

HELL: NEVER, FOREVER, OR JUST FOR AWHILE?

Richard L. Mayhue
Senior Vice President and Dean
Professor of Theology and Pastoral Ministries

The plethora of literature produced in the last two decades on the basic nature of hell indicates a growing debate in evangelicalism that has not been experienced since the latter half of the nineteenth century. This introductory article to the entire theme issue of TMSJ sets forth the context of the question of whether hell involves conscious torment forever in Gehenna for unbelievers or their annihilation after the final judgment. It discusses historical, philosophical, lexical, contextual, and theological issues that prove crucial to reaching a definitive biblical conclusion. In the end, hell is a conscious, personal torment forever; it is not “just for awhile” before annihilation after the final judgment (conditional immortality) nor is its final retribution “never” (universalism).

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A few noted evangelicals such as Clark Pinnock,¹ John Stott,² and John Wenham³ have in recent years challenged the doctrine of eternal torment forever in hell as God’s final judgment on all unbelievers. James Hunter, in his landmark “sociological interpretation” of evangelicalism, notes that “. . . it is clear that there is a measurable degree of uneasiness within this generation of Evangelicals with the notion of an eternal damnation.”⁴ The 1989 evangelical doctrinal caucus “Evangelical Affirmations” surprisingly debated this issue. “Strong disagreements did surface over the position of annihilationism, a view that holds that unsaved souls

¹Clark H. Pinnock, “The Conditional View,” in *Four Views on Hell*, ed. by William Crockett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 135-66.

²David L. Edwards and John R.W. Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1988) 312-29.

³John W. Wenham, “The Case for Conditional Immortality,” in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, ed. by Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992) 161-91.

⁴James Davison Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987) 38.

will cease to exist after death. Debate arose in the final plenary session over whether such a view should be denounced in the affirmations.”⁵ In forecasting the theological directions of the future, Millard Erickson cites the doctrine of “Annihilationism” as growing in popularity among evangelicals.⁶

The subject has been debated in both the popular press⁷ and scholarly circles⁸ with no apparent consensus being reached. So what is a Christian to believe? How is this aspect of the gospel to be presented? How should the doctrinal statement of a local church read? What should the pastor preach on this issue of personal eschatology which has such a direct, relevant bearing on all unbelievers?

All of the articles in this issue of *TMSJ* were topics covered by selected members of The Master's Seminary faculty in the Winter 1998 Faculty Lecture Series, the lectures being adapted for *TMSJ* to answer the theological question, “Is hell never, forever, or just for awhile?” Hopefully, answers to the practical questions above will emerge at the conclusion of this series.

SETTING UP THE DISCUSSION

The subject of hell raises at least three key questions. Are unbelievers (i.e., those who have not repented of their sin and embraced saving faith in the person of, the death of, and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ) destined for an eternity of conscious torment in a real place that the Bible refers to as the lake of fire or Gehenna (commonly called Hell)? Or, are unbelievers annihilated, i.e., put out of both material and spiritual existence? Or, do all humans eventually receive the grace of God's salvation, although for many after a time of purgatorial purification?

The Master's Seminary Statement of Faith addresses these inquiries in the following manner. “We teach that this resurrection of the unsaved dead to judgment will be a physical resurrection, whereupon receiving their judgment (John 5:28-29), they will be committed to an eternal conscious punishment in the Lake of Fire (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:11-15).”⁹

⁵“What Does It Mean to be Evangelical?” *Christianity Today* 33 (June 16, 1989):60, 63.

⁶Millard J. Erickson, *Where is Theology Going?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) 187-88.

⁷E.g., *Christianity Today* 31 (March 20, 1987).

⁸E.g. *Criswell Theological Review* 4/2 (1990) and *Evangel* 10 (Summer 1992).

⁹*The Master's Seminary 1998-2000 Catalog* (Sun Valley, Calif.: The Master's Seminary, 1998) 34.

Even though that defining statement reflects TMS's solid conclusions on the matter, the subject is immense in scope, embracing elements of Theology Proper, Anthropology, Hamartiology, Soteriology, and Eschatology. Some of the discussions are quite complex and at times confusing, especially if the student is not exegetically tethered on a continual basis to the text of Scripture.

However, the matters are crucial to a clear understanding of the gospel and relevant to the eternal destiny of people. Thus, few theological subjects could be as important and have so much depending on them personally. As a faculty, we at TMS believe that the Bible speaks definitively to the subject and successfully confronts the challenges put forth with any lingering issues satisfactorily resolved.

Since the essays in this issue of *TMSJ* are not merely statements of what we believe, but also why we believe, then their purposes will be to (1) identify/recognize the significant questions/issues; (2) sort through and analyze the appropriate biblical data; (3) focus on key issues; and (4) think exegetically toward solution/resolution to the end of confidently presenting and defending the conclusions, from a Scriptural vantage point.

Lest this topic be treated as merely academic or anyone tragically revel in his own salvation and hope of heaven to the minimizing or exclusion of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth to every person, be reminded that the final judgment of God and the ultimate destiny of unbelievers are fearful things. Jeremiah wept over the LORD's judgment on Jerusalem (Jer 9:1; 14:17-18). And similarly, Jesus shed tears over the impending divine wrath to fall on the same city later (Luke 19:41-44). Likewise, writer and reader alike should be sobered by the subject matter at hand. The OT clearly affirms that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek 18:23, 32) and the NT asserts that God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). Neither a cavalier attitude toward the lost nor a compassionate compromise are appropriate for a subject of such grave import.

FRAMING THE PARAMETERS

In regard to this series of articles, three caveats are in order. First, they address the final or eternal state of humanity, not the intermediate state. Next, they will not engage every nuance of challenge to the classic position of the church on hell, but rather will primarily take a proactive approach in order to build a biblical case. Third, their major emphasis will be on exegetical issues, not philosophical or even historical considerations.

Now concerning this introductory article in relationship to the rest, three clarifications need to be made. First, this study is designed to introduce and give an overview of the subject, but not render the final word on it. Second, this article will identify the key elements for evaluation, rather than plumb the depths of any one aspect. And finally, this essay will be foundational so that the remaining articles can

build the superstructure of the discussion.

EXAMINING THE BACKGROUND

Historical

A belief in the eternal, conscious torment of the lost in hell has been the almost unbroken testimony of the church, as has been the doctrine of the certain immortality of mankind.

As regards the fate of the wicked . . . , the general view was that their punishment would be eternal, without any possibility of remission.¹⁰

Everlasting punishment of the wicked always was . . . the orthodox theory.¹¹

The punishment inflicted upon the lost was regarded by the Fathers of the Ancient Church, with very few exceptions, as endless.¹²

The major exception to this doctrinal unanimity in the early church, was Origen (ca. 185-254) in *De Principiis*. Gregory of Nazianzus (ca. 300-374) and Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 330-395) might also have followed Origen's thoughts. However, by the fifth century, the doctrine of everlasting punishment in hell was not seriously challenged.

With regard to a complementary doctrine, the unconditional immortality of mankind has generally been universally accepted both in and outside of the church. W. O. E. Oesterley, no friend of the Christian faith, documents the general belief in immortality which predates Plato (ca. 429-347 B.C.), thus minimizing the thinking of most annihilationists that Platonian teaching later influenced Christian thought toward an unbiblical view of human immortality.¹³

This (immortality) is taken for granted in such a way, and is believed to be demonstrated so obviously, that it stands on the same level with the recognition

¹⁰J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper, 1976) 483. F. W. Farrar, *Eternal Hope* (New York: Macmillan, 1879) 56-57, found the idea of eternal conscious torment abhorrent but admitted that ". . . such has been and is the common belief of Christendom."

¹¹Philip Schaff, *The History of the Christian Church*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: A P & A, n.d.), cites and quotes numerous early church fathers to bolster the point (273-74).

¹²William G. T. Shedd, *A History of Christian Doctrine*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, n.d.) 414. Also see Jon E. Braun, *Whatever Happened to Hell?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1979), and E. B. Pusey, *What is of Faith as to Everlasting Punishment?* (New York: Oxford, 1880), for extensive historical discussion.

¹³W. O. E. Oesterley, *Immortality and the Unseen World* (New York: Macmillan, 1921).

of the fact that men live in the ordinary way.¹⁴

We have found that so far back as we can penetrate there is evidence of the fact that it has been natural to man to believe in some sort of existence after death.¹⁵

¹⁴Ibid., 190.

¹⁵S. D. F. Salmond, *The Christian Doctrine of Immortality*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1903) 463.

From the fifth century A.D. until the latter half of the nineteenth century, no orthodox leader seriously challenged the doctrine of hell. Perhaps the most notable nineteenth century exchange was between F. W. Farrar¹⁶ (conditional immortality) and E. B. Pusey¹⁷ (unconditional immortality). B. B. Warfield has provided a representative bibliography of the literature pertaining to that period.¹⁸

The issue has not seriously surfaced since then until the 1980's and 1990's, when an avalanche of books written on hell appeared (see "Providing a Selected Bibliography on Hell" below).¹⁹ Dozens of books and journal articles have dealt with the subject.

Theological

Over the millennia six basic approaches have examined the issue of the last state of humanity. Some have been philosophical and others theological.

Simple/Immediate Annihilationism

This represents the position that at death a human being goes out of

¹⁶Farrar, *Eternal Hope*.

¹⁷Pusey, *What is of Faith as to Everlasting Punishment?* Many suggest that William G. T. Shedd, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment* (1980 reprint, Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1886) was also among the best defenses of unconditional immortality.

¹⁸Benjamin B. Warfield, "Annihilationism," *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, vol. 1 (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908)183-86. This article has been reprinted in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, vol. 9 of *Studies in Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991) 447-57.

¹⁹See "Hell's Sober Comeback," *US News & World Report* (March 25, 1991):56-63, and "Heaven and Hell," *Christianity Today* (May 27, 1991):29-39.

existence forever, i.e., there is no future life for anyone. It has also been termed “materialism”²⁰ and “Pure Mortalism.”²¹ Democritus (ca. 460-380 B.C.), Aristotle (ca. 384-322 B.C.), Epicurus (ca. 341-270 B.C.), and more recently Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) championed this decidedly unchristian view.

Simple/Immediate Universalism

At death everyone passes immediately into an eternal life of bliss in the hereafter. Raymond Moody²² and Elizabeth Kubler-Ross²³ represent recent non-Christian advocates of this view.

²⁰Robert A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1984) 185-98.

²¹Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* 447-48. This language is also used by Millard J. Erickson, “Is Hell Forever?” *BibSac* 152 (July-September 1995):259.

²²Raymond A. Moody, *Life After Life* (Carmel, N. Y.: Guideposts, 1975).

²³Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: MacMillan, 1970).

Postponed Universalism/Restorationism

This view posits that at the resurrection all will be given eternal life. John Hick²⁴ represents a pluralistic variation of this position while Origen and John A. T. Robinson espouse a supposed Christian version of it.²⁵

Postponed Annihilationism

The mainstream of annihilationists believe that at the resurrection unbelievers will be judged and then put out of existence forever. This approach has rarely been affirmed before the mid-nineteenth century, e.g., by Arnobius (early fourth century A.D.) and Socinius (ca. 1539-1604). Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Christadelphians embrace this doctrine. The most recent published advocates include LeRoy Froom,²⁶ Edward Fudge,²⁷ Michael Green,²⁸

²⁴John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Macmillan, 1966).

²⁵John A. T. Robinson, *In the End God* (London: James Clarke, 1950).

²⁶LeRoy E. Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, 2 vols. (Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald, 1965). This is the standard Seventh-Day Adventist work on annihilationism/conditional immortality.

²⁷Edward W. Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes* (Houston, Tex.: Providential, 1982).

²⁸Michael Green, *Evangelism Through the Local Church* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990).

Philip E. Hughes,²⁹ John Stott,³⁰ Steven Travis,³¹ and John Wenham.³²

Possible Annihilationism/Postmortem Evangelism

²⁹Philip E. Hughes, *The True Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

³⁰David L. Edwards and John R. W. Stott, *Evangelical Essentials*. While not dogmatic on the issue, Stott noted in “The Logic of Hell: A Brief Rejoinder,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 18 (January 1994):33-34, “The late Professor F. F. Bruce wrote to me in 1989 that ‘annihilation is certainly an acceptable interpretation of the relevant New Testament passages.’ He added: ‘For myself I remain agnostic.’ My position is similar.” To the best knowledge of the writer, this is the last published statement by Stott on this issue.

³¹Stephen Travis, *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1982).

³²John Wenham, *The Goodness of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1974). Just recently his autobiography, *Facing Hell: The Story of a Nobody* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 1998), was released posthumously in which Wenham candidly describes the detailed development of his thinking and the strong conviction he held at his death (1996), especially 68-69, 178-79, 229-57. See also Wenham’s essay, “The Case for Conditional Immortality” 161-91.

This “second chance approach” reasons that after resurrection, unbelievers will have another opportunity to receive or reject Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Those who reject Christ for a second time will then face annihilation. Clark Pinnock is the most vocal advocate of this idea.³³

Certain Eternal Existence³⁴

The generally accepted, historic position of the church has been that after the final resurrection and judgment, mankind will either live blessedly in the presence of God or live in conscious torment in the fires of hell away from the presence of God forever. Contemporary proponents would include John

³³Clark Pinnock, “Conditional View” 135-66; idem, *A Wideness in God's Mercy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 168-75, idem, *Unbounded Love* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1994) 87-95. See the thoughtful critique by Paul R. House, “Biblical Theology and the Inclusivist Challenge,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 2 (Summer 1998):2-4, and John K. Barrett, “Does Inclusivist Theology Undermine Evangelism?” *EQ* 70/3 (1998):219-45.

³⁴Another way to categorize the various views would be (1) No Immortality (Simple/Immediate Annihilationism); (2) Conditional Immortality (Postponed Annihilationism and Possible Annihilationism); and (3) Unconditional/Certain Immortality (Simple Universalism, Postponed Universalism, and Certain Eternal Existence).

Blanchard,³⁵ Harry Buis,³⁶ Larry Dixon,³⁷ Robert Morey,³⁸ Alec Motyer,³⁹ Robert A. Peterson,⁴⁰ and John Walvoord.⁴¹

Polemical

Philosophical Issues

³⁵John Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?* (Durham, England: Evangelical, 1993).

³⁶Harry Buis, *The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1957).

³⁷Larry Dixon, *The Other Side of the Good News* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1992).

³⁸Morey, *Death and the Afterlife*.

³⁹Alec Motyer, *After Death: A Sure and Certain Hope* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1996).

⁴⁰Robert A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment* (Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995); cf. idem, "A Traditionalist Response to John Stott's Arguments for Annihilationism," *JETS* 37 (December 1994):553-68.

⁴¹John Walvoord, "The Literal View," in *Four Views on Hell*, 11-28. Additionally, see Harold O. J. Brown, "Will the Lost Suffer Forever?" *Criswell Theological Review* 4 (1990):261-78; Millard J. Erickson, "Is Hell Forever?" 259-72; Alan W. Gomes, "Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell," *Christian Research Journal* 13 (Spring 1991):15-19 and "Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell," Part 2, *Christian Research Journal* 14 (Summer 1991):9-13.

The questions concerning eternal torment raised by various opponents include “Isn’t eternal conscious torment needless cruelty?” and “Isn’t forever punishment incompatible with God’s love and mercy?” Preliminarily, one might observe that, for annihilationists, life imprisonment is more humane to the thinking of most than capital punishment or suffering through this life is more righteous than euthanasia. No major complaints are raised by annihilationists to the hundreds or thousands of years during which unbelievers suffer in the intermediate state. So why then be opposed to endless punishment in hell? This writer’s opinion would be that those sincere Christian scholars who have opted for conditional immortality have been far more influenced by an overemphasized anthropocentric view of the world and Scripture than a theocentric view (maybe more than they realize) and that this has colored their thinking.⁴²

The question is raised, “To whom and when, if ever, is immortality bestowed to a mortal creature?” Opponents of eternal torment in hell often assert that the church was dramatically affected by Platonic thought which taught that the soul was naturally created immortal. To that it must be hypothetically admitted that one Christian generation could possibly be deceived by an unbiblical philosophy. However, to support the idea that 2,000 years of doctrinal history has been almost universally blind to embracing pagan thought on this issue is beyond acceptable reason.

God’s justice is often brought to the forefront of the discussion. “Isn’t eternal punishment unjust as retribution for a non-eternal violation?” Yet, it must be remembered that God defines and sets the standard for what is just and unjust. The Scriptures reveal what that measure is, and thus an exegetical, not a philosophical, approach is the only one that will yield satisfactory answers. It could just be that sin against an eternally holy God is far more serious from His perspective than from the human point of view.

It has also been asked, “Would not the joy of the saints be greatly diminished in heaven to know that others are suffering in hell?” Again, one must retreat to Scripture, particularly Rev 21:4, for an answer. Also, it could be asked of annihilationists in response, “Would not the joy of the saints be greatly diminished in heaven to know that their unsaved acquaintances and family have now gone out of existence?” Humanly speaking, that latter hypothetical situation seems as

⁴²On the other hand, those who espouse conscious torment in hell have in their imaginative descriptions of hell’s awfulness often greatly exceeded what little detail the Scripture provides, beyond the fact of torment. For example, Dante Alighieri, *Dante’s Inferno* (Chicago: Thompson & Thompson, 1902), written in the thirteenth century.

sorrowful, if not more so, as the former.

Exegetical Issues

In this brief section, the writer raises some critical issues without attempting to settle them, due to the purpose and scope of this article.

1. Are *ᾠλεια* (*ap_leia*, “destruction”), *λεθρος* (*olethros*, “destruction”), and *ᾠλλυμι* (*apollymi*, “I destroy”) in such passages as Matt 7:13 (“the broad way of destruction”), 2 Thess 1:9 (“the penalty of eternal destruction”), and Matt 10:28 (“destroy both body and soul”) meant to convey “annihilation” or a substandard/ruinous life in the hereafter as compared to eternal life in the presence of God?
2. Is the fire imagery of *πυρ* (*pur*, “fire”), associated with Gehenna, picturing “annihilation” or conscious, continuous torment in such NT phrases as “lake of fire” (Rev 20:10), “furnace of fire” (Matt 13:42), “unquenchable fire” (Matt 3:12), and “fire and brimstone” (Luke 17:29)? What kind of fire produces continual “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt 8:12)?
3. Does *θανατος* (*thanatos*, “death”) connote “end of existence” or transition to “another kind of existence”?
4. Does the noun *αιων* (*ai_n*, “eternity”) and the adjective *αιωνιος* (*ai_nios*, “eternal”) primarily reflect lasting effect or lasting existence?

Theological Issues

1. Was Platonic thought regarding the natural immortality of man’s spiritual being actually integrated into Christian theology, or do the ideas of “eternal life” and “second death” come from the Scriptures?

2. Is there really a second chance for salvation after physical death?
3. Is one's salvation based on one's level of light/desire for God, or is salvation based on a true knowledge of and repentant response to the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ in a person's normal lifetime?
4. Does Scripture teach the ultimate reconciliation of all things in such a way that the ongoing, eternal existence of hell, Satan, demons, and unbelievers would be a contradiction or that would militate against God's full glory (cf. John 12:32; 1 Cor 15:28; Eph 1:10; Phil 2:10-11)?

DELIVERING GRIST FOR THE MENTAL MILL

Key Words

α_ών/α_ώνιος (*ai_n, ai_nios*)

1. Context strongly determines the meaning of eternity/eternal, whether it be "for an extremely long time" or "forever."
2. With rare exceptions (e.g., Rev 19:3), the plural is always used in the sense of "forever."
3. Would not Rev 14:11 indicate an eternal experience not just eternal results, as also the lake of fire experience (Rev 20:10)?
4. The use of the plural α_΄να (*ai_na*) in Jude 13 to describe the experience of "black darkness" is utterly unexpected and unnecessary if annihilationism were in view (cf. 2 Pet 2:17 where *ai_na* is not used).

_πόλεια/_πόλλυμι/_λεθρος (*ap_leia/apollymi/olethros*)

1. These words for destruction/ruin are never translated "annihilation"

in the NT.

2. These words are used in a temporal sense without the meaning of annihilation, e.g., Acts 8:20; 1 Cor 5:5; 2 Pet 3:6. Therefore, why should the meaning of annihilation be attached to them in an eternal sense?
3. Since *λεθρος* (*olethros*) and *απόλεια* (*ap_leia*) are used together in 1 Tim 6:9, would this not strongly militate against *ap_leia* meaning annihilation?

βασανίζω/κόλασις/_δυνάομαι (*Basaniz_/kolasis/odynaomai*)

1. Would not the idea of everlasting punishment demand the experiencing of hell, and not annihilation (cf. Matt 25:46)?
2. Do not the descriptive terms in Rev 14:10, 11 and 20:10 (“torment . . . forever,” “no rest day and night,” “tormented day and night,” and “forever and ever”) associated with torment/punishment point decidedly to an eternal experience?
3. If *βασανίζω* (*basaniz_*) is used of ongoing torment temporally (cf. Rev 9:5, 11:10), then would it not be reasonable to expect it also to describe continuous torment eternally?

Key Texts

Matthew 25:46

This writer asserts that “eternal life” shares a common idea with “eternal punishment,” i.e., they both imply a forever conscious existence. The contrast is obviously in a differing quality of existence that is endless in both cases.

Mark 9:43, 48 (cf. Isa 66:24)

The “unquenchable fire” of 9:43 must have an endless supply of fuel (otherwise it would be quenchable), which would be impossible if one took the annihilation view. Since the worm does not die, it implies an endless supply of food which could not be with the annihilation view.

John 3:36

With parallelism much like that in Matthew 25:46, the verse declares that the true believer has eternal life and the unbeliever has God’s wrath abiding, with the sense of continuation, on him. The concept of annihilationism would contradict the biblical sense of “continued abiding.”

2 Thessalonians 1:9 (cf. Matt 10:28)

This text is seemingly meaningless if “eternal destruction” meant annihilation. Rather the vocabulary (see the discussion of *λεθρος* above) and the implied contrast to believers in the presence of God point to eternal existence in a ruinous state.

Revelation 14:10-11

There are at least four major contextual/exegetical indicators that a conscious, continual experience is in view here, not annihilation.

1. The torment/*basaniz_* is done in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb.
2. The smoke of torment is an eternal phenomenon. Where there is smoke, there must be fire; and where there is fire, there must be fuel. So, eternal smoke demands eternal fuel, i.e., the lost.
3. Those being tormented have no rest or, in other words, they are in torment. This would not be true if this referred to

annihilation.

4. The torment goes on “day and night,” which would be incompatible with annihilationism.

Revelation 19:20 and 20:10 (cf. Matt 25:41)

In Rev 19:20, the beast and the false prophet are thrown alive into the lake of fire. One thousand years later they are still alive (20:10). The phrase in 20:10, “tormented day and night forever,” indicates that what their previous tormented experience had been for a millennium would continue throughout eternity. This also describes the experience provided by the “eternal fire” of Matt 25:41. Since this is true of them, would it not also be true of others who eventually reside in the lake of fire?

Revelation 22:15

The focus of attention here is the New Jerusalem whose occupants have washed their robes (22:14). Those who have not and are unclean dwell outside, implying a continuing existence, not a non-existence.

Key Theological Concepts

Intermediate Torment

Luke 16:24, 25 points to lasting, conscious torment on the part of unbelievers immediately after death, just as Rev 20:10 (cf. Matt 25:41; Rev 19:20) indicates one thousand years of torment during the millennium—these are essentially indisputable facts. Now, it would seem that philosophical arguments used by annihilationists against eternal conscious torment would be equally applicable here, but the facts of the texts contradict them. Since the annihilationist's thinking is not true here in the temporal sense, nothing would then make them valid in the eternal sense.

Degrees of Eternal Punishment

Matthew 10:15; 11:22, 24 and Luke 10:12, 14; 20:47 point to the decided idea that there will be degrees of punishment in Gehenna for unbelievers appropriate to the evil deeds done during one's life. This would strongly argue against annihilationism which basically calls for a "one size fits all" approach in that all are annihilated without variation.

Resurrection and the Second Death

Both Dan 12:2 and John 5:29 point to the ultimate resurrection of the lost. Then, Rev 20:11-15 describes their judgment by God with the outcome of a "second death" in the lake of fire (cf. 21:8). Just as the first death did not result in annihilation, as evidenced by

resurrection, neither will the second death.

Suffering in This Life

Annihilationists argue that it would be unloving and unmerciful for God to allow a person to experience eternal torment. They also reason that the punishment of eternal torment does not fit the nature of a temporal crime. Such logic seemingly fails to take into account that, from a human perspective, the sufferings of Job (Job 1–2) were not deserved, but God allowed them or that the sin of Achan (Joshua 7) did not seem to deserve death as the consequence, but God demanded it of both him and his family. Remember also the death penalty imposed on the one caught gathering wood on the Sabbath (Num 15:32-36). None of these, apart from divine revelation, seem to square with the character of God as humanly defined, yet Scripture authenticates them all as true and consistent with God’s perfect being. Thus annihilationists, who rest a large part of their case on this kind of thinking, should be extremely cautious in practicing theodicy.

REACHING A WORKING CONCLUSION

Because this essay is introductory in nature, not the final word in the anthology, let this writer propose a “working solution” to be affirmed and strengthened by the articles that follow. It is concluded,

No variation of Universalism nor any form of Annihilationism/Conditional Immortality is biblically or otherwise acceptable as a legitimate Christian view of Hell (Gehenna), i.e., life hereafter in the final state for unbelievers. Overall views other than “Certain Eternal Existence” as espoused in this essay are deemed to be historically, lexically, exegetically, contextually, and theologically deficient.

We find satisfying the confident conclusion drawn by S. Lewis Johnson: “It is doubtful that there is a doctrine in the Bible easier to

prove than that of eternal punishment (cf. Matt. 25:46).⁴³

PROVIDING A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON HELL

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