
THE BATTLE FOR HELL

A Survey and Evaluation
of Evangelicals' Growing
Attraction to the Doctrine
of Annihilationism

DAVID GEORGE MOORE

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Table of Contents

Dedication	iii
Table of Contents	v
Foreword	vii
Preface	ix
Acknowledgements	xi
Advance Praise	xiii
Chapter 1	
Current Evangelical Thinking on Hell	1
Chapter 2	
Explication and Evaluation of the Annihilationist Doctrine	17
Chapter 3	
Understanding the Nature of Hell: a Reappraisal	45
Chapter 4	
Implications and Applications From This Study	63
Chapter 5	
Some Personal Reflections	73
Bibliography	77
Subject Index	95
Scripture Index	99
About the Author	103



Foreword

"Eternal conscious punishment of the wicked?" This is what hell means, and it is not an easy idea to think about. Yet Dave Moore's book argues that we must not only think about it but also believe it if we want to be faithful to the teachings of the Bible.

This is an important book for evangelicals to read. It is important, first, because controversies over the doctrine of hell show signs of increasing in the next few years: several prominent writers within evangelicalism have used strong arguments to tell us that we should no longer believe in the doctrine of hell, and Moore considers those arguments carefully. But the book is important for a second reason: it will give Christians a deeper understanding of the doctrine of hell, and a stronger persuasion that it really exists.

This is a fair book. It represents the arguments of those who oppose the doctrine of hell in an honest and detailed way, often quoting from these writers themselves. Moore does not make simplistic arguments against easy opponents that he has invented; rather, he gives careful answers to the actual arguments made by respected writers who no longer believe in hell.

This is also a thorough book. His footnotes and bibliography will give the serious reader opportunity to explore this question in much more detail.

Finally, this is a sobering book. Moore deals honestly with the emotional struggles that all Christians must feel in pondering the doctrine of hell. If we really believe the biblical teaching on hell, then

it will certainly affect our entire attitude toward life, and toward the urgent necessity of proclaiming the gospel throughout the world.

This book is written clearly, but it is not an easy book to read. The difficulty comes in the nature of the subject matter. Hell is not something that any of us would choose to think about. But it is taught in Scripture, and that means that God thought that this teaching was profitable for our instruction and edification. Moore lays out the biblical teaching on this subject in a way that is faithful to Scripture, and that also shows much pastoral wisdom in helping us to deal with this subject in terms of our hearts as well as our minds.

Wayne Grudem, Ph.D.
Professor of Biblical & Systematic Theology
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
Deerfield, Illinois

Preface

The traditional teaching on the doctrine of hell is certainly one of the most troubling doctrines of the Christian faith. Is belief in hell necessary for true, evangelical faith? Or most importantly, is the doctrine of hell the teaching of Scripture?

Recently, a number of evangelical scholars have commented on their belief in the annihilation of the unrepentant. Instead of non-Christians suffering forever in an eternal hell, a growing number of scholars hold that the non-Christian will be obliterated into non-existence. Much rests on which of these two is correct.

After key terms are defined, and the importance of this issue discussed, chapter 1 begins with a survey of where some evangelical scholars stand on the judgment of the unredeemed. Chapter 2 looks at several of the objections that noted proponents of annihilation bring to bear. Important passages of Scripture are looked at, theological concerns, especially the justice of God, are evaluated, and the supposed influence of Greek philosophy on the doctrine of hell is considered. In chapter 3, an attempt is made to answer some of the emotional struggles Christians have with the doctrine of hell. This chapter presupposes that many Christians have misunderstood the nature of hell. There are then struggles with God's goodness that are often misplaced. The implications and applications of this study are far-reaching, so chapter 4 will delineate some of these. In the fifth chapter, I share some of my own personal struggles with the traditional doctrine of hell.

I am extremely grateful for the many people (as the acknowledgements will show) who have taken the time to give of themselves personally to me in this writing endeavor. Some of these people, like Dr. Clark Pinnock of McMaster College, are individuals that have very different views from the ones I hold on this subject. That being the case only increases my appreciation and heartfelt gratitude to them. I am glad that we as brothers and sisters can lovingly and truthfully grapple with what Scripture teaches on this most difficult subject. I will be most thankful to our gracious Lord if this book helps in some small measure to that end.

Acknowledgements

My wife, and closest friend, Doreen, has been the greatest source of encouragement in my life. I praise the Lord that she models that no true dichotomy exists between rigorous study and devotion to our great God.

To my sons, David and Christopher, who are everything I ever wanted in boys. I pray that you will learn to trust the Scriptures and love the Lord whom they reveal. To my dad for inculcating in me the values of integrity, responsibility, and hard work. To my mom for teaching me to be curious about the world we live in, and for giving me a love for reading. To my parents-in-law for encouraging me by demonstrating genuine interest in my research.

To John Freeman for first nurturing me in the Christian faith. To Darin Maurer for wearing out his knees on my behalf. To Dr. Robert Pyne, John Freeman, Roger Medd, Tom Wright, and Kurt Richardson for encouraging me by word and deed to strive for excellence in my studies.

To Dr. Wayne Grudem for his encouragement to me personally, and for modeling the all sufficiency of Scripture. To Dr. Thomas Nettles for modeling a very attractive form of integrating church history with biblical studies which has been a source of great edification. To Dr. John Woodbridge for consistently taking initiative and personal interest in my life. And for personal mentoring in the exciting field of history. To Rev. Keith Wells for going above the call of duty (as is his habit!) in helping me to locate appropriate research materials. To Dr. Fred Howe, my first theology professor, who always had time to listen.

To Dr. Clark Pinnoch for quickly responding to my various inquiries, and for graciously sending me some extremely helpful

unpublished materials. Also, much thanks to him, Dr. Dallas Willard, and Dr. J. I. Packer for taking the time to endorse the book.

To Roger Berry and Warren Culwell who have provided much wisdom and sanity here in Austin. Thanks for being such loyal friends. To Dr. Max Anders and Rich Van Houten for believing a "parachurch guy" was a good fit for Grace. To the pastors and elders at Grace for giving me the freedom to exercise my gifts. Special thanks to John Babcock for being such a gracious sounding board, and to our new senior pastor, Jim Rose, who gives me tremendous hope for the evangelical church. To my students at the Ezra Institute who make the teaching of theology such a delight. To my secretary, Barb Miaso, and to her husband, Jack, for taking the time to reformat this book. Thanks for being so conscientious, and such a joy to work with.

To Jon Boyd for his eagerness to serve me by formatting my computer, and for answering a myriad of questions about my Mac. More recently, to Matt Henke and Chris Glass who have lent a helping hand.

To all of the financial supporters who faithfully gave during the time when much of this research was initially done, I am deeply grateful.

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Advance Praise

"A very valuable analysis of options and opinions on a taxing theme."

J. I. Packer
Sangwoo Youtong Chee Professor of Theology
Regent College
Author, *Knowing God*

"In a day when prominent evangelicals are charging that to view the nature of hell as everlasting conscious torment is hideous and unscriptural, a burden to the church and a blot on her message, it is only natural that defenders of tradition would arise with a reply. Moore is a worthy defender—his book is fair and well documented and I commend it."

Clark Pinnock
Professor of Systematic Theology
McMaster Divinity College
Author, *The Scripture Principle*

"David Moore's book...is an urgent note of clarity in the increasingly bewildered world of 'evangelical theology.' I especially urge pastors and teaching elders to study it with their people. It will serve well as a basis for study groups in the local congregation."

Dallas Willard
Professor of Philosophy
University of Southern California
Author, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*



Chapter 1

Current Evangelical Thinking on Hell

"The ultimate horror of God's universe is hell," so writes John Wenham.¹ Indeed, hell is a brutal reality that challenges the Christian's commitment at the deepest level of his being. The prospect of this horrible reality has caused several evangelical leaders to reconsider their views of hell.² A belief that the Bible is teaching an eternal, conscious suffering of the impenitent in hell is no longer held by these individuals. As an alternative to the traditional teaching on hell, the doctrine of annihilationism is being posited as the proper view of Scripture. It should be noted that universalism, the belief that everyone will be saved in the end, has not yet made any significant inroads within evangelicalism.³

Definition of Key Terms

Before proceeding further, it must be made clear what is meant by the doctrines of hell and annihilationism.

In the Old Testament, the word Sheol does not appear in a limited or technical sense. Rather, it is used as the place where both the righteous and unrighteous go (Gen. 37:35; Job 14:13; Num. 16:33; Ps. 55:15; and Prov. 9:18).⁴ Certainly, the Old Testament does not give as clear a picture of the afterlife as does the New Testament. The LXX usually has the Hebrew Sheol translated into the Greek Hades.⁵ In the New Testament, Hades is the "underworld, the world of the departed."⁶ Sheol however, does not always refer to Hades, a reminder of the unfolding nature of revelation in Scripture.

It is the Greek word Gehenna that always means a place of suffering,⁷ what people commonly think of when the word hell is used.

The historical background to the term Gehenna is quite graphic. The valley of Hinnom, located south of Jerusalem, was the site for human sacrifices to the pagan god Molech (II Kgs. 16:3; 21:6). Prophets of God warned that impending judgment was the consequence for such sin (Jer. 7:32; 19:6).⁸

In sum, Sheol and Hades are usually descriptive of temporary dwellings of the dead, whereas Gehenna depicts the future punishment in the eternal state.⁹

In the book of Revelation, "death and hades were thrown into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14) where the unrighteous were thrown as well (Rev. 20:15). The lake of fire carries the same meaning that Gehenna does in the gospels; that is, a permanent residence for those who reject God.¹⁰

I will be using the word hell in the way just described; a permanent, eternal dwelling place for those who refuse to acknowledge Christ as Lord.

The concept of annihilationism needs to be understood as well. Those who hold to the doctrine of annihilationism believe that rejection of Christ will result in obliteration, utter non-existence. This will occur at the Great White Throne judgment. A related concept, conditional immortality, holds that immortality is not the inherent right of man, but God's gift. Conditions must be met before fallen man can receive eternal existence.¹¹ Though these two terms (annihilationism and conditional immortality) are not absolutely identical, they do not seem to amount to any substantive "theological difference."¹² Therefore, in this book, only the term annihilation will be used.

Historical Background

Over the past 15 years, the traditional teaching on the doctrine of hell has come under increased scrutiny and attack. Many have chronicled the debate. Donald Bloesch writes,

If anything has disappeared from modern thought, it is the belief in a supernatural heaven and hell. Even those who retain some vague idea of heavenly bliss beyond the pale of death are extremely reluctant to give serious credence to the threat of a final judgment and eternal condemnation.¹³

During the same year that Bloesch's systematic theology was published, Jon Braun wrote a book entitled Whatever Happened to Hell?¹⁴ Braun sounded the alarm that the doctrine of hell had fallen on hard times.¹⁵ Interestingly, Harry Blamires has said that there was a time in the not too distant past when hell was probably talked about too much.¹⁶ Now we have theologians announcing the death knell for the doctrine of hell. Gordon Kaufman of Harvard Divinity School says, "It seems to me we've gone through irreversible changes...I don't think there can be any future for heaven and hell."¹⁷ Furthermore, hell is seen by some as too trite for serious scholarship.¹⁸

Vernon Grounds also attests to the disappearance of belief in hell.

What William Gladstone wrote about eternal punishment in the late nineteenth century is equally true today: "It seems to be relegated at present to the far-off corners of the Christian mind, and there to sleep in deep shadow."¹⁹

Interestingly, noted church historian, Martin Marty, has written about the disappearance of hell from public discourse.²⁰

Evangelicals Who Object to the Doctrine of Hell

The debate about the traditional doctrine of hell has recently come into prominence with many evangelical leaders voicing opposition to it. In the rest of this chapter, I will sketch the views of key evangelicals who no longer hold to the doctrine of hell. In the next chapter, these views will be evaluated.

Major leaders in evangelicalism who either no longer believe in hell, or give much credence to opposing views include, but are certainly not limited to: Stephen Travis, John Wenham, John Stott, and Clark Pinnock.²¹

In Christian Hope and the Future, Stephen Travis gives a brief discussion of annihilationism and hell.²² His opinion on the existence of hell seems to be somewhat agnostic.

Nevertheless, a sense of proportion is required. The very ambiguity of the biblical evidence ought to suggest to us that this was an issue of secondary importance to the New Testament writers. We saw earlier

that judgment and salvation are to be understood in terms of relationship to God. In keeping with this, the most significant thing about the destiny of unbelievers is that they will be separated from Christ. Compared with that tragic fact, there is—according to the New Testament writers—little point in asking whether the lost continue to be conscious or are annihilated. It is because later Christians have been more concerned about happiness and misery than about relationship to God that they have persisted in asking such questions.²³

Two years later, Travis seemed to come to a more definitive conclusion on the doctrine of hell. Although Travis begins his discussion on hell in I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus by saying that he does not see the New Testament clearly teaching either annihilationism or hell,²⁴ he concedes that if pressed he would hold to the former.²⁵

John Wenham has also publicly commented on his leanings towards belief in annihilationism.²⁶ The late Philip Hughes held to annihilationism as well.²⁷

First of all, because *life* and *death* are radically antithetical to each other, the qualifying adjective *eternal* or *everlasting* needs to be understood in a manner appropriate to each respectively. Everlasting life is existence that continues without end, and everlasting death is destruction without end, that is, destruction without recall, the destruction of obliteration.²⁸ (emphasis his)

Hughes claims that heaven and hell existing simultaneously throughout eternity poses an unbiblical dualism which would undermine the sovereignty of God.²⁹ A cosmic battle that goes on endlessly is not acceptable. Furthermore, Hughes mentions that belief in annihilationism does not detract at all from the dread that unbelievers will experience when judged by God.³⁰

John Stott³¹ and Clark Pinnock³² have equally made clear their lack of belief in hell and adoption of the annihilationist position.

John Stott says that he approaches the issue of judgment with great reluctance.³³ Although Stott sees universalism as antithetical to the teaching of Scripture,³⁴ he does believe that Scripture might be pointing in the direction of annihilation of the unredeemed.³⁵ Stott confesses that he holds to annihilationism "tentatively."³⁶

It is instructive to cite briefly some of the issues that Stott is bringing to the fore in his opposition to the traditional doctrine of hell. A major concern of Stott's, as we will also see with Pinnock, is the emotional heartache that comes with believing in an eternal hell.

Well, emotionally, I find the concept [hell] intolerable and do not understand how people can live with it without either cauterising their feelings or cracking under the strain.³⁷

Stott sees many Christians as callous and diffident with respect to the lostness of man. His clarion call for believers to be more compassionate towards the lost is a good and necessary message for the Church.³⁸

For John Stott, and many others, hell is not an easy doctrine to be believed.³⁹ The awfulness of hell causes its opponents and proponents alike to struggle with its awesome ramifications.⁴⁰

Clark Pinnock is another evangelical⁴¹ scholar who holds to annihilationism. Unlike the other four scholars previously mentioned, a more protracted look at Pinnock's views on this issue will be given.

Clark Pinnock is a prolific writer.⁴² His Ph.D. is from the University of Manchester where he studied under the late F. F. Bruce.⁴³ Pinnock's wide-ranging influence in the theological world is without dispute. Some see him as the heir apparent to the role that Carl F. H. Henry has occupied for many years,⁴⁴ though this is questioned by others.⁴⁵

Over the years, Pinnock has drastically changed his views on such areas as politics⁴⁶ and apologetics.⁴⁷ More important to our particular concerns here is Pinnock's shift on various theological issues. So pronounced have some of these changes been that it has even caused Pinnock to exclaim of himself,

It [Price's article] certainly showed up my propensity to change my mind. Although this is part of life which is dynamic, I do worry that I am too vacillating. I do not always like myself when I think how many changes I have had to make and am still making. I wish I was more stable. Part of that may be the fact that a postfundamentalist like me really has no set tradition and has to find or create one.⁴⁸

For example, in former days, Pinnock was decidedly Calvinistic in his theology.⁴⁹ However, in recent years Pinnock has clearly moved to an Arminian position.⁵⁰

Rakestraw comments on the book, The Grace of God, The Will of Man, which describes Pinnock's "conversion" to Arminian theology.

These essays present and defend the proposition that God is a dynamic personal agent who respects the freedom he, by his sovereign choice, gives to human creatures...Pinnock is excited about the current theological shift among evangelicals and other Christians away from determinism in the doctrine of salvation and toward a genuine human freedom. The Bible is more and more being read in a fresh manner, he believes, in dialogue with modern culture, with the emphasis being placed on autonomy, temporality, and historical change.⁵¹

Although Pinnock is now clearly Arminian in his theology, there may be seeds of apprehension with Calvinism inherent in his earlier views. Robert Price sees this in Pinnock's early approach to apologetics. If the unbeliever is blinded by the noetic effects of the Fall (the proper Calvinistic understanding according to Price and many others), how would it be possible to reason with him about the Christian faith as Pinnock clearly did in his early work, Set Forth Your Case? To Price's way of thinking this seems inconsistent with true Calvinism.⁵² Though Price's analysis may have some merit, other Reformed theologians have argued that a more rational, or even Thomistic apologetical system is not antithetical to Calvinism.⁵³

Pinnock's current difficulties with Calvinism can be summarized by his trenchant comment that it "is the kind of theology that makes atheists."⁵⁴

Another major shift in Pinnock's theology occurs with his view of Scripture. In Set Forth Your Case, Pinnock is openly critical of those who deny the full inerrancy of Scripture.

A destructive principle has been admitted, the dichotomy of biblical errancy. If something is taught in Scripture, it may or may not be true. In other words, Scripture is not the ground for believing anything. If the Bible errs in minor matters, perhaps it errs also in major ones; if in incidental things, perhaps in substantial things as well...There is no real alternative to the dilemma, either a divine Savior and an infallible Bible, or a fallible Bible and no divine Savior. From the documents

alone it is possible to learn that they are reliable to a substantial degree (see chapter nine), but from Jesus Christ we learn their divinely inspired nature. Their general reliability is a matter of public fact; their infallibility is a doctrine revealed through Jesus Christ.⁵⁵

Pinnock goes on to give a good summary of how apparent errors are to be treated while holding to the inerrancy of Scripture.⁵⁶

In 1971, Pinnock's book, Biblical Revelation—The Foundation of Christian Theology⁵⁷ was published. This book clearly enunciated the inerrancy of Scripture. So significant was this book's influence that it caused Gordon Lewis to say that it was the best scholarly treatment of Scripture since Warfield.⁵⁸

In 1984, Pinnock's book, The Scripture Principle⁵⁹ was published. This book is clearly at odds with his earlier work on Scripture. In the foreword to a 1985 version of Biblical Revelation—The Foundation of Christian Theology, J. I. Packer writes that,

...it is noticeable that his recent writing about the Bible offers a more "functional," less "intrinsicist" view of the inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of Scripture than we find here.⁶⁰

Packer sees that Pinnock's change on the sovereignty of God may well have influenced his view on the inerrancy of Scripture.⁶¹

Pinnock is fully aware of the fact that his position changed with regard to the inerrancy of Scripture.

I thought Brown was perceptive when he noted that my book was both a defense of the traditional evangelical doctrine of Scripture and at the same time a thorough criticism of it. There is surely both continuity and discontinuity between The Scripture Principle and my earlier book Biblical Revelation (1971), for example. In the recent title, I toned down the precision of what I thought (sic) the Bible actually claims for itself when I reviewed the evidence again for that book. I had to admit that it does not appear to have a developed doctrine of its own "errorlessness," for instance.⁶²

Pinnock now describes himself as holding to an inerrancy of purpose. That is, the Bible is inerrant when it achieves its intended goal.⁶³

I mention Pinnock's shift on these other areas because they have important ramifications for how one views the doctrine of hell. We will see this more fully in the following chapters.

One last area⁶⁴ that is most pertinent to our purposes here, where Pinnock has clearly shifted views theologically, is with respect to the doctrine of hell.

It is ironic that Pinnock used to be very concerned that the traditional teaching of hell not "be safely jettisoned as nonessential baggage."⁶⁵ Furthermore, Pinnock's earlier view of Jonathan Edwards's preaching on hell was extremely favorable.

In his day Jonathan Edwards sought to destroy false happiness by presenting the reality of hell and judgment. We must seek to destroy that spurious security too by whatever tool at our disposal.⁶⁶

Moreover, Pinnock wrote disparagingly of modernist moves away from the wrath of God when the gospel message is preached.⁶⁷ Since this time, Pinnock has adopted belief in the doctrine of annihilationism. Not surprisingly, his current view of Jonathan Edwards's preaching about hell has changed considerably.

Pusey used hell as a whip to keep people morally observant, and Edwards used it to frighten them into faith. People even oppose annihilation on the grounds that it is not frightening enough and lets the wicked get off too easy! A great deal more than exegesis goes into decisions like these.⁶⁸

Additionally, Pinnock says that God would be more like Satan if there were a place where the impenitent suffered eternally.⁶⁹

It is important here to take a few moments and sketch Pinnock's reasons for holding to the annihilation of the impenitent. I use Pinnock's comments because his position represents several of the common objections that others level against the doctrine of hell.

As Pinnock surveys what the Scriptures record about the fate of the unredeemed, he finds an unconvincing case for a doctrine of eternal suffering. In fact, he feels that there is more biblical warrant to support the annihilation of the wicked than their eternal suffering.

Positively I am contending that Scripture and theology give solid support to the doctrine of the annihilation of the wicked. The case is impressive if not quite unambiguous, and the traditional view looks less likely in comparison with it.⁷⁰

The concept of the "destruction of the wicked" plays a determinative role in convincing Pinnock that the Scriptures are pointing to the annihilation of the unsaved. He cites passages like: Ps. 37 where the wicked are said to fade like grass, be cut off and be no more; Matt. 10:28 where Jesus is said to destroy both the soul and body in hell; and Phil. 3:19 where the wicked's end is destruction. These are a mere sampling of the verses he gives in support of his position.⁷¹

Pinnock also says that Greek philosophy has played a key role in influencing Christians about the natural immortality of the soul. He believes that this is what drives the traditional doctrine of hell more than exegesis.⁷²

Moreover, Pinnock holds that Augustine exerted tremendous influence on the Christian Church towards belief in the traditional doctrine of hell.⁷³ He argues that we must seriously consider whether Augustine was wrong about the doctrine of hell because he seemed to err on other issues (e.g.—the millennium, infant baptism, and God's "sovereign/arbitrary reprobation of the wicked)."⁷⁴ Pinnock declares that the "strongest argument for holding the Augustinian view of hell is the long tradition."⁷⁵ Quite clearly this is a different Clark Pinnock from the one that said,

If the character of God is compatible with His excluding sinners eternally from himself (Matthew 25:46), it would be petty to suggest that the temporal punishment of sinners in the Old Testament was intolerable.⁷⁶

Here we find that Pinnock's understanding of the fairness of God's wrath in the Old Testament is predicated upon his belief in the doctrine of hell. However, in his current denial of the traditional doctrine of hell, Pinnock makes it clear that he is not trying to detract from the awfulness of God's judgment.⁷⁷

The Challenge Ahead

The challenge to the traditional doctrine of hell is nothing new. Other times in the history of the Church have seen the same debate surface.⁷⁸ However, the need to address the peculiarities of the present debate about hell remain.⁷⁹ Unfortunately, the vacuum left by a dearth of scholarly writing on this topic makes it all the more critical and certainly calls for remedying.⁸⁰ It is with this conviction in mind that this present work is written.

With this sketch of where some noteworthy scholars stand on the doctrine of hell, we proceed in the next chapter to critique the annihilationist position from a biblical and theological perspective. Though this has been a broad overview encompassing several of the objections that are held by proponents of annihilationism, the next chapter will analyze some of them more closely.

Notes

1. John W. Wenham, The Goodness of God (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1974), 27. Roman Catholic philosopher Alfred Freddoso heartily agrees. "...there is ample reason for thinking that ultimately the most troublesome form which the problem of evil can take for the orthodox Christian is this: How is the existence of a benevolent and almighty God to be reconciled with even the possibility of someone's going to hell (whether this is thought to involve simple annihilation or the pain of everlasting separation from God)?" As quoted in Jerry L. Walls, Hell: The Logic of Damnation (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 4.

2. Clark Pinnock, who has voiced opposition to the traditional doctrine of hell has said, "Nevertheless, the view [annihilationism] I am advancing does seem to be gaining ground among evangelicals. The fact that no less of a person than J. R. W. Stott has endorsed it now will certainly encourage this trend to continue." Clark H. Pinnock, "The Destruction of the Impenitent," Criswell Theological Review 4 (Fall 1990): 249. For concern over this trend, see the foreword to John H. Gerstner, Repent or Perish (Ligonier, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1990).

3. Alan W. Gomes, "Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell," Christian Research Journal Part 1, 13 (Spring 1991): 16. Peter Geach's comment is worthy of serious consideration. "We cannot be Christians, followers of Christ, we cannot even know what it is to be a Christian unless the Gospels give at least an approximately correct account of Christ's teaching. And if the Gospel account is even approximately correct, then it is perfectly clear that according to that teaching many men are irretrievably lost....It is less clear, I

admit, that the fate of the lost according to that teaching is to be endless misery rather than ultimate destruction. But universalism is not a live option for a Christian." As quoted in Walls, Hell: The Logic of Damnation, 6. Walls also has a helpful summary and critique of John Hick's brand of universalism (70-80).

4. R. P. Lightner, "Hell," in Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1984), 506.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid. Also see John Alexander Motyer, "Hell," in Baker's Dictionary of Theology, ed. Everett F. Harrison (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1960), 267.

9. Robert A. Morey, Death and the Afterlife (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1984), 87, 89-90. Pinnock considers Morey's book a very able study of the traditional view. See Clark H. Pinnock, "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," 247.

10. Walter A. Elwell, ed. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, 506.

11. Gomes, "Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell," Part 1, 16.

12. J. I. Packer notes that conditional immortality and annihilationism comprise "a verbal distinction that corresponds to no theological difference." J. I. Packer, "Evangelicals and the Way of Salvation," in Evangelical Affirmations, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1990), 134. Others who tend to see the two synonymously include Alan W. Gomes, "Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell," Part 1, 16-17; and Harold O. J. Brown, "Will the Lost Suffer Forever?," Criswell Theological Review 4 (Spring 1990): 266.

13. Donald G. Bloesch, Essentials of Evangelical Theology, vol. 2 Life, Ministry, and Hope (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 211.

14. Jon E. Braun, Whatever Happened to Hell? (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1979).

15. Ibid., 12.

16. Harry Blamires, Knowing the Truth About Heaven and Hell (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Servant Books, 1988), 69.

17. Kenneth L. Woodward, "Heaven," Newsweek, 27 March 1989, 54.

18. Ibid.

19. Vernon C. Grounds, "The Final State of the Wicked," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 24 (September 1981): 211.

20. Martin E. Marty, "Hell Disappeared. No One Noticed. A Civic Argument," Harvard Theological Review 78 (July-October 1985).

21. The late Philip Hughes also held to annihilationism. Although it is uncertain whether the late F.F. Bruce ever held to annihilationism, he

nevertheless wrote a glowing endorsement in the foreword to a major work by a proponent of annihilationism. See Edward Fudge, The Fire That Consumes (Houston: Providential Press, 1982), viii. In response to Bruce's inconclusiveness on hell, the words of Leckie are instructive, "The most significant sign of the times, in this regard, is the increasing tendency among Evangelical theologians to adopt an 'agnostic' attitude towards the whole problem of Destiny." (caps. his) Quite interesting is the fact that this was said in 1918. It seems that there is nothing new under the sun! J. H. Leckie, The World to Come and Final Destiny (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clark, 1918), 196.

22. Stephen H. Travis, Christian Hope and the Future (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 133-136.

23. *Ibid.*, 136.

24. Stephen H. Travis, I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), 197.

25. *Ibid.*, 198.

26. John H. Wenham, The Goodness of God, 40-41. Also see Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry, eds., Evangelical Affirmations, 140. A full defense of Wenham's position can be found in Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed. Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1991), 161-91.

27. Philip E. Hughes, The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988).

28. *Ibid.*, 405.

29. *Ibid.*, 406.

30. *Ibid.*, 407.

31. For an explanation of Stott's position, see David L. Edwards and John Stott, Evangelical Essentials (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 312-331.

32. Clark Pinnock, "Fire, Then Nothing," Christianity Today, 20 March 1987; and Clark Pinnock, "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent."

33. David L. Edwards and John Stott, Evangelical Essentials, 312.

34. *Ibid.*, 319, 325.

35. *Ibid.*, 315.

36. *Ibid.*, 320. In 1992, I had two separate conversations with individuals who told me that they personally heard John Stott say that he has been grossly misunderstood by Americans on this issue. Though this may be the case, his comments to David Edwards seem to give much credence to the teaching of annihilationism. Furthermore, proponents of annihilationism, like Clark Pinnock, understand Stott's position to be in concert with theirs. See William Crockett, ed. Four Views on Hell (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992), 160, 162. John Wenham recalls personal conversation with John Stott in this regard. See Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell, 166.

37. *Ibid.*, 314.

38. "I want to repudiate with all the vehemence of which I am capable the glibness, what almost appears to be the glee, the *Schadenfreude*, with which some Evangelicals speak about hell. It is a horrible sickness of mind or spirit. Instead, since on the day of judgement, when some will be condemned, there is going to be 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; and Luke 13:28), should we not already begin to weep at the very prospect? I thank God for Jeremiah. Israelite patriot though he was, he was charged with the heartbreaking mission of prophesying the destruction of his nation. Its ruin would only be temporary; it would not be eternal. Nevertheless, he could not restrain his tears. 'Oh that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people' (Jeremiah 9:1; cf. 13:17; and 14:17). David L. Edwards and John Stott, *Evangelical Essentials*, 312-13.

39. Harold O. J. Brown, "Will the Lost Suffer Forever?," 261.

40. Dr. Kenneth S. Kantzer has said, "I wish they [those who believe in hell] were wrong. I wish I could say that God is too loving, too kind, and too generous to condemn any soul to eternal punishment. I would like to believe that hell can only be the anteroom to heaven, a temporary and frightful discipline to bring the unregenerate to final moral perfection. Quite frankly, I struggle with these questions." Kenneth S. Kantzer, "Troublesome Questions," *Christianity Today*, 20 March 1987, 45.

41. Some doubt whether Pinnock remains an evangelical any longer. See Clark H. Pinnock, "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," 249. Whether those like Pinnock who hold to the doctrine of annihilationism can truly be labeled evangelical is a matter that will have to be taken up elsewhere. There is a fair bit of disagreement about what constitutes true evangelical belief. It can be a very complex issue which entails much biblical as well as historical insight. My purposes here are less noble (*viz.*, to attest to the fact that Pinnock *et al.* are clearly products of the evangelical ethos. I label them evangelical for this rather pragmatic purpose).

42. See the comprehensive listing of Pinnock's writings up to 1990 in Ray C. W. Roennfeldt, "Clark Pinnock's Shift in His Doctrine of Biblical Authority and Reliability, An Analysis and Critique" (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 1990), 372-84.

43. For other background information on Pinnock see Robert V. Rakestraw, "Clark H. Pinnock: A Theological Odyssey," *Christian Scholar's Review* 19 (March 1990): 252; and Robert M. Price, "Clark H. Pinnock: Conservative and Contemporary," *Evangelical Quarterly* 88 (Spring 1988): 158.

44. Robert M. Price, "Clark H. Pinnock: Conservative and Contemporary," 157.

45. Robert V. Rakestraw, "Clark H. Pinnock: A Theological Odyssey," 269.

46. See Robert M. Price, "Clark H. Pinnock: Conservative and Contemporary," 166-67, 182; and Lloyd Billingsley, The Generation That Knew Not Josef (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1985), 141.

47. Earlier in Pinnock's life the influence of Francis Schaeffer was considerable. In Set Forth Your Case, Pinnock singles out Schaeffer for his influence. This particular book clearly was dependent on Schaeffer's apologetic system. The concept of a divided field of knowledge (see Escape From Reason by Francis Schaeffer) and the naming of a God "who is really there" are just two examples. See Clark H. Pinnock, Set Forth Your Case (Nutley, N.J.: The Craig Press, 1968), 2, 10, 25. Also see Robert V. Rakestraw, "Clark H. Pinnock: A Theological Odyssey,"; and Robert M. Price, "Clark H. Pinnock: Conservative and Contemporary," for an understanding of how Pinnock's perspective has changed on apologetics.

48. Quoted in Robert V. Rakestraw, "Clark H. Pinnock: A Theological Odyssey," 267. For a very helpful understanding of Pinnock's various shifts in theological matters see Robert M. Price, "Clark H. Pinnock: Conservative and Contemporary."

49. Robert V. Rakestraw, "Clark H. Pinnock: A Theological Odyssey," 252.

50. Clark H. Pinnock, "From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology," in The Grace of God, The Will of Man, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1989), 15-30.

51. Robert V. Rakestraw, "Clark H. Pinnock: A Theological Odyssey," 257.

52. Robert M. Price, "Clark H. Pinnock: Conservative and Contemporary," 162-63, 181-82.

53. See R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, Classical Apologetics (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1984).

54. Quoted in Robert M. Price, "Clark H. Pinnock: Conservative and Contemporary," 169.

55. Clark H. Pinnock, Set Forth Your Case 70.

56. Clark H. Pinnock, Set Forth Your Case, 70-1. His comment on page 73 of this book gives a good indication of where he previously stood with respect to the doctrine of inerrancy. "These few examples show how precarious criticism of biblical infallibility is. For until the interpreter is omniscient and all the evidence comes in, it is impossible to press the theory of 'inductive errancy.' We ought neither to underestimate our task (for there remains much homework yet to be done), nor to overestimate its size (for it is nowhere nearly as large as the propaganda suggests). Difficulties in Scripture do not overthrow the infallibility principle. They are but mountains yet to be scaled and lands yet to be conquered."

57. Clark H. Pinnock, Biblical Revelation—The Foundation of Christian Theology (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute, 1971; reprint, Phillipsburg, Pa.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1985).

58. Gordon R. Lewis, review of Biblical Revelation—The Foundation of Christian Theology, by Clark H. Pinnock, In Eternity 23 (January 1972): 50.

59. Clark H. Pinnock, The Scripture Principle (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1984).

60. Clark H. Pinnock, Biblical Revelation—The Foundation of Christian Theology, 7.

61. Ibid. For a helpful review of The Scripture Principle see Kevin Vanhoozer, review of The Scripture Principle, by Clark H. Pinnock, Westminster Theological Journal 48 (Spring 1986): 192-96.

62. Clark Pinnock, "Response to Delwin Brown," Christian Scholar's Review 19 (September 1989): 75. For an understanding of how Pinnock uses the Bible in doing theology, see Clark H. Pinnock, "How I Use the Bible in Doing Theology," in The Use of the Bible in Theology/Evangelical Options, ed. Robert K. Johnston (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 18-34.

63. Robert V. Rakestraw, "Clark H. Pinnock: A Theological Odyssey," 256. For further analysis on Pinnock's view of the Bible see Robert M. Price, "Clark H. Pinnock: Conservative and Contemporary," 160-61, 170-72, and 177-78.

64. Other areas where Pinnock has changed on theological issues can be found in Robert V. Rakestraw, "Clark H. Pinnock: A Theological Odyssey," 258-59, and 264. Also Robert M. Price, "Clark H. Pinnock: Conservative and Contemporary," Evangelical Quarterly 165-66, and 170.

65. Clark H. Pinnock, Set Forth Your Case, 50.

66. Ibid., 32.

67. Clark H. Pinnock, Evangelism and Truth (Tigerville, S.C.: Jewel Books, 1969), 33-36.

68. Clark H. Pinnock, "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," 258.

69. Ibid., 247, 253.

70. Ibid., 257.

71. Ibid., 250-52.

72. Ibid., 252-53. As with Philip Hughes (see page 4 of this chapter), he claims that hell would posit a dualistic view of the universe, 255.

73. Clark H. Pinnock, "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent", 244.

74. Ibid., 249.

75. Ibid., 257. Another reason why Pinnock feels hell is upheld by so many people is the need to keep people in line morally. For further historical insight on this view, see David P. Walker, The Decline of Hell (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 4, *passim*.

76. Clark H. Pinnock, Biblical Revelation—The Foundation of Christian Theology, 199.

77. Clark H. Pinnock, "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," 259.

78. For an interesting discussion of the debate during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see David P. Walker, The Decline of Hell.

79. For another in hearty agreement with this point, see the foreword to Robert A. Morey, Death and the Afterlife.

80. My own supposition that evangelicals have not addressed this issue much in the years previous to the 1980's was confirmed by perusing the journal Bibliotheca Sacra. From 1971-1980, no article specifically on hell could be found. Consult An Analytical Index to Bibliotheca Sacra 1971-1980 (Dallas: Dallas Seminary), n.d. Only two articles could be found that relate to the issue in any remote way. See James I. Packer, "The Way Of Salvation: The Problem of Universalism," Bibliotheca Sacra 30 (Jan.-March 1973); and S. Lewis Johnson, "God Gave Them Up," Bibliotheca Sacra 129 (April-June 1972). Equally, I have found only a handful of scholarly books on hell printed in the last 15 years. It recently came to my attention through the reading of a book by Jonathan Kvanvig (The Problem of Hell New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 13, that Martin Marty failed to find a single scholarly article on hell when he consulted the indices of several journals. This amazing incident was noted originally in Kenneth L. Woodward, "Heaven," 54. The recent debate on hell, however, has caused an astronomical upswing of magazine and journal articles on the topic in the last five years, which has truly been amazing. Even U.S. News & World Report recently carried a lead article on hell. See "Hell's Sober Comeback," U.S. News & World Report 25 March 1991, 56.

Chapter 2

Explication and Evaluation of the Annihilationist Doctrine

Attention will now be given to evaluating the most common objections that are marshaled against the traditional doctrine of hell. Clark Pinnock's writings on the subject of annihilationism will serve as the focal point since he has written so candidly and clearly on the subject. Furthermore, the objections that Pinnock raises are the common objections other annihilationists raise.

It needs to be stated at the beginning of this chapter that the burden of proof rests upon the annihilationist, not the so-called traditionalist.¹ Though Pinnock believes that the burden of proof lies with the traditionalist,² I strongly disagree because the annihilationist doctrine has been a minority view throughout the history of the Christian Church. A doctrine which has been held by a minority of Christians clearly has the burden of proof residing with it.³ Kendall Harmon has stated the case quite cogently.

The great majority of the finest theologians in the church for the last twenty centuries have held to the traditional view...This, in itself, is not definitive—the Scriptures are always the final court of appeal. But it does mean that if we are going to disagree with Augustine and Aquinas and Luther and Calvin and Jonathan Edwards (to name only a few among so many) we need to have extremely strong grounds for doing so and the burden of proof is on those who wish to change the traditional doctrine.⁴

In this chapter, it will be helpful to divide the annihilationist's objections into three main categories:⁵ biblical issues, theological considerations, and philosophical implications. Some emotional ramifications and objections will be addressed in chapters 3 and 4. Under biblical issues, four areas will be included: (i) the implications of the words "destruction" and "fire" in the New Testament; (ii) Matt. 25:31-46 with special attention paid to the word "eternal" (αἰώνιος); (iii) Rev. 14; and (iv) Rev. 20. Theological objections to the doctrine of hell will focus primarily on the character of God, with the justice of God receiving special emphasis. The only philosophical area which will be touched upon is the alleged Greek influence on the traditional doctrine of hell. Other philosophical issues could be mentioned, but they are outside the purview of this book.⁶

In chapter 3, I will argue that the emotional heartache many experience with the Bible's teaching on hell, though understandable and very real, is possibly misplaced. Chapters 3 and 4 will underscore the fact that emotional reservations about the doctrine of hell are not limited only to those who hold to annihilationism.

The format for the three areas of objections brought forth by the annihilationists will be as follows: an explanation of the objection will be given, then an evaluation of that objection, and finally positive evidence will be brought forth for the traditionalist position on hell.

Biblical Objections to the Traditional Doctrine of Hell

Pinnock and others⁷ find that the word "destroy" (ἀπόλλομι) and its cognate words carry weighty evidence in favor of the annihilationist position. There are several verses that Pinnock commonly uses to prove the point that the word destruction=annihilation of the unbeliever. Matt. 3:10,12,⁸ Matt. 5:22,⁹ I Cor. 3:17,¹⁰ Phil. 1:28,¹¹ Gal. 6:8,¹² and II Thess. 1:9¹³ are popular verses that are listed by him in this regard. We will examine these verses below. Other passages of Scripture are mentioned, but this sampling will be more than adequate to show the argument that Pinnock is seeking to make.

In response to Pinnock's argument that "destroy" (ἀπόλλομι) and its cognate words imply annihilation, we can note several verses where these words clearly do not take that meaning. In Rom. 14:15, Paul says that it is possible for a Christian to destroy or "ruin" (ἀπόλλομι)

his relationship with a fellow brother in Christ. The word apollumi is also used in Luke 5:37 for wineskins that are ruined. Though the wineskins are ruined, they obviously do not cease to exist. The "lost" (ἀπόλλυμι) sheep of Luke 15:4,6 and the "lost" (ἀπόλλυμι) son of Luke 15:2,4 are equally not references to annihilation. The point of lostness is that finding remains a real possibility. Something that is annihilated cannot be found! In John 6:27, certain food is said to "perish" (ἀπόλλυμι). The food is not obliterated into non-existence; it just ceases to be useful. In Matt. 2:13, Herod wanted to find Jesus and "destroy" (ἀπόλλυμι) Him. From the context (Matt. 2:16ff), it is clear that Herod wanted to kill Jesus, but killing certainly does not imply non-existence, especially with reference to Jesus! When people are killed, they continue to exist, albeit in a different form and dimension. Later, in the gospel of Matthew (8:25), when the disciples get caught in a storm, they cry out to Jesus to save them from "perishing" (ἀπόλλυμι). Again, the reference is to dying, not annihilation.

Matt. 3:10,12 is a favorite of Pinnock's to prove the annihilationist doctrine. In these two verses, Matthew records John the Baptist's commentary on judgment.

And the axe is already laid at the root of the tree; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire...And 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.

A brief response to Pinnock *et al.* on this passage comes in the way of a question: why is the fire unquenchable? If it continues to burn, it seems that there must be something to burn. As will be seen later with Matt. 25, Rev. 14, and Rev. 20, the fire does not go out because it continues to serve a purpose, namely the judgment of the wicked.¹⁴ Furthermore, just because a verse like Matt. 5:22 speaks of "fiery hell" does not compel one to believe in annihilationism. In this verse and others, Pinnock sees fire as totally consuming (annihilating) the wicked. The argument for this perspective is made however with little appreciation of why the fire continues.

In I Cor. 3:17, Paul says that if anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him. Here the "temple of God" refers to the Church

phtheirei...from phthero...both occurrences.

(see verses 9,17). It is not possible to annihilate the temple of God. "Destroying" the temple occurs when things such as divisions take place in the Body. A man may ruin or corrupt the Body of Christ, but never annihilate it. Similarly, God will not annihilate the one who causes divisions, but cause him ruin for such misdeeds.¹⁵

Another verse that Pinnock uses to prove that the Bible teaches annihilationism is Phil. 1:28. Paul says that those who oppose the gospel show that a sign of "destruction" (ἀπώλεια) is true of them. But, ἀπώλεια is used in Mark 14:4 (cf. Matt. 26:8) when a woman "wastes" perfume by pouring it on the head of Jesus. The perfume did not stop existing; it just was used for other purposes than the scribes and chief priests deemed appropriate.

Gal. 6:8 says that the one who sows to his flesh will reap "corruption" (φθορά). BAGD mentions that reap corruption is opposite "eternal life" (ζωή αἰώνιος).¹⁶ Paul is exhorting his readers to realize that there are real consequences that continue as a result of the choices we make. It makes less sense to think that sowing to the Spirit has eternal ramifications, but sowing to the flesh results in annihilation. The force of Paul's exhortation would be greatly diminished, or completely lost by such an interpretation.

II Thess. 1:9 records the fate of those who do not know God. They are described as "away from the presence of the Lord." Edward Fudge has commented accordingly on this verse,

*Colothron aionion
apo prosōpou tou Kyriou*

The "everlasting destruction" (2 Thess. 1:9) of the wicked does not mean that Christ will be forever in the process of destroying them but that their destruction, once accomplished, will be forever. The wicked will never reappear.¹⁷

Fudge believes this passage teaches that the wicked are annihilated. The effects of God's judgment are eternal. That is, the annihilated will never come back to life again. This interpretation is difficult to sustain for three reasons. First, destruction is modified by eternal. Gerstner has aptly said in challenging Fudge on the interpretation of another verse that, "Destruction and eternal destruction; fire and eternal fire; punishment and eternal punishment, are not synonyms."¹⁸ Second, ὀλεθρος (the same word is used in II Thess. 1:9) in I Cor. 5:5 does not mean the obliteration of the wayward

↳ "to deliver such a one over for the destruction of his flesh"

"brother,"¹⁹ but a warning of physical death for his sinful behavior. I Thess. 5:3 mentions the "destruction" (ὄλεθρος) that will come upon the ungodly. The destruction is meted out because the day of the Lord has come (5:2). The wrath of God will be upon the ungodly (5:8). In I Tim. 6:9, Paul writes, "but those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction." "Ruin and destruction" is elaborated as including "all sorts of evil," "wandering away from the faith," and "piercing themselves with many a pang." These kinds of consequences require existence. To say that "ruin and destruction"=annihilation here does a disservice to the context.

There is a third reason why it is highly doubtful that annihilation of the wicked is being described in II Thess. 1:9. Paul says that the ungodly will be "away from the presence of the Lord." Being away from God connotes another place, thereby requiring existence.²⁰

The following phrase suggests that Paul sees the punishment of persecutors as consisting in separation from the Lord; for this to mean anything they would have to continue to exist...For Paul there would probably always remain in the background the notion of a dreary, wretched existence, removed by the whole infinitude of God from that which he designated 'Life,' and this indeed is what is implied by separation from God.²¹

In closing, it is helpful to remember that the word "destruction" needs to be looked at as one of three images used to portray hell. Other images are punishment and privation, exclusion, or banishment.²² Kendall Harmon wisely observes how annihilationists like Edward Fudge tend to emphasize the metaphor of destruction to the exclusion of the other two.²³ In so doing, the case for annihilationism seems more convincing than it actually is.

The words of Hodge, though quite strong, must be weighed.

To destroy is to ruin. The nature of that ruin depends on the nature of the subject of which it is predicated. A thing is ruined when it is rendered unfit for use; when it is in such a state that it can no longer answer the end for which it was designed....A soul is utterly and

forever destroyed when it is reprobated, alienated from God, rendered a fit companion only for the devil and his angels.²⁴

Matthew 25:31-46 and the Implications of Αἰώνιος

Referring to Matt. 25:46, S. Lewis Johnson has said that it is "doubtful that there is a doctrine in the Bible easier to prove than that of eternal punishment..."²⁵ Suffice it to say annihilationists do not agree.

Matt. 25:31-46 describes what it will be like "when the Son of Man comes in His glory" (25:31). It will be a time of separation between the sheep and the goats (25:32,33). Those represented by the sheep are separated to the Lord's right and receive the blessings of the kingdom (25:34). Those separated to the left of the Lord Jesus are told by Him to "Depart from Me, accursed ones, into eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels..." The unrighteous "will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (25:46).

The controversy with this passage revolves around whether "eternal fire" (25:41) and "eternal punishment" (25:46) refer to an eternal place of suffering for the impenitent or annihilation. Clark Pinnock admits,

that the interpretation of hell as everlasting conscious torment can be found in this verse [Matt. 25:46], if one wishes to, especially if the adjective "conscious" is smuggled into the phrase "eternal punishment" (as is common).²⁶

However, Pinnock says, "Jesus does not define the nature either of eternal life or of eternal death."²⁷ According to Pinnock this allows for the interpreter to see either the traditional doctrine of hell or annihilation being taught here.²⁸ John Stott agrees with Pinnock. Claiming that eternal conscious punishment is in Matt. 25 reads too much into the text. All Jesus said is that both the life and the punishment would be eternal. He did not describe the nature of either one. Since Jesus said eternal life "is a conscious enjoyment of God

(John 17:3), it does not follow that eternal punishment must be a conscious experience of pain at the hand of God."²⁹

In Matt. 25:46, Jesus says that the unrighteous go "into eternal punishment" (lit. εἰς κόλασιν αἰώνιον) and the righteous "into eternal life" (lit. εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον). The juxtaposition of eternal with punishment and life is quite clear. Whatever is true of the punishment being eternal must equally be so with the eternal that modifies life.³⁰ D. P. Walker has stated the case well.

...it could be argued that the "everlasting fire" and "everlasting punishment" (τὸ πῦρ τὸ αἰώνιον, κόλασις αἰώνιος), to which Christ says He will send the wicked at the Last Judgment, did not necessarily mean that their torments would be eternal, since the word αἰώνιος or its Hebrew equivalent is often used elsewhere in the Bible in contexts where it cannot mean an indefinite period of time, as for example in Jude 6, where it is applied to the fire which destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. But this interpretation is highly improbable, since Christ is clearly drawing a parallel between the eternity of bliss awaiting the sheep and the eternity of misery awaiting the goats. It can only stand if one also denies eternal life to the saved.³¹

Annihilationists feel that it is wrong to import the word "conscious" into this passage, yet they draw a bifurcation between what is true of eternal punishment and eternal life. The former deals with annihilation because what is eternal is not people being judged throughout eternity, but the effects (they were annihilated) of the punishment.³² The objection that traditionalists are reading eternal conscious punishment into this passage seems a bit strange in light of the arbitrary distinction annihilationists give to eternal punishment and eternal life.

Further problems can be adduced with saying Matt. 25:46 is teaching the annihilation of non-Christians. Alan Gomes has said,

...the mere fact that the wicked are said to experience "punishment" (Greek: kolasin) proves two inescapable facts by the nature of the case: the existence of the one punished, and the conscious experience of the punishment...Someone cannot be punished eternally unless that someone is there to receive the punishment. One can exist and not be

punished but one cannot be punished and not exist...Punishment per se, is conscious or it is not punishment. A punishment that is not felt is not a punishment.³³

In critiquing Edward Fudge on his belief that the results of the punishment are eternal, Gerstner has offered this rejoinder,

* ...I repeat my earlier critiques that it is the punishment, not the result of it, that lasts forever: "everlasting punishment," to be punishment must be punishing.³⁴

Other problems persist if Jesus was speaking about annihilation and not eternal conscious punishment. John Broadus's comments underscore the difficulty.

It will at once be granted, by any unprejudiced and docile mind, that the punishment of the wicked will last as long as the life of the righteous; it is to the last degree improbable that the Great Teacher would have used an expression so inevitably suggesting a great doctrine he did not mean to teach.³⁵

Indeed, why would Christ if wanting to teach annihilation of the wicked use such language that would lead His Church astray?³⁶ Even Bertrand Russell understood Christ as teaching an eternal hell, something he believed to be a serious defect in Christ's character.³⁷ Additionally, how would Christ's words about Judas in Matt. 26:24c ("It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.") make any sense if annihilationism were true?³⁸ William Crockett's observation that Pinnock steers clear of how Christ would have certainly been understood by the Pharisees is worth serious consideration. → that is, if annihilation roughly = nonbirth, then we are being told by Jesus that Judas' final state will be worse than annihilation.

* Convinced that the doctrine of eternal hell is savage beyond belief, Pinnock ignores the contexts and historical settings of the New Testament, opting (as I said in my chapter) for possible interpretations rather than the more probable. What Pinnock needs to grapple with, but does not, is the historical setting in which Jesus' statements about hell are found. Pinnock overlooks the significant fact that the Pharisees were the largest and most popular Jewish sect in first-

century Palestine, and they taught that the soul suffered eternal conscious punishment. So when Jesus talked about the destruction of the wicked in hell and referred to their weeping and suffering, the Pharisaic crowds would have understood him to mean endless suffering, unless he specified that the punishment was annihilation (which of course he never did).³⁹

Ironically, it is Jesus who tells us more about hell than heaven, yet it is He whom we appeal to for hell's non-existence!⁴⁰ Jesus did not equivocate in Matt. 25:31-46. Judgment will be eternal.⁴¹ In the same way we may be confident that life will be eternal. The words of Pusey are instructive here.

Even men who would say, 'I would rather believe S. Matthew wrong than such a doctrine true,' would be shocked at the thought, if, for the name of S. Matthew, there had to be substituted the Name of our Redeemer. And yet if we know anything at all, we know that the doctrine of Everlasting Punishment was taught by Him Who died to save us from it.⁴²

Revelation 14:9-11

Clark Pinnock believes that a "more promising proof text for the traditional view is Revelation 14:9-11."⁴³ This text comes the closest in convincing Pinnock of the traditional view of hell.⁴⁴

In John's apocalypse, we observe that those who worship the beast and his image receive a mark on the forehead or hand (14:9). This results in God's wrath and being tormented with fire and brimstone (14:10). John then declares in Rev. 14:11,

And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.

Pinnock finds that it is significant that the smoke goes up forever. He states that "the text does not say the wicked are tormented forever."⁴⁵ Pinnock says that there is no relief from the wicked's

suffering as long as that suffering lasts, but the passage does not mention how long that is. It could fit either the annihilationist or traditional view. Rev. 14 does not detail the end of history which is called the second death, an image he sees very much in agreement with annihilationism (20:14).⁴⁶

In like manner, Fudge sees that the wicked are punished "until it is over."⁴⁷ Elaborating on this he says,

The victims can anticipate no respite by day or night. Their suffering is not exclusively a "daytime" activity, nor it (sic) it exclusively a "nighttime" activity. There is no intermission in the suffering while it continues. But the other three figures in this scene all suggest that it will finally cease, when the destruction is completed and nothing is left. Then only rising smoke will testify to the everlasting penalty that has been exacted.⁴⁸

Kendall Harmon astutely observes many problems with Fudge's methodology of interpreting Rev. 14. Fudge believes that conscious suffering is being spoken of in Rev. 14 and says that its figures must be interpreted in light of the Old Testament. Harmon points out however that this causes difficulties for Fudge because John the apostle speaks of people tormented with fire.

If, as Fudge has argued, the New Testament only uses Old Testament *ideas*, but Fudge finds in this text [Rev. 14:10,11] the idea of fire as an image for suffering, then what Old Testament passage is the source on which Fudge is drawing for this idea? There are no Old Testament texts which speak of torment in fire, so Fudge is actually admitting an idea which came from somewhere else...⁴⁹ (emphasis his)

Other problems arise for interpreting the doctrine of annihilation from this passage. The word "torment" (βασανίζω) is so strong that even annihilationists do not attempt to make it mean something other than painful torture.⁵⁰ Again, their view would be that the torture is either temporary before annihilation, or directed at fallen angels, not humans.

The smoke of the torment is eternal (14:11). Smoke that is eternal requires an eternal fire, and an eternal fire connotes something is

being burned. To say that we have eternal smoke with no fire and nothing that kindles the fire seems rather odd.⁵¹

The eternal nature of the impenitent's suffering is amplified by the words "they have no rest day or night (14:11)."⁵² Fudge's comment that this connotes temporal suffering misses the brutal and inexorable nature of the suffering described. The "forever and ever" with "no rest day or night" is so emphatic it makes one wonder how any contrary interpretation to eternal conscious torment of the damned is possible.

Revelation 20:10-15

Rev. 20:10-15 is closely akin to much of what we observed in Rev. 14:9-11.⁵³ In Rev. 20:10, the devil, the beast, and the false prophet were thrown into the lake of fire "where they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." Rev. 20:11-15 describes the great white throne judgment with the result that if "anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (20:15)."

Unlike Rev. 14:11 where Pinnock admits humans are in view, it is the devil, the beast, and the false prophet who are present in Rev. 20:10 and they surely cannot be equated with ordinary human beings, can they? Furthermore, Pinnock approvingly quotes commentator G. B. Caird in saying that the second death is "extinction and total oblivion."⁵⁴

To hold as Pinnock does that the three mentioned in Rev. 20:10 "come to an absolute end [annihilation]"⁵⁵ is amazing considering the emphatic nature of the phrase "tormented day and night forever and ever." It is compelling that every instance of εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων means "absolute endlessness or eternity."⁵⁶ This is "the most emphatic expression of unending, ceaseless activity possible in the Greek language."⁵⁷ As was seen with Rev. 14:11, the force of the passage is difficult to construe as anything less than eternal suffering. Even if one concedes that the three listed in Rev. 20:10 are very different from humans,⁵⁸ it is clear from Rev. 20:15 that the fate of unrepentant humans is the same. They are also "thrown into the lake of fire."

It is quite interesting to find that Pinnock believes Rev. 14:9-11 is the most problematic text for annihilationism,⁵⁹ while Fudge, another annihilationist, finds Rev. 20:7-10 to be the most troublesome.⁶⁰ This

seems indicative of the fact that the New Testament teaching on the traditional doctrine of hell is not limited to one obscure text.⁶¹

The Justice of God

The justice of God is an extremely important area for consideration in the debate about hell. Clark Pinnock sees that God would be like a "bloodthirsty monster who maintains an everlasting Auschwitz for his enemies" if the traditional doctrine of hell is upheld.⁶² James Mill, the father of John Stuart Mill, would have agreed.

...all ages and nations have represented their gods as wicked, in a constantly increasing progression...till they reached the most perfect conception of wickedness which the human mind can devise, and have called this God, and prostrated themselves before it.⁶³

Furthermore, Pinnock believes it to be terribly unfair to have everlasting suffering for "finite sins."⁶⁴ Equally, John Stott questions whether eternal conscious torment is compatible with the doctrine of God's justice.⁶⁵ Pinnock goes on to say that hell "offends our sense of natural justice. Hell as annihilation on the other hand does not."⁶⁶ Annihilation "makes better sense of hell in terms of justice."⁶⁷ The argument that sins are worthy of an eternal punishment because they are committed against an eternal God does not convince people any longer like it did during the Middle Ages.

The claim that God would be a "bloodthirsty monster who maintains an everlasting Auschwitz" if the traditional doctrine of hell is true carries problems even from the beginning of the analogy. Those who suffered in Auschwitz suffered under the cruel tyranny of truly evil men. Justice was not served in any way whatsoever by having Jews suffer there. On the other hand, the justice of God is compatible with the traditional doctrine of hell because all people truly deserve it. Pinnock's comparison with Auschwitz evokes strong emotion, but fails in offering an adequate analogy.⁶⁸ One could argue that Pinnock's analogy is an "absurd analogy" because of the incongruities between traditionalists' views of God and the truly barbaric monsters that ran places like Auschwitz. Pinnock's analogy further fails since people are in hell of their own will, whereas those in

Auschwitz were not in any form or fashion there because they had chosen that for themselves! Stott also decries the injustice in having people eternally suffer for sins ("finite sins" as Pinnock so labels them) committed here on earth.

Many criticisms of the annihilationist understanding of what God's justice should look like can be given. First, the designation "finite sins" is an awkward one. It is granted that humans are finite, but it is clear that we as time-space creatures frequently make decisions that have eternal import. Passages such as Rom. 8:18 and I Cor. 4:17,18 remind us of this fact.

Second, Stott's difficulties pertaining to the seeming unfairness of God if hell includes eternal suffering is answered by his own remark. He mentions that eternal suffering would not necessarily be unfair if those in hell never repented.⁶⁹ Indeed, as will be argued in the next chapter, that is the case.

Third, Pinnock's objection that hell "offends our sense of natural justice" is quite troubling. The trumpeting of the attractiveness of annihilationism because it is not offensive to our sense of natural justice⁷⁰ is even more alarming. It must be stated quite emphatically that our sense of justice is perverted, twisted, and distorted. What we as humans deem to be fair can many times be far removed from what God says.⁷¹ This certainly is depicted in Paul's exhortation in Rom. 3:1-4. Paul raises the question whether the unbelief of certain Jews nullifies the faithfulness of God. In verse 4, Paul uses strong language to retort to such fallacious reasoning.

May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, That Thou mightest be justified in Thy words, and mightest prevail when Thou art judged.

◀ Man's sense of justice fails miserably ▶

Fourth, Pinnock's statement that annihilation is more compatible with God's justice is simply outrageous. In fact, Harry Blamires believes God would be more like Satan (*contra* Pinnock)⁷² if annihilationism were true.⁷³ Blamires believes that God could not be just if Himmler was annihilated.⁷⁴ How would Jews who suffered in Nazi concentration camps feel about Himmler being annihilated?⁷⁵ Would their sense of "natural justice" find annihilation or eternal suffering for Himmler as more appropriate? Amazingly, neither

Pinnock nor Philip Hughes sees annihilationism as mitigating its awfulness!⁷⁶ It is common for God's justice and love to be scrutinized by people who see an eternal hell as violating either, or both of these character qualities.⁷⁷ C. Samuel Storms's remarks on the justice of God are good to remember.

Justice is that principle in virtue of which a person is given his due. To withhold from a person what he deserves or what the law demands that he receive is to act unjustly. How, then, can it be unjust to withhold from a person what he does *not* deserve? If you are in my debt and I demand payment, I can hardly be said to have acted unjustly. Similarly, should you not pay me, as you are obligated by law, it is justice that demands you suffer the consequences. All humanity stands infinitely indebted to God, rightly condemned to suffer the penal consequences that our sin deserves. No man can rightfully claim to deserve divine clemency, for 'there is none who does good, there is not even one. (Rom. 3:12b).'⁷⁸

Interestingly, prominent sociologist, Peter Berger, sees the traditional doctrine of hell as manifesting man's moral outrage at injustice. Instead of hell depicting some vindictive, dark side of man, it may reflect a profound moral sensitivity.⁷⁹

Unfortunately, it is all too commonplace for critics of the traditional teaching on hell to portray believers in heaven manifesting a sick glee as they observe those in hell suffering.⁸⁰ Again, these images provoke great emotional resistance to hell, but fail to describe adequately the phenomena of Scripture. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 18:23) and neither should His followers. In heaven, believers will be like Christ (I John 3:3) and Christ's desire was to save people, not condemn them (Matt. 9:36-38; Mark 10:45; John 3:17; II Pet. 3:9). Though many in the end will not be saved (Matt. 7:13,14), there is no reference in Scripture that depicts the believer manifesting some sick glee as he contemplates the fate of the lost. Pinnock *et al.* do not have a defensible protest here. The reasoning that an eternal hell must include believers with some demented type of joy over the fate of the lost is not biblically warranted. It certainly is the case that believers should have joy over the exercise of God's justice (see Prov. 21:15), but it is a *non sequitur* to understand that as synonymous with a sick delight.⁸¹ It does seem

somewhat commonplace with this issue to portray falsely those who hold to the traditional doctrine of Scripture as obscurantists of one sort or another.

Though the following two people are universalists, their objections to the traditional doctrine of hell clearly dovetail in many ways with the objections mentioned by annihilationists.

Talbott designates those who hold to the traditional doctrine of hell as "hard hearted theists."⁸² Those who hold to universalism he labels "biblical theists."⁸³ He is honest enough to admit that these descriptions are a "concession to my own biases."⁸⁴ Arbitrary and emotionally laden tags such as Pinnock and Talbott use might prove productive polemically, but they do a grave disservice to furthering the debate at hand.

A further example of a faulty view of justice comes from another universalist. Though universalism is not the doctrine under question, it is helpful to observe one writer's use of the parable of the workers (Matt. 20:1-16) to draw out some implications about God's justice. Again, the reasoning sounds very similar to that of some annihilationists.

Some people conceive of justice in such a way that a person is just, if and only if (i) he is fair (i.e., treats like cases alike) and (ii) treats no one worse than he deserves to be treated. Clearly no one who conceived of justice in this way could argue that God's perfect justice required him to put men who are sufficiently sinful in hell. On this conception, God will be unjust only if he treats equally sinful men differently or if he treats some persons worse than they deserve. But God could avoid both of these actions if he awarded eternal salvation to everyone without exception. The fact that he gave eternal salvation to Judas as well as to Peter and John would no more make him unjust on this conception, than it would show that the vineyard owner in Jesus' parable (Matthew 20:1-16) was unjust because he gave a penny both to the men that worked all day and to the men who worked for one hour. Treating like cases alike, does not require treating unlike cases differently. And someone who treats all cases alike can be just on this conception, provided only that he treats no one worse than he deserved to be treated.⁸⁵

Many problems arise with Adams's analysis of God's justice. First, she uses language that is vague and open to all types of interpretations. What does it mean to be "sufficiently sinful?" Biblically, all of us are. Second, God does not treat anyone "worse than they deserve." All of us deserve hell.⁸⁶ Romans 3 is quite clear on this fact. The amazing thing is that God treats many of us far better than we deserve. With this reminder, we are getting closer to the meaning of the parable that she cites. The parable of the workers is in Scripture to teach us that even some who are late in coming to Christ (the classic deathbed scenario) will enjoy the bliss of heaven. To use this parable to make a statement for universal salvation does not even fit the story. In the parable of the workers, the workers come to work freely. Adams's concept of salvation seems to be given to all people regardless of their willingness. She is fuzzy in her thinking when it comes to understanding God's grace vis à vis His justice.⁸⁷ Packer has well said,

God is not true to Himself unless He punishes sin. And unless one knows and feels the truth of this fact, that wrong doers have no natural hope of anything from God but retributive judgment, one can never share the biblical faith in divine grace.⁸⁸

One final difficulty with the annihilationist position in sustaining any meaningful idea of God's justice has to do with levels of hell. The New Testament teaches that it will be "more tolerable" for some people on the day of judgment than for others (Matt. 11:24). Some will receive "many lashes" (Luke 12:47); some "will receive but few" (Luke 12:48). It seems that the unrighteous will be assigned to the level of hell commensurate with their deeds (Rev. 20:12,13). A Stalin or a Hitler⁸⁹ would suffer more than someone who did not exhibit such depraved behavior.⁹⁰ It would be a "moral and rational outrage" to have some hard-core drug pusher who had ruined many people's lives simply be annihilated.⁹¹

It should be stated that there are annihilationists who believe that there will be a time of temporary suffering proportionate to how evil an individual has been on earth,⁹² but the final outcome will be obliteration into non-existence. There are some problems with such a view. First, Fudge and Pinnock are probably conceding more than they think with the view that some suffering will take place as a result

of God's judgment. This clearly shows that they do not entirely object to unbelievers consciously suffering for their sins.⁹³ So the issue is not that God will punish people for their sins, but that the length cannot be eternal. Second, though it seems like a mediating position to allow for some suffering on the part of the ungodly, it ends up with the same difficulty inherent in immediate annihilation of the wicked. Would we think that it was more just if a mass murderer who remained unrepentant was released from prison even after serving 30 years?⁹⁴ Third, if the suffering has paid for their sins, then why don't they get to go to heaven? This would be similar to a Roman Catholic understanding of purgatory. If their suffering does not pay for their sins, why do they cease paying for it?⁹⁵ Ultimately, even temporary judgment before final annihilation eliminates the consequences of a sinful life.⁹⁶ It seems that annihilationism is much more offensive to our "sense of natural justice" than its adherents let on.

The Alleged Influence of Greek Philosophy

According to some annihilationists, Greek philosophy has played a very significant role influencing the Christian Church to believe in the traditional doctrine of hell.⁹⁷ Pinnock believes that the traditional doctrine of hell posits a "cosmological dualism."⁹⁸ The idea of two kingdoms (God's and Satan's) existing eternally "just doesn't sound right."⁹⁹ Pinnock feels that annihilationism "makes more sense metaphysically because the idea of God having any opposition in the form of Satan and unredeemed humanity is eliminated."¹⁰⁰ Pinnock also sees Augustine, not Scripture as the culprit responsible for promulgating the traditional doctrine of hell.¹⁰¹

The argument to show Greek philosophy's influence on the traditional doctrine of hell goes something like this: only God possesses immortality (I Tim. 6:16), and he graciously gives "embodied life" to his people (I Cor. 15:21, 50-54; II Tim. 1:10). Nothing resides in the nature of the human soul which demands it go on living forever.

Many things can be said by way of criticism about the claim that Greek philosophy has exerted great influence on the traditional understanding of hell. First, the notion of "cosmological dualism" that Pinnock brings as his criticism toward the traditional view of hell

obscures the issue. It is conceded that a dualism where God and Satan have equal authority and power throughout eternity would in fact be an unbiblical notion. Satan is a created being (Isa. 14; Ezek. 28; Col. 1). God is uncaused and self-existent (Ex. 3:14; Isa. 43:10d,11). Satan's power is derived from God (Job 1,2).

The generic umbrella "cosmological dualism" however fails to explain clearly whether any form of dualism is unbiblical. H. B. Kuhn's comments are helpful in this regard.

Christian theology generally accepts a modified moral dualism, recognizing God as supremely good and Satan as a deteriorated creature bent everywhere upon the intrusion of evil. This, however, is not dualism in the sense of its usual definition, since Christian theology does not consider Satan to be ultimate or original, and sees him ultimately excluded from the universe.¹⁰²

The reason why Satan existing eternally does not sound right to Pinnock is because he makes the jump that Satan's eternal existence=perpetual opposition against God. To say that a bound and banished creature is exercising true opposition against God fails to understand Satan's judgment in the lake of fire.

Though Pinnock feels that annihilationism will eliminate the supposed difficulty of "cosmological dualism," it is ultimately Scripture that must be our guide in determining what ultimate reality is, not what seems correct. Pinnock often invokes phrases like "it just doesn't sound right" to knock down the traditional doctrine of hell.¹⁰³ The nature of special revelation however, is such that we would never naturally come to God's truth on our own initiative. God must intervene and show us His truth, which needs to be our ultimate authority. Ironically, it was Pinnock who years ago eloquently penned the following words.

The sola scriptura is the Protestant answer to the problem of authority. Theology without valid authority is like art with all freedom and no form, or a ship without a rudder. An authority is simply that which has a recognized right to rule us. Divine revelation itself structures authority for us. Scripture alone has a right to command our compliance and obedience.¹⁰⁴

A departure from the authority of Scripture is always disastrous. By authority, we need to recognize that this is not just mental assent to the inerrancy of Scripture, but allowing God's Word the right to be supreme over our feelings and/or what we think is fair and proper.¹⁰⁵

Conceding that God alone has immortality does not necessarily lead one to conclude that an eternal hell can't exist.¹⁰⁶ God is able¹⁰⁷ to give immortality to anyone—the redeemed or the unredeemed.

Conclusion

In sum, the traditional doctrine of hell is well grounded in Scripture, in concert with the justice of God, and not some fanciful idea of pagan philosophy. It does seem that much of the objection to the doctrine of hell is based on human reason and emotional revulsion. The role of emotions and how that figures into this whole debate is where our study now turns.

Notes

1. One who holds to the traditional teaching on the doctrine of hell.
2. "The Bible gives a strong impression to any honest reader that hell denotes final destruction, so the burden of proof rests with those who refuse to believe and accept this teaching." Clark H. Pinnock, "The Fire That Consumes," in *Four Views on Hell*, 145.
3. This in no way implies that a minority view will most likely be wrong. Its proponents, however, have the responsibility for proving the legitimacy or plausibility of the view in question. Even John Stott mentions his hesitancy to acknowledge his belief in annihilationism because of his respect for the "longstanding tradition which claims to be a true interpretation of Scripture." David L. Edwards and John Stott, *Evangelical Essentials*, 319. "Heaven and hell have been two virtually unquestioned doctrines of the Bible since the Christian church began." John H. Gerstner, *Repent or Perish*, 29.
4. Kendall Harmon, "The Case Against Conditionalism: A Response to Edward William Fudge," in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, 200.
5. Alan Gomes uses different names for his divisions in critiquing the annihilationist doctrine, but the issues addressed are similar. See Alan W. Gomes, "Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell," Part 2 *Christian Research Journal* 14 (Summer 1991): 9.

6. Philosophical speculations can be dangerous when it comes to understanding what the Bible is teaching on a difficult subject like hell. One writer says, "So far as I can tell, not a single passage in the Bible would require a believer to accept such a doctrine [hell] and the whole thrust of the New Testament is inconsistent with it." (19,20) This author goes further in saying that the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matt. 25 "has nothing to do with final judgment or the ultimate fate of the wicked." (20) "God's love for one person logically requires that he love all persons" (32) and that "there can be no exclusiveness in love." (33) Fortunately, he is honest enough to tell the reader that he is giving the philosophical merits for eternal punishment, not the biblical ones (20). Thomas Talbott, "The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment," Faith and Philosophy 7 (January 1990). Assuming that God's particular action or manifestation of a character quality (say His love) logically requires him to act the same way toward everyone else is biblically unwarranted. The sovereign choosing of nations (Deut. 7:7,8) and individuals (Eph. 1:4,5) is up to God. If my wife has the prerogative to love me in an exclusive way, why would not God be able to? The Bible makes it quite clear that God's ways are higher than ours (Isa. 55:8,9), causing us to see in a mirror dimly at times (I Cor. 13:12). God has secret plans which we know nothing of (Deut. 29:29). Other examples show the difficulty that pure philosophical speculation can cause. One philosopher uses mathematical equations to show the difficulties with belief in hell. See Marilyn McCord Adams, "Hell and the God of Justice," Religious Studies 11 (1975): 440. Another comes up with a view that people who have not freely chosen to believe in God here on earth will be under compulsion to do so in heaven. See W. W. Bottoms, "The Fate of the Lost," The Expository Times 60 (Oct. 1948-Sept. 1949): 351. There may be something to the observation that "the chief objections to the doctrine of Endless Punishment (caps. his) are not Biblical but speculative." See William G. T. Shedd, The Doctrine of Endless Punishment (n.p.: 1885; reprint, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1990), 118. In a recent publication, one philosopher asks the reader to trust that philosophy answers the dilemma of hell when biblical exegesis is virtually non-existent in his work. See Jonathan L. Kvanvig, The Problem of Hell (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 153, 158.

7. See David L. Edwards and John Stott, Evangelical Essentials, 315-16. For an irenic and even-handed response to Stott, see Robert L. Reymond, "Dr. John Stott on Hell," Covenant Seminary Review 16 (Spring 1990).

8. Clark H. Pinnock, "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," 251.

9. Clark H. Pinnock, "Fire, Then Nothing," 40.

10. William Crockett, ed., Four Views on Hell, 146; Clark H. Pinnock, "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," 251.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Whether the fire is literal or metaphorical, the point of the passage stands. The fire will not go out because it continues to serve a purpose. A judicious and scholarly treatment that argues for the metaphorical view of hell can be found in William V. Crockett, "The Metaphorical View" in Four Views on Hell, 43-76.

15. "To engage in divisions is to 'destroy' the divine society, and consequently to invite God to 'destroy' the sinner. The word does not indicate either annihilation or eternal torment...It simply makes it clear that he who commits a grave sin lays himself open to a grave penalty." Leon Morris, The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1976), 70.

16. William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. Translation and adaptation of the fourth revised and augmented edition of Walter Bauer. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 858b.

17. Edward Fudge, "The Final End of the Wicked," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 27 (Sept. 1984): 333.

18. John H. Gerstner, Repent or Perish, 127. For more helpful insight on the word "destroy" see Loraine Boettner, Immortality (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1956), 121-24.

19. Put in quotes because of the uncertainty of this person's relationship to God. See verses 10-13.

20. Much thanks to Dr. Bruce Ware of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School for pointing this out to me. "There is no mental image for 'nothing.'" Robert A. Morey, Death and the Afterlife, 31. "Here is where I got an Excedrin headache in my philosophy class. Before the world began there was nothing. But what in the world is 'nothing?' Where can we find it? Obviously nowhere. Why? Because it is nothing and nothing doesn't exist. It can't exist, because if it did then it would be something and not nothing. Are you starting to get a headache like mine? Think about it for a second. Nuts! I can't tell you to think about 'it' because nothing isn't an 'it.' I can only say 'nothing isn't.'" R. C. Sproul, The Holiness of God (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1987), 16.

21. Ernest Best, A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 262. Also see the discussion on II Thess. 1:9 in Robert A. Morey, Death and the Afterlife, 90, 109-11, 149-50.

22. Kendall Harmon, "The Case Against Conditionalism: A Response to Edward William Fudge," in Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell, 213.

23. Ibid., 213-4. Another helpful discussion that shows destruction does not equal annihilation is found in Alan W. Gomes, "The Annihilation of Hell," Part 2, 10.

24. Larry Dixon, The Other Side of the Good News (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1992), 79.

25. S. Lewis Johnson, "God Gave Them Up: A Study of Divine Retribution," Bibliotheca Sacra 129 (April-June 1972): 131.

26. William Crockett, ed., Four Views on Hell, 156.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. David L. Edwards and John Stott, Evangelical Essentials, 317.

30. A sampling of those in hearty agreement with this observation include David F. Wells, "Everlasting Punishment," Christianity Today, 20 March 1987, 41; Loraine Boettner, Immortality, 118-19; Robert A. Morey, Death and the Afterlife, 130-35 and 148 where he mentions that the "classic commentators are unanimous on the fact that an honest exegesis of Mt. 25:31-46 will reveal that if *aionios* means 'endless fullness of life' for the righteous, then it must mean 'endless punishment for the wicked.'" S. Lewis Johnson, "God Gave Them Up: A Study of Divine Retribution," 131; Alan W. Gomes, "Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell," Part 1, 18; Leon Morris, "The Dreadful Harvest," Christianity Today, 27 May 1991, 36; "Here αἰώνιος plainly refers to both punishment and life, so that it is impossible to give the word two different meanings. This settles the question: hell is as eternal as is heaven; heaven no more so than hell." R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 1001. Charles Spurgeon said of this, "Of course, the reward of the righteous is to be of no longer continuance than the punishment of the wicked. Both are described as 'everlasting' in the same verse [Matt. 25:46], spoken by the same sacred lips; and as the 'punishment' is made to be only 'age-lasting,' so must the 'life' be." As quoted in John F. MacArthur, Ashamed of the Gospel (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1993), 64.

31. D. P. Walker, The Decline of Hell, 19-20 and page 94 where it is said that even John Locke did not try to explain away the parallel in Matt. 25 between eternal life and eternal punishment.

32. See John H. Gerstner, Repent or Perish, 94,97 for an explanation of Edward Fudge's view on this.

33. Alan W. Gomes, "Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell," Part 2, 11.

34. John H. Gerstner, Repent or Perish, 150. Also see pages 2 and 85.

35. As quoted in Robert A. Morey, Death and the Afterlife, 148; Luther said that he had to accept hell or else declare that God was a liar. D. P. Walker, The Decline of Hell, 8.

36. Alan W. Gomes, "Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell," Part 1, 19; Robert A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife*, 89ff.; and Kendall Harmon, "The Case Against Conditionalism: A Response to Edward William Fudge," 207-9.

37. My thanks to Kendall Harmon for leading me to this. "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." Bertrand Russell, "Why I Am Not A Christian," chap. in *Why I Am Not A Christian* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 17. Piper mentions that Gehenna appears 12 times in the New Testament and that 11 of those are uttered by Christ Himself. See John Piper, *Desiring God* (Portland, Ore.: Multnomah, 1986), 45.

38. In all of my research, I never found one proponent of annihilationism seek to explain this most nettlesome passage for their view.

39. William Crockett, ed., *Four Views on Hell*, 172.

40. John H. Gerstner, *Repent or Perish*, 15. Roger Nicole has put it well, "It is worthy of note that, in the biblical record, those who spoke most about future punishment in its irrevocable finality are Jesus and the apostle John, the very ones who also represented most glowingly the supreme glory of God's love and the unshakable certainty of his ultimate triumph." Walter A. Elwell, ed. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 51.

41. In John Stott's very able work on Christology, *The Cross of Christ*, he cites Matt. 25:41, but unfortunately quotes only three words of the verse, "On the last day, those who have not found refuge and cleansing in Christ will hear those most terrible words: 'Depart from me.'" In the footnote for these three words he simply puts Matt. 25:41 rather than the more accurate Matt. 25:41b which would remind the reader that only part of the verse has been quoted. Hopefully, this was just an oversight by Stott. See John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 107.

42. E. B. Pusey, *What is of Faith as to Everlasting Punishment?* (Oxford, Eng.: Devonport Society of the Holy Trinity, 1880), IX.

43. William Crockett, ed., *Four Views on Hell*, 157. This passage is seen as one of three most convincing by D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell*, 19.

44. William Crockett, ed., *Four View on Hell*, 157. John Wenham agrees. See *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, 179.

45. *Four Views on Hell*, 157.

46. *Ibid.*

47. Edward Fudge, "The Final End of the Wicked," 331.

48. *Ibid.*

49. Kendall Harmon, "The Case Against Conditionalism: A Response to Edward William Fudge," 209. In pages 210-12, Harmon gives further help in critiquing Fudge's position.

50. Robert A. Morey, Death and the Afterlife, 142.

51. John H. Gerstner, Repent or Perish, 58.

52. Robert Mounce makes the observation that "do not cease" is used in Rev. 4:8 for the worship which will never stop. Again, this would militate against the annihilationist position. See Robert H. Mounce, The Book of Revelation (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1977; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), 276.

53. Seen as one of the three most convincing passages for the traditional doctrine of hell by D. P. Walker, The Decline of Hell, 19.

54. Clark H. Pinnock, "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," 257.

55. *Ibid.*

56. Robert A. Morey, Death and the Afterlife, 138.

57. Lenski as quoted in Alan W. Gomes, "Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell," Part 1, 18.

58. This is an important point to Edward Fudge, "The Final End of the Wicked," 332.

59. William Crockett, ed., Four Views on Hell, 157.

60. Fudge has conceded that, "This is the single most problematic text in the whole Bible for the extinction of all evil, even though it does not specify human beings." Edward Fudge, "The Final End of the Wicked," 332. See Harold O. J. Brown, "Will the Lost Suffer Forever?," 266 for a response to Fudge and others on Rev. 20:10.

61. To say as Edward Fudge does that traditionalists are doing eisegesis with the text of Scripture, and that there is no biblical support for the doctrine of hell, seems overstated even based on the comments of some annihilationists who concede that there are passages that do not fit so neatly with their view. See Edward Fudge, "The Final End of the Wicked," 328, 334. "Although the scriptural authority for hell is so strong, stronger perhaps than for any other fundamental doctrine, there are some texts that can be used to attack it; but they do not amount to a serious weakness." D. P. Walker, The Decline of Hell, 33.

62. William Crockett, ed., Four Views on Hell, 149. Pinnock approvingly quotes Hans Küng, "Even apart from the image of a truly merciless God that contradicts everything we can assume from what Jesus says of the Father of the lost, can we be surprised at a time when retributive punishments without an opportunity of probation are being increasingly abandoned in education and penal justice, that the idea not only of a lifelong, but even eternal punishment of body and soul, seems to many people absolutely monstrous." *Ibid.*, 153. The argument of Küng is troubling because of the reliance on human standards of justice in determining how God should act. Jonathan Kvanvig mentions that Küng believes the threat of hell to be only a mere possibility. The final state of affairs for all humans according to Küng is to experience the

"all-embracing mercy" of God. As quoted in Jonathan L. Kvanvig, The Problem of Hell, 75. At least two difficulties arise with K  ng's position—1.) If the threat of hell is only a "mere possibility," wouldn't this rob it of its potency? 2.) Jesus and the disciples seem to be involved in a fairly elaborate ruse if K  ng is correct because the statements made by them seem to suggest a different view on the afterlife for the unbeliever than the one K  ng espouses.

63. As quoted in Jerry Walls, Hell: The Logic of Damnation, 5.

64. Clark H. Pinnock, "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," 255.

65. David L. Edwards and John Stott, Evangelical Essentials, 319.

66. William Crockett, ed., Four Views on Hell, 151.

67. *Ibid.*, 153. Calvin alludes to Augustine as saying that it is "perverse" to measure divine forms of justice by human ones. See John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion trans. by Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983), III.XXIV.XVII.

68. For two helpful discussions on the fallacy of false analogy see D. A. Carson, Exegetical Fallacies (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1984), 123-24; and David Hackett Fischer, Historians' Fallacies (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1970), 251-53.

69. David L. Edwards and John Stott, Evangelical Essentials, 319.

70. Some have argued just the opposite and say that it may be an attraction to Christianity for many because of the strong sense of God's justice. See Jonathan L. Kvanvig, The Problem of Hell, 15-16.

71. It is quite possible that our love for democratic ideals has contributed to a deficient view of God's judgment. See the suggestive comments made in this regard. *Ibid.*, 29.

72. "Let me say at the outset that I consider the concept of hell as endless torment in body and mind an outrageous doctrine, a theological and moral enormity, a bad doctrine of the tradition which needs to be changed. How can Christians possibly project a deity of such cruelty and vindictiveness whose ways include inflicting everlasting torture upon his creatures, however sinful they may have been? Surely a God who would do such a thing is more nearly like Satan than like God." Clark H. Pinnock, "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," 247.

73. Harry Blamires, Knowing the Truth About Heaven & Hell, 49.

74. *Ibid.*, 15.

75. John H. Gerstner, Repent or Perish, 127; "As to the wicked, the wickedness of some men here on earth far exceeds any punishment that befalls them or could be inflicted on them. Mere extinction is hardly a morally adequate punishment for one who has spent a lifetime engaging in wanton and bloodthirsty cruelty." Harold O. J. Brown, "Will the Lost Suffer Forever?", 264. Even some liberal scholars do not find the traditional teaching of the Church on hell antithetical to God's justice. See D. P.

Walker, The Decline of Hell, 32. One survivor of Auschwitz, Elie Wiesel, whose God was "murdered" as he experienced the ghastly horror of that place would be an interesting person to ask about this. See Elie Wiesel, Night, trans. Stella Rodway (New York: Avon Books, 1960), 44, *passim*.

76. See Philip E. Hughes, The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ, 407; and Clark H. Pinnock, "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," 259.

77. Some of the literature that speaks to these issues includes W. W. Bottoms, "The Fate of the Lost," 350; Vernon Grounds, "The Final State of the Wicked," 212-13; Ronald L Hall, "Hell, Is This Really Necessary?" International Journal for Philosophy of Religion 25 (Sept. 1981): 114; Paul Helm, "Universalism and the Threat of Hell" Trinity Journal 4 (Spring 1983): 36; Thomas Talbott, "The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment," 19, 23; Loraine Boettner, Immortality, 117; and Geoffrey Rowell, Hell and the Victorians (Oxford, Eng.: Clarendon Press, 1974), 13. For Darwin, hell was not compatible with a compassionate, loving God. See A. E. Wilder-Smith, Man's Origin, Man's Destiny (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1968), 209. See the good insight from John Murray for clarification on what God's justice actually means in C. Samuel Storms, Chosen for Life (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House), 87. A good response to John Stott's objections to the traditional understanding of God's justice can be found in Robert L. Reymond, "Dr. John Stott on Hell," 57. "God, in the reprobation of some, does not act a cruel part. Whoever accused a chief magistrate of cruelty for not sparing a company of atrocious malefactors, and for letting the sentence of the law take place upon them by their execution?" Jerome Zanchius, Absolute Predestination (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1971), 83.

78. C. Samuel Storms, Chosen for Life, 121-22.

79. As quoted in Jerry L. Walls, The Logic of Damnation, 30-31.

80. William Crockett, ed., Four Views on Hell, 136, 138, 140. On the other side, Schleiermacher believed that no one could be happy in heaven if they knew people were in hell. See William Nigel Kerr, "Weakening the Church and Destroying the Gospel," Action (Sept.-Oct. 1989): 9. Blamires makes the point that love would demand justice since love does not want people to be deceived into thinking that they are good when they are not. See Harry Blamires, "The Eternal Weight of Glory," Christianity Today, 27 May 1991, 6, 9. Clark Pinnock disagrees with Blamires and rather likes to focus on God's "boundless mercy." See William Crockett, ed., Four Views on Hell, 140.

81. See the helpful comments in Ajith Fernando, Crucial Questions About Heaven and Hell (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1991), 67, 93-4.

82. Thomas Talbott, "The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment," 22.

83. *Ibid.*, 23.

84. Ibid. Throughout Talbott's article there seems to be a lack of appreciation for the fact that true freedom **would entail** the possibility of deceiving one's self (see Jer. 17:9; Heb. 3:13).

85. Marilyn McCord Adams, "Hell and the God of Justice," 434. Also see 437.

86. There are others who fail to appreciate the differences between God's justice and grace. Jonathan Kvanvig confuses God's creation with God's children. See The Problem of Hell, 158.

87. Marilyn McCord Adams, "Hell and the God of Justice," 435.

88. J. I. Packer, Knowing God (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 118.

89. Even Stephen Travis assumes this. See Stephen H. Travis, Christian Hope and the Future, 134.

90. See Robert A. Morey, Death and the Afterlife, 153 and Mark Littleton, "The Horrible Doctrine," Discipleship Journal 34 (July 1986): 16.

91. Harry Blamires, Knowing the Truth About Heaven and Hell, 20. It should be noted that religious hypocrites, especially religious leaders, have more accountability (Jas. 3:1), and thus will suffer more in hell if they were not true believers. Not unlike Dante consigning some popes to the depths of hell! See Dante Alighieri, The Divine Comedy: Inferno (New York: Vintage Books, 1950), Canto XIX.

92. Both Pinnock and Fudge hold this view. William Crockett, Four Views on Hell, 154; John H. Gerstner, Repent or Perish, 128.

93. Kendall Harmon, "The Case Against Conditionalism: A Response to Edward William Fudge," 205.

94. This analogy does work because annihilationism *is* a release from suffering. Again, non-existent beings do not suffer!

95. My thanks to Dr. Tom Nettles for raising this point during my thesis defense at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

96. Alan W. Gomes, "Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell," Part 1, 18; and Alan W. Gomes, "Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell," Part 2, 11.

97. See, for example, the protest of Fudge. Edward Fudge, "The Final End of the Wicked," 325-26, 328-29, 332.

98. William Crockett, ed., Four Views on Hell, 154.

99. Ibid.

100. Ibid., 155.

101. Ibid., 143 and Clark H. Pinnock, "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," 243-44.

102. Walter A. Elwell, ed., Evangelical Dictionary of Theology s.v. "Dualism," by H. B. Kuhn. Murray Harris has said, "...forfeiture of immortality means the deprivation of eternal blessedness but not the

destruction of personal existence." As quoted in Dixon, The Other Side of the Good News, 76.

103. William Crockett, ed., Four Views on Hell, 29, *passim*.

104. Clark H. Pinnock, Biblical Revelation—The Foundation of Christian Theology, 120. "...the doctrine [hell] does not originate with human reason nor is it influenced by human sympathy. The theologian here, as always, is appointed to discover and defend that which God has revealed." Lewis Sperry Chafer, Chafer's Systematic Theology vol. 4 (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1980), 427-28. Gerstner says that eliminating the doctrine of hell annihilates God and His Word. John H. Gerstner, Repent or Perish, 185. "I am not, of course, basing my understanding of hell on human logic. It is part of the revelation in Scripture and accordingly belongs among the doctrines that all who see Scripture as their final authority accept." Leon Morris, "The Dreadful Harvest," 37.

105. For a book that questions biblical authority, and therefore the doctrine of hell, see Samuel J. Barrows, The Doom of the Majority of Mankind (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1883), 135-36, esp. 141. See Crockett's response to Pinnock on this issue in Four Views on Hell, 174.

106. See Harold O. J. Brown, "Will the Lost Suffer Forever?", 273-75; and Alan W. Gomes, "Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell," Part 1, 17.

107. Pinnock makes light of the fact that Augustine explained unregenerate man's ability to burn forever (physically and mentally) by God's miraculous power. Clark H. Pinnock, "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," 244. Though some may not be sure whether those in hell have physical pain, it is incredible that any Bible-believing Christian would portray God's miracle-working power as a scapegoat for a faulty view. As Larry Dixon comments, "If God can use a burning bush to communicate to His chosen person in Exodus 3 without consuming *it*, who is to say that His fire of judgment cannot punish those who refuse to believe the Gospel without consuming *them*?" (cf. Dan. 3:19-27) The Other Side of the Good News, 81. (emphasis his)

Chapter 3

Understanding the Nature of Hell: a Reappraisal

The belief in annihilationism, that unrepentant sinners will be obliterated into non-existence, rather than suffer eternal, conscious torment in hell, has far-reaching consequences. Separate cases have been made that annihilationism greatly affects missions,¹ evangelism,² the authority of Scripture,³ other important doctrines,⁴ and even the role of church history.⁵

Proper interpretation of the Bible as to what God will do to unbelievers at the Great White Throne Judgment is certainly debated by proponents on both sides of this issue. But, quite clearly, the text of Scripture is not the only significant area in influencing how people feel about this issue. Emotions and personal intuition play a much larger part than one might suspect. Specifically, there is a sense of moral outrage many experience as they consider a good, loving, merciful, kind, and forgiving God allowing the impenitent to suffer consciously in an eternal hell.

Emotional Objections to the Doctrine of Hell

Consider some of the candid comments that are made in this regard. John Stott has said, "Well, emotionally, I find the concept [hell] intolerable and do not understand how people can live with it without either cauterising their feelings or cracking under the strain."⁶

Clark Pinnock, with equal force has said,

Would it be right to pretend to be calm when I am not?...I do not feel calm about the traditional doctrine of hell, and so I will not pretend. Indeed, how can anyone with the milk of human kindness in him remain calm contemplating such an idea as this?⁷

Later in the same article, Pinnock concedes,

Second, my own essay illustrates the primary reason why people question the tradition so vehemently. They are not first of all impressed by its lack of a good scriptural basis (that comes later). They are appalled by its awful moral implications.⁸

In a recent book entitled, Four Views on Hell, Pinnock comments accordingly,

But are annihilationists perhaps in the same situation with the experience-culture factor dominating their view as well? There is some evidence of this. The reader will have detected, for example, strong emotion in my rejection of the traditional view. Obviously, I am rejecting the traditional view of hell in part out of a sense of moral and theological revulsion to it. The idea that a conscious creature should have to undergo physical and mental torture through unending time is profoundly disturbing, and the thought that this is inflicted upon them by divine decree offends my conviction about God's love. *This is probably the primary reason why people question the tradition so vehemently in the first place.*⁹ (emphasis added)

Proponents of both annihilationism and the traditional doctrine of hell agree on one thing—hell is an extremely difficult doctrine to accept.¹⁰ It is clearly understandable why annihilationists are aghast at the implications of the traditional doctrine of hell. Donald Guthrie's comments in this regard are worth noting.

Another undeniable fact is that judgment is eternal. It is this latter fact which has led some, who consider unending punishment to be unethical, to propound a theory of annihilation. The doctrine of eternal punishment is not an attractive doctrine and the desire to substitute for it the view that, at the judgment, the souls of the wicked will cease to exist, is understandable.¹¹

Responding to Various Emotional Objections: Introduction

Some of the emotional heartache that Pinnock and others describe can easily be remedied by showing that there are erroneous ideas that many carry with them about the nature of hell. For instance, Pinnock pictures Christians as having a sick delight in heaven as they observe the plight of the damned in hell. Pinnock uses the analogy of the glee some people feel when they watch a cat squirming in agony as it is tortured in a microwave.¹² One searches the Scriptures in vain for believers experiencing this kind of demented joy in heaven. Some may point out that Rev. 19:3 validates what Pinnock and others are saying here. This verse records saints in heaven singing praises to God because His judgment has taken place. However, even a cursory reading of Rev. 19:1-3 will reveal that these praises are not borne out of some sick delight in watching others suffer, but in the vindication of God's justice (see especially verse 2).

But, the fact still remains, as John Wenham has said, that the "ultimate horror of God's universe is hell."¹³ How are Christians to address these penetrating reservations that many have about the traditional doctrine of hell?

The difficulties many have with hell do not need to be resolved by adopting the annihilationist doctrine. It is my contention that these and other emotional struggles with the traditional doctrine of hell are frequently borne out of a fundamental misunderstanding about the nature of hell. My purpose is to show that proponents of both the traditional doctrine of hell and annihilationism tend to misunderstand or possibly neglect altogether some crucial doctrines related to the doctrine of hell. Therefore, attendant emotional struggles that ensue are often misplaced. The following discussion will certainly not eliminate all struggles people have concerning the doctrine of hell, but it should clear the dust considerably and hopefully offer some helpful perspective.

Understanding the Ramifications of an Unrepentant Heart

The story of Lazarus and the Rich Man in Luke 16 is a good starting point in considering some of the commonly held misconceptions people carry about hell.¹⁴ In this passage, Luke tells us a little about the lives and future destinies of a certain Rich Man

(commonly referred to as Dives¹⁵) and Lazarus, a poor man (16:19,20). Upon death, Lazarus is carried to Abraham's bosom (16:22) and Dives finds himself tormented in Hades (16:23). Dives cries out, "Father, Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue; for I am in agony in this flame" (16:24). As the story progresses, Dives is clearly told that relief of any sort is an impossibility (16:25,26). In the comment made by Dives to Abraham, notice that he does not say, "I was wrong in living such a sinful life. God have mercy on me. I repent. I am now ready to serve God. I have learned my lesson." Dives never admits wrongdoing of any kind whatsoever. This passage is deafening in its silence in this regard. Dives simply wants the *consequences* of his sin reduced, but he never recognizes his sin! I. Howard Marshall has said that Dives remains "totally blind and unrepentant."¹⁶

The Bible makes it clear that there is a sorrow that leads to repentance (II Cor. 7:9), "but the sorrow of this world produces death" (II Cor. 7:10). Godly repentance seeks forgiveness from God because there is the acknowledgement of being a sinner, not because sin has caused embarrassing or difficult circumstances in one's life. David in Psalm 51:4 is a good example of godly repentance. The acknowledgement that his sin was ultimately "against God" proved the authentic nature of his repentance.

In contrast to David, Esau is a good example of someone who displayed the type of sorrow that leads to death. Hebrews 12:16,17 records,

that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.

Esau cried not because he realized what he did was wrong, but simply because he lost the blessing (Gen. 27:34-38). It was the *result* of Esau's sin that saddened him, not the sin itself.

The lesson from Dives and Esau is this: those in hell never truly repent of their sin. They forever remain in a state of rebellion toward God because their fallen nature does not carry the ability to recognize its depravity and need for God.

There are some who would take great exception to what I have just described about the unregenerate's lack of ability to repent. One such objector, Thomas Talbott, speaks to the issue in this way.

And the New Testament does, it seems to me, present such a picture, namely this: The more one freely rebels against God, the more miserable and tormented one becomes; and the more miserable and tormented one becomes, the more incentive one has to repent of one's sin and to give up one's rebellious attitudes.¹⁷

Nels Ferré, a believer in universalism has said that "there are no incorrigible sinners; God has no permanent problem Children."¹⁸ Such lofty views of man's inherent goodness are not found in Scripture. On the contrary, it seems that the unbeliever in hell will persist in his rebellion toward God,¹⁹ with the consequent lack of desire to repent.²⁰ Indeed, the case has been made that unbelievers in hell become more obstinately defiant toward God, not less so.

There is no line in the Bible which could lead us to think that Hell is in any wise a place where repentance could reform the sinner and bring him to bow before God. There seems, on the contrary, to be evidence that men will grow harder and harder against God when they are separated from him. There is no evidence that the suffering of Hell does anything to change the heart of unrepentant men. In fact, when the devil is finally cast into the lake of fire where the Antichrist and the false prophet have already been for a thousand years, there is no suggestion that they are in any wise repentant.²¹

Indeed, as Rev. 9:20,21 and 16:9-11 clearly show, man does not repent when judgment increases. Rather, he only blasphemes God all the more.²²

Man does not end up in hell against his will.²³ On the contrary, it is a place where God says to men, "Thy will be done."²⁴ It seems that there is much biblical warrant for Milton's comment that the impenitent would rather "reign in hell than serve in heaven."²⁵ Apart from the grace of God in redemption, all humans would desire to be autonomous from God rather than love and serve Him in heaven. Unregenerate man remains a rebel forever.

The objection could be leveled that no one would want to stay in hell once they experienced its awfulness. How many non-Christians

could be found who would say they prefer hell to heaven? The reason that non-Christians would voice their desire to be in heaven over hell however is the fundamental misunderstanding they have of what heaven will be like.

In heaven, the supreme joy is God Himself,²⁶ yet the self, not God, is the center of the non-Christian's being.²⁷ How is it possible then for those who reject the love of God to desire to be where love is supreme?²⁸

Furthermore, Psalm 16:11 says that "in God's presence there is fulness of joy," yet the idea of being in God's presence worshipping and adoring Him is abhorrent to a non-Christian. Puritan Richard Baxter has said, "When carnal persons think of heaven, their conceptions of it are also carnal; and were it possible for such to obtain it, it would certainly be their trouble, not their rest, because it is so contrary to their nature."²⁹ I have never heard a non-Christian tell me he gets excited about the prospect of worshipping God throughout eternity! So, in one sense the unbeliever would rather have hell than heaven because heaven is totally contrary to his nature and affections. It is not the suffering of hell they choose or even desire, but the alternative (heaven) is so repulsive to them that they continue to choose hell even with its attendant suffering. It does seem, as C. S. Lewis has noted, that hell is a place where the door is locked on the inside.³⁰

An illustration here might help to further make the point about unregenerate man's disdain for God and His heaven, and why hell would be more consistent with his nature.

Consider the many clinically depressed people that fill the psychiatric wards of hospitals throughout this country. Are they happy, or enjoying themselves? By definition of their problem we know that they are not. Do they want to get well? Well, it is common knowledge in the mental health care profession that many do not. There seems to be a sick delight in their depression.³¹ When a psychologically healthy person observes someone who has suffered from severe depression for many years and does not want to get well, there is a great bafflement that occurs, "Why doesn't this person want to get well? Life is worth living!" In similar fashion, though baffling to Christians, it seems Scripture gives us a portrait of a non-Christian hating hell, yet not wanting to leave. This kind of destructive and irrational³² behavior is foreign to the thinking of a Christian, and

therefore difficult to understand. This will be looked at further in the discussion of Romans 1.

Understanding the Depravity of Man

Most of us do not have a proper appreciation for how sinful man is. Various polls have been taken that reveal as few as 5% of the population believe that they have any chance of going to hell.³³ Hell simply does not have much influence in Western Christianity anymore.³⁴

Mark Littleton has said that unbelievers are "far more malicious and pernicious than they might appear to be on the surface."³⁵ There certainly is much biblical warrant for such an idea. The following discussion will demonstrate this.

Furthermore, it is common for Christians to transfer how much they shudder in utter horror of hell, and erroneously believe that the non-Christian views hell in the same way. Much can be said to the contrary.

The Image of God in Man

The image of God is what distinguishes man from the rest of God's creatures.³⁶ Millard Erickson has said the image of God is "intrinsic to man" and "man would not be human without it."³⁷ Believers and unbelievers alike are created in the image of God. The image of God incorporates the concept of personality.³⁸ Millard Erickson has said with regard to the image of God, that,

God's creation was for definite purposes. Man was intended to know, love, and obey God. He was to live in harmony with his fellow man, as the story of Cain and Abel indicates. And he was certainly placed here upon earth to exercise dominion over the rest of creation. But these relationships and this function presuppose something else. Man is most fully human when he is active in these relationships and performs this function. Man qua man has a nature that includes the whole of what constitutes personality: intelligence, will, emotions. **We experience full humanity only when we are properly related to God.** No matter how cultured and genteel, no one is fully human

unless a redeemed disciple of God. This is man's telos, that for which he was created.³⁹ (emphasis added)

I agree with Erickson's observations and believe that the relationship of man's humanness relative to the image of God is something that has been sorely missing in discussions about the fate of unbelievers in hell.

Many Christians, as mentioned previously, struggle with the concept of an eternal hell because its awfulness seems so inconsistent with the benevolence of God. Christians are growing into Christlikeness, and therefore having the image of God restored.⁴⁰ In a real sense, to borrow Erickson's description, Christians are becoming more human. Again, such a person views the terror of hell from a different perspective than an unbeliever who is uninterested in the things of God. Moreover, a Christian's conception of hell is more stark and awful because he knows something of the difference between man's supposed goodness and the burning holiness of God. A non-Christian, on the other hand, doesn't see this distinction so graphically, or possibly not at all. Hell is repugnant to a Christian because he doesn't want to be there, and that is truly where he doesn't belong. On the other hand, hell will be a "home" of sorts, but certainly not an enjoyable one for the non-Christian; a place or existence that is totally consistent with his corrupt nature. This does not mean that hell really isn't that awful. Quite the contrary. Hell is not a place of joy, peace, or anything good. Non-Christians will suffer tremendously in hell. However, Christians commit a grave error when they assume that non-Christians would view hell in entirely the same way as them. A Christian truly would want to leave hell because it is most certainly antithetical to his nature and affections; a non-Christian will never want to leave hell even though there is unending pain and misery. Again, it is not because the non-Christian likes pain or that the pain is not severe. Rather, it is because the alternative of heaven is not desirous to the non-Christian in any sense at all. Hell is perfectly consistent with his fallen and corrupt nature.

Calvin said that there is a degeneration in the image of God ^{of} among non-Christians. "For as believers are recognized to be Sons of God by bearing His image, so the wicked are properly regarded as the children of Satan, from having degenerated into his image."⁴¹ As being in heaven holds no interest for Satan, so the same is true for those who follow him (John 8:44).

HELL
/
/

degeneration
in the
image of
God

"Beastlikeness" of Unregenerate Man

Additionally, from Scripture we find that there are many "animal/beast-like" characteristics that are attributed to unregenerate man. Before proceeding along this line of reasoning, this claim is not being made to posit any ontological dissimilarity between unregenerate and regenerate men. However, I do believe that it will emphasize how spiritually unlike unbelievers are from believers, and therefore underscore again how faulty it is for Christians to imagine that their abhorrence of hell is exactly the same as a non-Christian's.

In Deut. 23:18 a male prostitute is called a "dog," something that both Goliath (I Sam. 17:43) and Hazeel (II Ki. 8:13) knew to be a loathsome term. II Chronicles 33:11 records that Manasseh was captured with hooks. These hooks were used "as though he were a wild bull."⁴²

Ps. 106:19,20 says that the Israelites, "made a calf at Horeb, and worshipped a molten image. Thus, they exchanged their glory for the image of an ox that eats grass." Later in the Psalms, we find that those who worship idols will become like them (Pss. 115:8 and 135:18). There is a real sense in which we take on the characteristics of who or what we adore.

The word "leviathan" can appear in the Old Testament "as a literal animal, a figure for Egypt (Ps. 77:14), and a figure for sinful humanity in general (Isa. 27:1)."⁴³

Vine has also made some interesting comments about the beast-like tendencies of man in rebellion to God.

Symbolically, man in separation from God, and relying on his own thought and strength, and resources, is a beast. When Asaph envied the prosperity of the wicked, he confessed to God, 'I was as a beast before Thee' (Psalms 73:22); 'man being in honour abideth not [that is, apart from God]: he is like the beasts that perish' (Psalms 49:12). The natural tendency of the beast is 'downward' (Ecclesiastes 3:21). As man was made in the image of God, he is only manly when he is godly (compare 2 Peter 2:12).⁴⁴

The most vivid portrayal of sinful man's propensity to act like a beast is seen in the life of Nebuchadnezzar. Dan. 4:25-26,30 records that Nebuchadnezzar was driven from mankind because of his pride.

His judgment was that he would live with the beasts in the fields (4:15,23,25,32). His physical appearance included hair like eagles' feathers and nails like birds' claws (4:23).

Later, when Nebuchadnezzar humbled himself before God, he says that his reason returned to him (4:34,36). Nebuchadnezzar mentions that his reason came back to him when he honored and praised God (4:34). Previously, Nebuchadnezzar was said to have a "beast's mind" (4:16).

* An unregenerate man in the process of perishing will always see God's ways as foolish (I Cor. 1:18). As with Nebuchadnezzar, so it is true for all—only God can show someone the folly of their thinking about Him. Man out of fellowship with God reasons instinctively about what is fair and good. Man's standard for such things is always found wanting because it goes no further than himself for the reference point.

At the end of this dramatic lesson, Nebuchadnezzar proclaims the greatness of God and His prerogative "to humble those who walk in pride." (4:37) Nebuchadnezzar comes to his senses and realizes that it was perfectly right for God to allow him to undergo this severe test. God certainly has the prerogative to judge sin, whether by temporary means as in the case with Nebuchadnezzar, or by eternal means (hell) for those who persist in their rebellion against Him.

The disease where someone takes on the characteristics of an animal was recorded as early as the fourth century, possibly even earlier.⁴⁵ The illness has certainly been observed in modern times.⁴⁶ The story of Nebuchadnezzar is no fanciful tale, but a vivid depiction of how severely sin can destroy someone.

* In the New Testament, we have false teachers called "unreasoning animals" (II Pet. 2:12; Jude 1:10). Again, we see that these godless teachers live their lives by instinct, rather than the dictates of Scripture (II Pet. 2:19-22). One commentator has said with respect to these verses that,

...these apostates (whether false teachers, their victims, or both) never were what they seemed to be and returned to what they had been all along. Dogs and pigs can be scrubbed but not kept clean, for it is in their nature to return to unclean living. Such apostates are in a tighter bondage, they are farther from the truth, and they are in deeper in spiritual filth than ever before.⁴⁷

Other verses attest how "beastly" man can be. Imagery such as "lust horses" (Jer. 5:8), and dogs are just some of them (Phil. 3:2; Rev. 22:15).

Romans 1 also shows where rebellion against God results in all kinds of ungodly behavior, including a "depraved mind" (1:28). Those described in this passage are doing the very thing that destroys them, yet they continue to do it (1:18-32, esp. vv. 21-24). They seem to love what they hate, and hate what they love. It is extremely difficult for a Christian to grasp this type of thinking because its irrationality⁴⁸ comes from a foolish heart (1:21; cf. Eph. 4:17,18). Sin destroys what God desires to remake (I Pe. 2:11); it will never give lasting fulfillment (Heb. 11:25).

Examples of people choosing to destroy themselves by willful rebellion to God are certainly not limited to the pages of Scripture. People with destructive drug or sexual addictions continue in their aberrant behavior even though in many cases it no longer offers any pleasure or satisfaction. Moreover, the real possibility of AIDS is no deterrent for those who obstinately continue in their depraved lifestyles.

Sanctification, on the other hand, brings joy (Gal. 5:22), and progressively makes someone more like Christ (Ro. 8:29). This certainly is the more reasonable way to live one's life.

A Christian's abhorrence of sin (that it is first and foremost against God) is totally unlike the sadness sin brings to the life of the unbeliever. The non-Christian is saddened, as mentioned earlier, by the consequences of sin, not that it separates him from God. Esau was "repentant" about losing his birthright, but afterwards he still wanted to kill Jacob (Gen. 27:30-46, esp. vv. 41,42)!

Again, thinking that a non-Christian views spiritual reality in the same way as a Christian is an erroneous assumption because the two are pictured very differently in Scripture—children of Satan (John 8:44); children of God (I John 3:1-3).

Others have spoken of the "beast-like" nature of fallen man. C. S. Lewis writes,

To enter heaven is to become more human than you ever succeeded in being in earth; to enter hell, is to be banished from humanity...To be a complete man means to have the passions obedient to the will and the will offered to God...There may be a truth in the saying that 'hell is hell, not from its own point of view, but from the heavenly point of

view.' I do not think this belies the severity of our Lord's words. It is only to the damned that their fate could ever seem less than unendurable.⁴⁹

→ Millard Erickson, W. E. Vine, and C. S. Lewis all agree that true humanness only comes from obedience to God. It seems that the Scriptures concur with that consensus.

In The Weight of Glory, C. S. Lewis mentions that,

the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you meet, if at all, only in a nightmare.⁵⁰

Whether one entirely agrees with Lewis's dramatic depiction of hell and those who are part of it, it does seem to be helpful in reminding us that believers and unbelievers are fundamentally different in their outlooks about God and His universe, something that many Christians would do well to keep in mind.

In his Pensées, Pascal said the following about the differences between man in relationship with God, and man apart from God.

✂ These fundamental facts, solidly established on the inviolable authority of religion, teach us that there are in fact two equally constant truths. One is that man in the state of his creation, or in the state of grace, is exalted above the whole of nature, made like unto God and sharing in his divinity. The other is that in the state of corruption and sin he has fallen from the first state and has become like the beasts....Whence it is clearly evident that man through grace is made like unto God and shares his divinity, and without grace he is treated like the beasts of the field.⁵¹

Pascal further develops the idea of man's beastlikeness apart from God when he describes fallen man's pursuit of fleshly pleasures.⁵²

Equally, Calvin has described the beastlikeness of man apart from God.

Thus, Gryllus, also, in Plutarch (*lib. quod bruta anim. ratione utantur*), reasons most skilfully, when he affirms that, if once religion is banished from the lives of men, they not only in no respect excel,

but are, in many respects, much more wretched than the brutes, since, being exposed to so many forms of evil, they continually drag on a troubled and restless existence: that the only thing, therefore, which makes them superior is the worship of God, through which alone they aspire to immortality.⁵³

In a similar way, Jonathan Edwards believed that countries influenced by God's revelation made people more humane, while lack of revelation caused people to be more brutish or beast-like. This is why Edwards saw tribal peoples as being more animalistic than civilized people. It was in no way meant as a racial slur, but simply an observation that man achieves true humanity by access and responsiveness to God's truth.⁵⁴

Modern-Day Illustrations

When ghastly displays of man's inhumanity to man take place, we expect non-Christians who believe in the inherent goodness of man to be surprised. Some recent events underscore this phenomenon. A recent article in Maclean's was entitled, "Saddam is Not a Human Being." The author portrays Hussein in the following way.

Afterwards, in a classic act of terrorism Saddam got the leadership of the party to 'volunteer' to participate in the firing squad that summarily executed these 'conspirators,' thus making everyone complicit in murder. This is not a human being in any normal sense of the word.⁵⁵

As an aside, this is an interesting thought because Hussein saw himself as the heir to Nebuchadnezzar's throne, another person who experienced beastlikeness!

The brutal murdering⁵⁶ spree of Jeffrey Dahmer is another case in point of how man has the ability to act like an animal. In Time magazine, one author concluded his article about Dahmer in this way, "We have spent a great deal of time trying to understand the motivation for such a heinous crime and concluded that some acts are so evil they simply cannot be explained."⁵⁷ The Jeffrey Dahmers of this world catch many of us off guard. How can someone be so wicked?⁵⁸ Thoughts such as these show that many people, Christians

* included, have a lack of appreciation for Scripture's clear appraisal of man apart from the redeeming work of God. The Bible says that unregenerate man has a "throat that is an open grave" (Rom. 3:13), and "feet that are swift to shed blood" (Rom. 3:15). Ghastly and depraved behavior like cannibalism is not something limited to fiction like Lord of the Flies, but a brutal reality that the Scriptures tell us we are all capable of apart from the grace of God (Deut. 28:53-57⁵⁹; II Ki. 6:28,29).

Conclusion

These are tough truths to acknowledge, but utterly crucial if we are to understand a little bit better why hell may be different than we commonly conceive. It still holds true that all people are created in the image of God (Gen. 9:6; Jas. 3:9), thereby endowing them with great worth and dignity. Though the image of God in man can be marred, it seems that Scripture indicates it can never be totally lost. Our understanding and appreciation, however, for the *imago Dei* in man should not cause us to lose sight of the fact that man apart from God's salvific grace is capable of horrendous evil.

In sum, it is my conviction that the doctrine of man's depravity has been increasingly de-emphasized, or even forgotten by many evangelicals. When this important truth is lost, it is no wonder that our self-indulgent, what's in it for me? culture, which many Christians have become part of, would struggle with the doctrine of hell. Man apart from God hates Him, and wants nothing to do with Him. The appropriate place for such a person is hell, a place entirely consonant with his corrupt nature.

Notes

1. Harold O. J. Brown, "Will the Lost Suffer Forever?," 277.
2. Richard Baxter, The Saint's Everlasting Rest (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1847), 135.
3. Leon Morris, "The Dreadful Harvest," 37; Lewis Sperry Chafer, Chafer's Systematic Theology, vol. 4, 427-8.
4. Brown, "Will the Lost Suffer Forever?," 263-5.

5. Ibid., 267-271, 278; Alan W. Gomes, "Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell," Part 1, 16. See what the author calls "a discernible historical cycle to the Christian Church's attitude toward the doctrine of hell" in Robert A. Morey, Death and the Afterlife, introduction.

6. David L. Edwards and John Stott, Evangelical Essentials, 312.

7. Clark H. Pinnock, "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," 246.

8. Ibid., 258. This is an interesting comment by Pinnock because he is highly critical of traditionalists who are influenced (in his opinion) by things other than Scripture.

9. William V. Crockett, ed., Four Views on Hell, 164.

10. Ibid., 135-36; Leon Morris, "The Dreadful Harvest," 34; and Brown, "Will the Lost Suffer Forever?," 261.

11. Donald Guthrie, New Testament Theology (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 892.

12. Pinnock, "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," 245.

13. John W. Wenham, The Goodness of God, 27.

14. Amazingly, one scholar says that the point of this story "has nothing to do with the afterlife." Jonathan L. Kvanvig, The Problem of Hell, 154.

15. The Latin Vulgate translates the Greek plousios (rich or wealthy) by dives. See Merrill C. Tenney, ed., The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1975), vol. 2, s.v. "Dives," by J. B. Scott.

16. I. H. Marshall, The Gospel of Luke. A Commentary on the Greek Text (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1978), 637. Interestingly, Marshall says that the arrogance of Dives is further exhibited by his ordering around of Lazarus even while in hell.

17. Thomas Talbot, "The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment," 39.

18. As quoted in Vernon C. Grounds, "The Final State of the Wicked," 213.

19. "Let it be kept in mind also that with all restraints removed the sinner goes on sinning endlessly, defiantly, against God, and that *endless* punishment is the penalty for *endless* sinning." Loraine Boettner, Immortality, 119 (emphasis his).

20. See C. S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1962), 124; and E. B. Pusey, What is of Faith as to Everlasting Punishment? (Oxford, Eng.: Devonport Society of the Holy Trinity, 1880), 287.

21. Donald Grey Barnhouse, Expositions on Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure, vol. 3 God's Heirs (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1958), 210. "If the impenitent sinners were assigned to their own abode, their suffering would be everlasting if God were the Punisher, because He could and would keep the impenitent sinner alive forever because impenitent sinners do not repent in the next world. Punishment never changes people's attitudes....So God's punishment would

go on forever because the sinner continues to sin and incur God's punishment." John H. Gerstner, Repent or Perish, 71. Also see Donald Bloesch, Evangelical Theology vol. 2, 227-8; and Richard Baxter, The Saint's Everlasting Rest, 79-80 for the same idea. Worship of anything or anyone other than God causes us to sin "more and more (Hos. 13:2a)."

22. My thanks to Dr. Wayne Grudem for pointing this out to me. Jer. 5:3 suggests much the same thing.

23. Many who hold to Calvinistic theology and many who hold to Arminian theology would be in agreement on this point. For representatives of both sides see S. Lewis Johnson, "God Gave Them Up," 128; and Clark H. Pinnock, "The Fire That Consumes," in Four Views on Hell, ed. William Crockett, 24.

24. Quote by C. S. Lewis found in David W. Lotz, "Heaven and Hell in the Christian Tradition," Religion in Life 48 (Spring 1979): 89.

25. As found in C. S. Lewis, The Great Divorce (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1946), 66. The quote is from John Milton, Paradise Lost (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1962), 1.263.

26. Harry Blamires, "The Eternal Weight of Glory," 33.

27. Leon Morris, "The Dreadful Harvest," 36.

28. Ibid., 37. "...we might well reflect that there is no good reason for thinking that those who reject the love of God in this life will welcome being placed in that heaven where love is supreme. As H. Maynard Smith says, anyone who goes to hell 'will go because he will feel more at home there than in heaven.' This is not unlike T. F. Torrance's view that 'all who finally choose evil find it a burning Hell still to be grasped in the hand of eternal love.'" (*The Apocalypse Today*); "...while God has done everything to make it possible for the lost man to be saved, he chooses to reject it all...Thus, hell is the habitation of those who want nothing to do with God." Mark R. Littleton, "The Horrible Doctrine," 16.

29. Richard Baxter, The Saint's Everlasting Rest, 43-4. A similar idea can be found in John Owen, The Glory of Christ trans. by R.J.K. Law. (Carlisle, Penn.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 7-8.

30. C. S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain, 127.

31. While I was in Yugoslavia on a short-term missions project during the summer of 1986, our team of six periodically met some emotionally hurting people. Being the leader of the team, I was asked what to do with those who wanted much of our time, and yet weren't showing signs of interest in spiritual matters. Providentially, I happened to be meditating on the gospel of John at the time. I came across the man whom Jesus healed at Bethesda. It is interesting to note that the text says that he had been sick for 38 years (5:5), yet Jesus had the supposed audacity to ask him if he wanted to get well. It seems that Jesus was asking him if he *truly desired* to get well or simply remain content in self-pity (5:6,7). "The divine goodness therefore is not to be

charged with cruelty for letting them [the damned] continue in that existence, though it be very miserable, when they themselves will not have it removed: or for not altering their condition, which they utterly refuse to have altered." D. P. Walker, The Decline of Hell (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 214.

32. On the irrationality of sin, see Ted Peters, Sin: Radical Evil in Soul and Society (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 9-10, 15-16. Peters has written a very helpful book on the subject of sin. One unfortunate weakness is the unnecessary detail (at least in this author's mind) that he goes into with regard to some criminal cases, etc. (see especially chapters 7 and 8). This may violate the spirit of Eph. 5:12 where we are admonished not even to speak of the things done in the dark. The reader, of course, is left to form his own opinions on the matter.

33. See Jon Braun, Whatever Happened to Hell?; Kenneth L. Woodward, "Heaven," Newsweek, 27 March 1989, 53; and D. P. Walker, The Decline of Hell (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 41. For a classic example of how people are not in touch with their sinfulness and therefore the real possibility of going to hell, see Jonathan Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God", vol. 2, The Works of Jonathan Edwards (Edinburgh: the Banner of Truth Trust, 1988 reprint), 7-12. Universalists certainly see much goodness in man. "If there is a hell, it exists only for a time, i.e., until the last recalcitrant sinner decides to say yes to God." Stephen T. Davis, "Universalism, Hell, and The Fate of the Ignorant," Modern Theology 6 (January 1990): 174; John Hick has said, "...the inherent gravitation of our being is towards him [God]..." As quoted in Paul Helm, "Universalism and the Threat of Hell," 42.

34. Brown, "Will the Lost Suffer Forever?," 262.

35. Mark R. Littleton, "The Horrible Doctrine," 15.

36. Millard J. Erickson, Christian Theology (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1985), 72. Further insight on the image of God can be found in D. J. A. Clines, "The Image of God in Man," Tyndale Bulletin 19 (1968); and Charles Lee Feinberg, "The Image of God," Bibliotheca Sacra 129 (July-Sept. 1972).

37. Millard J. Erickson, Christian Theology, 471.

38. *Ibid.*, 513. Also see Everett F. Harrison, ed., Baker's Dictionary of Theology, 340-1; and Walter A. Elwell, ed., Elwell's Dictionary of Theology, 547.

39. Erickson, Christian Theology, 513-4.

40. John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, I.XV.IV.

41. *Ibid.*, I.XIV.XVIII. See the helpful discussion of Calvin's view on the *imago Dei* in Mary Potter Engel, John Calvin's Perspectival Anthropology (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1988), 37-72. My thanks to Dr. Robert Pyne of Dallas Theological Seminary for pointing this book out to me.

42. Eugene H. Merrill, "II Chronicles," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary vol.1, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1985), 645.

43. J. Barton Payne, "Leviathan," in Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago, Ill: Moody Press, 1980), 472.

44. W E. Vine, Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1981), 31.

45. Leon Wood, A Commentary on Daniel (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1973), 121-22; and Edward J. Young, The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1949), 112.

46. J. Dwight Pentecost, "Daniel," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary, vol. 1, 1342.

47. Kenneth O. Gangel, "II Peter," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary, vol. 1, 874.

48. I am grateful to Dr. Wayne Grudem for provoking further thinking along these lines.

49. C. S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain, 125-6.

50. C. S. Lewis, The Weight of Glory (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), 15.

51. Blaise Pascal, Pensées, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1966), 66.

52. *Ibid.*, 77.

53. John Calvin, Institutes, I.III.III. Also see, D. P. Walker, The Decline of Hell, 139.

54. Jonathan Edwards, The Works of Jonathan Edwards vol. 2, 463. Similar thoughts can be found in Las Casas's observations about the natives in Florida (ca. 1550s). See Jeremy C. Jackson, No Other Foundation (Westchester, Ill.: Cornerstone Books, 1980), 255.

55. Barbara Amiel, "Saddam is not a Human Being," Maclean's, 4 March 1991, 15.

56. It is not surprising that Dahmer who was heavily involved in occultic practices would end up as a murderer. Satan has come to "steal, kill, and destroy" (John 10:10a), so it should not be shocking when his followers do the same (John 8:44). Proverbs 8:36 makes the same point.

57. Alex Prud'Homme, "Did They All Have to Die?," Time, 12 August 1991, 28.

58. Thanks to Jeff Pitts for stimulating me to think further along these lines.

59. It is instructive to note that this passage underscores the idea that "refined and delicate" men (v. 54) and women (v. 56) are the ones who are involved in cannibalism. The point is being made that no one is exempt from these ghastly displays of depravity.

Chapter 4

Implications and Applications

From This Study

It is always important to consider the "so what?" of theology. When theology becomes purely an intellectual pursuit with no application to life, the very nature of theology is jeopardized, for theology is meant to transform the entire person, not just part of him.¹ True mental transformation will result in life transformation. Paul understood all too well that what we think about will transform who we are (Rom. 12:2; Phil. 4:8).

Why the Doctrine of Hell is Being Contested Today

There are many reasons one could give why the doctrine of hell is debated so vigorously at this time in the Church. First, the influence of modernity has played a determinative role. James Davison Hunter argues that the evangelical church in its desire to be culturally relevant, and thereby inoffensive to non-Christians, has become more "civil" and less likely to tell non-Christians about such things as hell.²

Second, a strong case can be made that most Christians, though intellectually believing in the afterlife, are nonetheless apt to not have it impact them or occupy too much of their time. Harry Blamires has declared in this regard, "The young do not want to think about the afterlife because it is too far off, and the old do not want to think about it because it is too near."³

Third, preaching on such things as judgment and hell is almost non-existent.⁴ Much could be said about this, but comments will be limited to five of the more pronounced reasons. First, if the truth were

known, there is much dissonance between what preachers preach and what they truly believe.⁵ This disparity is unfortunately not limited to preachers. Others are affected as well. One missiologist has soberly declared that, "Many of us [Christians] are closet universalists."⁶ A poll at an Urbana conference revealed much the same. Only 37% of the 5,000 who participated in the survey believed that a person was eternally lost without Jesus!⁷

Another reason why many preachers no longer preach on subjects like judgment, fear of God, and hell, is the "me" orientation that permeates much of evangelical Christianity in the West. A step into just about any Christian bookstore will tell this tale quite dramatically. "How to" books are displayed at the front of the store because they sell. The paucity of classics, serious theology books, commentaries, and the like are usually reserved for the back of the store, because they are not popular, even among pastors. Pop psychology has clearly made its way into many so-called Bible believing churches, and has become the definer of spirituality, rather than theology.⁸ Fortunately, many wonderful exceptions to this prevalent malady exist.⁹

Third, too many preachers fail to preach the whole counsel of God's Word (Acts 20:27). When ministers use the pulpit as a platform for various hobby horses, preaching focuses on certain truths of Scripture to the neglect or total exclusion of others. For example, if a preacher desperately wants his congregation to understand God's love (a noble and biblical goal), he might only direct his congregation's attention to passages that talk about God's love.

Thus far, the vacillation of preachers, the "me" orientation of American Christianity, and preachers not preaching the "whole counsel of God's Word" have been mentioned as reasons why judgment and hell are not being preached on very much. A fourth reason is discordant views among those who eventually exert tremendous influence (albeit unrecognized for the most part) on pastors and their congregations, viz. evangelical scholars.

Recently, a conference sponsored jointly by the National Association of Evangelicals and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School met to hammer out a statement that would reflect evangelical beliefs. The statement on judgment reads as follows:

We affirm that only through the work of Christ can any person be saved and be resurrected to live with God forever. Unbelievers will be separated eternally from God. Concern for evangelism should not

be compromised by any illusion that all will be finally saved (universalism). We affirm the preaching of ultimate hope in and through Christ. In an age of anxiety and despair, the blessed hope of God's ultimate victory is not only a warning of divine judgment, but a wonderful hope that gives light and meaning to the human heart.¹⁰

A clear dismissal of universalism is certainly superior to an earlier statement on evangelical belief put out by Fuller Seminary.¹¹ The Evangelical Affirmations statement modifies the separation from God—eternally, something the Fuller statement failed to do. However, the Evangelical Affirmations statement is not without its problems. The statement does not tell us what eternal separation is. It would have been extremely helpful to say “hell,” especially in our day and age when so many Christians are waffling on this issue. Separation, even modified by eternal is a bit innocuous. The statement also fails to say that annihilationism is an inappropriate view for an evangelical Christian. An explicit statement declaring that annihilationism is not consistent with evangelical Christianity is certainly a touchy issue, especially when you have someone of John Stott's stature who has made such a tremendous contribution to evangelical Christianity. However, to say John Stott is not in line with evangelical convictions on this issue does not necessarily nullify him from being considered an evangelical. Raymond's words are instructive in this regard. ✓

But nothing I have said should be construed to mean that I regard him [John Stott] as an untrustworthy guide in *all* things Evangelical. He is far too significant a leader in modern Evangelicalism and I have learned far too much from him myself—indeed, I have learned from him even in this very book [Evangelical Essentials]—for me to suggest that. But on this point I would urge the church not to follow him, however horrible the traditional depiction of hell is. We must bear in mind that it is not the church or its pastors, as I have already pointed out, who authored the doctrine of hell. Rather, it is Christ and those apostles—particularly the apostle John—whom He inspired who were the chief exponents of it. If we would be Christ's disciples, I submit that we must teach it too.¹² (emphasis his)

If the doctrine of hell is a cardinal doctrine of the evangelical faith,¹³ then it behooves us to be vigilant to preserve it. It is quite

ironic that the same publisher (Zondervan) that published the book, Evangelical Affirmations, wrote the following words.

So disturbing is the idea of hell that most pastors and church members simply ignore the doctrine of final retribution, preferring to talk in vague terms about a separation of the wicked from the righteous.¹⁴

A fifth and final reason why there is so much debate about hell today are the misrepresentations and misunderstandings many people carry with them about hell. Some of this was already looked at in the previous chapter, but a few more things need to be said. First, the issue of whether the fire is literal or metaphorical is not a crucial area for determining whether someone will hold to the traditional teaching on the doctrine of hell. Contrary to the representation by some people,¹⁵ there are many who believe in the traditional doctrine of hell who see the fire as metaphorical.¹⁶ Second, many Christians have rebelled against the graphic notions of hell articulated by people like Dante and Jonathan Edwards. In the case of Edwards, whether one appreciates the style he employs in his best known sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" or not, it is important to remember that hell was well established in his mind, and therefore in his preaching.¹⁷ We would do well to consider a little more closely why Edwards thought it so important to communicate the doctrine of hell in this way, rather than just dismissing him and the doctrine of hell as relics of the past. Moreover, Christians who aggressively strive to be "culturally relevant" in order to buy a hearing, and supposedly more converts to the faith, need to ponder that sermons stressing the sovereignty of God and the unworthiness of sinners were some of Edwards's most effective in seeing people come to know Christ.¹⁸ This is not to argue however, as some have misunderstood, that hell is being used for pragmatic purposes.¹⁹ It is just to say that the whole counsel of God's truth must be preached.

What the Church Should Do

Many positive points of application can be listed. Our discussion will be limited to seven areas.

First, our hearts as believers should cry for compassion toward those who are headed down the path to hell. Stott and Pinnock's

exhortations to be more emotionally moved by this issue are helpful, though they seem to caricature traditionalists as uncaring about the plight of the unredeemed.²⁰ If we as Christians experienced hell for a moment, how much that would influence the way in which we share our faith!²¹ Flippancy in our speech about hell reveals how little we appreciate the magnitude of eternal matters. We must cease and desist from such empty and worldly chatter if we are to honor our Lord, who spoke on the subject of eternal judgment with tremendous sobriety. (1, A)

Second, pastors and ministers of Scripture must teach the whole counsel of God's Word, including topics like sin²² and hell. The whole gospel must be preached. Pastors must view, as Richard Baxter did, that evangelism is a "great work" to participate in.²³ It should be stated, however, that extremes exist on both sides of teaching about hell. Some Christians overemphasize things like hell and judgment to the loss of teaching on grace and forgiveness.²⁴ Other Christians react to this "hell fire and brimstone" approach and "abbreviate the gospel by presenting only the attractive side of the message."²⁵ Preaching the whole counsel of God's truth prevents such excesses. Historian Jeremy Jackson helps us with an historical example. 2

If Wesley had sometimes to recommend preachers to stress the love and mercy of God, along with his justice, nowadays he would find himself giving the opposite advice in most of our churches.²⁶

Third, hell should not be looked at as a "stick to beat people into salvation"²⁷ though this in no way diminishes the need for direct and honest preaching on the subject. People do not need to be harangued incessantly by judgment, but they do need honest, bold, loving, and patient correction in their errant ways (II Tim. 2:24-26). 3

Fourth, it needs to be remembered that hell is inextricably linked to other doctrines such as sin, judgment, and the atonement.²⁸ This should serve as a great motivation not to abandon lightly the preaching and teaching about hell.²⁹ R.V.G. Tasker even wrote that eliminating hell will eventually eliminate heaven.³⁰ 4

Fifth, it seems quite clear that annihilationism undermines the urgency of preaching the gospel.³¹ Groups that stress annihilationism or universalism have not launched great missionary enterprises.³² This makes sense because a doctrine like annihilationism tends to "comfort sinners"³³ and does not provoke any real soul-searching on the part of the unbeliever.³⁴ Again, the comment of Jesus pertaining to 5

Judas that it would have been better for him not to have been born makes the point here.

6 Sixth, we need to consider why it is that the major cults reject hell.³⁵ Though we must be careful not to apply "guilt by association" as Clark Pinnock has cautioned against, it does seem odd that so many heterodox groups reject an eternal hell. Having so-called authoritative books in place of, or in addition to the Bible, could certainly be one leading reason for this. Clearly Christians should not accept hell simply for the pragmatic reason of not wanting to be identified with cults.³⁶ Being convinced from Scripture must be paramount.

7 Seventh, pastors must preach doctrine. It is a shame when so many people complain that learning theology is an impractical and unnecessary endeavor. This is not the fault of theology, but of those who are trying to teach it. Deep truths of God's Word need to be understood by all believers. They are not to be limited to some select group of initiates. To teach doctrine properly requires a deep understanding of it, and a passion to communicate its beauty and life-transforming power to others.

Where We Need to Go From Here

The debate about the traditional doctrine of hell is a crucial area that many evangelicals are currently grappling with. What does in fact happen to those who reject Christ? Are they damned for all eternity, or are they annihilated into oblivion? As seen in this study, it is no trivial matter to be bypassed.³⁷ It is imperative that believers search the Scriptures so as to be faithful to the charge to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3)."

Notes

1. This is argued quite persuasively in Richard A. Muller, The Study of Theology (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1991).

2. See Davison's discussions of modernity in James Davison Hunter, American Evangelicalism (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 84-91; and James Davison Hunter, Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 34-40, 183-

4. David Wells makes a similar point. See David F. Wells, God in the Wasteland (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 26-27. Bernard Ramm has mentioned how cultural factors that the evangelical Christian might not even be aware of can chip away at the foundations of belief in hell. See Bernard Ramm, The Evangelical Heritage (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1973), 72.

3. Harry Blamires, "The Eternal Weight of Glory," 30.

4. Even conservative scholar Kenneth Kantzer admits that he has neglected to preach on hell for 30 years. See "Hell's Sober Comeback," 56. Also see, William V. Crockett, ed., Four Views on Hell, 136.

5. See D. P. Walker, The Decline of Hell, 6,7. For similar remarks, see Richard Baxter, The Reformed Pastor (Portland, Ore.: Multnomah Press, 1982), 97; and Richard Baxter, The Saint's Everlasting Rest, 203-4.

6. David A. Fraser, "The 2.4 Billion: Why are We Still So Unconcerned?" in Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, eds., Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1981), 328. Also, see John H. Gerstner, Repent or Perish, 23 for a similar remark. Consider the following comment by Richard Baxter. "Alas! brethren, we surely do not believe man's misery; we surely do not believe the truth of God's threatenings. Did we verily believe that all the unregenerate and unholy shall be eternally tormented in hell, how could we hold our tongues? How could we refrain from tears when we look them in the face, as did the prophet when he looked upon Hazael, especially when they are our kindred or friends, that are near and dear to us? Thus secret unbelief of the truth of Scripture, consumes our vigour of each grace and duty." Richard Baxter, The Saint's Everlasting Rest, 209.

7. J. Ronald Blue, "Untold Billions: Are They Really Lost?" in The Bib Sac Reader, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 236.

8. "But positive Christianity does not hold to human depravity, but to human inability. I am humanly unable to correct my negative self-image until I encounter a life-changing experience with nonjudgmental love bestowed upon me by a Person whom I admire so much that to be unconditionally accepted by him is to be born again." Robert H. Schuller, Self-Esteem: The New Reformation (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1982), 67. A well written book on gospel preaching today that provides a good critique of Schuller's approach can be found in William A. Dryness, How Does America Hear the Gospel? (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), 119-30. For further analysis of Schuller's book, see James Davison Hunter, Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation, 70-1. It is worth mentioning that Schuller may be changing his methods. On March 31, 1992, I listened to Rich Buhler interview Robert Schuller. As a result of nearly dying from a bizarre accident in Europe, Schuller said that he was "coming out of the closet" and will be more direct

when it comes to telling people about Christ. One hopes that this indeed will be the case!

9. The three churches that have been most instrumental in my spiritual growth (Camelback Bible Church in Paradise Valley, Ariz.; Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, Calif.; and Calvary Evangelical Free Church in Essex Fells, N.J.) all presently have pastors who do not compromise with the Word of God. I praise God for them!

10. Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry, eds., Evangelical Affirmations, 13. See the report of the conference in "What Does It Mean to Be Evangelical?" Christianity Today, 16 June 1989, 60, 63.

11. In 1979, David Allan Hubbard wrote a book entitled, What We Evangelicals Believe, subtitled Expositions of Christian Doctrine Based on the Statement of Faith of Fuller Theological Seminary. The doctrinal stance on the future of the non-Christian is quite vague. All it mentions is that "The wicked shall be separated from God's presence..." The rest of the statement on eschatology concerns the believer. See David Allan Hubbard, What We Evangelicals Believe (Pasadena, Calif.: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1979), 20. For further insight into Fuller's non-commitment on hell, see "Doctrinal Changes at Fuller," Christianity Today, 7 May 1971, 39-40; and George M. Marsden, Reforming Fundamentalism (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987), 268.

12. Robert L. Reymond, "Dr. John Stott on Hell," 59.

13. *Ibid.*, 56.

14. Four Views on Hell, 7. The preface is signed by the publisher.

15. See David W. Lotz, "Heaven and Hell in the Christian Tradition," 85, where the author says that the traditional teaching on the subject typically holds to this position. Though this may be the case, his statement can lead the reader to think that metaphorical views of the fire are antithetical to an orthodox view of hell, which clearly is not true.

16. See for instance, Robert L. Reymond, "Dr. John Stott on Hell," 46; Leon Morris, "The Dreadful Harvest," 34-6; Alan W. Gomes, "Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell," Part 1, 17; and Harold O. J. Brown, "Will the Lost Suffer Forever?" 271.

17. Many people sorely misunderstand how much Edwards preached on the subject of hell and judgment. Actually, only about 10% of Edwards's sermons were about judgment. Modern thinking which presents Edwards as incessantly talking about judgment is a sure sign how little we talk about such things today.

18. See Paul K. Jewett, Election and Predestination (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1985), 131.

19. That people like John Walvoord and others say that hell is a "spur to evangelism" does not mean, as Pinnock suggests, that this is the prime reason why traditionalists want to maintain the doctrine of everlasting punishment. It

simply is a statement of fact. Belief in the traditional doctrine of hell will spur us on to share the good news. See the discussion in Four Views on Hell, 39 cf. 28.

20. I participated in several prayer meetings while on staff with Campus Crusade for Christ at Stanford University where one or more of our group was moved to weeping by the lostness of various people. "I wish they [those who believe in the traditional doctrine of hell] were wrong. I wish I could say that God is too loving, too kind, and too generous to condemn any soul to eternal punishment. I would like to believe that hell can only be the anteroom to heaven, a temporary and frightful discipline to bring the unregenerate to final moral perfection. Quite frankly, I struggle with these questions." Kenneth S. Kantzer, "Troublesome Questions," 45. This hardly sounds like someone who has "cauterized" his emotions!

21. "What if you had lain in hell but one year, or one day, or one hour, and there felt all those torments of which you now do but hear, and if God should turn you into the world again, and try you with another lifetime, what manner of persons would you be! How solemnly would you speak of hell, and how earnestly would you admonish the careless to take heed, lest they should come into that place of torment!" Richard Baxter, The Saint's Everlasting Rest, 135. "Many Christians do not believe this [hell] to be true. If they did, they would have prayer meetings morning and night. They would run up and down the streets weeping, agonizing, pleading with lost souls to be reconciled to God through the Lord Jesus Christ." Hyman J. Appelman, Hell: What is it? (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1947), 20.

22. See two good examples of this in Iain Murray, Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography (Carlisle, Pa.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 114.

23. Richard Baxter, The Reformed Pastor, 73. Also see page 27 for a bold statement to fellow pastors on their own salvation.

24. I debated one such person in the Sigma Chi house at Stanford University. Though this traveling evangelist claimed to be a Christian, his message never got to the point of explaining God's forgiveness in Christ.

25. Harold O. J. Brown, "Will the Lost Suffer Forever?" 265. For a helpful analysis of the gospel message, see Thomas J. Nettles, By His Grace and For His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1986), 383-428.

26. Jeremy C. Jackson, No Other Foundation, 207. Billy Sunday's trenchant comment that many pastors were getting money "under false pretenses" if hell was not true shows how far afield preaching has gotten in a relatively short period of time. See The Other Side of the Good News, 9.

27. Leon Morris, "The Dreadful Harvest," 34.

28. Stephen T. Davis, "Universalism, Hell, and the Fate of the Ignorant," 177.

29. One leading Baptist theologian, H. Wheeler Robinson, believed that "there is something unhealthy in being over-much concerned with hell." See Thomas J. Nettles, By His Grace and For His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life, 37.

30. See Crucial Questions About Hell, 112.

31. Harold O. J. Brown, "Will the Lost Suffer Forever?" 277.

32. Robert A. Morey, Death and the Afterlife, 168.

33. *Ibid.*, 157.

34. John H. Gerstner, Repent or Perish, 13, 187. Also see, Crucial Questions About Hell, 144. John Wenham disagrees. See Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell, 184.

35. See the various lists of cults who reject the traditional doctrine of hell in Robert A. Morey, Death and the Afterlife, 204; John H. Gerstner, Repent or Perish, 30; and Alan W. Gomes, "Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell," Part 1, 15.

36. D. P. Walker, The Decline of Hell, 8,9. Pragmatism is a dead-end road. Consider one such pragmatist who believes that hell is valuable only as a "symbol" in which "one's humanness is laid bare." See Stanley O. Yarian, "The Twentieth-Century Role of the Hell of St. Francis of Assisi and Dante," Soundings 66 (Fall 1983): 346. Also see 332-3, 340.

37. John Wenham agrees wholeheartedly. See his poignant comments in Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell, 190-91.

Chapter 5

Some Personal Reflections

It has been nearly thirteen years since I sat down in a McDonald's restaurant pondering the horrific ramifications of Matt. 7:13,14. In this passage, Jesus reminds us that the way is broad that leads to destruction and many are those who will enter by it.

As I sat there contemplating the awesome implications of such a statement, I started to observe more closely the people that were eating lunch that day. I saw caring mothers with their children, elderly people enjoying one another's company, and just plain ol' Americans sharing lunch with a spouse, business partner, or friend. Could most of these folks be headed to hell? What did Jesus' use of the word "many" mean? So troubling were these questions that it not only caused me to reconsider seminary studies, but I was evaluating whether I could adhere to the Christian faith any longer. At the time, I figured that I was somewhat odd for these sorts of doubts, but now I know differently.

Though there were many ways that God ministered to me during this difficult time, not the least of which was some very supportive friends, I did find great comfort in a growing appreciation for the hidden counsels of God's will. Scripture makes it quite clear that all things will not be clear. There are certain things that only God knows (Deut. 29:29; Isa. 55:8,9). Even the apostle Paul, for all his brilliance and erudition, exclaimed that we now see "in a mirror dimly" (I Cor. 13:12). As Proverbs 25:2 says, "it is the glory of God to conceal a matter." Does this make our heavenly Father cruel, or on some power trip? Absolutely not.

Consider the following illustration. A young boy goes out to play with his neighbor friend who lives across the street. This is the regular time when the young boy is allowed to play with his buddy. As the young boy makes his way across the street, he fails to see a car

Practical Theol

which is speeding his way. Alerted to the impending danger, the father grabs his son by the shirt and throws him out of harm's way. All the young boy knows at the moment is that his father spoiled his fun. Instead of playing with his friend (something the father supposedly sanctioned), he is presently face down on the grass of his front yard. As the father goes over to lovingly help his son up, the boy is perplexed why the father would act in such a seemingly cruel manner. Here his father had given him permission to play, and now he seems to be reneging on his word. Is he schizophrenic, or worse yet, is he just downright mean-spirited? Though these are certainly two options that could cross the boy's mind, there is another, especially if he has a good relationship with his father. If the relationship with his father is a solid one, built on years of trust, the son will most likely believe that the father's intentions were for his good, even though that may be perplexing to him at the moment of impact with the Bermuda grass. It is the father's stellar character that causes the son to wait and gather more data. In his little psyche the "jury is still out."

I think most of us can identify with this little boy, especially when we are facing difficult times in our own lives, or observing others whose lives are marked by suffering of an extremely graduated form. Like the little boy, we find ourselves perplexed. We are not in bad company when we do. Many stalwarts of the faith have been perplexed by suffering, including the apostle Paul and John the Baptist. Even our Lord in his humanity could be counted among this illustrious group as we consider his plea for release in the Garden of Gethsemane. As with the little boy, we have a heavenly Father whose character is impeccable. He can be trusted.

When the father went to pick up his son, he immediately started to explain his seemingly unloving behavior. Though the father's explanation was tremendously comforting, it did not surprise his son, because he knew his father could be trusted. It is the same with our heavenly Father. The only difference is that explanations are many times detained until we get to heaven. Many people, however, see this as a cop-out. If God has such great reasons, why doesn't he start revealing them to us? Though Scripture gives us some reasons for things such as an eternal hell, the complete picture is unavailable to us here on earth. It does not, as some would have us believe, show that God is unwilling to disclose them to us; it is simply that we could not comprehend what he was saying in our present, fallen state. No

matter how fabulous the physics instructor, it is going to be impossible for an infant to understand quantum mechanics! The deficiency is not with the teacher, but with the pupil. It is inherently impossible for an infant to comprehend such lofty matters. It is the same with us. Look at Job. God told Job that he could not pass the introduction to theology class so how could he expect to take upper division classes? This is no "power play" fueled by arrogance on God's part, but merely a statement of fact. Another incident in the New Testament will underscore this.

Right after Jesus fed the five thousand, He began to say some difficult things. He claimed to be the bread of life and that life would only be found by eating his flesh and drinking His blood. Strange words. What on earth did He mean by this? It certainly did not comfort the masses, because most stopped following Him. Peter however, was different. Though it seems that Peter was not totally certain what Christ meant, he responded in faith. When Christ asked Peter if he was going to depart as well, Peter responds, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God. (John 6:68,69)." Peter knew enough about the character of Jesus to trust Him with the statements that were as John records "difficult statements."

From Scripture we find that there is much we can know about God and His ways, yet to think we can fully understand His plan is the height of arrogance. As Paul says, "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor." The context of this particular verse in Romans 11:34 underscores the point again. On the heels of a very challenging description of God's sovereign prerogatives (Ro. 9-11), Paul announces that God's ways and thoughts are truly higher than ours.

I have learned when confronted with something that does not seem to be consistent with a good and loving God to rest on passages like Ps. 145:17 which are eminently clear in describing God's nature. He is righteous and kind in all that He does. I can bank on the fact that everything He does will be marked with righteousness and kindness. In the glories of heaven, when I am being picked off the "grass" by my loving, heavenly Father, will I "know fully just as I also have been fully known (I Cor. 13:12)."

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Subject Index

- Adams, Marilyn McCord: belief in universalism, 31-32
Aionios: 22-25; see eternal; see Clark Pinnock;
 see John Stott
Alighieri, Dante: 43,66
Annihilationism: 1,2
Apoleia: see destroy
Apollumi: see destroy
 Pinnock's understanding of the word, 18
Aquinas, Thomas: 17
Augustine, Aurelius: 9,17,33,41,44
Auschwitz: 28-30
Basanizo: see torment; strong word for suffering, even with
 annihilationists, 26
Baxter, Richard: 50,67,69,71
Berger, Peter: 30
Blamires, Harry: 3
 on the justice of God, 29, 63
Bloesch, Donald: 2, 3
Braun, Jon: 3
Broadus, John: Christ taught clearly on hell, 24
Brown, Delwin: 7
Bruce, F. F.: 5; possibly held to annihilationism, 12
Caird, G. B.: 27
Calvin, John: 17,41,52,56-57
Conditional immortality: see annihilationism
Crockett, William: critique of Pinnock, 24-25
Dahmer, Jeffrey: 57
Destroy: see apoleia; see apollumi; see olethros

- Dualism: 4,15,33; biblical dualism, 34
 Edwards, Jonathan: 8,17,57,66,70
 Erickson, Millard: 51-52,56
 Eternal: see aionios; see Clark Pinnock; see John Stott
 Ferré, Nels: 49
 Freddoso, Albert: 10
 Fudge, Edward: 20,21,24,26
 believes that Rev. 20:7-10 is the most problematic passage for
 the annihilationist position, 27; some suffering will take place
 before unbelievers are annihilated, 32-33
 Gehenna: 1,2
 Gerstner, John: 20; his critique of Fudge, 24
 Gomes, Alan: 23-24
 Grounds, Vernon: 3
 Guthrie, Donald: 46
 Hades: 1,2
 Harmon, Kendall: 17,21; critique of Fudge, 26
 Heaven: lack of belief in, 2
 Hell: see judgment;
 unimportant issue some say, 3-4
 levels of, 32
 Henry, Carl F. H.: 5
 Hick, John: his belief in universalism, 11; see universalism
 Himmler, Heinrich: 29
 Hitler, Adolf: 32
 Hodge, Charles: 21
 Hughes, Philip: 4,30
 Hussein, Saddam: 57
 Image of God: 51-52,58
 Immortality: 2,9
 Jackson, Jeremy: 67
 Johnson, S. Lewis: 22
 Judgment: Great White Throne, 2,45
 lack of belief in, 2,3
 Justice, God's: 28-33; see Blamires; see Pinnock; see Stott
 Kantzer, Kenneth: wishes the traditional doctrine of hell was not true,
 13,71
 Kaufmann, Gordon: 3
 Kuhn, H. B.: 34
 Küng, Hans: 40-41

- Lake of fire: 2
- Lewis, C. S.: 50,55-56
- Lewis, Gordon: 7
- Littleton, Mark: 51
- Luther, Martin: 17
- Marshall, I. Howard: 48
- Marty, Martin: 3
- Mill, James: 28
- Mill, John Stuart: 28
- Milton, John: 49
- Molech: 2
- Olethros: 20,21; see destroy
- Packer, J. I.: 7,11; on the justice of God, 32
- Pascal, Blaise: 56
- Phthora: 20
- Pinnock, Clark: 3,4
 background of, 5
 changes on various issues, 5-8
 annihilationism more convincing than traditional view,
 8-9,17
 debate about whether he is an evangelical, 13
 Francis Schaeffer's influence, 14
 interpretation of Matt. 25:31-46, 22
 fails to appreciate the religious milieu of first century
 Palestine, 24-25
 Rev. 14:9-11 is the most compelling text for the traditional
 doctrine of hell, 25-27; traditional doctrine of hell
 poses problems for the justice of God, 28-30
 some suffering will take place before unbelievers are
 annihilated, 32-33
 traditional view of hell posits unbiblical dualism, 33-34
 emotional difficulties with the traditional doctrine of hell, 46
 need to be more compassionate toward the lost, 66-67
 be careful of guilt by association, 68
- Price, Robert: 6
- Pusey, E. B.: 8, 25
- Reymond, Robert: balancing criticism of Stott's position on
 annihilationism with respect for his contribution to
 evangelicalism, 65
- Russell, Bertrand: 24

- Schaeffer, Francis: 14
Schleiermacher, Friedrich: 42
Schuller, Robert: 69-70
Scripture: authority of, 34-35
Sheol: 1,2
Stalin, Josef: 32
Storms, C. Samuel: 30
Stott, John: 3
 tentative about belief in annihilationism, 4
 emotional heartache over traditional doctrine of hell,
 5,13,45
 Pinnock's understanding of Stott's view on hell, 10
 Wenham's understanding of Stott's view on hell, 12
 Stott's interpretation of Matt. 25:31-46, 22-23
 traditional doctrine of hell poses problems for the justice of
 God, 28-29
 reticence of evangelicals to criticize Stott's doctrinal beliefs,
 65
 need to be more compassionate toward the lost, 67
Sunday, Billy: 71
Talbot, Thomas: belief in universalism, 31,49
Tasker, R. V. G.: 67
Torment: see basanizo; strong word for suffering, even with
 annihilationists, 26
Travis, Stephen: 3,4
Universalism: 1,31
 antithetical to Scripture, 4,10-11
 see Adams; see Ferré; see John Hick; see Talbot
 many Christians practically hold this view, 64
 Evangelical Affirmations statement declares universalism to
 be unbiblical, 65
Vine, W. E.: 53,56
Walker, D. P.: his interpretation of Matt. 25:46, 23
Wenham, John: 1,3,4,47
Wesley, John: 67
Wiesel, Elie: 42

Scripture Index

Genesis

9:6	58
27:30-46	55
27:34-38	48
37:35	1

Exodus

3	44
3:14	34

Numbers

16:33	1
-------	---

Deuteronomy

7:7,8	36
23:18	53
28:53-57	58
28:54,56	62
29:29	36,73

I Samuel

17:43	53
-------	----

II Kings

6:28,29	58
8:13	53
16:3	2
21:6	2

II Chronicles

33:11	53
-------	----

Job

1,2	34
14:13	1

Psalms

16:11	50
37	9
49:12	53
51:4	48
55:15	1
73:22	53
77:14	53
106:19,20	53
115:8	53
135:18	53

145:17 75

Proverbs

8:36 62

9:18 1

21:15 30

25:2 73

Ecclesiastes

3:21 53

Isaiah

14 34

27:1 53

43:10,11 34

55:8,9 36,73

Jeremiah

5:3 60

5:8 55

7:32 2

9:1 13

13:17 13

14:17 13

19:6 2

Ezekiel

18:23 30

28 34

Daniel

3:19-27 44

4:15ff 54

4:25,26,30 53

Hosea

13:2 60

Matthew

2:13 19

2:16ff 19

3:10,12 18,19

5:22 18,19

7:13,14 30,73

8:12 13

8:25 19

9:36-38 30

10:28 9

11:24 32

20:1-16 31

22:13 13

24:51 13

25 19,36,38

25:30 13

25:31-46 18,22,25,38

25:41 39

25:46 9,22,23,38

26:8 20

26:24 24

Mark

10:45 30

14:4 20

Luke

5:37 19

12:47,48 32

13:28 13

15:2,4 19

15:4,6 19

16 47

16:19-26 48

John

3:17 30

5:5-7 60

6:27 19

6:68,69 75
8:44 52,55,62
10:10 62
17:3 23

Acts

20:27 64

Romans

1 51
1:18-32 55
3 32
3:1-4 29
3:12 30
3:13 58
3:15 58
8:18 29
8:29 55
9-11 75
11:34 75
12:2 63
14:15 18

I Corinthians

1:18 54
3:9 20
3:17 18,19,20
4:17,18 29
5:5 20
5:10-13 37
13:12 36,73,75
15:21 33
15:50-54 33

II Corinthians

7:9,10 48

Galatians

5:22 55
6:8 18,20

Ephesians

1:4,5 36
4:17,18 55
5:12 61

Philippians

1:28 18,20
3:2 55
3:19 9
4:8 63

Colossians

1 34

I Thessalonians

5:2 21
5:3 21
5:8 21

II Thessalonians

1:9 18,20,21,37

I Timothy

6:9 21
6:16 33

II Timothy

1:10 33
2:24-26 67

Hebrews

11:25 55
12:16,17 48

James

3:1 43
3:9 58

I Peter

2:11 55

II Peter

2:12 53,54

2:19-22 54

3:9 30

I John

3:1-3 55

3:3 30

Jude

3 68

6 23

10 54

Revelation

4:8 40

9:20,21 49

14 18,19,26

14:9-11 25,27

14:10,11 26

14:11 26,27

16:9-11 49

19:1-3 47

20 18,19

20:10 40

20:10-15 27

20:12,13 32

20:14 2,26

20:15 2

22:15 55

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