

Annihilationism – a Refutation

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Introduction

The doctrine of annihilationism cannot be discussed without discussing the Bible doctrine of Hell. The Bible depicts Hell as a place where sinners who die in their sins will suffer uninterrupted torment forever (Mat. 5:22; 10:28; 25:46; Mark 9:43, 47–48; et al.). Human beings love the pleasure that comes from gratifying their fleshly lusts in forbidden ways and few can be persuaded to forsake such (Mat. 7:13–14). Men not only seek pleasure, but they also seek to avoid pain and suffering as much as possible. This being so, they reason that a place and state of **eternal torment**, as described in the Bible, constitute “cruel and unusual punishment” as a consequence for merely enjoying “the pleasures of sin for a season” (Heb. 11:25).¹

They want to be able to live in rebellion against God, their Creator, and His will with impunity. We should therefore not think it strange that men have invented and eagerly embraced various means of escaping the awful sentence, “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). The doctrine of annihilationism is one of the several attempts to escape the Bible doctrine of eternal damnation for sin.

Annihilationism is a form of materialism that denies the immortality of the human soul, insisting that human beings are merely mortal, physical, material. This doctrine holds that the wicked will be atomized, snuffed out of existence – annihilated, either before or after the Judgment, rather than being consigned to punishment that never ends in a fiery Hell. While the doctrine itself is heresy, the equally great sin may be the attempt by its purveyors to so contort the Word of God as to make it appear that it teaches their contorted doctrine. Contrariwise, this doctrine is rooted in sheer human emotion and feeling, wishful thinking, a subjective view of what is “fair” and “unfair,” and an utter rejection of the consistent message of God’s inspired men – rather than in the immutable Will and Word of God.

Seeds and Soils of Annihilationism

The nearest thing to annihilationism in the first century was the teaching of the Sadducean sect of the Jews. They were the theological modernists and ultra-liberals of their day, described by Luke as those who “...say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit”

(Acts 23:8; cf. Luke 20:27). They had imbibed pagan philosophy, and it destroyed their faith in fundamental realities and doctrines pertaining to the nature of man and his eternal destiny.

While they were fatally and egregiously wrong, ironically, they were more consistent than the modern-day annihilationists. The Sadducees **denied immortality for all** in their denial of the resurrection and of the existence of angels and spirits. The annihilationists of our time are highly selective; they willingly embrace Heaven and immortality for the righteous, but utterly reject Hell as the depository of immortal wicked souls. Such theological “supermarket shopping,” wherein one selects only that which pleases him from God’s “shelves” of revelation, would be most convenient were it possible. However, the eternal bliss of Heaven and the eternal misery of Hell following the Resurrection and the Judgment stand as inseparable doctrines in the Word of God:

Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, 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 (John 5:28-29); And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life (Mat. 25:46).

Note it well: For good and evil alike there will be (1) a resurrection, (2) a judgment, and (3) an eternal existence. Men may **reject** the teaching of Jesus on these subjects (as most do), but they cannot honestly **misunderstand** it! Therefore, one cannot logically and consistently (based on the teaching of the Son of God) deny immortality in Hell for the wicked without likewise denying it for the righteous in Heaven: Eternal life and eternal torment stand or fall together as one doctrinal entity in Scripture.

The Pharisees (the rival sect of the Sadducees) were sorely deficient in many ways, both in doctrine and character, but they held to the Truth concerning the Resurrection and the immortal nature of man (Acts 23:8b). In these doctrines the Lord and the Pharisees were one. The foregoing statements of Jesus’ teachings are but samples of many others in which He maintained the reality of the universal (1) resurrection of the dead, (2) the final Judgment, (3) immortality and eternal destiny of man, and (4) the existence of Heaven and Hell as the respective realms in the spirit world for the righteous and the unrighteous. He taught these things in very literal, unambiguous, and plain words, and did so frequently. He actually taught and warned about the Judgment and Hell far more than He taught about Heaven. (This fact is Ironical considering the annihilationist’s acceptance of Heaven and the utter rejection of Hell.)

The inspired men through whom Jesus revealed the New Testament constantly and consistently reinforced the Lord's teaching as outlined above. There cannot be the slightest doubt about the meaning of their teachings. As did the Christ, they repeatedly taught these doctrines with clarity. In spite of the plethora of apostasies and digressions from the Truth following the apostolic era, the Biblical doctrines of the immortality of the soul and the eternal punishment of the wicked in Hell at the hands of a just God remained an almost universally settled conviction throughout Christendom during the first sixteen centuries of the Gospel Age.²

We can better understand the doctrine of annihilationism if we know some of the historical and philosophical perspective out of which it has arisen. As previously indicated, annihilationism relates directly to the doctrine of Hell. More specifically, it relates to – and has emerged from – man's revulsion at and rejection of the doctrine of eternal punishment. To study one, we must study both.

While Hell has fallen on hard times (as far as that which the Bible teaches about it is concerned), history amply demonstrates that the outright denial of Hell to any significant degree, or its companion, loss of belief in Hell, are relatively recent phenomena. The only significant ancient dissenter to the Biblical view of Hell was Origen in the third century, who was eventually condemned by two ecumenical councils for his heresy. (Rare though it was/is, the councils stumbled onto the Truth occasionally!) With the approach of the Renaissance (c. A.D. 1500) man's emphasis became less and less God-centered and more and more man-centered. Humanism, which placed man at the center of all things as the be-all, do-all, and end-all, began to displace true Theism. The more men promoted themselves, the more they demoted God. Eventually men (even the "theistic" humanists) counted themselves so precious and valuable that they could not abide the thought of eternal punishment or retribution, or of a sin grievous enough to warrant it. Jon Braun well describes this philosophical development:

From the sixteenth century on, God's judgment was a constant target for attack by humanists both within and outside the church [i.e., Protestantism and Catholicism, DM]. Hell and humanism didn't mix; they can't mix and never will mix. It just won't do to have highly exalted man experiencing the torments of hell eternally. First, it is presumed that the precious creature couldn't possibly do anything bad enough to warrant such punishment. And even more significantly, the humanists are convinced that God could not bear the eternal loss of even one of the marvelous man-creatures.³

In more recent years certain radical modernistic and liberal theologians have fully embraced and brazenly espoused universalism, one of the most popular anti-hell philosophies. John A.T. Robinson, late Bishop of the Church of England, made a career out of blasphemy on several fundamental Biblical doctrines, including the doctrine of Hell. In 1949 he wrote an article in which he said the following:

Christ, in Origen's old words, remains on the Cross as long as one sinner remains in hell. That is not speculation; it is a statement grounded in the very necessity of God's nature. 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.⁴

Note well Robinson's authority—not Christ and the apostles in the first century, but Origen, the heretic, in the third century! Only eighteen years following his article quoted above (1967), Robinson wrote a book titled, *But That I Can't Believe*. He apparently thought that he had convinced everybody that Hell belonged to the realm of fable, mythology, and the superstition of the Dark Ages: "There are still a few who would like to bring back hell, as some want to bring back birching and hanging. They are usually the same types who wish to purge Britain of horror comics, sex, and violence."⁵ Apparently Robinson loved horror comics, sex, and violence as much as he hated Hell!

Emil Brunner, one of the darlings of liberal theologians in the 20th century, obviously agreed with Robinson's universalism, as his following statement from 1954 demonstrates:

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.⁶

Brunner's glasses must have been tinted or fogged over when he read the Bible (why do such infidels bother to read it at all?). Aside from the insistent Scriptural theme of judgment against and eternal punishment for unforgiven transgressors of God's Law, the very existence of a plan of salvation (which Brunner feigns to believe in) necessarily implies "its polar opposite"—damnation. The will of God is "unambiguous and positive" all right, but about the **existence** rather than the non-existence of a Final Judgment and of eternal retribution for sin in a place called Hell.

The Legacy of Anti-Hell Theology

The Hell-denying heresy of Robinson and Brunner and their ilk has trickled down even to small-town pulpiteers as the abnormal has now become increasingly normal. Those once considered radicals have gradually become “mainstream.” For a century or more professors who are theological liberals of the most rank and radical sort have dominated the sectarian seminaries. Many of them had/have no stomach for anything unpleasant, guilt-provoking, foreboding, or “negative” connected with their brand of religion and their concept of God. Their primary assumptions all but categorically ignore Divine Justice and Divinely-administered retribution for sin, if not denial of immortality. Over several decades these schools have turned out hundreds of thousands of infidel ecclesiastics who have incessantly vomited their weekly poison of unbelief upon their Biblically ignorant, defenseless denominational flocks.

The basis of their theology is an over-emphasis on and perversion of the love, grace, mercy, kindness, and longsuffering of God. This over-emphasis has been accompanied by an obvious de-emphasis (in many cases total avoidance and/or denial) of the balancing traits of God’s justice, law, wrath against sin, and the corollary implication of these verities — **retribution in eternal Hell for impenitent sinners.** The centuries-old Biblical “orthodoxy” concerning Hell has been so watered-down that even so-called “Evangelical” denominations, usually morally conservative, have come to freely accept such things as divorce for any cause, sexual indulgence, and social drinking as behaviors that are compatible with a “Christian lifestyle” and the hope of Heaven. Furthermore, such influential Evangelical leaders as Philip Hughes and John Stott (“the pope of the evangelicals”) have succumbed to annihilation dogma.⁷

The aforementioned theistic humanism that emerged from the Renaissance has spawned at least five schools of Hell-denial:

1. **Atheistic Humanism** — the doctrine that man is the ultimate form of life and correspondingly, the denial of the existence of God. That which brings pleasure, joy, and happiness to man is all that matters. Since there is no God, there is no absolute right or wrong, no Judgment, no Heaven or Hell, no existence except physical, earthly life.
2. **Universalism** — the doctrine that all mankind will eventually be “saved.” This doctrine is the child of the presupposition that Hell could not exist as an eternal state because God is too loving and benevolent to allow anyone to suffer forever in such a place. Robinson and Brunner, cited above, were obvious advocates of this view. The Unitarian/Universalist

Church is the corporate promulgator of this deadly philosophy, but it has many fellow travelers and sympathizers scattered throughout the denominational world.

3. **Liberalism**—a philosophy I loosely apply to the idea that while Hell may exist and some may go there, no sin is bad enough nor sinner wicked enough to really deserve it. It differs little from universalism in its outcome. Liberalism may be defined as a thinly disguised form of universalism.
4. **New Ageism**—an umbrella term that covers all sorts of pagan, weird, off-beat, occult, mystical, imaginary, nonsensical, anti-Biblical philosophies.⁸ One of its primary emphases is “self-esteemism” (shades of humanism). To New Age devotees the root of all human problems is lack of or low self-esteem. Where did men get such a low opinion of themselves? Why from the “traditional” (translation, “Christian” as they perceive it) view of things, of course. All this preaching about sin and Hell has produced guilt-ridden personalities and has just ruined man’s self-esteem! To the New Ager, “Acknowledging oneself as a sinner destroys a human being. His solution to this is simply to define sin out of existence and declare man sinless.”⁹ Of course, this also conveniently defines Hell out of existence.
5. **Annihilationism**—the doctrine that the wicked will be punished by cessation of consciousness and existence. Thus they define *Hell* as cessation of existence rather eternal torment at death. There are two principal versions of annihilationism:
 - (1) Some (e.g., the “Jehovah’s Witnesses”) allege that men are wholly mortal and that the wicked absolutely cease to exist at death (“absolutists”).
 - (2) Others (e.g., the Adventists and an increasing number of “evangelicals”) likewise aver that man is not created immortal, but that the righteous will be granted immortality for eternity with God at the resurrection, while the wicked will be raised with a “conditional” immortality to suffer a time of punishment commensurate with their wickedness, after which they will be annihilated. This view is sometimes called “conditionalism,” but in both versions (absolutism and conditionalism), the result for the wicked is the same—whether sooner or later—annihilation.

Annihilationism and the Church

Has all of this influenced any of our brethren? Sadly, yes, and over a span of many years. Dr. John Thomas, a British physician, who deserted the church, began the Christadelphian sect in 1844. A cardinal tenet of this sect is that unbelievers will remain eternally dead.¹⁰ In 1852 the popular, dynamic, and charismatic Jesse B. Ferguson caused all manner of confusion in the church in Nashville, Tennessee, by his pronouncements on the fate of the wicked after death. While we have not found a statement from him explicitly advocating annihilation of the wicked, he clearly denied believing that the wicked would be punished after death.¹¹ We hardly see how his comments could imply anything other than annihilationism.

After being strongly opposed and exposed, he found refuge in denominationalism, but not before doing grievous injury to the church in Nashville.

So far as I know the first one among us in recent times to espouse annihilationism has been Edward Fudge. He has for several years been an elder in the Bering Drive Church of Christ in Houston, Texas, long known for its advocacy and toleration of extremely liberal theology and practice. In 1984, I invited brother Fudge to speak on the Third Annual Denton Lectures, hosted by the Pearl Street Church of Christ in Denton, Texas. I specifically invited him because he had written and published a book in 1982 in which he vigorously argued the annihilationist position.¹² The purpose of the invitation was to allow him to present his theology so that it might be placed in sharp contrast with and refuted by the Truth of God's Word, which, at my invitation, Gary Workman did in an effective way.¹³ The very way that I worded Fudge's topic for his manuscript and lecture summarizes the thesis of his book: "The Judgment of God Against Sinners Will Be Eternal Extinction Rather than Unending Conscious Torment."¹⁴ He classifies himself as a "conditionalist" (per the Adventists, as previously described) and labels all those who accept the teaching of the Bible as "traditionalists." A denominational scholar, Robert Morey responded to Fudge's book with a book of his own in 1984.¹⁵ In this ringing refutation, Morey averred that Fudge merely summarized *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, a large work by the Adventist, Leroy Froom.¹⁶ Another denominational author, John Gerstner, has likewise exposed and refuted Fudge's views in his book, *Repent or Perish*.¹⁷

In this day of doctrinal freaks in the church we should not be surprised that some brethren have found Fudge's views attractive. Perhaps among the first to jump on Fudge's bandwagon was Al Pickering who became known to many through his "Sharpening the Sword" Seminars over the past several years. In a phone conversation with Wayne Jackson in 1987 he pontificated that it is "a slap in the face of God" to teach that the wicked will be in conscious eternal torment in Hell.¹⁸ F. LaGard Smith, the Pepperdine law professor and popular author and lecturer, has also publicly endorsed Fudge's views. In a series of lectures on "A Christian Response to the New Age Movement" at Pepperdine University Lectures in April 1988, he advocated "soul-sleeping" and strongly argued that the souls of wicked men will be utterly consumed rather than punished. Concerning the soul, he averred that God "will destroy—not punish it, not dangle it, not torture it—destroy it."¹⁹ Apparently, Smith's comments whetted the appetite of officialdom at Pepperdine for the annihilationist doctrine, so

they invited Edward Fudge himself to present his “conditionalist” views in their 1991 lectureship. John Clayton, the liberal, agnostic, theistic evolutionist lecturer that some brethren refuse to be warned about, has enthusiastically endorsed Fudge’s book, declaring: “I have never been able to be comfortable with the position that a person who rejected God should suffer forever and ever and ever.”²⁰

Besides these are many brethren whom we might describe as **practical** annihilationists, as demonstrated by their loose and latitudinarian approach to grace, baptism, the identity of the church, fellowship, worship, marriage, divorce, and remarriage, the nature of God, Biblical authority in general, and yes, what the Bible teaches about the Judgment and Hell. Some preachers have had the audacity to announce to the congregation that they will no longer preach on Hell because it does not fit in with their *make-’em-feel-good-at-all-costs* agenda. Such brethren seem to have great difficulty identifying any doctrine as heresy or any practice as sinful, however outrageous and unscriptural it is. They will not oppose or expose any teacher or preacher as false or his/her doctrine as damnable, regardless of how contrary to Gospel Truth it may be (including the doctrine of annihilationism, I would suppose). They embrace in their fellowship those who are not in fellowship with God. They have found devilish and ingenious ways of contorting the Bible and of redefining ordinary words to fashion “loopholes” whereby they promise God’s approval to practicing adulterers and drunkards, and to heretics of every stripe and hue.

Without question, the denial or even the mitigation of the Bible doctrine of Hell is very appealing. If human lust and selfish gratification are one’s major pursuits, who would not be attracted to the concept that denies...

1. The reality of consequential sin
2. Ultimate accountability for behavior
3. That a Supreme Being Creator has imposed a code of conduct
4. The existence of a final, inescapable, horrible eternal retribution for rebellion against Divine law?

Does not the prevalence of the denial of Hell offer at least a partial explanation for the unconscionable rampant crime, the animalistic sexual behavior, the rising tide of anti-Christian sentiment, and the rapidly vanishing reverence for truth in a society whose founding fathers were almost all unabashed theists? It is beyond contradiction that multiplied millions, in one way or another, have rejected the reality of Hell. But shall we surrender its existence to the

infidels, the skeptics, the liberals? Or shall we, as the Lord's church, continue to warn people about it and help them avoid it if they so choose?

What Did Jesus Teach?

There are many lines of argument that can be followed in setting forth the teaching of the Bible on this subject. Obviously, I will not be able to examine them all in this brief document. I will therefore primarily confine my examination of annihilationism to the teachings of Jesus, the Christ, only occasionally noticing passages from other inspired writers. I believe the following premise to be unassailable:

The existence of Hell as a place of eternal punishment for the wicked cannot be denied without denial of the Christ Himself. Thus, annihilation theology involves the even more fundamental issue – **belief in the Christ Himself!**

Despite all the avowals of annihilation and denials of Hell, there is still the stubborn, nagging, undeniable, and repeated teaching of Jesus that must be considered. He said much more about Hell than Heaven. Certainly, He used the term far more than any other New Testament teacher. However, there is far more in His teaching about Hell than merely the statements in which the word *Hell* appears. When rightly perceived, every warning about the Judgment, every prohibition of evil, every encouragement to righteousness, and every declaration about sin has the concept of eternal damnation behind it and embedded in it. Otherwise, they are so many empty warnings. In fact, Jesus' earthly sojourn and the stated purpose of His coming are rendered vain and unnecessary apart from the reality of the eternal damnation of the souls of men because of their sins. In fact, setting aside the clear teaching of Jesus about Hell for the moment, the very coming of Christ from Heaven to earth and the sacrifice of Himself upon the cross for the sins of mankind are the ultimate arguments for the reality of eternal damnation – Hell itself. Now, from the teaching of Jesus, let us see why we must continue to warn people about Hell – whether or not they want to hear it.

Man Has an Immortal Soul

The immortality of the soul is a major battleground in any discussion of annihilation claims. For there to be a Hell, a place of eternal punishment for the wicked, human beings must survive death as a conscious personality – that is, he must possess immortality. Annihilationists allege that man does not innately possess an immortal soul, but that immortality is conferred (upon those to whom it is given) at the resurrection: "Immortality is inherent in God alone.... Believers, now being mortal by nature, receive immortality from Jesus Christ as a gift conferred

at the resurrection of the last day.”²¹ To the “absolutists” the wicked never receive it and are thus never resurrected, but are annihilated upon dying physically. For the “conditionalists,” “immortality” is conferred on the wicked only for the appropriate time of their punishment, after which their “immortality” expires, and they are annihilated (so much for “immortality”).

Jesus taught unequivocally that man is immortal, that he is more than flesh and blood: “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” (Mat. 10:28). The context is one in which Jesus is warning the newly appointed apostles that they will suffer severe persecution (vv. 16–27). Even if they are killed for His sake, He tells them that it will be only the body that dies. Men will not be able to kill the soul—it will survive physical death, demanding their immortality. Clearly, Jesus’ language demands that the immortal soul is **coexistent** with the mortal body—immortality is not something to be later conferred. If the apostles possessed no unkillable soul at the time of their bodily death, the words of Jesus are superfluous at best and nonsense at worst. Obviously, even the most violent killer could not kill that which did not exist.

But the annihilationists argue that this passage supports their contention, asserting that *destroyed* equals *annihilated*. They thus claim that the Lord here is teaching that God will annihilate both soul and body of the wicked in Hell. However, even the most elementary Greek word study proves otherwise. *Destroyed* is from *apollumi*, a word is used in numerous passages in which “annihilation” cannot possibly be the meaning:

1. The wineskins “burst” (Mat. 9:17).
2. The sheep was “lost” (Luke 15:4–9).
3. The prodigal son was “perishing” (v. 17).

Neither these nor a host of other occurrences of *apollumi* can bear the meaning of “annihilation.” Jesus also used the noun form of *apollumi* (i.e., “destruction”) in reference to Hell (Mat. 7:13). W.E. Vine says that this word

...signifies to destroy utterly; in Middle Voice, to perish. The idea is **not extinction** but ruin, loss, **not of being**, but of well-being.... So of persons...; of the loss of well-being in the case of the unsaved hereafter (Mat. 10:29; Luke 13:3, 5; John 3:16...) [emph DM].²²

Note that Vine’s definition precisely contradicts and falsifies the contention of the annihilationists.

The comment of J. W. McGarvey on Jesus’ use of *destroy* in this passage is instructive:

Materialists are wont to catch at the word destroy in this place, as proof that the soul can be annihilated. But in doing so they ascribe to the term destroy a sense which it does not bear,

and they overlook the fact that this passage utterly refutes the doctrine that the soul dies with the body. Jesus says, "Fear not them who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul;" but if the soul dies with the body, then he who kills the body kills the soul too, and cannot avoid killing it. To destroy, is not to annihilate, but to bring to ruin; and the soul and body are brought to ruin when they are cast into hell.²³

It is significant that Joseph Henry Thayer, the renowned Greek lexicographer, was a Unitarian who did not believe in eternal punishment, yet his knowledge of the meaning of *apollumi* and his personal integrity as a scholar forced him to define this word as "to be delivered up to eternal misery."²⁴ Robert Morey makes the following strong statement:

In every instance where the word *apollumi* is found in the New Testament, something other than annihilation is being described. Indeed, there isn't a single instance in the New Testament where *apollumi* means annihilation in the strict meaning of the word."²⁵

Thomas B. Warren commented as follows on the Lord's teaching in this passage: "Thus, it is clear that Matthew 10:28 teaches the persistence of human personality after physical death (the immortality of the soul)."²⁶ The idea of being "destroyed" in Hell is that one will suffer utter, irreclaimable loss and ruin forever.

There Is a Realm in the Spirit World Called "Hell"

In the passage quoted above Jesus referred to Hell in such a way as to indicate His knowledge of and fullest confidence in its reality. He threatened "the hell of fire" for those who curse their fellows as fools (Mat. 5:22). He referred to Hell as a real place into which men would be "cast down" as retribution for their sin (29-30). He further taught that one who causes another to sin will be cast into "the hell of fire" (18:9).

When Jesus referred to Hell, what did He mean by it? Space forbids a thorough study, but a brief history of the word will perhaps be worthwhile. First, it is important to notice that the KJV consistently uses "Hell," when in fact, "Hades" (transliterated from *hades*, unseen, referring to the unseen realm of the dead, i.e., departed spirits, whether wicked or righteous) is under discussion (e.g., Mat. 16:18; Luke 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31; et al.). Our English word *Hell* is correctly translated from *gehenna*, which appears twelve times in the Greek New Testament (used eleven times by the Lord [counting parallels], once by James). The word *gehenna* is a reference to the Valley of Hinnom (aka "the valley of the Sons of Hinnom") near Jerusalem. Joshua first mentioned this place strictly as an innocent landmark (15:8). Centuries later, Judah had so apostatized into idolatry that the valley of Hinnom had become the place where the

corrupt kings Ahaz and Manasseh burned their children alive in homage to the pagan god, Molech (2 Chr. 28:3; 33:6).

Josiah, the righteous restorer king, abolished this heinous practice (2 Kin. 23:10), and the valley thenceforth became a place of abomination and abhorrence. As early as the second century B.C., uninspired Jewish literature used *gehenna* as a figurative expression for the final, eternal punishment of sinners. The Son of God placed His stamp of Divine approval upon this usage and applied this word in the very same way. He used the name of the earthly and material valley of abomination and abhorrence to refer to the place of ultimate and eternal abomination and abhorrence.

The Descriptions of Hell

Consider the following Scriptural descriptive terms for Hell:

1. As seen above, the original use of *gehenna* by the Jews as a name for the place of eternal punishment related to the fire that was used in the abomination of sacrificing children to Molech. The Lord perpetuated this thought connection by describing the final, eternal *gehenna* as a place of fire. As noted above, He twice called it “the hell of fire” (Mat. 5:22; 18:9). He twice referred to it as “the furnace of fire” into which the wicked will be cast after the Judgment (13:42, 50). He twice called it “unquenchable fire” (Mark 9:43, 47–48). The Hell thus described by Jesus is correctly identified with the “baptism” (plunging, overwhelming, immersion) in unquenchable fire mentioned by John, the Lord’s forerunner (Mat. 3:11–12) and with “the lake of fire” into which the devil, the beast, the false prophet, and all those not found written in the book of life will be cast for **eternal torment** (Rev. 20:10, 15; 21:8).
2. The Lord did not stop with his identification of Hell with unquenchable fire, but coupled it with the extremely graphic description of a place “where their worm dieth not” (Mark 9:47–48). On the figures of unquenchable fire and undying worms, A.T. Robertson, renowned Greek scholar, commented: “It is thus a vivid picture of eternal punishment.”²⁷ Thayer says that the Greek phrase referring to unquenchable fire and undying worms signifies that “their punishment after death will never cease,” with the worms perhaps symbolizing the loathsomeness of the penalty.²⁸ J.W. McGarvey saw the same vivid application of Jesus’ words:

The image is taken from Isaiah 44:24 and is that of worms feeding on the dead carcasses of men. Applied to the future state, as it unquestionably is in this passage, it represents those who shall be cast into hell as being in a state of decay and rottenness, while unquenchable fires are burning them but never consuming them.”²⁹

Note that McGarvey speaks of the fire that burns, but never consumes the wicked, in contrast to the entire thesis (and title) of Edward Fudge’s book, *The Fire that Consumes*.

Warren well sums up the teaching of Jesus here:

It is clear that Jesus has taught, in the passage at hand, that the personality of man persists beyond physical death. According to Mark, Jesus has here taught that the wicked are to suffer acutely. This implies that they will be conscious, for one cannot be described truly as suffering while he is not even conscious. From this implication, it follows that man is to be conscious after death. There can be no consciousness without persistence of personality. Not only is the punishment to be acute, but it is also to be unending. Thus, it follows that the persistence of man's personality beyond death will be unending. The passage under consideration teaches that such will be the case for those who are "cast into hell."³⁰

3. Jesus said that Hell is a place in which its occupants will be "destroyed" (Mat. 10:28) (see comments above for the significance of *destroyed*).
4. The Christ referred to Hell as a place of eternal "punishment" in His description of the Final Judgment (Mat. 25:46). *Punishment* is from *kolasis*, referring to torment, torture, suffering, chastisement. *Kolasis* is the word behind *torment* which the rich man experienced in Hades (Luke 16:23, 38). Concerning Matthew 25:46, M.B. Riddle and Philip Schaff said: "The word 'punishment' expresses positive misery, not 'annihilation'."³¹ The apostle John also teaches the fact of torment, punishment in Hell (Rev. 14:10–11; 20:10). (I will give attention to the word *eternal* in relation to *Hell* and *punishment* below under the subheading, "The Duration of Hell.")
5. The Hell of which Jesus warned is a place of separation from God, Christ, and the redeemed of the ages – banishment from Heaven itself. The lost are "cast into hell" (Mat. 5:29). Jesus will say to those who are lost at the Judgment, "**Depart** from me" (7:23; 25:41). He taught that Hell is a place of "**outer** darkness" (8:12; et al.). He said that the wicked would be "**cast forth without**" the eternal kingdom of God (Heaven) (Luke 13:28). Other inspired writers echoed these declarations (Eph. 2:12; 2 The. 1:9; Rev. 22:15, 18; et al.;) (all emph. DM.).
6. The Lord taught that those in Hell would not be by themselves. While God apparently created Hell originally for the devil and his angels, all those who are lost will at the Judgment be consigned to the same terrible place (Mat. 25:41). John taught the same thing (Rev. 20:10, 15; 21:8). Thus, part of the grief and anguish suffered by the residents of Hell will derive from their inescapable association with wicked men and women.

The Lord is rather specific in His preview of the populace of Hell:

- Those who are self-righteous and egotistic and who deprecate others as fools (Mat. 5:22).
- Those who are unwilling to give up whatever causes them to sin or to sacrifice whatever will keep them from serving God (vv. 27–30).
- Those who are false prophets/teachers (7:15–20; 15:13–14).
- Those who confess Christ, but do not respect God's authority, even though they sincerely claim to work for Christ (vv. 21–23).
- Those who reject the messengers, thus the message, of the Christ (10:14–15).
- Those who persist in unbelief in the face of overwhelming evidence for the authenticity of the Christ and His Truth (11:20–24).
- Those who profess godliness but who practice evil (hypocrites) (23:13–36).

- Those who are wicked, wasteful, murmuring, blasphemous, lazy servants of Christ (25:14–30; Luke 19:12–27).
- Those who are selfish, stingy, cold, unkind, uncompassionate, unsympathetic (25:41–46; Luke 16:19–31).³²

Additionally, Paul, Peter, and John identified the populace of Hell:

- Paul listed the full gamut of wickedness and depravity to which men can stoop, called these evils “the lusts of the flesh,” and said that those who so behave (whether alien sinners or Christians) are Hell-bound (Rom. 1:18–32; 1 Cor. 6:9–11; Gal. 5:19–21). He also warned that the “lawless one,” those who receive not the love of the Truth, those who make “shipwreck concerning the faith,” those who are deceived by riches, and those who are heretics or factious will be residents of *gehenna* (2 The. 2:4–12; 1 Tim. 1:19–21; 6:9–10; Tit. 3:10–11).
- Peter identified **brethren** who are false teachers (who themselves are overtaken by evil and who entice others to follow their wicked doctrines and practices) as those who will be lost in Hell (2 Pet. 2:1–22).
- John consigned not only Satan, the beast, and the false prophet to Hell, but also all men who had followed them in wickedness, evil, and immorality of all sorts and whose names are therefore not written in the book of life (Rev. 19:20; 20:10,15; 21:8; 22:15).

Imagine the misery and terror of being imprisoned with the likes of Ahab and Jezebel, Herod the Great, Nero, Domitian, the Popes, the Spanish Inquisition administrators, Charles Darwin, Adolph Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Charles Manson, and like monsters (not to mention the multiplied millions of lesser-known evil-doers and false teachers) with no hope of relief or escape. This factor alone would be all but unbearable, even if there were no fire, no worms, or no outer darkness.

The Duration of Hell

Jesus not only taught the reality of Hell (which conditionalists concede), but the eternality of it (which they most certainly deny). When He concluded His description of the Final Judgment, Jesus said, “And these shall go away into **eternal** punishment: but the righteous into **eternal** life” (Mat. 25:46 [emph. DM]). Obviously, if eternal life is a reference to Heaven, eternal punishment is a reference to Hell. But there is more: The unrighteous will be cast into “**eternal** fire” (Mat. 18:8; 25:41; et al. [emph. DM]). Paul echoes: Those who “know not God” and “obey not the gospel...shall suffer punishment, even **eternal** destruction” (2 The. 1:8–9 [emph. DM]).

John taught the same thing. The rebels against God described in Revelation 14:10–11 “...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....” John described the destiny of Satan in similar language: “And the devil...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**” (20:10 [emph. DM]).

Annihilationists, realizing the force of *aionios* (“eternal,” “for ever and ever”) in these contexts, are wont to argue that it “...is a qualitative rather than a quantitative word.”³³ However, reputable authorities do not agree. Vine says of *aionios* (“eternal”):

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 (1 Tim. 6:16), and of His glory (1 Pet. 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 (2 Cor. 5:1), elsewhere said to be “immortal” (1 Cor. 15:53), in which that life will be finally realized (**Mat. 25:46**; Tit. 1:2 [emph. DM]).³⁴

According to Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, when referring to the future, *aionios* means “without end.”³⁵ *TDNT* says that *aionios* is used “as a term for the object of eschatological [end of the world] expectation” and that if it has the “full sense of divine eternity” when used in reference to rewards, then in reference to fire, punishment, and destruction (Mat. 18:8; 25:41, 46; 2 The. 1:8-9; et al.), it has...only the sense of ‘unceasing’ or ‘endless’.”³⁶

Workman correctly points out on Revelation 14:10-11 that “it is not the smoke of **annihilation** but the ‘smoke of their **torment**’ that will go up forever.... The only logical conclusion is that the torment will last as long as the smoke.”³⁷ Since the smoke goes up “for ever and ever” (an emphatic phrase denoting unending ages) so does the punishment—requiring the existence of personality and consciousness. However, the eternal duration of Hell is likewise seen in the fate that Satan will suffer; he will be “tormented day and night for ever and ever” in the lake of fire and brimstone (Rev. 20:10). Here we have not merely the “smoke” of torment, but **the torment itself** continuing without interruption and unendingly. It will not do for the annihilationist to say that this refers to the devil rather than to men, for men who are not recorded in “the book of life” will suffer the same fate (vv. 14-15; 21:8).

The experience of being cast into Hell (“the lake of fire”) is identified by John as “the second death” (20:14-15; 21:8; cf. 2:11; 20:6), which annihilationists would have us believe is another literal death that results in extinction or annihilation of the wicked. However, this cannot be. The “first death” that men experience is that of the physical body: “It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment” (Heb. 9:27). Notice that this death is involuntary—it is an appointment that men cannot escape, and it occurs before the Judgment.

Men can kill the body, thus causing it to literally die (because it is mortal), but the soul does not die with the body (Mat. 10:28).

The “first death,” which is the final enemy of Christ (and of men), will itself be abolished when the Lord comes (1 Cor. 15:23–26). The simultaneous resurrection of all men from the dead (Mat. 25:31–32; John 5:28–29; Acts 24:15; Rev. 20:11–12) at the coming of Christ (1 Cor. 15:20–23; 1 The. 5:16–17) will constitute the deathblow to death itself, marking the utter defeat and abolition of physical death. Then will death be “swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15:54b). Thus nevermore shall men **literally** die for they will have been given a “spiritual” body (vv. 42–44), which is “incorruptible” and “immortal” (vv. 50–54) for the habitation of the “unclothed” immortal soul (2 Cor. 5:3–4). So following the resurrection, all will possess both an immortal soul **and** an immortal body, neither of which can literally die. Following the Judgment, all will either be welcomed into the bliss of endless life or be sentenced to torment and misery of the same duration (Mat. 25:46).

As noted above, literal, physical death itself will have been destroyed at the coming of the Lord, which will occur **before** the Judgment (Heb. 9:27), but the “second death” will occur **after** the Judgment (Rev. 20:11–15). The annihilationist therefore has the “grim reaper” still doing his work after the Lord has put him out of commission! Upon their resurrection, the departed spirits of Hades will be called forth to be judged (v. 13). Both death (the state of separation of body and soul [Jas. 2:26]) and Hades (the realm of spirits thus separated [Acts 2:27, 31]) are personified, judged, and symbolically cast into the lake of fire, signifying that their reign over man and against God has ceased (v. 14a). This hurling of death and Hades into the lake of fire is called the “second death” (v. 14b).

The “second death” must be a figurative or non-literal death since death and Hades would not be affected by literal or physical death. Yet, the same “second death” is assigned to wicked men. So the “second death” men will suffer in the immortal state is a **figurative** death—a term for the awful condition of the lost in a hopeless, never-ceasing, conscious experience of torment and woe, rather than extinction. The basic connotation of the word *death* is instructive just here, that being **separation**. In the “first death” the body and spirit are separated from each other (Jas. 2:26). In the “second death” man is forever separated from God. Vine has an excellent summary statement:

Death is the opposite of life; it never denotes non-existence. As spiritual life is “conscious existence in communion with God,” so spiritual death is “conscious existence in separation from God.”³⁸

Only if Hell is endless can its fire be “unquenchable” (Mat. 3:12; Mark 9:43, 48). No one can believe the words of Jesus and believe in the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory, the Jehovah’s Witnesses materialistic doctrine of absolute annihilation, or the “conditionalist” concept of temporary punishment for the wicked, followed by extinction. No one can consistently (or Biblically) believe in an endless Heaven while denying an endless Hell.

Conclusion

On the one hand are the annihilationists (along with the Atheists/Humanists, the Universalists, the liberal theologians, the New Agers, and all the other no-hell advocates). Arrayed against them in stark contrast is Jesus the Christ, the Lord of Heaven and Earth. **None can question the fact that He taught the reality of immortality and of Hell as a place of eternal punishment of the wicked.** Men may accept or reject the teaching, but they cannot rationally deny that He did teach these things. Ironically, those who reject His teaching (on this or any other subject) will themselves be rejected at the Judgment and confined to the very place, the existence of which they denied (John 12:48).

The dogma of annihilation is a powerful demonstration of how far from the Truth men can be led when they allow their own thinking to father their doctrine, rather than allowing the doctrine of Christ to father their thinking. Men cannot “see” how a loving God can allow even wicked men to suffer in Hell forever. It is not “just” or “fair” for men to be tormented unendingly with no hope of relief. “Therefore,” some way must be found to warp, twist, contort, or blatantly deny what God has revealed about the nature of man and of his eternal destiny. Many have become amazingly adept at this practice. As with those who wrest the words of Paul, so with all who wrest the words of the Savior – they do so “unto their own destruction” (2 Pet. 3:16).

We have it directly from the mind and the mouth of the Only Begotten of the Father, Jesus the Christ, concerning (1) the immortality of the soul, (2) the fact of the resurrection of all the dead, and (3) the reality, nature, and duration of Hell. Further, we have the consistent “Amens” in the teaching of the inspired New Testament writers throughout.

After quoting in his book, *Whatever Happened to Hell?*, several passages in which the Lord set forth the doctrine of Hell as a place of eternal punishment for the ungodly, Jon Braun observed:

Does any question remain as to whether or not Jesus declared the eternal punishment of the wicked? All the authority of the almighty God is present in the Words He spoke about hell. Jesus had more to say about hell than any other speaker or writer in the Bible. If He was mistaken in what He said, then the almighty, eternal, and everlasting God was mistaken. And that is not the case. Indeed, if it comes to a disagreement: "Let God be true and every man a liar." ...What more could Jesus have said? There is absolutely no way the clear impact of His words can be brushed aside, and the assertion made that there is no eternal doom for the ungodly, unless of course, we join the critics who arbitrarily determine that Jesus didn't really say these things at all.... Jesus, the One who is coming again to judge the living and the dead, expressed Himself clearly and without room for doubt about it. The rest of the New Testament writers followed His lead to the letter. Retribution for the ungodly is eternal, without end.³⁹

Heaven and Hell stand or fall together, both in reality and duration. If Heaven is real, so is Hell. If Hell is denied, so must Heaven be. If Hell exists, but is only brief, Heaven must be also. However, if Heaven is eternal, Hell cannot be otherwise. They are both as real as the God Who made us and Who gave us the inspired revelation concerning Himself, His Son, and their marvelous plan of salvation. It is not because God is mean, but because He is merciful, that He has warned us of Satan, sin, the Judgment, and Hell. God sent His Son into our world in the flesh that we might have a road, a path, a way to Heaven and to God – a destination otherwise unreachable (John 1:1–2; 3:16; Phi. 2:5–8). Jesus the Christ is Himself that road – the **only** road – that leads to God and Heaven (John 14:6). If we pass through the narrow gate and then stay on the straitened way it opens to us, it will lead us to life eternal (Mat. 7:13). Jesus' own simple summary of entering that road to Heaven is as follows: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16). Let us never flag in our efforts to preach and teach the one message that is the "power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16).

Jesus depicted Hell so frighteningly, horribly, terribly unimaginable that He boldly challenges all men to make whatever sacrifice necessary to escape its horrors (Mat. 5:29–30; 6:19–25, 33; 8:18–21; 10:28, 37–38; 13:44–45; 16:24–26; 19:21–22; et al.). Surely, this is the course of wisdom. If eternal Hell exists as the Bible teaches, the doctrine of annihilationism is utterly and damnably false!

Endnotes

1. All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated or included in quotations from others.

2. Parts of this chapter were originally published in a similar form in "The Churches of Christ Salute You in Your Desire to Miss Hell," *The Churches of Christ Salute You*, ed. Gary Colley (Austin, TX: Southwest Church of Christ, 1997), pp. 354–71.
3. Jon E. Braun, *Whatever Happened to Hell?* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1979), pp. 35–36.
4. John A.T. Robinson, "Universalism—Is It Heretical?" *Scottish Journal of Theology* (June 1949), p. 155.
5. Robinson, *But I Can't Believe That* (New York, NY: The New American Library, 1967), p. 69.
6. Emil Brunner, *Eternal Hope* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1954), p. 182.
7. Jackie M. Stearsman, "Is Eternal Punishment Justified?" *Whatever Happened to Heaven and Hell?* ed. Terry M. Hightower (San Antonio, TX: Shenandoah Church of Christ, 1993), p. 75.
8. See chapter by Gary W. Summers on "New Ageism" elsewhere in this book.
9. Johanna Michaelsen, *Like Lambs to the Slaughter* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Pub., 1989), p. 298.
10. Wayne Jackson, "Denial of Eternal Punishment," *The Spiritual Sword* (April 1997), p. 35.
11. Earl I. West, *The Search for the Ancient Order* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1949), 1:264.
12. Edward William Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes* (Houston, TX: Providential Press, 1982).
13. Gary Workman, "The Judgment of God Against Sinners Will Be Unending Conscious Torment Rather than Eternal Extinction" *Studies in the Revelation*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Pub., Inc., 1984), pp. 492–508).
14. For a good summary of Fudge's basic arguments in his own words, see this chapter in *Studies in the Revelation*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Pub., Inc., 1984), pp.475–91).
15. Robert Morey, *Death and the Afterlife* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1984).
16. Wayne Jackson, "Changing Attitudes Toward Hell," *Whatever Happened to Heaven and Hell?* ed. Terry M. Hightower (San Antonio, TX: Shenandoah Church of Christ, 1993), p. 64.
17. John Gerstner, *Repent or Perish* (Soli Deo Gloria Pub., 1990).
18. Wayne Jackson, "Debate Challenge Withdrawn," *Christian Courier* (December 1987), p. 31.
19. Jackson, "Changing Attitudes...", pp. 65–66.
20. John Clayton, *Does God Exist?* (September/October 1990), p. 20, as quoted by Wayne Jackson, "Denial of Eternal Punishment," *The Spiritual Sword* (April 1997), p. 35.
21. Robert L. Whitelaw, ed., *Resurrection/The Witness* (January–April 1997), p.2 . This quote comes from the statement of editorial aim of this periodical, on the back cover of which Edward Fudge's book is advertised.
22. W.E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966), 1:302.
23. J.W. McGarvey, *The New Testament Commentary on Matthew and Mark* (Des Moines, IA: Eugene S. Smith reprint, n.d.), p. 93.
24. Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York, NY: American Book Co. reprint, n.d.), p. 36.
25. Morey, p. 90.

26. Thomas B. Warren, *Immortality – All of Us Will Be Somewhere Forever* (Moore, OK: National Christian Press, 1992), p. 32.
27. A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers Pub., 1930). 1:346.
28. Thayer, p. 580.
29. McGarvey, p. 322.
30. Warren, p. 48.
31. M.B. Riddle and Philip Schaff, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1879), p. 207.
32. The account of the rich man in torment describes the state of departed spirits in the intermediate Hadean realm (cf. 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6), rather than in the final, eternal abodes of the souls of men. However, the respective states of Lazarus (in comfort) and the selfish rich man (tormented, in anguish in flames) prefigure the respective eternal final destinies (Heaven and Hell) of each, and representatively, of all after the Judgment. Incidentally, this account is the strongest kind of evidence that each person—whether good or evil—possesses an immortal soul that does not even sleep (in unconsciousness, per Adventist dogma), much less die, when the body dies.
33. R.V.G. Tasker, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries – Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1961), p. 240, and Fudge, p. 49.
34. Vine, 2:43.
35. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. by William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 28.
36. Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1981). 1:209.
37. Workman, p. 504.
38. Vine, 1:276.
39. Braun, pp., 146, 163.

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