

## **Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell**

### **Part Two**

by Alan W. Gomes

In [Part One](#) of this article I discussed how some prominent evangelicals recently have abandoned the doctrine of eternal, conscious punishment for the wicked in favor of various annihilation theories. I also examined the scriptural teaching on the doctrine of hell, paying particular attention to key passages from the Gospel of Matthew and the Book of Revelation. From our investigation, we saw that the biblical teaching on the fate of the unsaved is clear: they will experience conscious torment of unending duration.

From what we saw in Part One, we might well question how anyone who claims to believe in the authority of Scripture — as the evangelical annihilationists do — could affirm anything but the traditional teaching. Evangelical annihilationists counter that they have rational and biblical evidence to support their position. In Part Two of this article, we will examine some of the main arguments advanced by annihilationists in support of their theory.

In the short space available it is not possible to present every proof annihilationists could marshal in defense of their position — just as there was not enough space in Part One to advance many of the arguments supporting the orthodox position. In Part One, I selected what I consider to be the strongest arguments in favor of the traditional teaching. In this concluding installment I will do the same in presenting the annihilationists' case. In selecting these arguments I have tried to discern which ones the annihilationists themselves regard as the strongest. These proofs appear in virtually every defense of the annihilationist view.

When annihilationists present their case, their evidence generally falls into one of three basic categories. First we have the moral arguments, which maintain that the traditional teaching on hell would — if true — involve immoral actions on God's part. Second are linguistic arguments, based on the meaning of key biblical terms used to describe the final fate of the wicked. Third are exegetical arguments that attempt to neutralize verses the traditionalists commonly offer in proof of their position (such as those expounded in Part One). We will consider evidence from each of these three categories. (A fourth category, that the traditional doctrine is derived from the Platonic notion of the soul's immortality, was adequately answered in Part One.)

## Moral Arguments

Annihilationists frequently complain that it would be immoral for God to inflict everlasting torture on His creatures. Clark Pinnock regards the doctrine of endless punishment as "morally flawed" and a "moral enormity."<sup>[1]</sup> If the "outrageous doctrine" of the traditionalists were true, God would be a "cruel" and "vindictive" deity. In fact, He would be "more nearly like Satan than like God, at least by any ordinary moral standards...." Indeed, the traditionalist's God is a "bloodthirsty monster who maintains an everlasting Auschwitz for victims whom he does not even allow to die."<sup>[2]</sup>

Annihilationists commonly argue that endless torment represents a punishment far in excess of the offense committed. John Stott maintains that if the traditional teaching were true, there would be "a serious disproportion between sins consciously committed in time and the torment consciously experienced throughout eternity."<sup>[3]</sup> Likewise, Pinnock states, "it would amount to inflicting infinite suffering upon those who have committed finite sin. It would go far beyond an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. There would be a serious disproportion between sins committed in time and the suffering experienced forever."<sup>[4]</sup> Such vindictiveness, we are told, is totally incompatible with the character of God and utterly unacceptable to "sensitive Christians."<sup>[5]</sup> It would "serve no purpose" and be an act of "sheer vengeance and vindictiveness," which is "out of keeping with the love of God revealed in the gospels."<sup>[6]</sup>

Stott and Pinnock's argument that "sins committed in time cannot be worthy of eternal suffering" is fallacious. It assumes that the heinousness of a crime is directly related to the time it takes to commit it. But such a connection is nonexistent. Some crimes, such as murder, may take only a moment to commit, whereas it may take a thief hours to load up a moving van with someone's possessions. Yet, murder is a far more serious crime than theft.<sup>[7]</sup>

Second, the nature of the object against which the sin is committed, as well as the nature of the sin itself, must be taken into account when determining the degree of heinousness. As W. G. T. Shedd observes, stealing in general is a crime, but stealing from one's mother is even more despicable because one owes special allegiance to one's parents. Torturing an animal is a crime, but torturing a human being is an even greater crime, worthy of greater punishment. The criminal act is the same in each case (i.e., stealing and torture), as is the person committing the act. But "the different worth and dignity of the objects upon whom his action terminates makes the difference in the gravity of the two offenses."<sup>[8]</sup>

How much more serious, then, is even the slightest offense against an absolutely holy God, who is worthy of our complete and perpetual allegiance?<sup>[9]</sup> Indeed, sin against an absolutely holy God is absolutely serious. For this reason, the unredeemed suffer absolute, unending alienation

from God; this alienation is the essence of hell. It is the annihilationist's theory that is morally flawed. Their God is not truly holy, for he does not demand that sin receive its due.

The reason these "sensitive Christians" have such an emotional problem with hell is because they, in the words of Anselm, "have not as yet estimated the great burden of sin." <sup>[10]</sup> If they truly saw sin as God does (recognizing that no sinner can do so perfectly), they would not have the slightest problem with the doctrine. Indeed, they would find themselves distraught if God did not punish sin for all eternity.

### **Linguistic Arguments**

Annihilationists believe they can make a case for their theory based on the meaning of key biblical terms used to describe the ultimate fate of the wicked. LeRoy Edwin Froom, in his book *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, presents a list of seventy words that he says demonstrate total annihilation. <sup>[11]</sup> On the basis of these words, Froom exults triumphantly that "no loopholes are left." <sup>[12]</sup> Edward W. Fudge likewise cites this list, and concludes: "Without exception they portray destruction, extinction or extermination." <sup>[13]</sup>

Space will not permit us to examine all or even many of the words that Froom, Fudge, Stott, and others offer to establish their position. We should note, however, that many of the words in Froom's "impressive, cumulative array" of seventy terms do not even merit examination. <sup>[14]</sup> For example, he lists words like "tear" and "tread down" as proof of annihilation — as if a torn piece of paper has been removed from existence! Here, we will consider a few of the words that at least offer the possibility of teaching annihilation. By refuting these examples, I will demonstrate the flaws in their method generally. <sup>[15]</sup>

### **"Destroy," "Perish," and "Cut Off"**

Annihilationists believe that words like "perish," "destroy," and "cut off" indicate total annihilation. Fudge declares that these words "seem clearly to say what the conditionalist wishes to convey ... and the conditionalist is confident that the ordinary man in the street can tell us what those words usually mean to him." <sup>[16]</sup>

The most common term translated "destroy" in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word *abad*. It is used to describe the fate of the wicked, as in, for example, Proverbs 11:10. But should we understand this destruction to mean total annihilation?

It is clear from other Old Testament passages using this word that *abad* need not mean annihilation. <sup>[17]</sup> The word has a range of meaning. For example, Numbers 21:29 says that the people of Chemosh were "destroyed" (*abad*). But this is a reference to their being sold into

slavery, not to their annihilation. In 1 Samuel 9:3 and 20, the word is used in reference to Saul's "lost donkeys" (*athonoth abadoth*). In this context, the word means "lost," not "annihilated." In Psalm 31:12, a vessel is "broken" (*abad*), not annihilated. Here, the meaning is that the vessel is rendered unfit for use, not that it has lapsed into nonexistence. It simply is not true that *abad*, "without exception," must mean annihilation. <sup>[18]</sup>

Evildoers are also said to be "cut off." Fudge and Pinnock both cite Psalm 37:22, 28, 34, and 38 as representative. <sup>[19]</sup> These verses, they believe, prove the utter annihilation of the wicked. The word used here is *carath*. But note that this same word is used to describe the Messiah being "cut off" (Dan. 9:26), who certainly was not annihilated. Even if one admits that the wicked are "annihilated" in the sense of being removed from earthly existence (as Jesus was), this would not prove that they are removed from any existence.

Turning to the New Testament, annihilationists claim that the Greek word *apollumi* conveys total annihilation. Stott asserts that the verb *apollumi* means "destroy," and the noun *apoleia* means "destruction." He cites Matthew 2:13, 12:14, and 27:4, which refer to Herod's desire to destroy the baby Jesus, and the later Jewish plot to have Him executed. Stott then mentions Matthew 10:28 (cf. James 4:12): "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy [*apolesai*] both soul and body in hell." <sup>[20]</sup> He regards this "destruction" as a reference to the soul's total annihilation in hell. Stott also offers the contrast between believers and unbelievers as manifest proof: "If believers are *hoi sozomenoi* (those who are being saved), then unbelievers are *hoi apollumeno*i (those who are perishing). This phrase occurs in 1 Corinthians 1:18, 2 Corinthians 2:15; 4:3, and in 2 Thessalonians 2:10." <sup>[21]</sup> He believes that this language of destruction points to the total annihilation of the wicked.

Stott concludes: "It would seem strange, therefore, if people who are said to suffer destruction are in fact not destroyed; ... it is difficult to imagine a perpetually inconclusive process of perishing." <sup>[22]</sup>

Careful scrutiny of passages using these words shows, however, that they do not teach annihilation. Consider 1 Corinthians 1:18, one of the passages cited by Stott. This passage tells us that "the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing [*tois apollumenois*]." This participle is in the present tense, which, as Robert Reymond rightly notes, "describes existing people who are presently perishing. The verb does not suggest that their future state will be non-existence." <sup>[23]</sup>

As Reymond points out, Luke 15:8-9 uses the word to describe the lost but existing coin. In Luke 15:4 and 6 it describes the lost but existing sheep. The prodigal (but existing) son is described by this term in Luke 15:17, 24. <sup>[24]</sup> Murray Harris cites other passages, such as John 11:50, Acts 5:37, 1 Corinthians 10:9-10, and Jude 11, where the concept of destruction (*apoleia*) or perishing

(*apolusthai*) need not imply annihilation. <sup>[25]</sup> Indeed, as Albrecht Oepke remarks in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, "What is meant here [in passages speaking of divine judgment] is not a simple extinction of existence, but an everlasting state of torment and death." <sup>[26]</sup>

It is true that *apoleia* is often translated "destruction" or "ruin." But [Charles Hodge](#) explains how "destruction" or "ruin" differs from annihilation: "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." <sup>[27]</sup>

Roger Nicole offers an illustration that highlights in a very lucid way the truth of Hodge's explanation. We speak of an automobile as wrecked, ruined, demolished, or "totalled," "not only when its constituent parts have been melted or scattered away, but also when they have been so damaged and twisted that the car has become completely unserviceable." <sup>[28]</sup>

## "Consume"

Annihilationists also point to words translated "consume" or "consumed" in the Old and New Testaments as proof that the wicked are annihilated. Pinnock states, for example, that the Bible repeatedly "uses the imagery of fire consuming (not torturing) what is thrown into it. The images of fire and destruction together strongly suggest annihilation rather than unending torture." <sup>[29]</sup> Pinnock then cites Malachi 4:1 as a case in point.

Stott likewise claims that the imagery of fire does not refer to conscious torment, even though all of us who have experienced being burned have felt acute pain. He says that the main function of fire is not to cause pain but to secure destruction, as in the case of an incinerator. The Bible speaks of a "consuming fire" and of "burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:12; cf. Luke 3:17). Stott concludes, "The fire itself is termed 'eternal' and 'unquenchable' but it would be very odd if what is thrown into it proved indestructible. Our expectation would be the opposite: it would be consumed forever, not tormented forever. Hence it is the smoke (evidence that the fire has done its work) which 'rises forever and ever' (Rev. 14:11; cf. 19:3)." <sup>[30]</sup>

In response, Robert Morey and others have shown conclusively that the Hebrew words translated "consume" are used in many contexts where the meaning cannot possibly be annihilation (e.g., Ps. 78:45; Lam. 3:4; Ezek. 13:13; etc.). <sup>[31]</sup> (Since space does not permit an exposition of these passages, I refer the interested reader to Morey's fine discussion.) Therefore, we should not assume automatically that the mere presence of the word "consume" *ipso facto* proves annihilation. Context is always determinative.

Now, let us grant that fire normally represents that which consumes or annihilates its fuel until nothing but ashes are left. Normal fire dies out once the fuel has been consumed. But the fire of judgment is no normal fire: it is described as an eternal fire (Jude 7) which is unquenchable (Mark 9:48). The fact that the smoke is said to rise "forever and ever" is not evidence that "the fire has done its work," as Stott wrongly infers, but rather that the fire is doing its work through a process of endless combustion. Stott replaces the "unquenchable" fire of Jesus with the "quenchable" fire of the annihilationists.

The same argument holds for the undying worms (Mark 9:48). Worms are able to live as long as there is food for them to consume. Once their food supply has been consumed, the worms eventually die. But the torments of hell are likened to undying, not dying worms. This is because their supply of food — the wicked — never ceases.

### **Annihilationist Answers to Texts Supporting the Traditional View**

Adherents of the annihilationist position believe that they have the teaching of Scripture on their side, and that they are able to answer the arguments advanced by the traditionalists in support of eternal, conscious punishment. But is this really the case?

In Part One I put forth a few selected texts to demonstrate the doctrine of eternal punishment. I stated my conviction that these texts alone are sufficient to settle the matter once and for all. Let us see how annihilationists attempt to answer the challenge of these texts, and whether they succeed at doing so.

#### **Matthew 25:46**

Consider the approach of John Stott:

At the end of the so-called parable of the sheep and goats, Jesus contrasted "eternal life" with "eternal punishment" (Matt. 25:46). Does that not indicate that in hell people endure eternal conscious punishment? No, that is to read into the text what is not necessarily there. What Jesus said is that both the life and the punishment would be eternal, but he did not in that passage define the nature of either. Because he elsewhere spoke of eternal life as a conscious enjoyment of God (Jn. 17:3), it does not follow that eternal punishment must be a conscious experience of pain at the hand of God. On the contrary, although declaring both to be eternal, Jesus is contrasting the two destinies: the more unlike they are, the better. <sup>[32]</sup>

Stott is incorrect in asserting that the passage "does not define the nature of either [eternal life or eternal punishment]." As we observed in Part One, 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. If either of these two are lacking, then punishment is not occurring — at least not in any meaningful sense of the term.

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. Nonentities cannot receive punishment. Now, it is possible that one could receive punishment for a time and then be annihilated. In that case, we would have a finite time of punishment followed by a finite process of annihilating (i.e., the actual time it takes to accomplish the annihilation), followed by an unending result of the annihilating process. But the Bible uses the adjective "eternal" to describe the punishment itself, not merely the result of the punishment.

But mere existence is not enough either. One cannot "punish" a rock or a tree, even though these might exist. Annihilationists (e.g., Pinnock <sup>[33]</sup>) sometimes complain that traditionalists "smuggle" the word "conscious" into their descriptions of punishment. But really, the traditionalist need not "smuggle" anything into the description. Once we have said the word "punishment" we have also said, at least by implication, the word "conscious." Punishment, *per se*, is conscious or it is not punishment. A punishment that is not felt is not a punishment. It is an odd use of language to speak of an insensate (i.e., unfeeling), inanimate object receiving punishment. To say, "I punished my car for not starting by slowly plucking out its sparkplug wires, one by one," would evoke laughter, not serious consideration.

Stott's axiom, "The more unlike they [i.e., heaven and hell] are, the better," actually harms his own case. If heaven represents unutterable joy, then hell should be unutterable sorrow. Yet, the whole point of the annihilationist's argument is to mitigate the horror of eternal suffering for the lost, not to increase it.

### **Revelation 20:10**

Since Matthew 25:46 is more than adequate to refute annihilationism, we could stop here. But in Part One we saw that Revelation 20:10 is also an exceedingly clear passage teaching eternal punishment for the lost. Even if we conceded Matthew 25:46 to the annihilationists, what could they possibly say in response to John's words: "And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever"?

## Clark Pinnock on Revelation 20:10

Pinnock states that in Revelation 20:10 "it is the Devil, the Beast, and the false prophet who are the only ones present, and they cannot be equated with ordinary human beings, however we should understand their nature. John's point seems to be that everything which has rebelled against God will come to an absolute end." [\[34\]](#)

Well, first of all, even if Pinnock's point is that "everything which has rebelled against God will come to an absolute end," John's point is that the Devil, beast, and false prophet will be tormented day and night, forever and ever. To read the text is to refute Pinnock.

Second, Pinnock's statement that the Devil, beast, and false prophet "cannot be equated with ordinary human beings, however we should understand their nature" is both ambiguous and proves nothing, however one wishes to interpret it. Of course an angel's nature is different than a human being's nature. But the point of "equivalence" is not the nature of the beings (i.e., angels as disembodied spirits vs. human beings as psycho-physical unities), but their ultimate fate. I demonstrated clearly in Part One that the fate of wicked humans is "equated" with the fate of the Devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 14:11; 19:20; 20:15).

Besides, even in terms of nature, the Devil (and other angelic beings) can be equated with humans in this respect: both are personal, sensate (i.e., feeling) beings who can experience conscious torment. Consider, for example, Matthew 8:29, where the demons exclaim to Jesus, "Have you come here to torment us before the time?" This shows clearly that demons can be tormented.

If Pinnock allows that Revelation 20:10 proves even the Devil's unending torment, as the form of his argument implies, he will have annihilated one of the main pillars of his position: the belief that finite creatures are incapable of committing infinite sin ("however sinful they may have been" [\[35\]](#)), and thus cannot be punished justly with unending torment.

## John Stott on Revelation 20:10

Let us see how John Stott handles this same passage. He declares, "The beast, the false prophet and the harlot, however, are not individual people but symbols of the world in its varied hostility to God. In the nature of the case they cannot experience pain. Nor can 'Death and Hades,' which follow them into the lake of fire (20:13)." [\[36\]](#)

If the beast, the false prophet, and the harlot are only abstract symbols — with no relation to individual people — then Stott is certainly correct in saying that they cannot experience pain. Symbols, being abstractions, cannot be tortured. However, the text says that these three are



tortured. It is well and good to deny that abstractions can be tortured. But then Stott should tell us what the text does mean when it describes these alleged abstractions as "tormented day and night." Yet, no explanation whatever is offered. We are left with two possible conclusions: (1) that the three are not mere abstractions (contrary to Stott's exegesis); or (2) that Revelation 20:10 is pure gibberish (contrary to the character of God, who inspired the text). If forced to choose between such an exegesis or God's character, the choice is obvious: the beast, false prophet, and harlot are not mere abstractions but have reference to individual people.

Now, even if we allow that these three are "symbols of the world in its varied hostility to God," we must admit that the world which they symbolize is made up of individual people who are the ones exercising the hostility. If abstractions cannot be tortured, neither can they express hostility. At some level, then, these symbols must designate real people. The same can be said for the expression "death and hades." That is to say, it is individuals held in the power of death and occupying hades who are cast into the lake of fire. This is made exceedingly clear by verses 13-15 of the same chapter.

For the sake of discussion, let us grant to Stott the impossible: the beast, false prophet, and harlot are abstract symbols with no real reference to individual people. Is Stott prepared to say the same about the Devil? Certainly Stott still believes in a personal devil. But the text says, "And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." As we observed when refuting Pinnock's argument, the annihilationists fall on their own sword: finite beings, they tell us, cannot be punished with infinite punishment. Since none of the annihilationists are prepared to ascribe infinity (and, hence, true deity) to Satan, they must abandon their "moral" argument.

### **Edward Fudge on Revelation 20:10**

Edward Fudge is recognized by many within the annihilationist camp as the standard-bearer for the position. What does the apostle of annihilationism say in response to this verse?

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. In view of the overwhelming mass of material otherwise found throughout Scripture, however, one ought to remember the general hermeneutical rule that calls for interpreting the uncommon in light of the common and the obscure in light of the more clearly revealed. <sup>[37]</sup>

I can paraphrase the essence of Fudge's response as follows: "We know from elsewhere in the Bible that annihilationism is true. Therefore, this verse cannot possibly mean what it says."

What about the hermeneutical principle Fudge invokes, "unclear passages should be interpreted by the clear ones"? Fine. Let us admit his principle. We have already shown that the passages advanced in favor of the annihilation theory can, and often must, be interpreted in the traditional sense. But what is ambiguous about Revelation 20:10, in so far as the doctrine of eternal, conscious torment for the lost is concerned? <sup>[38]</sup>

Is the word "devil" ambiguous? As seen throughout Fudge's writings, he believes in a personal, malignant spirit-being called the Devil. There is no ambiguity here.

How about the expression, "lake of fire and brimstone"? What is ambiguous about that? Certainly, when God threatens sinners with the lake of fire and brimstone, they do not immediately scratch their heads and ask for clarification. Fudge argues that the term "lake of fire" is "but a symbol for annihilation." <sup>[39]</sup> But, if we might borrow the words of Fudge himself, the traditionalist "is confident that the ordinary man in the street can tell us what those words usually mean to him." Given the fact that the place described in Revelation 20:10 is a place of unremitting torment, annihilation does not (and cannot) come naturally to mind! Now, we did note in Part One that many traditionalists do not regard the "fire" of Gehenna as being a kind of material fire, but as symbolic of something far worse. Regardless of one's stand on that question, this "ambiguity" does not affect the argument here. The "fire" of Gehenna is at least as bad as the material fire we know in this life.

How about the expression, "beast and false prophet"? Like Stott, Fudge regards the language as "symbolic," referring to "political power and apostate religious beguilement." He concludes that these "are not persons who can be tortured in fire." <sup>[40]</sup> We already saw the futility of this "symbolic vs. personal" interpretation in connection with Stott. <sup>[41]</sup> But even allowing that the beast and false prophet are neither individual people nor symbolic of individual people, one cannot escape the fact that the Devil is an individual and that he is tormented day and night, forever and ever. Here Fudge is on the ropes, and grudgingly admits, "There is no easy solution." But then he adds, "Yet to this point no human beings are involved in the lake of fire, nor does this passage say that any of Adam's race are tormented forever and ever." <sup>[42]</sup> Of course, verse 10 does not mention humans, but one need only look at verse 15 of the same chapter — not to mention Matthew 25:41, Revelation 14:11, and Revelation 19:20 — to see that Satan's human followers experience the same fate as he.

If Revelation 20:10 teaches the eternal, conscious torment of the Devil (as indeed it does), then that fact alone annihilates the annihilationist's entire system because: (1) The Devil's eternal punishment reduces to ashes their "no infinite punishment for finite sin" defense. (2) It also shows that eternal, conscious punishment against a sensate, finite, sinful being is moral — and if it can be moral in one case, it can be moral in others. (3) It leaves the traditionalist in a position

to prove his entire case simply by showing that unregenerate sinners experience the same fate as the Devil and his angels, a task that is quite easy to do.

How about the word "tormented" (*basanizo*)? What is unclear about that? We examined the consistent scriptural usage of this word in Part One. We already observed that Fudge tacitly admits the obvious meaning of this term — at least in the Devil's case. But in the case of his "abstractions" (i.e., the beast and false prophet), Fudge, like Stott, tells us that abstractions cannot be tormented. He then leaves us hanging as to what John could have possibly intended by such a meaningless expression.

Finally, is there something ambiguous about the phrase, "day and night forever and ever"? Here we find the emphatic form *eis tous aionas ton aionon* ("unto the ages of the ages"). This construction is used only to describe unending duration. We saw in Part One that this phrase is the most emphatic way of expressing endless duration possible in the Greek language.

#### Superior Sensitivity or Secular Sentimentalism?

Pinnock speaks of the "sensitive Christians" who have no choice but to abandon the doctrine of hell in favor of a kinder and gentler fate for the wicked. <sup>[43]</sup> But as J. I. Packer observes, "the feelings that make people want conditionalism to be true seem to me to reflect, not superior spiritual sensitivity, but secular sentimentalism which assumes that in heaven our feelings about others will be as at present, and our joy in the manifesting of God's justice will be no greater than it is now." <sup>[44]</sup>

We should never forget that it was the Lord Jesus Christ, more than any other, who enunciated the doctrine of everlasting torment for the lost. Christ had no need to attend a modern sensitivity training workshop; He was "sensitivity incarnate." But He also manifested a perfect balance of love and justice. The same holy God who "shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire" (2 Thess. 1:7) is the God who stooped to become one of us, and bore the vengeance of God's fire in His own body on the tree. If God should open our eyes to understand the terrible price He paid, we would in that instant comprehend the awful guilt of spurning that price. If those who scorned the old covenant were consumed with the fire of this present age, "how much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant" (Heb. 10:29)?

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## NOTES

1. Clark Pinnock, "Fire, Then Nothing," *Christianity Today*, 20 March 1987, 440; "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," *Criswell Theological Review* 4, no. 2 (Spring 1990):246-47, 253.
2. Pinnock, "Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," 246-47; 253.
3. David L. Edwards and John R. W. Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988), 318.
4. Pinnock, "Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," 255.
5. Pinnock, "Fire, Then Nothing," 40.
6. Pinnock, "Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," 254-55. See also Stephen Travis, *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 199.
7. See W. G. T. Shedd, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1886; reprint, Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, 1980), 152-53. It is also possible to interpret Pinnock's and Stott's ambiguous language to mean that sins committed in the realm of time (i.e., sequential duration) cannot justly be punished in a timeless, eternal realm (i.e., eternity in the sense of an "eternal now"). At least in Pinnock's case, it hardly seems likely that this is what he intends, since elsewhere he has wrongly argued against understanding even God's existence — much less the existence of His creatures — as "timeless." But even if this were their intended meaning, the argument would be refuted simply by noting that the realm in which sinners suffer in hell is the same — temporally speaking — as the realm in which they committed the sins: it is a temporal realm. Sinners in hell, as well as saints in heaven, do not occupy "eternity" in the same sense that God does; that is, as an "eternal now." Sinners will experience their punishment in temporal sequence, just as the sins they committed took place in temporal sequence. An endless time of punishment is a time of punishment nonetheless.
8. *Ibid.*, 152.
9. The infinity of guilt for sin against God was cogently argued by St. Anselm in the eleventh century in his epochal work, *Cur Deus Homo?* ("Why the God-Man?"). See especially Book 1, Chapters 20-24, 239-51. In *St. Anselm: Basic Writings*, trans. S. N. Deane (La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1962).
10. *Ibid.*, 242.
11. LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, 2 vols. (Washington, DC: The Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1965), 1:106-11.
12. *Ibid.*, 1:107.
13. Edward W. Fudge, "The Final End of the Wicked," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27 (September 1984):326.
14. Froom, 1:108.

15. Robert A. Morey deals with many more of these terms in his book, *Death and the Afterlife* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1984).
16. Edward W. Fudge, "'The Plain Meaning': A Review Essay," *Henceforth* 14 (1985):23-24.
17. See Morey, 109.
18. There are several other Hebrew words that are often rendered "destroy" or "ruin." For a discussion of these, see Morey, 108 ff. For additional evidence that "destroy" does not mean "annihilate," see Harry Buis, *The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1957), 125 ff.
19. Edward W. Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes* (Fallbrook, CA: Verdict Publications, 1982), 92-93; Pinnock, "Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," 250-51.
20. Edwards and Stott, 315.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*, 316.
23. Robert Reymond, "Dr. John Stott on Hell," *Presbyterion* 16 (Spring 1990):53.
24. See Reymond, 53; Albrecht Oepke, "apoleia," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 1 (1964), 397.
25. Murray J. Harris, *Raised Immortal: Resurrection and Immortality in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 184. See also R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg, 1943), 297.
26. Oepke, 397.
27. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979 reprint edition), 3:874.
28. Roger Nicole, "Universalism: Will Everyone Be Saved?" *Christianity Today*, 20 March 1987, 34.
29. Pinnock, "Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," 250.
30. Edwards and Stott, 316.
31. Morey, 110 ff.
32. Edwards and Stott, 317.
33. Pinnock, "Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," 256.
34. *Ibid.*, 257.
35. *Ibid.*, 247.
36. Edwards and Stott, 318.

37. Fudge, *Final End of the Wicked*, 332.

38. Some may wish to argue that the entire book of Revelation, being a symbolic and prophetic book, is "ambiguous." But even if symbolic language (like any language) has a range of meaning, the language is certainly not meaningless, nor can it mean anything anyone wishes it to. Even granting the reasonable range of meaning for the words in the passage before us, the traditional doctrine concerning hell is still affirmed. In any case, it is not necessary to defend the understanding of the Book of Revelation as a whole, since the annihilationists themselves grant this point. Even Fudge, who calls the Revelation 20:10 passage "obscure," draws whatever conclusions he can from the passage in support of his position. This will be evident as we proceed.

39. Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 304.

40. *Ibid.*

41. The logic that should be followed here is clear, and is easily expressed as a syllogism: (1) Mere abstractions cannot be tormented. (2) The text says that the beast and false prophet are tormented. (3) Therefore, the beast and the false prophet cannot be mere abstractions. I say "mere" abstractions because I have no problem believing that these could be abstract symbols that refer ultimately to individual persons. In that case, through a figure of speech, one could speak of "tormenting" the symbol with the understanding that it is the people represented by the symbol that actually undergo the torment.

42. Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 304.

43. Pinnock, "Fire, Then Nothing," 40.

44. J. I. Packer, "Evangelicals and the Way of Salvation: New Challenges to the Gospel — Universalism, and Justification," in *Evangelical Affirmations*, ed. Kenneth Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 126. In Part One, I stated that I do not believe that annihilationists hold their position merely out of sentimentalism. In citing Packer's remarks, I do not wish to take away with my left hand what I granted with the right. Nevertheless, while I will take the evangelical annihilationists at their word when they declare their belief in the authority of Scripture, it also seems that emotional factors have predisposed them to interpret the texts on hell in a less-than-objective manner.

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