no eternal punishment" dogma is the notion that such is at variance with true justice. The argument might be framed like this. The Bible speaks of a just and good God; it also teaches the doctrine of eternal hell. These two positions are mutually exclusive. Therefore, the Scriptures are inconsistent and cannot be true.

We insist, however, that those who thus argue are under obligation to defend their use of the terms "just" and "good." By whose standard are

these character traits to be measured? Critics of the Bible must not be allowed to become “theological dictionaries unto themselves.” Their reasoning is based solely upon **their own ideas** of how goodness and justice should be expressed.

If it is true that the Scriptures teach that God has appointed eternal punishment for impenitently evil people, and if it likewise is correct that the Bible affirms the justice and goodness of Jehovah, then it must follow that eternal punishment is not inconsistent with the nature of God. It is at odds **only** with some men’s **perception** of goodness and justice.

Second, no one (skeptic or otherwise) is ready to concede that evildoers are unworthy of **any** type of punishment. It is recognized that no society could survive in such an atmosphere. Should the rapist, the robber, and the murderer be told: “Admittedly, you have done wrong, but we (society) will not punish you for your crimes. This would be unjust”? Is there anyone who argues that there should be **no** consequences resulting from criminal conduct? Surely not! It is conceded, therefore, that punishment is not inconsistent with true justice.

Third, let us take our reasoning a step further. Is it the case that genuine justice can be served even when an evil man’s punishment is extended beyond the time involved in the commission of his crime? Do we, for example, in our criminal justice system, ask the murderer, “Sir, how long did it take you to kill your wife?”—then assign his incarceration accordingly? Would justice be maintained by such an approach?

Here, then, is the point. True justice, combined with genuine goodness, allows the possibility that a wrongdoer may be required to suffer a penalty that is considerably longer than the duration of his evil. The real issue, therefore, is not punishment per se, or even protracted punishment; rather, it is **eternal** punishment. The skeptic (or religious materialist) simply wants to tell God how long the penalty is to be! Remember, however, in a system of true justice, the offender is not allowed to set his own sentence.

Eternal Punishment and a Just God

Since no one has ever returned from the dead to discuss his or her personal experiences, this issue is not one that can be settled by human speculation; rather, it must be decided by divine revelation. When the relevant biblical data is assembled, it will be seen, even from man's jaundiced viewpoint, that the fact of eternal punishment is not inconsistent with the character of a righteous God. Our case will be set forth in a series of interrelated propositions.

The Nature and Fall of Man

Man was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26), hence, he is a volitional being. He has the power to choose good or evil. Joshua challenged Israel, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Joshua 24:15). Humanity was not programmed to rebel, rather, men have "willed" to reject Heaven's plan for living on this earth (see Matthew 23:37; John 5:40). Man was made upright, but he generally has sought the way of evil (Ecclesiastes 7:29). There are consequences associated with this type of activity.

Sin and the Nature of God

The Bible clearly teaches that God is an absolutely holy Being (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8)—i.e., he is utterly separate from evil. His holiness is demonstrated in numerous narratives in the Scriptures. At Sinai, the chasm between God and sinful Israel was underscored vividly (Exodus 19:12-25). The tabernacle arrangement, with its holy place and most holy place (the abode of God [Exodus 25:22]) certainly was designed to instruct the Hebrews relative to Jehovah's holy nature (Exodus 26:33).

The Lord's holiness not only suggests that he cannot commit sin personally (James 1:13), it also means that he cannot ignore rebellion as if it had never happened. The prophet Habakkuk declared to Jehovah: "Your eyes are too pure to look upon evil [i.e., favorably]; you cannot tolerate wrong" (1:13, NIV). God takes no pleasure in wickedness (Psalm 5:4), and those who indulge themselves therein will be recipients of his vengeance (11:6-7). The Bible affirms that the outpouring of divine wrath on the ungodly is, in fact, a

“revelation of the **righteous** judgment of God” (Romans 2:5; emphasis added).

Sin Separates From God

When humanity chose to sin, it made the decision to be separated from the holy Creator. The prophet clearly stated: “[Y]our iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you” (Isaiah 59:2). In biblical parlance, “death” generally denotes a separation of some sort. When the spirit departs the body, the body is dead (James 2:26). Similarly, when a person enters a state of sinfulness, he becomes spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1), for, by that act, he has determined to separate himself from God. Remember, the initiation of this estrangement was not forced on us by our Maker; it is totally human responsibility.

Hell: The Ultimate Separation

Inspiration describes the penalty of hell as “the second death” (Revelation 20:14), which suggests that it is the ultimate separation from God. This is emphasized forcefully in several New Testament passages. In the parable of the virgins, those unprepared virgins who “slept” (i.e., died), when awakened by the coming of the Bridegroom, wanted entrance into his presence, but the door was shut, and they were denied that association (Matthew 25:1-13).

Unprofitable servants will be “cast out” and will hear the Lord exclaim: “Depart from me” (Matthew 25:41). Paul expressed it like this. Those who know not God and who obey not the gospel, “shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction **from the face of the Lord** and from the glory of his might” (2 Thessalonians 1:9; emphasis added). This abiding separation from God is but a continuation of the estrangement that the rebel cultivated in this life. The Lord is not responsible for such a reckless decision!

The Horror of Separation from God

How is it possible to describe the spiritual state of being banished from the presence of the supreme Being of the universe? Being alienated from Jehovah is the ultimate experience of horror. It is a separation from

everything that is pure and good, everything that is right and wholesome, and everything that makes for joy and tranquility. It is, however, a **spiritual** experience, and since the human mind operates on the plane of the material, we really are not prepared to appreciate the gravity of such a circumstance. Hence, God has employed appropriate symbolism to describe the agonies of hell.

The spiritual abode of the wicked is a state of pain, trouble, and sorrow (Psalm 116:3). It is characterized by shame and contempt (Daniel 12:2), and is a realm of affliction (Jonah 2:2). Hell is a place of outer darkness where there is weeping and the gnashing of teeth (Matthew 25:30)—a sphere of eternal fire (Matthew 25:41) where the “worm” (a figure for gnawing anguish) does not die (Mark 9:48).

The wicked are described as being beaten with stripes (Luke 12:47-48). They are recipients of God’s wrath and indignation, they experience tribulation and anguish (Romans 2:8-9), and they suffer punishment as a manifestation of the Lord’s vengeance (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). Hell is a place of utter torment, where no rest ever is known (Revelation 14:10-11).

While it would not be an expression of responsible exegesis to literalize the figures of speech cataloged above, one must never forget that the symbolism is designed to emphasize the terror of being abandoned by God. Moreover, the figures doubtless do not do justice to the actual reality of this eternal nightmare!

Is the Punishment Eternal in Duration?

A major objection to the doctrine of hell is its everlasting nature. Must the suffering go on without end? Is it really just for one to be punished forever when he or she has been devoted to evil for only a relatively brief span of time? Consider this question for a moment.

Is God just in granting eternal bliss to those who have served him only temporarily in this world? This writer never has heard the Lord charged with unfairness in this instance! It must be emphasized again that the issue is not one that can be determined with the subjective reasoning of biased human emotion. The Bible must supply the answer.

The Scriptures explicitly affirm the abiding nature of divine retribution. The shame and punishment of evil people will be everlasting (Daniel 12:2; Matthew 25:46). “Everlasting” literally means “always being.” Note its contrast with “temporal” in 2 Corinthians 4:18.

The claim is made, however, that “everlasting” does not always mean that which is absolutely unending in nature. True, but in all such cases we learn this not from the nature of the word itself, but from additional information in the Scriptures. The context always is the final judge of any word’s meaning.

In Matthew 25:46, the “eternal” punishment of the wicked is contrasted with the “eternal” life (i.e., communion with God) of the righteous. Here, clearly, both are unending in duration. Further, Jesus emphasized that in hell, the agony does not cease (Mark 9:48), and John notes that the smoke of the “torment” of hell’s inmates “goes up [the Greek present tense stresses continuous action] for ever and ever” (Revelation 14:11). Compare the duration of the blissful worship described in Revelation 4:8-10.

Also, the nature of the soul argues for eternal punishment. Consider the following.

We Are Not Merely Mortal

Materialists allege that we are wholly mortal, without a soul. If such were the case, one man could murder another and **completely destroy him**.

Christ declared, however: “And be not afraid of them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). (The word “destroy” does not mean annihilation. “The idea is not extinction but ruin, loss, not of being, but of wellbeing” [Vine, 212].) One must conclude that the soul is immortal.

Ongoing Existence

In one of the Lord’s discussions with the Sadducees, he said that in the resurrection men do not “die anymore: for they are equal unto the angels” (Luke 20:36). It is quite clear that there is something about man that lives forever.

Incorruptible Apparel

When Peter wanted to encourage godliness in Christian women, he suggested they should be clothed with the incorruptible apparel of a meek and quiet spirit (1 Peter 3:4). It hardly seems appropriate that a corruptible spirit should be clothed with incorruptible apparel. The implication concerning the abiding nature of the spirit is obvious.

Judas' Example

Jesus said of Judas Iscariot that it would be better for him if he never had been born (Mark 14:21). If that traitor had no existence prior to his commencement as a human being, and if he was to go out of existence at death, why would it have been better had he never been born? The Lord's statement indicates that Judas' soul, in a state of torment, would survive the death of his body.

Finally, the nature of the resurrected body demands that punishment for the wicked is everlasting. In 1 Corinthians 15:52, Paul affirmed that the dead are raised "incorruptible" (cf. 1 Timothy 1:17, where the term is used of God). Elsewhere we are told that the unjust will be raised (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15), and Christ acknowledged the punishment of both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28). All of these factors lead only to the conclusion that if there is punishment after death, it must be eternal in its duration—unless it can be shown that there is some plan of salvation in that state. And for that view, there is absolutely no evidence at all. In fact, the Bible teaches just the opposite.

After death, **judgment** follows—not a second chance for salvation (Hebrews 9:27).

Between the temporary abode of those who die saved and those who die lost, "there is a great gulf fixed" (the perfect-tense form in the Greek Testament stresses the abiding nature of the separation), and passing from one realm into the other is an impossibility (Luke 16:26). Moreover, the rich man in that place of torment acknowledged that his brothers on earth needed to make preparation during their earthly sojourn; he knew there was no post-death plan of redemption (see Luke 16:28-31).

In the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1ff), those who “slumbered and slept” (a figure for dying) in an unprepared condition, awoke (i.e., were raised—[Daniel 12:2]) in precisely that same state, hence, were forbidden to enter in with the Bridegroom (Christ).

There is no opportunity for obedience after death!

Justice and Equitable Punishment

An added dimension to this study surely must be that of “degrees of punishment.” The Scriptures teach that eternal punishment will be proportionate to what is deserved. Jesus said that in “the day of judgment” it would be “more tolerable” for those pagan cities that had received little spiritual influence than for those cities that rejected him in spite of seeing his marvelous deeds (Matthew 11:22-24).

In one illustration, the Lord told of a certain servant who behaved himself in an unseemly fashion. When his master came and found him unprepared, he assigned him to punishment. Christ then stated:

“And that servant, who knew his lord’s will, and made not ready, nor did according to his will, shall he be beaten with many stripes; but he that knew not, and did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. And to whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required, and to whom they commit much, of him will they ask the more” (Luke 12:47-48).

Christ indicated that there were varying levels of responsibility when he said to Pilate: “[H]e that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin” (John 19:11). The writer of Hebrews spoke of those who would receive “sorer punishment” (10:29), and James admonished: “Be not many of you teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive heavier judgment” (3:1). Of one thing we may be certain: even in the punishment of those who are evil, the Judge of all the earth will do what is right (Genesis 18:25).

God’s Goodness and the Cross

No one can argue logically against the benevolence of Jehovah in light of the cross. As we observed earlier, the holiness and justice of Deity demand that sin be addressed. Appropriate reward for good and evil is an evidence that

“there is a God that judges in the earth” (see Psalm 58:10-11). The problem is: how can a just God keep from sending rebellious man to hell?

The answer is: **through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ**. In Romans 3:21-26, Paul affirmed that God has shown his righteousness in sending Christ as a propitiation for sin. In this loving act, he preserves his own righteousness, yet, at the same time, becomes the Justifier of those who, through faith, are obedient to his Son (Hebrews 5:8-9).

When Christ died, it was not for any sin he had committed. Though he was tempted in all points like as we are, he had no sin (Hebrews 4:15). When Peter wrote that Jesus “did not sin,” he employed a verbal tense which suggests that the Lord **never** sinned—not even once (1 Peter 2:22)!

Isaiah repeatedly emphasized the substitutionary nature of the Lord’s death when he wrote:

“But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:5-6).

When the prophet declared that our “iniquity” was laid upon the Son of God, he employed a figure of speech known as metonymy (one thing is put for another)—in this case, the cause being put for the effect.

In other words, God did not put our **sins** upon Christ, but the **penalty** of our wrongs. Christ bore our “hell” twenty centuries ago. In spite of the fact, therefore, that all sinners deserve to be lost, the Lord has provided a way to “escape the judgment of hell” (cf. Matthew 23:33). No man can argue against the love of God in light of his unspeakable gift at the cross!

The Eternal Punishment of the Lost

by Lehman Strauss

This chapter is an endeavor to write a statement of the most solemn doctrine in all the Bible. When I first attempted to preach on this subject some years ago, invariably I found myself asking God for tenderness in presenting it. Today I must confess that there still lingers an averseness on my part to declare that there is no hope that any measure of divine grace or mercy ever will be extended to one person after death, but that there is rather a fearful anticipation of retribution in the lake of fire. This averseness to assert the divine claims about Hell is not the result of waning convictions or of doubts concerning the reality and literalness of the everlasting misery of the unsaved. Contrariwise, the growing convictions and God-given confirmations of the endless agony of the wicked dead cause me to tremble at the horrible thought of damned souls in flames of torment forever.

Hell--An Unpopular Subject

I am aware of the fact that this subject is an unpopular one. Since those memorable days when Jonathan Edwards preached that potent and moving sermon on "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," the doctrine of the eternal retribution of the lost has gradually gone into obscurity. A daily newspaper printed the following on May 29, 1944. "A Navy chaplain said today some naval officers forbade chaplains to tell their men they were in danger of Hell. The chaplain, Frederick Volbeda, of Washington, a veteran of Pearl Harbor, said his own commanding officer once heard him preach repentance & actual punishment and swore he would 'have no hell-fire preaching on this ship.'" Chaplain Volbeda made his report at the 84th annual General Assembly of the Southern Presbyterian Church.

When Irvin S. Cobb, the internationally famous humorist and writer, died in March 1944, he referred to Heaven as "a powerfully dull place, populated to a considerable and uncomfortable degree by prigs, time servers and unpleasantly aggressive individuals," and then he added that "Hell may have a worse climate but undoubtedly the company is sprightlier." Of course, Cobb did not believe in Hell, for he insisted that those in charge of his burial "avoid reading the so-called Christian burial service, which, in view of the language employed in it, I regard as one of the most cruel and paganish things inherited

by our forbears from our remote pagan ancestry. Instead, let the 23rd Psalm be read. This has no threat of eternal hell-fire."

Irvin Cobb was doubtless a success as a humorist, but no amount of jocose treatment of Hell can deliver him from the anguish and agony of his soul today. The best this wit and humorist could say about our Lord Jesus Christ was that He was "the greatest gentleman that ever lived." To all such flattery and humanism our Lord only answers: "Ye must be born again." On this vital and eternal issue Cobb declared himself. If he died denying every fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith, how solemn will be his day of accounting for casting such aspersions. God brands all who reject and ridicule His Word as "raging waves of the sea foaming out their own shame, . . . to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever" ([Jude 13](#)). Some day the tables will be turned, and "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh" ([Psalm 2:4](#)).

Our hearts go out in sympathy and pity for Cobb and the millions like him who died unbelievers and passed consciously into an endless eternity and the hell-fire they scoffed and denied.

Mr. Cobb requested that at his funeral the Twenty-Third Psalm be read because it contains "no threat of eternal hell-fire." We do not propose a debate on the theological content of this best loved Psalm of David, but we can say without fear of contradiction that Cobb's knowledge of the Bible was the result of a prejudiced investigation, to say the least. The Author of the Shepherd-Psalm is also the Author of all that the world knows about future life, and eschatology of the Holy Scriptures is not silent on the doctrine of the eternal retribution of the unbelieving and wicked dead in a place of torment.

False Theories

Many conflicting theories have been formed regarding this subject. Of course, those mentioned under the above heading are human theories that have not the support of the Word of God. Here we can do little more than make a passing reference to these man-made ideas. These are *Conditional Immortality*, *Universalism* and *The Restoration Theory*.

1. Conditional Immortality. This theory is built on the error that all who do not receive everlasting life will die as the animals and be annihilated or wiped out of existence. It contends that immortality is conditional upon receiving the gift of everlasting life. If anyone dies not having the gift of everlasting life he shall not be punished with everlasting torment. He shall be annihilated.

2. Universalism. The universalistic theory holds the idea of universal redemption. For example, a certain number of Scripture references are used to prove that Christ died for all men alike. Therefore, all men alike shall be saved in the end. Universalism uses such texts as Paul's when he said: "We preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" ([Colossians 1:28](#)). Certainly, the Apostle could not have meant that he expected every man that ever came into the world to be made perfect in Christ. The words "every man" could refer only to those to whom Paul addressed his Epistle; namely, "To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ" (1:2). This theory does not deny that all men are lost by sin, but it contends that all men will finally be saved and enter into everlasting life. Universalism falls when it overlooks the Biblical fact that salvation and everlasting life are applied to no one apart from his personal acceptance of it as a **divinely bestowed gift to "whosoever will."**

3. The Restoration Theory. This view, called by some Restitutionism, appeals to the universalist in that it does not deny that all men are lost, but that sometime, somewhere, all creation (including Satan and the fallen angels) will be restored or reconciled to God. Being contrary to reason and common sense, the average person labels this view as preposterous. But let us look at 2 texts that are used to form the basis of the false view of Restitutionism. The words of our Lord are quoted: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me" ([John 12:32](#)). We must exercise care that these words of Christ do not lead us to believe the heretical teaching of Restitutionism. Our Saviour never meant that all men finally shall be saved by His crucifixion. Dr. A. C. Gaebelien in his commentary on "The Gospel of John" says: "The analogy of other texts shows plainly that the only reasonable sense is, that Christ's crucifixion would have a 'drawing' influence on men of all nations, Gentiles as well as Jews." But it is quite possible also that this verse has a future application. In the preceding verse (31) which was given in connection with verse thirty-two, Jesus spoke of the future when "the prince of this world shall be cast out." Of a truth, in that day "all men" will be drawn unto Him.

His introductory statement

Restitutionism depends largely upon that mighty statement uttered by the Apostle Paul in [Philippians 2:10, 11](#), "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." This passage means that all creation, whether animate or inanimate, in heaven, on earth, or under the earth, will confess (or publicly declare) and thereby agree to the testimony that God the Father has given of His Son. There is not the slightest indication that all men who acknowledge the authority of Christ *must* be saved or that they *will* be saved. While our Lord was here on

earth the demons frequently acknowledge His authority (see [Mark 1:24, 34; 3:11, 12](#)), and we know that everlasting fire is prepared for the Devil and his angels ([Matthew 25:41](#)).

Arguing Against Hell from the Love of God

We hear it said often that God is too tender, kind, and forgiving to allow men to suffer in Hell. Pleading the love and pity of God, men insist that He would not allow His creatures to perish. There are many beautiful and sentimental sayings about the love of God that are quoted to support the view that He would not allow one soul to suffer torment in eternity. But we dare never lose sight of the fact that one's escape from Hell is not dependent upon the love of God but upon the repentance and faith of each individual person. God is love, to be certain, but man also has a free will. Men are not doomed and damned to Hell by God, but they go there because they have willfully rejected God's only way of escape from sin's penalty, saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. God was love in the Old Testament times, and yet the children of Israel were punished for their sins. God is love now, but He does not open the doors of penal institutions to deliver those who are being punished for their crimes. It is but the fair treatment of society to protect it against the persistent wrong doings of the criminal, and certainly Heaven would not be safe nor desirable if there were no protection against sin and crime. It would seem to the writer that God owes it to the faithful believers that the wicked be separated from them in Heaven. It would be an insult to the justice and honor of God were He to allow the unrighteous and unholy rejectors of Jesus Christ to share eternally the abode and "the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" ([1 Corinthians 2:9](#)).

The natural and inevitable consequence of sin is punishment. Proper punishment of a child does not derogate from the love of the parent. Sin condemns just as sure as fire burns, and God is justified in putting into effect the immortal law that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" ([Galatians 6:8](#)).

Hell--A Literal Place of Future Punishment

Some people engage themselves in much wishful thinking about Hell. It has been said that the fires of Hell mean the torments of conscience. Others say that Hell is simply the grave. We do not question that the torments of conscience will be included in the eternal punishment of the lost, though Hell will not be the torments of conscience only. But we cannot agree at all with those who teach that Hell is simply the grave. One must be either a deceiver or an illiterate to say that Hell is the grave. When the unsaved rich man died he

went to Hell, and cried: "I am tormented in this flame" ([Luke 16:24](#)). Certainly, he was not merely in the grave. He had five brothers whom he desired to be saved lest they also should come to that place of torment. Now if his five brothers would have repented and become saved, their conversion could not have kept them from the grave, for "it is appointed unto men once to die" ([Hebrews 9:27](#)). Repentance and conversion will keep one from Hell but never from the grave. The bodies of all men, excepting those believers who are alive when Christ comes, will return to the dust. Hell is not the grave. The body of the rich man was dead, but that man knew that his soul was in a literal place & not merely in a spiritual state. Notice the use of the word "fire," which denotes that the fire of Hell is as literal as the place itself. Repeatedly our Lord and the apostles spoke of the fire of Hell.

But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire ([Matt. 5:22](#)). Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down & cast into the fire ([Matt. 7:19](#)). The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth ([Matthew 13:41, 42](#)). Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire ([Matthew 18:8, 9](#)). Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil & his angels ([Matt. 25:41](#)). Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched ([Mark 9:44](#)). And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame ([Luke 16:24](#)).

In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ ([2 Thessalonians 1:8](#)).

And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire ([Jude 6, 7](#)).

The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb ([Revelation 14:10](#)).

Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her ([Revelation 18:8](#)).

And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone ([Revelation 19:20](#)).

And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever ([Revelation 20:10](#)).

And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire ([Rev. 20:14, 15](#)).

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death ([Revelation 21:8](#)).

You may study these statements and believe them, or else you may pass them by. You may believe that the Bible is for today, or else you may laugh at it as a bit of obsolete dogma. But today you are face to face with eternal statements in the Word of God which will survive the heavens and earth. Your unbelief cannot disprove nor alter them. When the resurrected physical bodies of the unbelievers of every age leave the Judgment of the Great White Throne, they will go into a literal Hell of fire.

And be sure that the body will share with the soul in its suffering. Jesus said: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" ([John 5:28, 29](#)). May we ask what part of man is in the grave? We all agree that it is his body. Therefore, we can depend on Christ's statement that that part of man that is buried in the grave will come forth to be damned eternally.

Will Future Punishment be Endless?

At death the eternal state of each person is immutably fixed. The words "eternal," "everlasting," "forever" and "for ever and ever" express endless duration. The New

Testament use of these expressions denotes eternity.⁵ It is unreasonable to assume that there is an eternal Heaven but not an eternal Hell. Eternal punishment is as much a truth of God's Word as is the eternal rewards for the righteous. Jesus said: "And these shall go away into *everlasting* punishment, but the righteous into life *eternal*" (Matthew 25:46). The life of the righteous is everlasting, but so is the punishment of the wicked everlasting. The Bible says that salvation is *eternal* ([Hebrews 5:9](#)), life is *eternal* (John 6:54), redemption is *eternal* (Hebrews 9:12), and the inheritance of the saints is *eternal* (Hebrews 9:15). But it says also that the fire of Hell is *eternal* & everlasting ([Matthew 18:8](#); [Jude 7](#)); the chains of Hell are everlasting ([Jude 6](#)); the blackness of darkness is for ever ([Jude 13](#)), and the torment is for *ever* and *ever* ([Revelation 20:10](#)). The punishment of the wicked & the life of the righteous are for equal duration, "for ever and ever."

Where is Hell?

Here we cannot be dogmatic. This question cannot be answered fully. Geographically Hell cannot be located. The *old theory* held by many is that Hell is in the heart of the earth. A brief article appeared in "Moody Monthly" (July 1940) in which the author sought to locate Hell. The following is a brief summary of that article.

It is clear that Hell is not in this earth. The Apostle Peter speaks of the day when the earth is to be dissolved by fire:

The earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved.... Nevertheless we, according to His promise look for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness ([2 Peter 3:10-13](#)).

We are not persisting in this view of the geographical location of Hell, for the Bible gives us no positive declarative statement of its situation. Where this outer darkness is, where the endless fire is, where Hell is we do not know, nor must we know. It is sufficient to say that Hell is a prepared place, and experientially it is at the end of every unsaved sinner's life.

**Come sinners, seek His grace
Whose wrath ye cannot bear;
Flee to the shelter of His cross,
And find salvation there.**

The two phrases which are most difficult for annihilationists to explain:

1. “the smoke of their torment will rise forever and ever”

(from Revelation 14:11)

2. “They will be tormented day and night forever and ever”

(from Revelation 20:10)

**God's Gift of
Beingness &
Personhood
Continues.
Consciousness
Isn't Consumed!**

@ Grace - God's Love - Hell's Horror - Nexus

- *Teacher Seneca To Student Nero*
Mercy Involves Reason Where
Decision In Our Full Control;
- *Teacher Seneca To Student Nero*
Pity Is Akin To 'Wretchedness'
It Is Helplessly Succumbing At
The Sight Of The Ill Of Others

@ Grace - God's Love - Hell's Horror - Nexus

- **MERCY:** WHERE WE
DO NOT GET WHAT WE
DO REALLY DESERVE
- **GRACE:** WHERE WE
DO GET WHAT WE DO
NOT REALLY DESERVE

@ Grace - God's Love - Hell's Horror - Nexus

- ***God "Is" Love: 1st John 4: 7 - 8***
- ***God Sent His Son For Our Provision: John 3: 16***
- ***As Our Parent He Punishes Us Justly:***
 - During Our Life God By Way Of His Pro-Video {Providence} Feature Develops Us Spiritually & Makes Course Correction.
 - In This World & The Next – God Respects Our Free Will Choices – He Always Accepts – He Does Not Always Approve.
 - Our Obedience In Basic Choice & By Free Will Gives Glory To Him & We Get To Be With Him Forever.
 - In Our Disobedience We Are Respected – From The Unwilling - God Withdraws His Presence & Withholds His Communion.

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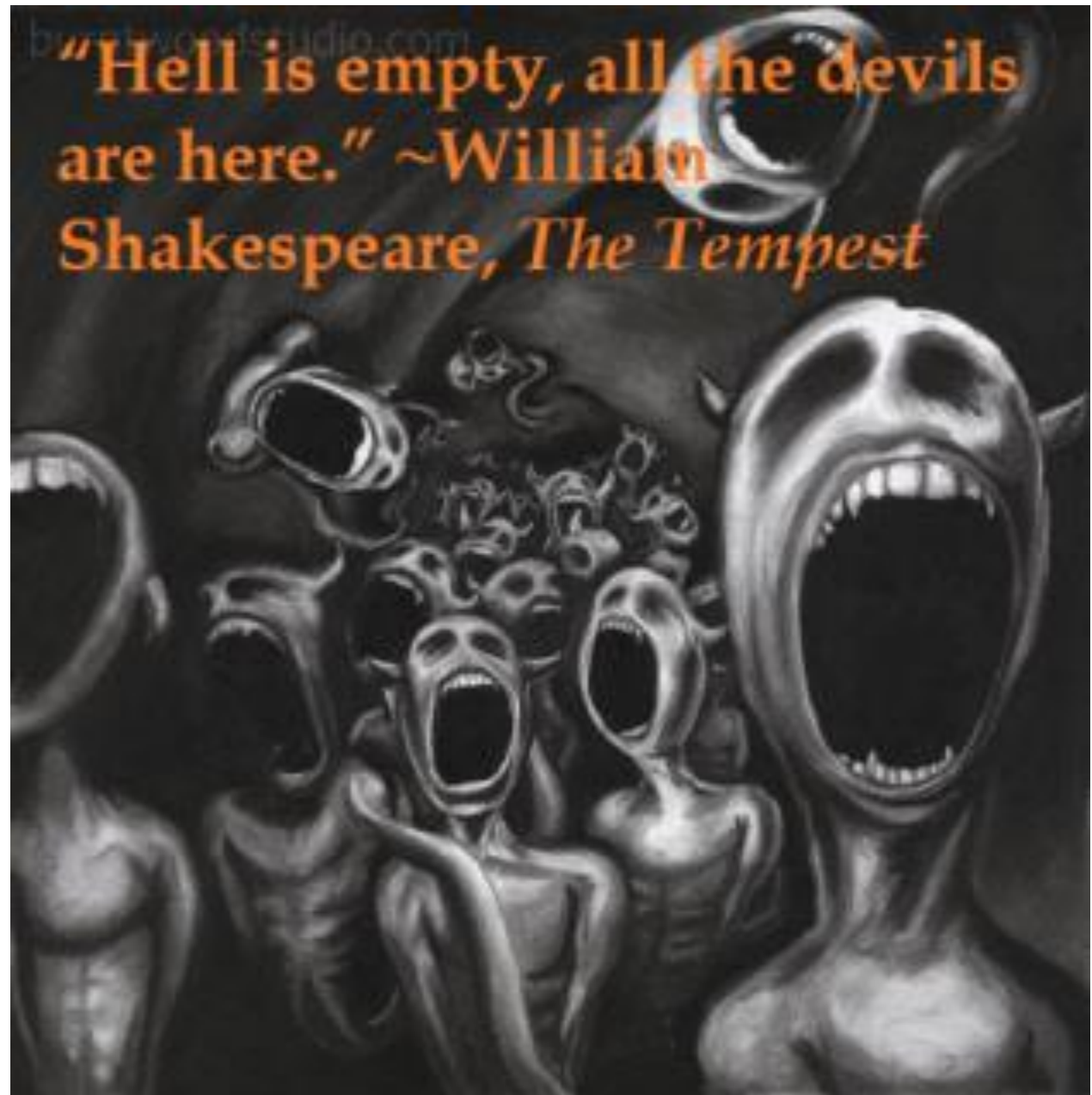
- What Resides Afterwards Is An Imprisoned Community Of Chaotic Autonomy. The Human Wicked & The Rebel Angels Exist Endlessly In Company Together Within The Loop Of Their Own Thoughts & In Constant Awareness Of Their Punitive Condition.
- Current Reality Of Time & Space & Meaning Of Measurement Will Be Done Away; Finite Actions Have Their Infinite Consequences.
- Even So - Jesus Says - To These Who Would Not Have Been Happy With Heaven Anyway – As Judge – God Will Exhibit Fairness & Show Mercy.
- According To The Savior, There Will Be Those Sad Souls - Who In Rejecting Him - Will Not Have Access To Forgiveness Of Even Their Minor Infractions; For These God Will Sentence By The Standard Of Proportionality & For Those Never Hearing The Good News – Mercy!
- Mark 12: 40 - & - Luke 12: 47, 48 [Indicate] - Along With An Afterlife Administration Of Relative Rewards - An Applied Principle Of Degreed Punishment By Which - According To This System - Religious Hypocrisy & Willful Ignorance Will Receive The Harshest Treatment.

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- Luke 11: 37 – 12: 58 - The Extended Passage In It's Entire Context – Was Directed At Both Jewish Authorities & Future Christian Leadership. Increase In Ability – Increase In Accountability – Greater Responsibility – The More That Was Required! {Read Related Passage – James 3: 1}
- From The Two Old & New Testament Story Narratives Of Jonah & The Rich Man We Get Two Cautionary Images That Serve To Represent The Possible Range Of That Punishment – Matthew 12: 39 – 41 Relates.
- Extending This Proportional Standard To Try To Alter The Nature Of The Punishment From Retributive To Remedial Or To Delimit By Way Of Extinction Is Not Proper Exegesis & Is Improper In Presumption.
- However, Importantly, For Some Such As Homer Hailey, Ideas Held Of Conditional Immortality Did Not Have Observable Consequence In Their Efforts At Evangelism. In Several Situations, Convictions Were More Heartfelt Than Thought Out & Hopeful Speculation Rather Than Strong Dedication – Mean-spirited Response To Them Would Be Wrong.
- *From Apologetics Press The Last Words On This Argument:*
- “Would a person guilty of sin be in a better position to determine how long sin should be punished than a sinless, perfect God (1st John 1: 5)?”

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- “Once the point is conceded that a loving God could punish sin with at least one minute of punishment after this life, then the only question left is to answer is: Who is in the best position to determine how long punishment should be? Would it not be a righteous judge who knew every detail of the crime, including the thoughts and intents of the criminal? God is exactly that. He is not motivated by selfishness, greed, or other vice, but sits on a throne of righteousness (Psalm 89: 14). Furthermore, He knows all the facts of the case (Proverbs 15: 3) and the intents and thoughts of the lawbreakers (Psalm 44: 21). Only God is in a position to determine how long sin should be punished.”



ONE BIG MISS

N.T. Greek Verb: *“To Sin”*
“Hamartano” Or “To Miss”

Vine’s Expository Dictionary

(1046) *“Sinning Against God”*

(1) By Angels, II Peter 2: 4;

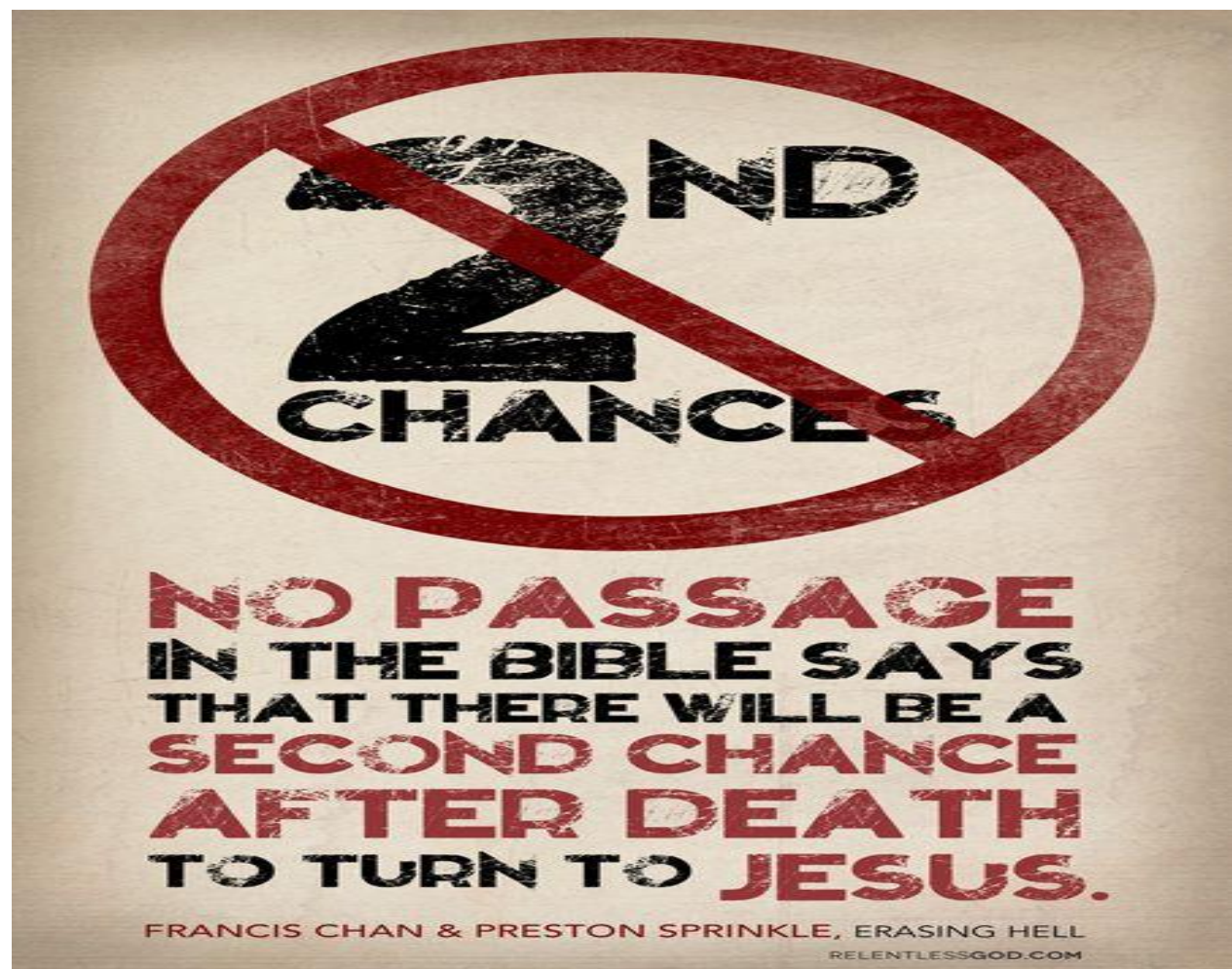
(2) By Man, Matthew 27: 4.

THE BIG MISS

It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the light and out into the nothing... Indeed the safest road to hell is the gradual one – the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.

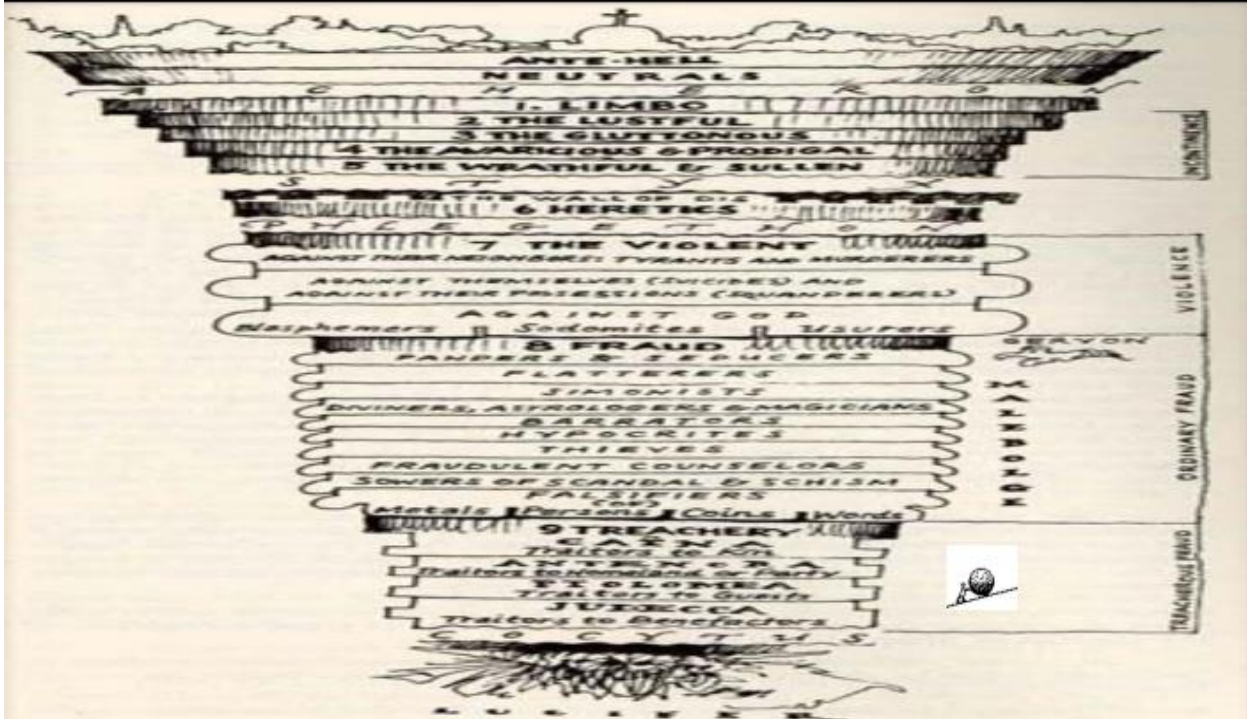
- Lewis, Screwtape Letters

With The Second
Death No More
Second Chances





THE THINKER LOOKING INTO THE INFERNO



“The Wrath That Endures Forever” by William Crockett

“Universalist will argue that wrath does not function this way (without hope). It is reformatory or purgative, not retributive... While it may be necessary for (God) to punish those that persist in wickedness, He does so out of love with intent to restore.”

PUNISHMENT & REFORMATION:

“When we examine orge in Paul we find no reason to assume that it has reformatory elements. There’s no thought of reformation for the wicked. They receive only wrath. (First Thessalonians 1: 10; 5: 9)

Paul makes sharp distinction between the fates of the wicked, calling one the sons of light and the other the sons of darkness. Those of the day will have eternal peace, but those of night will be destroyed by the wrath (orge) of God (5: 3, 9). If a universalist argues that wrath is chastening anger in Paul, then he needs to show why orge should be understood as reformation – especially since there is no occasion where the apostle uses orge in a reformatory sense.”

WRATH THE OPPOSITE OF LOVE:

“Paul understands God’s wrath in a similar post-exile manner. He believes that at the close of the age divine orge will fall only on unbelievers. This text does not suggest that God’s wrath reforms sinners by inducing repentance nor does it imply that wrath conceals God’s love, as if wrath ultimately brought good to the recipients, or as if it were an instrument designed to draw erring ones back to Himself. In Paul’s theology eschatological wrath means that after death God no longer loves the wicked nor is He prepared to act in behalf of the wicked.”



Fire Insurance Commercial:

**“WHEN YOU ARE
IN A HORROR
MOVIE YOU
MAKE POOR
DECISIONS!”**



As Long as You Live on the Earth You Do Not Have A “PERMANENT RECORD” That Follows After This Life & Thru All Eternity. All You Have To Do Is To YIELD, SURRENDER Turn Your Life Around, Acting In Obedient Faith.



REPENT



Revelation 20:14–15

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.

If you die in your sins, its too late to REPENT.

So Make a CHOICE



Gospel Truth = Conditional Salvation
Not Conditional Immortality

JUDGEMENT PREPARED
FIVE STATES FIVE STEPS

Five States of the Soul:

- **EXEMPTION:**
- Ezekiel 18: 20; Matthew 18: 1 – 3
- **CONDEMNATION:**
- Galatians 3: 22
- **JUSTIFICATION:**
- Romans 5: 1, 2; 8: 1, 2
- **DAMNATION:**
- Matthew 23: 3; Mark 16: 16
- **GLORIFICATION:**
- Romans 8: 17, 30; II Thess. 1: 7 - 12

JUDGEMENT PREPARED

FIVE STATES FIVE STEPS

Five Steps For Saving:

- **HEARING:**
- Romans 10: 17; Matthew 7: 24 - 27
- **BELIEVING:**
- Hebrews 11: 6; Mark 16: 15, 16
- **REPENTING:**
- Acts 2: 38; 17: 30; Luke 13: 3
- **CONFESSING:**
- Matthew 10: 32, 33; Acts 8: 36, 37
- **BAPTISM:**
- Romans 6: 3 – 5; Acts 8: 36 - 38