

The Hermeneutics of Annihilationism:

The Theological Method of Edward Fudge

by Robert A. Peterson*

My purpose in this essay is to evaluate the biblical hermeneutic of the evangelical conditionalist Edward William Fudge. I have chosen Fudge, the author of *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of Final Punishment*, for two reasons.¹ First, his work has attracted considerable attention of late. As evidence of this fact I cite two essays in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, edited by Nigel Cameron.² John W. Wenham ascribes importance to Fudge's book when he includes it with three others that, in his estimation, have not been answered by traditionalist writers:

I have been waiting since 1973 for a reply to the massive work of Froom (2,476 pages), to Atkinson's closely argued 112 pages, to Guillebaud's 67 and (more important) to the one additional book which has appeared on the conditionalist side: Edward Fudge's *The Fire That Consumes*³

Wenham's remarks occur in the introduction to his essay, "The Case for Conditional Immortality." In the essay that follows Wenham's, Kendall S. Harmon makes "The Case Against Conditionalism: A Response to Edward William Fudge."⁴ Notice that when Harmon seeks to interact with a contemporary annihilationist, he chooses Fudge. Harmon gives two reasons for so doing: "First, although not as prominent as John Stott or Philip Hughes, Mr. Fudge's work is more substantial than theirs (500 pages) and is devoted exclusively to the doctrine of hell. Secondly, Mr. Fudge's book has been praised for its tone and its thoroughness."⁵ Plainly, the stock of *The Fire That Consumes* is on the rise.

My second reason for choosing to evaluate the biblical interpretation of Fudge is that in the preface to *The Fire That Consumes* he says that he has given attention to hermeneutics and that he invites evaluation of his work:

This book is written to be read - and argued with! I have no ax to grind and no cause to champion; I have tried to follow the ordinary methods of sound, biblical exegesis. Competent scholars and serious students are cordially invited to enter into dialogue. Check the statements made here. Weigh the evidence. Examine the arguments. Measure the work by every proper standard. All that matters is that we seek God's truth for His glory and the salvation of sinners!⁶

I appreciate the openness Fudge here expresses. In this paper I take up one aspect of his challenge. I propose to evaluate his hermeneutic within the framework of his theological method.⁷ Like most writers on the doctrine of hell, Fudge does not devote a section of his book to hermeneutics.⁸ Nevertheless, he refers to principles of interpretation throughout *The Fire That Consumes*. By studying these stated principles and the hermeneutic implicit in his exegesis, we can discern some aspects of his hermeneutical method.

Fudge's book totals 500 pages. Instead of trying to evaluate all of his exegesis, I have chosen to base my evaluation primarily on his treatment of three NT passages: Matthew 25:41, 46; Revelation 14:9-11; and Revelation 20:10, 15. I have chosen these passages because they have figured most prominently in the history of the doctrine of hell. Indeed, Augustine, Thomas, Calvin, Edwards, and Shedd, to name the stalwarts of the orthodox view of hell, all regard one or more of these passages as teaching the endless conscious torment of the wicked.⁹ I have studied Fudge's treatment of these passages (within the context of his whole book) in order to evaluate his hermeneutical approach and method. As a result I summarize Fudge's hermeneutic under the following headings.

USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Fudge devotes a thirty page chapter of *The Fire that Consumes* to a study of "The End of the Wicked in the OT."¹⁰ Contrary to the assumption of many, the OT has much to say about the fate of the wicked. Fudge points to numerous biblical examples of God's judging the ungodly. I will cite two: the Genesis flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

At the time of the flood, "God decided 'to wipe mankind..., from the face of the earth'" (Gen 6:5). Indeed, Fudge notes, "God told Noah his plan... 'to destroy... every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything will perish'" (v. 17). Subsequently, God fulfilled his threat and, "When the flood came, 'Every living thing that moved on the earth perished....'" (Gen 7:21). Fudge concludes, "Here there is no doubt about the meaning of 'perish,' 'destroy,' or 'die'.... In this actual historical example of the end of the world, those terms were clearly literal. They meant being 'wiped out,' being 'wiped off the face of the earth.'¹¹

The fate of Sodom and Gomorrah is another example given by Fudge of God's judging the wicked in the OT. In this case, "The fire fell from heaven and burned the wicked to ashes, resulting in a total desolation that would never be reversed!"¹² Indeed, as Fudge amplifies in a footnote, "The final outcome of 'fire and brimstone' in the prototypal historical judgment of Sodom was the complete extermination of every sinner...."¹³

It is not necessary to multiply examples. These two enable us to understand Fudge's conception of the fate of the wicked according to the OT - annihilation. Although Fudge is not the first conditionalist to reach this conclusion, as he acknowledges,¹⁴ he has given it new visibility. Consider these words from an article he wrote in 1984:

Is the OT silent concerning the wicked's final fate? Indeed it is not. It overwhelmingly affirms their total destruction. It never affirms or even hints at anything resembling conscious unending torment. The OT uses about 50 different Hebrew verbs to describe this fate, and about 70 figures of speech. Without exception they portray destruction, extinction or extermination. Not one of the verbs or word-pictures remotely suggests the traditional doctrine.¹⁵

How are we to evaluate Fudge's conclusions? I must give them a mixed review on the basis of a study of the major Old Testament judgment texts.¹⁶ Such a study reveals that the punishments of God described in them are earthly and temporal, resulting in physical death. These passages do not speak of life after death or eternal destinies. This is significant in the light of Fudge's claim that the Old Testament supports his view of the extinction of the wicked.¹⁷ Fudge correctly asserts that the judgment passages use the "vocabulary of destruction." God punishes the ungodly in the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, the plagues and Red Sea, and the captivities by "wiping them out, cutting them off, putting them to an end, overthrowing them." As a result the wicked "perish, die, are consumed, shattered, destroyed."

Fudge errs, however, when he claims that these OT texts teach the annihilation of the wicked. If that were the case, then the judgment passages would teach too much, for the "annihilation" depicted in them does not follow the resurrection and punishment of the wicked, as does the annihilation for which Fudge argues. Instead, the "annihilation" presented by the OT would entail cessation of existence at death and this is more akin to Bertrand Russell's view than to the teaching of evangelical annihilationists. Actually, however, since these passages do not speak of judgment after death, they do not teach annihilationism and pose no threat to the orthodox view of eternal punishment.¹⁸

I conclude that Fudge's claim that the OT judgment passages teach annihilationism is false. Moreover, Fudge's error has serious repercussions in the light of his theological method, for after concluding that the OT teaches annihilationism, Fudge reads this conclusion into the NT. This is evident, for example, in his comments on "burning sulfur" in Rev 14:10. There Fudge asserts, "In the Bible the symbol derives its meaning from the annihilation of Sodom and Gomorrah."¹⁹

A page later Fudge argues that the images of "burning sulfur" and of "carrion birds" eating "the corpses" both "sound out a message of utter extinction." Furthermore, "Rev 19:20, 21 has both

figures and distinguishes between them, but it gives no indication of changing this basic meaning of either” (italics mine). Here we see Fudge’s theological method in action. The OT provides the “basic meaning” of the images of God’s judgment - annihilationism - and the NT “gives no indication of changing this basic meaning.”²⁰

I will elaborate below on Fudge’s habit of reading his annihilationist understanding of the OT into the NT. For now it is sufficient to have demonstrated the faulty basis for this practice. Fudge has misinterpreted the numerous OT texts that use the “vocabulary of destruction” as teaching annihilationism. This is the source of his mishandling of the NT.

APPEAL TO LINGUISTICS

Throughout *The Fire That Consumes*, Fudge appeals to linguistics in an effort to strengthen his case for conditionalism. Unfortunately, his work is marred by linguistic fallacies. I will cite two different types of such errors.

First, at times, he adopts a diachronic rather than a synchronic approach to the study of words. Fudge claims that the meaning of “punishment” in Matt 25:46 is disputed. He then cites among other authorities Aristotle, Plutarch, and the Septuagint. Fudge would do well to heed Moises Silva’s caution:

We must accept the obvious fact that the speakers of a language simply know next to nothing about its development; and this certainly was the case with the writers and immediate readers of Scripture two millennia ago.... It follows that our real interest is the significance of Greek or Hebrew in the consciousness of the biblical writers; to put it baldly, “historical considerations are irrelevant to the investigation” of the state of the Koine at the time of Christ (italics in original).²¹

Second, Fudge commits a linguistic fallacy in his treatment of the Pauline pair of words “trouble” (*thlipsis*) and “distress” (*stenochoria*) in Rom 2:9. After noting a few other occurrences of this pair in Paul’s writings, Fudge remarks, “Paul is one of those who are ‘hard pressed... but not crushed,’ and he uses these same two words in participle form to say so (2 Cor 4:8).” So far, so good. But next Fudge draws an unwarranted conclusion, “This last translation is suggestive for our present verse [Rom 2:9]. Judgment day will find the wicked ‘hard pressed’ - to the point of being ‘crushed.’”²²

This is an example of what D. A. Carson calls, “Unwarranted adoption of an expanded semantic field.” Carson explains:

The fallacy in this instance lies in the supposition that the meaning of a word in a specific context is much broader than the context itself allows and may bring with it the word's entire semantic range. This step is sometimes called illegitimate totality transfer.²³

Although *stenochoroumenoi*, used metaphorically, may be rendered “crushed” in 2 Cor 4:8 (the NIV does so), it is illegitimate to transfer this meaning to the noun *stenochoria* in Rom 2:9 and suggest that it implies the literal “crushing” - the annihilation - of the wicked on judgment day.

I conclude that Fudge's appeal to linguistics sometimes has the opposite of his desired effect: it harms rather than helps his case for annihilationism.

AVOIDANCE OF TEXTS AND OPPOSING ARGUMENTS

Another feature of Fudge's hermeneutic is his occasional avoidance of aspects of biblical passages that are difficult to reconcile with conditionalism. Sometimes this avoidance takes the form of ignoring the strongest arguments of traditionalism.

An example of the latter is his failure to correlate Matt 25:4 1 with Rev 20:10, in spite of the fact that he dedicates eleven pages to a study of Matt 25:41, 46.²⁴

Included in Jesus' teaching concerning the sheep and the goats are his terrible words to the wicked, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt 25:41). Traditionalists since Augustine have interpreted Scripture by Scripture and gone to Rev 20:10 for help in understanding this “eternal fire prepared for the devil.” There John describes Satan's fate, “And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”

Referring to Matt 25:41 and Rev 20:10, Augustine reasons, “Eternal' in the first passage is expressed in the second by 'for ever and ever', and those words have only one meaning in scriptural usage: the exclusion of any temporal end.”²⁵

Many traditionalists since Augustine have regarded this as a strong argument for endless punishment. A recent example is Alan Gomes's use of this argument in his presentation of the two sets of texts (Matt 25:41, 46; Rev 14:9-11; 20:10) that he views as “conclusively” teaching eternal conscious torment (*italics mine*).²⁶

What is Fudge's hermeneutical technique for dealing with this prominent traditionalist argument? He simply does not address it. In so doing he actually weakens his case for conditionalism, by giving the impression that he avoids the traditionalist argument because he cannot answer it.

At other times Fudge avoids biblical texts that are difficult to harmonize with conditionalism. One example is Fudge's handling of the angel's message in Rev 14:9-11:

If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.

This text is one of the pillars upon which the traditional doctrine of hell has been built. It may seem odd for me to cite Fudge's treatment of this passage as an example of his avoiding difficult texts because he devotes more than six pages to its exposition! Nevertheless, it is a striking example of avoidance. In fact, all the more so, because of the amount of space Fudge allots to it.

After briefly setting Rev 14:9-11 in its literary context, Fudge divides it into four elements: "Wine of God's Fury," "Burning Sulfur," "Rising Smoke," and "No Rest Day or Night." He then treats the four in turn. In so doing he mentions the OT more than twenty-five times and the NT more than fifteen times. He regards many of these texts as teaching annihilationism and insists that we interpret Rev 14:9-11 accordingly. Amazingly, however, other than an exposition of "There is no rest day or night" and a brief summary at the end of his discussion, Fudge does not explain Rev 14:9-11 at all.²⁷

What are we to make of this? Fudge informs us of the theological method he intended to follow when he states his aim of "letting the Scripture interpret itself."²⁸ Certainly, interpreters are to compare Scripture with Scripture, as Luther urged. Furthermore, consulting the OT background is especially important for those seeking to understand the Apocalypse, which is replete with OT allusions and symbolism. Unfortunately, however, Fudge has not allowed other Scriptures to inform his exegesis of Rev 14; instead he has substituted his comments on many other texts for the interpretation of Rev 14:9-11 itself. And this does not constitute an exegesis of this critical text. Indeed, Fudge has not explained verses 9-11 as John has put them together. Instead, he has created his own theological context for Rev 14:9-11 out of his mosaic of biblical texts. And apparently, he assumes that the interpretation of Rev 14:9-11 will be apparent to his readers - it teaches the same conditionalism that Fudge finds elsewhere in the Bible.

Granted, John's statements in Rev 14:9-11 are very difficult for conditionalist interpreters to handle. But this is exactly what Fudge has to do in order to prove that annihilationism can stand up to the scrutiny of biblical exegesis. Instead, he has bombarded the reader with Scripture references. Although this may have the effect of impressing some readers, careful ones will notice that Fudge has never explained the verses at hand! The result once again is a weakening of his case for conditionalism.

I do not want to be misunderstood. I am not prying into Fudge's motives or accusing him of dishonesty. Rather, I am criticizing his theological hermeneutic. At times he simply avoids texts that are difficult for his position.

Another example is his treatment of Mark 9:43-48. Although Fudge discusses seventy New Testament passages under individual headings, he does not devote a separate heading to this significant text; instead, he subsumes it under his treatment of Matt. 18:8, 9. There Fudge plays Matthew's and Mark's accounts against each other to avoid the difficult verses for annihilationism. For example, Fudge notes that whereas Matthew speaks of "eternal fire," Mark speaks simply of being "thrown/going into hell." What conclusion are we to draw from this? Fudge urges, "Matthew's language may add flavor and force, but it should not be naively interpreted in a way that contradicts Mark's."²⁹ I must ask why it is naive to seek to understand each passage on its own merits before doing theological systematization? And why should one regard unbelievers' being thrown into hell as incompatible with endless punishment, unless one were committed a priori to annihilationism?

Fudge diverts his readers' attention from Jesus' strong words about hell in Matt 18:8,9 and Mark 9:44, 48 by noting that Calvin in his commentary on these passages, "does not elaborate at all on final punishment."³⁰ I fail to understand how that lessens Fudge's responsibility to explain the verses at hand. Nevertheless, he simply skips Jesus' words in Mark 9:44, where he speaks of "hell, where the fire never goes out."

Fudge does treat Jesus' saying in Mark 9:48 that hell is "where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched." But his treatment is another example of avoidance. He instructs us that the worm here "is a devouring worm, and what it eats - in Isaiah's picture here quoted without amendment - is already dead."³¹ Once more Fudge imposes his annihilationist reading of the OT upon the NT text. Does this sufficiently explain Jesus's words about the worm's not dying? Wouldn't the worm die, when it had consumed its host? Shouldn't a conditionalist theologian address the traditionalist arguments arising out of the biblical text? At least this traditionalist gets the impression that Fudge is reading his theology into passages that are difficult to assimilate to his position.

Moreover, my impression is only confirmed by Fudge's explanation of Jesus' description of hell as a place "where... the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:48). Fudge informs us, "The devouring worm is aided by a consuming fire" (italics in original). As evidence he points us to biblical references already adduced along with passages in Homer and Eusebius.³² Is this not clear avoidance of Jesus' words? Jesus says nothing in Mark 9:42-48 about a consuming fire; instead, he says that hell-fire "is not quenched" (v. 48). And Fudge has not interpreted these words in the context of Jesus' message.

In sum: Fudge's avoidance of the strongest traditionalist arguments and of the texts used for centuries to teach the endless punishment of the wicked damages his case for conditionalism.³³

LOGICAL FALLACIES

The Logical Fallacy of Argumentum ad Hominem In his zeal to argue for conditionalism Fudge at times commits logical fallacies. I will cite two examples. Irving M. Copi defines argumentum ad hominem (abusive) as follows: "The phrase 'argumentum ad hominem' translates literally into 'argument directed to the man....' This fallacy.... is committed when, instead of trying to disprove the truth of what is asserted, one attacks the man who made the assertion.... The way in which this irrelevant argument may sometimes persuade is through the psychological process of transference. Where an attitude of disapproval toward a person can be evoked, it may possibly tend to overflow the strictly emotional field and become disagreement with what the person says" (italics in original).³⁴

Fudge argues in this manner in his treatment of Jesus' words in Matt 25:46. There, speaking of the goats and sheep respectively, Jesus declares, "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Traditionalists have often pointed to the parallelism of the fates of the righteous and unrighteous when making their case for the endless punishment for the wicked. Augustine, for example, argued this way, "Christ, in the very same passage, included both punishment and life in one and the same sentence when he said, 'So those people will go into eternal punishment, while the righteous will go into eternal life' (Matt. 25:46). Augustine contends:

If both are "eternal", it follows necessarily that either both are to be taken as long-lasting but finite, or both as endless and perpetual. The phrases "eternal punishment" and "eternal life" are parallel and it would be absurd to use them in one and the same sentence to mean: "Eternal life will be infinite,

while eternal punishment will have an end.” Hence, because the eternal life of the saints will be endless, the eternal punishment also, for those condemned to it, will assuredly have no end.³⁵

How does Fudge counter this traditionalist argument? First, he contends that eternal punishment means irreversible annihilation. “When the wicked have perished, it will be forever - their destruction and punishment is unending as well as qualitatively different from anything we now know.”³⁶

Second, Fudge responds to this traditionalist argument by employing an argumentum ad hominem. He writes, “We must be careful in pressing the parallel between ‘eternal’ life and ‘eternal’ punishment that we do not fall into any spirit of vindictiveness or ungodly joy at the fate of the wicked.”³⁷

The implication is that understanding Matt 25:46 as teaching endless punishment for the wicked makes one liable to vindictiveness. Copi puts the argumentum ad hominem into the category of “irrelevant arguments.” The premises of such arguments “are logically irrelevant to, and therefore incapable of establishing the truth of, their conclusions.”³⁸ This is true of Fudge’s argument here: whether traditionalists are vindictive or not has nothing to do with the meaning of Matt 25:46. In fact, the defenders of the orthodox doctrine of hell have often demonstrated compassion for the lost. But whether they are compassionate or vengeful does not help us understand Jesus’ words.

Fudge, by arguing in this way, seeks to persuade by “the psychological process of transference,” to use Copi’s description. As was already noted, “Where an attitude of disapproval toward a person can be evoked, it may possibly tend to overflow the strictly emotional field and become disagreement with what the person says.”³⁹

Unfortunately, Fudge pursues this line of argumentation in a chapter of his book entitled, “Traditionalism’s Problem of Pain.”⁴⁰ Here he cites extreme portrayals from church history of the wicked’s “everlasting torture in agony,” and declares, “If the whole point is to scare the poor and the little children, why not give them a fright they will never forget?” He even paints crude Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim pictures of hell to heap ridicule on the traditionalist view.⁴¹

Fudge’s argument here is as unconvincing as that employed by defenders of endless punishment who use an argumentum ad hominem against annihilationism by grouping conditionalists with cultists.⁴²

The Logical Fallacy of Petitio Principii

Fudge also commits the logical fallacy of vetitio principii. Copi describes this fallacy:

In attempting to establish the truth of a proposition, one often casts about for acceptable premisses from which the proposition in question can be deduced as conclusion. If one assumes as a premiss for his argument the very conclusion he intends to prove, the fallacy committed is that of petitio principii, or begging the question.⁴³

Fudge commits this fallacy in his exposition of the lake of fire in Rev 19:20. He argues that the beast and false prophet are not actual people but institutions, and hence incapable of suffering conscious, sensible pain. Their being cast into the lake of fire cannot, therefore, indicate endless punishment. Fudge then notes that Homer Hailey does not regard Rev 19:20 as describing Christ's second coming.⁴⁴

Fudge next appeals to Hanns Lilje who " marvels that John gives no description here of any battle." Lilje writes of Cod's throwing the beast into the lake of fire:

The very moment when this purpose of God is fulfilled, the mighty power of the beast shrivels up like a collapsed balloon, as if it had never been. It has been unmasked, and its true character revealed: it was empty, futile presumption.⁴⁵

Fudge notes that "Lilje is content to use the word 'annihilated' to express the meaning of the lake of fire. Fudge's next sentence is revealing, "In the case of the beast and false prophet, therefore, the lake of fire stands for utter, absolute, irreversible annihilation" (italics mine).⁴⁶ Here Fudge commits the logical fallacy of petitio principii, or begging the question. Fudge does not prove that the lake of fire signifies annihilation. He merely states that Lilje thinks it means this. On that basis ("therefore") Fudge concludes that the lake of fire stands for obliteration. Fudge here assumes his conclusion. This aspect of his argument, therefore, lacks cogency.

Fudge commits the same fallacy in his comments on Heb 2:2,3. There, after admitting that this passage "gives no details of that terrible and certain punishment," he nevertheless concludes that the wicked will "perish forever in the second and final death."⁴⁷

APPEAL TO SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

While commenting on the “wine of God’s fury” in Rev 14:10, Fudge speaks of the cup of God’s wrath. In this context he says:

Such was the cup Jesus accepted from God’s hand in Gethsemane, and to drink it unmixed He refused even the numbing wine offered by His murderers (Matt. 26:39, 42, 44; 27:34). He suffered torment of body and soul. More than that, He drained the cup of God’s wrath, passively enduring the simultaneous draining of His own life into total death.⁴⁸

Here Fudge, following the examples of Atkinson and Froom before him, teaches that Jesus was annihilated in his death. In fact, Fudge devotes six panes of his book to the thesis: “Jesus’ Death Involved Total Destruction.”⁴⁹ Here he quotes approvingly James Dunn’s statements, “Man could not be helped other than through his [Jesus’] annihilation,” and “This process of destruction is speeded up in the case of Jesus, the representative man, the hilasterion, and destroys him.”⁵⁰ Next Fudge agrees with Oscar Cullmann who wrote that:

[Jesus] can conquer death only by actually dying, by betaking Himself to the sphere of death, the destroyer of life, to the sphere of nothingness....
Whoever wants to conquer death must die; he must really cease to live - not simply live on as an immortal soul; but die in body and soul, lose life itself...
Furthermore, if life is to issue out of so genuine a death as this, a new divine act of creation is necessary. And this act of creation calls back to life not just a part of man, but the whole man - all that God had created and death had annihilated.⁵¹

Fudge insists that the Scriptures teach that Jesus was annihilated:

The Bible exhausts the vocabulary of dying in speaking of what happened to Jesus. He “died for our sins” (1 Cor 15:3). He laid down His “life [psyche]” (John 10:15). He was destroyed (Matt 27:20, KJV) or killed (Acts 3:15). Jesus compared his own death to the dissolution of a kernel of wheat... (John 12:23-26). Jesus “poured out His life [psyche] unto death” and in so doing was “numbered with the transgressors” (Isa 53:12; italics in original).⁵²

Fudge admits, “We naturally recoil from such a thought, that the Son of God could truly have perished - even for a moment.” Yet this is what Fudge believes happened. He faults Calvin for

his refusal to believe that “Jesus’ ‘soul’ truly died.”⁵³

In his conclusion Fudge writes:

Every scriptural implication is that if Jesus had not been raised, He - like those fallen asleep in Him - would simply have perished (1 Cor 15:18). His resurrection reverses every such estimation of affairs¹ assuring us instead of the death of Death (2 Tim 1:10; Heb 2:14; Rev 20:14).⁵⁴

To be precise, Fudge concurs with Edward White who held that when Jesus died in crucifixion his humanity was annihilated, but not his divinity.⁵⁵

Fudge, therefore, seeks to strengthen his case for annihilationism by arguing that Jesus bore the pains of hell in his death, that is, he was annihilated. What are the systematic implications of such a view? Do they strengthen or weaken Fudge’s case for conditionalism?

The systematic implications of holding that Jesus was annihilated when he died are enormous. Nothing less than orthodox Christology is at stake. The definitive statement concerning the Person of Christ was made by the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Included in the Definition of the Council of Chalcedon is the following formal confession of faith:

In agreement, therefore, with the holy fathers, we all unanimously teach that we should confess that our Lord Jesus Christ is one and the same Son, the same perfect in Godhead and the same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, the same of a rational soul and body, consubstantial with the Father in Godhead, and the same consubstantial with us in manhood, like us in all things except sin; begotten from the Father before the ages as regards His Godhead, and in these last days, the same, because of us and because of our salvation begotten from the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, as regards His manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, made known in two natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, the difference of the natures being by no means removed because of the union, but the property of each nature being preserved and coalescing in one prosopan and one hupostasis- not parted or divided into two prosopa, but one and the same Son, only-begotten, divine Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets of old and Jesus Christ Himself taught us about Him and the creed of our fathers has handed down.⁵⁶

John Cooper encapsulates the teaching of Chalcedon:

Since the Council of Chalcedon the church has officially recognized what is taught in the New Testament and held by the early church: that because of the incarnation Jesus Christ is both truly God and truly human; that he is one person with two natures, one divine and one human; and that these natures are neither mixed together nor are they separable.⁵⁷

Next, Cooper highlights the disastrous implications of holding that Jesus was annihilated in his death:

Now if the extinction- re-creation account of Jesus' resurrection is true, then the teaching of Chalcedon is false. The two natures of Christ are separable and were in fact separated between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. The human being Jesus completely ceased to exist.... So the divine-human person Jesus Christ did not exist for the interim. Only the nonincarnate Word, the wholly divine Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, existed during that time.⁵⁸

Furthermore, if Jesus were annihilated on Calvary, and his natures separated because his humanity ceased to exist, then his resurrection constituted another incarnation. This incarnation would differ from the first in that this time the Word would take to himself resurrected flesh. Notwithstanding, it would be a second incarnation.

I conclude: instead of Fudge's appeal to systematic theology strengthening his case for conditionalism, it weakens it considerably. Indeed, to hold that Jesus' humanity was annihilated on the cross, brings one into conflict with Chalcedonian Christology. Such a prospect ought to cause conditionalists to re-examine their views, for the Bible teaches that Christ did suffer the pains of hell, but not as they are conceived by annihilationists.⁵⁹

CONCLUSION

Space prevents me from considering other aspects of Fudge's theological hermeneutic. I omitted one important aspect because it has been treated adequately by Kendall S. Harmon. That is Fudge's tendency to read into Scripture a period of penal suffering for the ungodly prior to their annihilation. To quote Harmon, "He [Fudge] often introduces a chronological lapse of time in New Testament passages which is not there in the texts themselves."⁶⁰

I have evaluated Fudge's use of the OT, appeal to linguistics, avoidance of texts and of opposing arguments, logical fallacies, and appeal to systematic theology. I have pointed out deficiencies in his methodological approach in these five areas. As a result, I conclude that Fudge's case for conditionalism is not as strong as he and others have thought. In fact, evaluated in terms of hermeneutics and theological method, his case appears to be weak.

* Robert Peterson holds a Ph.D. from Drew University and is Professor of Systematic Theology at Covenant Theological Seminary. A version of the present essay is forthcoming in a collected volume tentatively entitled *Hermeneutics: Select Essays from the 1994 Evangelical Theological Society* and is published here by permission. Prof. Peterson's new book, *Hell On Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995), should be out in June.

1 Edward Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of Final Punishment* (Houston: Providential Press, 1982). I thank Mr. Fudge for reading this paper and offering comments. I note that Fudge affirms the resurrection of the saved and the lost and rejects the teaching of Jehovah's Witnesses that hell is only the physical grave.

2 Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed., *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992).

3 John W. Wenham, "The Case for Conditional Immortality," *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, 164. My first footnote gives the bibliographical information for Fudge's book. The other three books are: Harold E. Guillebaud, *The Righteous Judge* (n.p., 1941); Basil Atkinson, *Life and Immortality* (n.p., n.d.); LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1965-66). Guillebaud's and Atkinson's books were published privately and are obtainable from the Reverend B. L. Bateson, 26 Summershard, S. Petherton, Somerset, U.K. TAI3 5DP.

4 In Cameron, ed., *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, 193-224.

5 *Ibid.*, 195-96.

6 Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, xv.

7 Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton (*Let the Reader Understand. A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible* [Wheaton, IL: BridgePoint, 1994], 65-67) helpfully discuss the relation between systematic theology and hermeneutical method.

8 One exception is Robert A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1984), 19-33.

9 David Knowles, ed., *The City of God* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), XXI. 23 (pp. 1001, 1004, 1005); Vernon J. Bourke, trans., *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith. Summa contra Gentiles. Book Three, Providence, Part II*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956), 144.8 (p. 216), 145.5 (p. 219); D. W. Torrance and T. F. Torrance, eds., *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries. A Harmony of the Gospels, vol. III* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 117-118; John H. Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 75; W. G. T. Shedd, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1986; first published 1885; second edition, 1887), 89.

10 Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*. 87-117.

- 11** Ibid., 98.
- 12** Ibid., 100.
- 13** Ibid., 100, n.10.
- 14** Fudge approvingly cites Froom, Petavel, and Constable in the notes of his chapter on the OT in *The Fire That Consumes*. He could have added Atkinson's name as well.
- 15** Edward Fudge, "The Final End of the Wicked," *JETS* 27.3 (1984): 326.
- 16** See chapter two of my *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995) for the details of this study.
- 17** Fudge is not the only one to make this claim. For another example, see Clark H. Pinnock, "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," *Criswell Theological Review* 4.2 (1990): 250-52
- 18** At least two OT texts, Dan 12:2 and Isaiah 66:24, do speak of the fate of the wicked after death. Fudge agrees, but then errs when he interprets these as teaching the annihilation of the wicked after resurrection (see *The Fire That Consumes*, 110-115). To the contrary, both texts suggest the endless conscious torment of the wicked. See chapter two of my *Hell on Trial* for a theological exegesis of these passages.
- 19** Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 296.
- 20** Ibid., 297.
- 21** Moises Silva, *Biblical Words and their Meaning. An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 38.
- 22** Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 262.
- 23** D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 62.
- 24** Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 192-202.
- 25** Knowles, ed., *The City of God*, XXI. 23 (p. 1001).
- 26** Alan W. Gomes, "Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell, Part One," *Christian Research Journal* 13.4 (1991): 17-18. See also Larry Dixon, *The Other Side of the Good News* (Wheaton, IL: BridgePoint, 1992), 89.
- 27** Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 295-301.
- 28** Ibid., 299.
- 29** Ibid., 184
- 30** Ibid.
- 31** Ibid., 185

32 Ibid.

33 How does Fudge attempt to reconcile annihilationism with Rev 20:10, where John asserts that the devil “will be tormented for ever and ever” in the lake of fire? He admits, “There is no easy solution.” He concludes, however, “Whatever the case with Satan, the final punishment of the wicked is a different subject,” *ibid.*, 304, 307. Fudge here tries to avoid the plain sense of Rev 20:10 and the fact that four verses later wicked humans too are cast into the same lake of fire.

34 Irving M. Copi, *Introduction to Logic*. 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 54-55.

35 Knowles, ed., *The City of God*, XXI. 23 (pp. 1001-1002).

36 Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 195.

37 Ibid.

38 Copi, *Introduction to Logic*, 53

39 Ibid., 55.

40 Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 411-422.

41 Ibid., 419-420.

42 See John H. Gerstner, *Repent or Perish* (Ligonier, PA: Soli Den Gloria, 1990), 30; and Morey, *Death and the Afterlife*, 202-03.

43 Copi, *Introduction to Logic*, 65.

44 Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 303.

45 Ibid., 303-304.

46 Ibid., 304.

47 Ibid., 272-273.

48 Ibid., 296.

49 Ibid., 228-234.

50 Ibid., 229.

51 Ibid., 230.

52 Ibid

53 Ibid., 231.

54 Ibid., 233-234.

55 Ibid., 230-231.

56 J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (2nd ed. New York: NY: Har-Row, 1960), 339-340.

57 John Cooper, *Body, Soul, & Life Everlasting. Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 144.

58 Ibid., 144-145.

59 I thank my student Jimmy Agan for helping me to understand better the connection between the doctrine of hell and Christ's atonement.

60 Harmon, "The Case Against Conditionalism," 210-12. For two more examples of this error in *The Fire That Consumes*, see 47, 48.

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